ARISTOTLE’S ETHICS AND THE CRAFTS: A CRITIQUE

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Abstract

This dissertation is a study of the relation between Aristotle’s ethics and the crafts (or technai). My thesis is that Aristotle’s argument is at key points shaped by models proper to the crafts, this shaping being deeper than is generally acknowledged, and philosophically more problematic. Despite this, I conclude that the arguments I examine can, if revised, be upheld. The plan of the dissertation is as follows – Preface: The relation of my study to the extant secondary literature; Introduction: The pre-Platonic concept of technē, as evidenced in Greek philosophical and literary sources, in particular the early Hippocratic corpus; Chapter one: The Platonic concept of technē, followed by an investigation of whether Plato affirms a virtue-technē in the Protagoras and Republic; Chapter two: Aristotle’s concept of technē, followed by scrutiny of his arguments in NE VI.5 against a virtue-technē, and of his analyses of slavery and deliberation; Chapter three: An exposition of Aristotle’s function argument, followed by a dominantist interpretation of it, and an explanation of dominantism as in part a technē-influenced doctrine; Chapter four: An examination of Aristotle’s ethical mean and its problems, with a diagnosis of these in terms of influence by the Philebus, and by paradigms derived from the crafts; Chapter five: Argument that Aristotle’s theory of habituation suffers from two significant opacities, these being a function of influence both by the Republic, and by models of craft-learning; Conclusion: Response to key objection; Aristotle’s ethics revised, defended.
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The way human beings understand the world tends to be at all times …
shaped by the know-how of the day, by what people can do and
how they usually go about doing it

(Zygmunt Bauman)
Preface

‘Every technē and every enquiry, and similarly every action and choice, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason, the good has rightly been declared that at which all things aim’ (NE 1094a1-3). In this way, Aristotle invokes the notion of technē – viz. ‘skill’, ‘art’, ‘expertise’ or ‘craft’ – at the beginning of the first sentence of the first chapter of the Nicomachean Ethics. This is a telling opening: for, as I shall argue, Aristotle’s core concepts and arguments in ethics are crucially informed by models and structures derived from the technai. By ‘informed’ here, I do not mean to indicate a merely contingent relation, according to which the crafts serve Aristotle simply as a convenient source of analogies, ones intended (perhaps) to make his argument more immediately intelligible. Rather, it will be my contention that Aristotle’s key moral philosophical claims are, to a significant degree, reliant on and responsive to how things work specifically in the technai. Subtract this essential dependence, and the question of whether Aristotle can fully uphold these claims – through independent, close scrutiny of the moral phenomena themselves – becomes a real and pressing one.

In at least two respects, I take my critique of Aristotle’s ethics to be a departure from the approaches usually taken in the secondary literature. First, while a considerable amount of attention has been paid to the philosophical significance of technē within ancient Greek philosophy as a whole, most of this work has appeared in languages other than English, and – if we confine ourselves to studies on the pre-Hellenistic material – most of it is on Plato. Indeed, no less a commentator than Terence Irwin devotes a good part of Plato’s Moral Theory to investigating the force of what he calls the ‘craft analogy’ in Plato’s early dialogues. But when it comes to Aristotle’s ethics, the vast majority of interpreters fail to explore the possibility of there being systematic and illuminating relations between Aristotle’s arguments on the one hand, and paradigms that find their proper home in the crafts on the other. In what follows, I want to rectify this imbalance – and, in a sense, I want to reverse it. For I will argue that although the idea that virtue is a technē is mooted in the Platonic

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1 Salient examples here are René Schaefer’s ΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΗ et TExNh: Etude sur les notions de connaissance et d’art d’Homère à Platon (1930); Jörg Kube’s TExNh und APETH: Sophistisches und Platonisches Tugendwissen (1969); Dirko Thomson’s «Techne» als Metapher und als Begriff der sittlichen Einsicht (1990); Giuseppe Cambiano’s Platone e le tecniche (1991). The one extant, book-length study in English of technē and its relevance to Greek philosophy is David Roochnik’s book on Plato, Of Art and Wisdom: Plato’s Understanding of Techne (1996).
dialogues, it is never affirmed therein. By contrast, it is in Aristotle’s work that—
despite his explicit rejection of a virtue-technē—ethical reflection becomes shaped in
a determinate and systematic way by notions derived from the crafts.

Secondly, the one Anglophone study of technē and its relation to Aristotle’s
ethics of which I am aware—viz. Joseph Dunne’s magisterial Back to the Rough
Ground: ‘Phronesis’ and ‘Techne’ in Modern Philosophy and in Aristotle (1993)—
mounts an argument that is essentially antithetical to mine. 2 Dunne acknowledges that
in ‘the earlier books of the Ethics we must face the embarrassing fact (embarrassing,
that is, for a thesis such as mine, which tries to show that in setting up phronesis as the
paradigm of ethical knowledge Aristotle was setting limits to the applicability of
techne) that Aristotle turns quite unselfconsciously to techne in order to clarify or
illustrate points about the virtues’ (245). But having acknowledged this, and having
listed exactly the same technē-influenced discussions that will concern me, 3 Dunne
goes on to exclude the possibility that Aristotle’s ethics is just as, if not more directly
shaped by technē-models than are his biology, physics or metaphysics. Dunne writes:
point] … [indeed,] in E.N. 6 he outlines his notion of phronesis as specifically ethical
knowledge in a direct contrast with techne’ (252).

Dunne’s view here is justified, I take it, insofar as Aristotle does rule out
phronēsis as a species of technē—something I will explore in chapter two. But on a
wider front, Dunne seems to me misguided, for he fails to take full account of the
evidence: evidence that points to Aristotle’s ethics being in no way an exception to
the dominance of technē-models within his thought as a whole. Indeed, if my
argument is well-founded, it will turn out that in some ways Aristotle’s ethics is more
determined by those models than is subject-matter dealt with elsewhere in his
writings. For whereas his non-ethical writings rarely make use of craft-models in a
more than merely illustrative or analogising fashion, it is precisely in his ethics that

2 In the German philosophical tradition, the relation between practical wisdom [phronēsis] and technē
has been a topic of interest ever since Hans-Georg Gadamer’s Truth and Method (1960). Following
Gadamer, both Jürgen Habermas and Hannah Arendt have contributed to debate in this area. But I have
decided not to engage directly with this tradition, and for two main reasons. First, because the German
debate is very complex and involved, so would immensely complicate and lengthen my own argument.
Secondly, and more importantly, because the Anglo-American literature is in general more closely
attentive to Aristotle’s texts, and less interested in carving out autonomous philosophical positions. For
an excellent overview of how Gadamer, Habermas and Arendt each treat Aristotle, see Dunne 1993.

3 Namely, Aristotle’s function argument, his ‘doctrine’ of the mean, and his account of moral
habituation.
Aristotle oversteps the limits of this approach, allowing those models to do more of the argumentative work than he acknowledges (or, for that matter, others acknowledge). Despite the immensity and unparalleled nature of Aristotle’s philosophical achievement, I will argue that this constitutes a significant problem for him.

It amounts to a significant problem, but not an insuperable one. In the Conclusion, I shall investigate how Aristotle’s central arguments and claims in ethics could be revised in order to avoid the difficulties I aim to reveal over the course of this study. Suffice it to say that not all these difficulties carry the same weight, and none of them appears to me destructive of Aristotle’s moral philosophical enterprise as a whole, which retains its unique and indisputable value. All I wish to demonstrate is that there are clear problems to be resolved in that enterprise, and that there is a more systematic and determinate basis to these than has hitherto been recognised.
The aim of the present study is to examine the relation between ethics and technē in Aristotle’s ethical works. It will be my contention that Aristotle’s central arguments and claims in ethics are strongly dependent on models supplied by the technai – variously translatable as ‘crafts’, ‘skills’, ‘arts’ or ‘forms of expertise’. This dependence is, I hope to show, not only deeper and more pervasive, but also philosophically more problematic than has hitherto been recognised. In other words, while Aristotle’s moral philosophy as a whole constitutes an unsurpassed intellectual synthesis, I want to explore an aspect of that synthesis that I think is both more salient, and gives rise to more difficulties, than scholars have previously allowed. In order to do this, I shall first outline the extent to which Aristotle inherited his reliance on the technai from Plato – this will be the subject of chapter one. And to make Plato’s interest in the technai fully intelligible, I shall also look at the pre-Platonic history of the concept of technē – that will be the task of the following Introduction.

Before embarking on that task, however, it is worth offering two methodological justifications for it. First, even a brief survey of Greek writings before Plato reveals that technē had already developed a rich and relatively coherent semantic content before becoming a tool in philosophical analysis. As I shall argue in chapter one, it was largely owing to the relevance of this content to an analysis of human virtue [aretē] that Plato became drawn to the technai. Admittedly, no less a scholar than Julia Annas judges that for the ancient philosophers ‘Virtues are like skills in that they have an intellectual structure’, a structure that allows agents to be ‘critically reflective’ about their ethical practices – and that this is the only salient feature of the technai vis-à-vis ethics.1 But as I hope will become clear, this is severely to underestimate the positive, detailed conceptual content of technē, and the relevance of that content to ethical analysis. In addition, and in consequence, it is also to underestimate the potential for dispute concerning the influence of the technai in shaping philosophical argument.

Secondly, a grasp of the pre-Platonic history of technē is essential in avoiding an anachronistic understanding of the concept. For instance, Robert Brumbaugh writes of

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‘Plato’s relation to the arts and crafts’ (in Werkmeister 1976), suggesting that the *technai* can be captured adequately by this distinctively modern phrase. But this suggestion is undermined by the fact that, as will become evident, *technē* has an extension far wider than that of any related English concept. Indeed, Plato uses *technē* to cover not only (say) cobbbling and smithing, but also medicine, mathematics and astronomy\(^2\) – practices it is hard to construe as arts and crafts in a contemporary sense. Similarly, Brumbaugh sometimes uses the terms ‘technology’ and ‘technical’ to refer to practices covered by *technē* and its cognates. But while many Greeks may well have revered the *technai* in the way many moderns tend to revere technology,\(^3\) Brumbaugh’s terminology here is again anachronistic, for it implies that the *technai* demonstrate the kind of complexity and scientifically informed sophistication characteristic of modern technology. And it is unlikely that any Greek *technitēs* (craftman) could even aspire to these.\(^4\)

A distinct yet no less anachronistic usage can be seen in the treatment of the *epistēmē*/*technē* distinction as identical to the modern distinction between the pure and applied sciences. This usage pictures *epistēmē* as theoretical knowledge, such knowledge being strongly precisionist in nature; by contrast, it pictures *technē* as related to workmanship, and as having little concern with exactitude. Now this may broadly capture certain elements of the *epistēmē*/*technē* distinction as found in late Plato and Aristotle. But as René Schaerer, Richard Parry, David Roochnik and Anne Balansard all maintain, using the modern distinction between the pure and applied sciences in this way fails to reflect the fact that in much of earlier Greek writing, *epistēmē* and *technē* are used interchangeably.\(^5\) Accordingly, none of the neat contrasts it projects onto these two terms can – without heavy qualification – bear scrutiny.

Having made these methodological points, I will briefly outline how I intend to proceed. In what follows, I will survey the pre-Platonic conception of *technē*. Although

\(^2\) See (eg) *Charm* 165e-6a; *Gorg* 450d; *Hipp Min* 367e-8c; *Phil* 56c-e; *Soph* 219c; *Stat* 258d-e.

\(^3\) Connor 1971, 125-6; Nussbaum 1986, 89-91 and Nussbaum 1990, 107 hold that, by Plato’s time, the *technai* were seen as central to the human project of achieving skilled mastery over nature.

\(^4\) Cf Beiner 1988, Part One of which is entitled ‘The reign of *techne*’. In relation to the book’s subject-matter – ‘Democratic theory and technological society’ – this once more suggests that a misleadingly modern sense is being given to an ancient term.

\(^5\) See Schaerer 1930, 5 on Bacchylides, 12-13 on Sophocles; Parry 2003, 2 on Xenophon; Roochnik 1996, 90 on early Plato. Balansard shows in detail that, at least before the *Republic*, Plato follows common Greek practice in treating *epistēmē* and *technē* as broad equivalents (see Balansard 2001, 95-118; cf Nussbaum, 1986, 94, 443-4 n.10 and Wolfsdorf 2008, 103).
the evidence here is variegated, I hope it becomes clear that – even if different authors stress different aspects of the concept – a broadly self-consistent picture of the nature of technē emerges. And furthermore, this picture will, I hope, reveal the main conceptual marks that were to make technē so attractive as an analytical tool to both Plato and Aristotle. After this, I will examine one technē in particular, that of medicine, as discussed within the Hippocratic Corpus. This serves as an instructive case-study, not just because in the Platonic dialogues ‘Socrates [refers to] medicine much more than any other technē’ (Parry 2003, 3), but also because the Hippocratic Corpus contains the only surviving pre-Platonic theoretical investigation of technē.6

The word technē derives from the Indo-European root ‘tek’, meaning ‘to fit together the woodwork of a ... house’ (see Roochnik 1996, 19). According to Jörg Kube, this informs the earliest meaning of the Greek term, which was probably ‘house-building’ (Kube 1969, 13) – something betrayed, perhaps, in the etymological connection between technē and tēktōn (carpenter). In the earliest available literary texts, the term covers shipbuilding, and – especially in Homer – smithing (see Kube 1969, 14-19; Löbl 1997, 208, 210). For instance, in the Iliad Homer refers three times to Hēphaistos klutotechnēs, ‘Hephaestus, renowned for craft’ (see 1.571, 18.143 and 391; cf Odyssey 8.286). In book eight of the Odyssey, the works of Hephaestus are referred to as technai or technēentes (see lines 296-7, 327 and 332). And throughout the Odyssey, the products of smithing are mentioned as the products of technē: ‘the smith came, bearing in his hands ... the implements of his craft [peirata technēs]’ (3.432-3); ‘a cunning workman whom Hephaestus and Pallas Athene have taught all kinds of craft [technēn pantoën]’ (6.233-4, 23.160-61); ‘May he never have designed [technēsamenos], or hereafter design [technēsaito], such another [belt], he who stored up in his craft [technē] the device of that belt’ (11.613-14).7

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6 The dating of the Corpus is controversial, but it is likely that at least ‘On technē’ and ‘On ancient medicine’ – the centrally relevant texts – date from the fifth century B.C.E. As Jacques Jouanna maintains, the former is ‘generally dated from the last quarter of the fifth century’ (see Jouanna 1999, 378), and the latter, similarly, from the ‘end of the fifth century’ (owing partly to a reference to Empedocles; see ibid. 376). For corroboration of these claims, see Nutton 2004, 63, Heinemann 1961, 112 n.32 and note 16.

7 At Iliad 3.61-2, Homer refers to technē in the context of shipbuilding: ‘one who, well skilled [technē], hews a piece for a ship’. And at Odyssey 5.270-71, he speaks of Odysseus, who ‘sat and guided his raft skilfully [technēentōs] with the steering oar’.
From etymology and early usage, then, we can determine a property of technē that will remain more or less constant: namely, that whoever practises a particular technē possesses a determinate form of expertise. As Felix Heinimann affirms, ‘Each technē is correlated with a quite determinate [bestimmte] task and type of achievement’ (106). Or as Rudolf Löbl puts it, for every technē ‘there is a telos, a goal, at which it aims ... a kind of job [Werk] or action, that has to be realised’ (211). These references to particular ‘tasks’ or ‘goals’ should not be taken to preclude an individual technē having as its proper concern a plurality of actions or products. After all, smithing (for one) encompasses a diverse set of these. Rather, the uniqueness of each technē lies at the level of a particular range of tasks and aims: for example, geōrgia aims at the production of food, grammattikē at both studying and teaching spelling and grammar, and mantikē at predicting the future in various ways. It is in this sense, I take it, that ‘every technē must have a quite determinate goal [Ziel], which distinguishes it from other technai’ (Heinimann 1961, 120). So already in the pre-Platonic literature, the technai appear defined by special areas of competence, each of which is unique to a particular technē.8

A further theme closely associated with the technai is that of achieving control or mastery over a specific subject-matter, and thus – in many cases – over the environment as well. For instance, in Sophocles’ Antigone the chorus sings: ‘[Man] masters with his arts [mēchanai] the beasts of the open air ... The horse with his shaggy mane he tames ... He has a resource for everything’ (348-60). In the Homeric Hymn to Hephaestus, the author writes: ‘In earlier times [mortals] lived in caves on mountains like wild beasts, but now they have learned crafts [erga] because of Hephaestus, famed for skill [klutotechnēn], and thus all year long they pass their lives easily, without care in their own houses’ (from Gagarin and Woodruff 1995, 35).9 And the locus classicus for this theme of skilled control is Prometheus Bound: ‘Like shapes within a dream’, Prometheus tells his audience, ‘[humans] dragged through their long lives and muddled all, haphazardly. They knew not how to build brick houses to face the sun, nor work in wood ... They had no certain mark of winter nor of flowery spring nor summer ...’ I was the

8 Schaerer suggests that the uniqueness condition here may derive in part from particular technai having traditionally been allotted to particular gods – smithing, for example, being under the care of Hephaestus (see Schaerer 1930, 10).

9 For the Greek text, together with a justification for rendering erga here as equivalent to technas, see Allen, Halliday and Sikes 1980, 411 and commentary.
first to yoke beasts to be slave to the traces … for lack of drugs [people] wasted, until I showed them blendings of mild simples … I was the one who first judged what out of dreams came truly real’ (448-486, transl. David Grene, in Grene and Lattimore 1991).

In this way, technē is closely associated with human power: Prometheus mentions, in addition to the various powers elaborated above, how navigation tames the seas (467-8), while lettering allows men to ‘hold all in memory’ (460-61). But if so, this inevitably sets the technai in conflict with forces that militate against human power. Sometimes these forces are conceived of as divine, and as Schaerer remarks, the paradigmatic instance of divine resentment at human power-through-skill is once again the Aeschylean Prometheus Bound (see Schaerer 1930, 6). Yet these forces can also be conceived of more naturalistically: as Kube writes, ‘[technē] designates the sphere of human influence … which stands opposed to the divine powers of phusis and tuchē’ (Kube 1969, 227). Phusis (nature), tuchē (chance) and moira (fate) – each is invoked, at different times and by different authors, as a threat to that realm of human autonomy that technē was instrumental in opening up. For instance, Antiphon recognises the threat of an untamed nature to man’s dominance when he writes that ‘We conquer by technē things that defeat us by phusis’ (see Gagarin and Woodruff 1995, 74).

This dictum, which points up nature’s tendency to undermine human attempts at control, raises the question of what conditions such control. If the technai give men a measure of power, how is that power made possible in the first place? It is made possible, I take it, primarily by each technē’s accurate grasp of its subject-matter. As Schaerer maintains, the technai were thought of as aiming at ‘a reasoned understanding of that which is exact, as opposed to anything that cannot be accurately grasped [tout ce qui dépasse la mesure]’ (Schaerer 1930, 1). In light of this, it is significant that among the crafts Prometheus gives to mankind is said to be ‘numbering … pre-eminent of subtle devices [sophismatōn]’ (459). And as I shall detail later on, a key text in the Hippocratic

10 That Prometheus is the inventor of ‘every art [pasai technai]’ (506) does not preclude mankind’s use of the arts constituting a challenge to the gods in general. Michael O’Brien refers to many fifth century sources that oppose divine power to human power-through-tecnhē (see O’Brien 1967, 58-73). In particular, he cites Sophocles’ Oedipus Tyrannus as dramatising this conflict.

11 Solon pictures moira as effectively excluding technē when he writes that ‘moira … brings evil and good to mortals … Surely there is risk in every activity, and no one knows, when a situation begins, how it will turn out’ (from Solon’s Prayer to the Muses, 13.64-6, quoted in Roochnik 1996, 28). For fragments that oppose the power of tuchē to that of technē, see Democritus B119, 197 in Diels-Kranz 1964.
Corpus claims that ‘where correctness and incorrectness each have an exact measure [or exact standard, orthos horos], surely there must be a technē’ (On technē V 30-32). Indeed, several pre-Socratic writers indicate that orthotēs, ‘exactness’ or ‘correctness’, is a desideratum when conveying information in any area of human endeavour.\(^\text{12}\)

This tendency to align technē with the aspiration to exactitude, and a concomitant rational control, is connected to three related, yet distinct marks of technē. First, because the technitēs ideally has a clear, systematic grasp of his craft, he himself – insofar as he is genuinely skilled – is reliable. This distinguishes him from the amateur, who although he may on occasion produce impressive results, is (owing to his lack of fine-grained skill) more liable to make mistakes, and to be vulnerable to contingency. Secondly, because the technitēs aspires to a fund of reliable knowledge, he should be able to pass that knowledge on efficiently to others. As Democritus holds, ‘Neither art nor wisdom is attainable if one does not learn [oute technē oute sophiē ephikton, ἐν μὲν μαθῆι τις]’ (Diels-Kranz 1964, Frag. 68, B59).\(^\text{13}\) Again, this distinguishes the skilled man from someone ultimately dependent on luck – for the latter has no transmissible expertise. Thirdly, because the knowledge characteristic of the technai can ideally be broken down into various methods, once an apprentice has sufficiently grasped the methods relevant to his craft, he can thereby be certified as a technitēs. Taking the certifiability of the technitēs together with the above marks of technē – viz. exactitude and control, reliability and teachability – it is not surprising that even before Plato the technai received much recognition and respect, being indicative of authority and wisdom [sophia]. Indeed, as Löbl remarks, ‘in this period [from Homer to the sophists] sophos and technē were closely associated with each other’ (Löbl 1997, 208).\(^\text{14}\)

\(\text{For instance, a Protagorean fragment praises orthotēs onomatōn (Diels-Kranz 1964, Frag. 80, A24), Gorgias lauds orthotēs logōn (ibid. Frag. 82, B6), and Democritus favours orthoepēia (ibid. Frag. 68, B20a), viz. ‘correct language’}.\)

\(\text{Annas agrees that teachability is an essential mark of the technai (see Annas 1995, 231). As Löbl puts matters, ‘technē can be taught and must be learnt’ (Löbl 1997, 211). And Heinimann comments, ‘only that which can be taught has the right to be called a technē’ (Heinimann 1961, 106). See also Sennett 2008, 54.}\)

\(\text{Besides the Democritean fragment above, take, for example, the Anaxagorean fragment that holds humans to be superior to the animals in virtue of their ‘experience and memory and wisdom and skill [empeiriai de kai mnēmēi kai sophiēi kai technēi]’ (Diels-Kranz 1964, Frag. 59, B21b). Take also Gorgias’ The Defence of Palamedes, where he associates technē with sophia, and contrasts both with mania (madness) (see ibid. Frag. 82, B11a, §25, lines 19-23). And NB the following line from Sophocles’ Antigone: ‘wise beyond hope is the contrivance of his art [sophon ti to mêchanoen/ technas huper elpid’echōn]’ (355-6).}\)
This close association between technē and wisdom suggests that the technai were conceived of as essentially valuable forms of knowledge and activity. Admittedly, several authors dwell on the constraints set on the power of technē. For example, the chorus in Antigone points out how no expertise can guarantee happiness – ‘the inventive technē [man] possesses ... brings him now to ill, now to good’ (367). Prometheus is bound to and tortured on a rock: ‘All these devices [mēchanēmata]’, he declares, ‘I invented for human beings. Yet now in my own misery, I can’t devise one single trick [sophisma] to free myself from this agony’ (469-71). And it has already been seen how Solon virtually excludes the possibility of technē, asserting instead the omnipotence of moira (see note 11). But despite these strong reservations about the power of technē, it seems reasonable to allow that, insofar as it does manage to enlarge the sphere of human epistemic and practical control, technē is justly thought of as beneficial. After all, the word techniēs is semantically a close relative of dēmiourgos, literally ‘one who works for the people’: once again, the idea of benefit appears implicit in the term (for more on the role of the dēmiourgos, see Sennett 2008, 22). As Heinimann puts things, there is thus a consensus that, in order to count as a technē, an expertise ‘must be demonstrably useful, life-promoting or life-preserving’ (Heinimann 1961, 117).

It should be noted at this juncture that while technē covers the semantic range of ‘craft’, ‘skill’, ‘art’, ‘expertise’, etc., in certain contexts it is properly translated as ‘artifice’, ‘ruse’, ‘device’, ‘trick’, etc. (see Scherer 1930, 1). And this might be thought to undermine my claim about the inherently beneficial nature of the technai. Indeed, at least four instances of technē and its cognates in Homer occur within ethically pejorative contexts. The Loeb edition of the Iliad translates kakotechnos as ‘evil design’ (15.14) and technēsomai as ‘contrive’ (23.415), while the Loeb edition of the Odyssey translates doliēs ... technēs as ‘crafty wiles’ (4.455), and doliēn ... technēn as ‘treacherous device’ (4.529). Moreover, in Hesiod’s Theogony five out of the six occurrences of technē and its cognates are plausibly taken as pejorative. The Loeb edition translates these as ‘scheme’ (160), ‘artifice’ (540-41), ‘deception’ (547), ‘cunning’ (560) and ‘trick’ (770). Do these examples not impugn my claim that the technai are essentially beneficial forms of practice? I think not, for just as English marks an important distinction between ‘craft’ and ‘craftiness’, ‘art’ and ‘artfulness’, so Greek can be understood as distinguishing...
between the *technai* proper, and modes of behaviour that – although perhaps borrowing certain techniques from the crafts – do not embody the ends of the crafts *per se.*

Before moving on to the case-study of medicine, it is worth summarising the essential marks of *technē* as witnessed by the range of pre-Platonic texts outlined above. In brief, a *technē* is taken to have a unified, determinate *telos* and area of expertise, which (taken as a whole) is unique to the art in question. An area of expertise affords human control over that area, and may thus involve control over parts of the environment as well: for example, the rules of carpentry are grasped *per se*, but also involve mastery over various actual materials. And insofar as mastery is achieved, thus far rival powers, such as the gods, or chance, are excluded. This mastery or control is enabled in turn by exact knowledge – or more accurately, a *technē* could be said to *aspire* to a precise grasp of its objects (after all, many crafts can be engaged in at different levels of expertise). It is this epistemic precision that conditions a skill’s teachability, and that grounds the kind of reliability and certifiability characteristic of the *technitēs* and his wisdom. Lastly, the *telē* embodied in the *technai* are essentially beneficial, even if they encompass certain techniques that – when abstracted from a particular *technē* – can be used for bad ends.

I want to turn now to the question of how far the marks of *technē* outlined above are reflected in the art of medicine [*hē iatrikē technē*], as this is analysed in the early Hippocratic Corpus. While none of the Hippocratic writings are finally traceable to Hippocrates himself (see Lloyd 1970, 50; Jouanna 1999, 56-8; Nutton 2004, 61-2), it remains the case that – as Charles Kahn attests – they contain ‘the only nonfragmentary scientific/philosophic texts that have reached us from the fifth century’ (Kahn 1991, 7). Moreover, they are the only non-Platonic and non-Aristotelian texts before the Hellenistic period that deal with the concept of *technē* in a systematic, philosophical way. So besides medicine constituting a central example of *technē* for the Platonic Socrates, there are strong independent reasons for concentrating on it as a test-case.

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15 Plato’s *Phaedrus* contains a distinction of a similar kind between the *technai* and mere *technēmata*, or ‘techniques’ (see 268a ff.) The issue of the value-neutrality of the *technai* will arise in chapters one and two, where I shall argue that both Plato and Aristotle affirm the fundamentally beneficial nature of the *technai*.

16 Jones maintains that *On technē* is probably the work of Protagoras, or possibly Hippias. In either case, it derives from ‘the great sophistic period’, towards the end of the fifth century B.C.E. (see Jones 1923, vol.2, 187-8). And he holds that *On ancient medicine* was composed around 430-420 B.C.E., either by Hippocrates, or by a ‘very capable supporter of his school’ (see ibid. vol.1, 5).
On at least two counts, the early Hippocratic writings present medicine as satisfying the above criteria for a genuine *technē*. First, medicine is described as having one, delimited *telos*, which it is the unique task of medicine to achieve – namely, health. Admittedly, some writers stipulate a more modest task for *hē iatrikē technē*: doctors do not have to achieve health in all cases, they merely have to strive for it as far as possible. But given this (very reasonable, and perhaps always implicit) qualification, the initial criterion for medicine being a *technē* is unproblematically met. Secondly, health is presented as – or rather, is assumed throughout to be – a clear benefit. Indeed, it is a universally acknowledged benefit, which serves as an uncontroversial motivation for those entering the medical profession. True, the Hippocratic oath does warn doctors against misusing their know-how for ends other than health. But this is precisely a warning against medical *malpractice*, because ends other than health are not understood as proper to the *technē* of medicine.

Some early Hippocratic writings note the way in which mastery of medicine is threatened by the putative workings of chance [*tuchē*]. *On technē*, in particular, is concerned to answer the charge that the practice of medicine is vulnerable to unpredictable, chance events. This charge was common, for as Michael Frede remarks, Greek doctors were often not distinguished (or worse, not distinguishable) from incompetent artisans or itinerant healers (see Frede 1987, 226, 233). Indeed, the author of *Regimen in acute diseases* goes so far as to say that ‘the art as a whole has a very bad name among laymen, so that there is thought to be no art of medicine at all’ (VIII 3-5, in Jones 1923). This scepticism concerning the *technē*-status of medicine was grounded in the supposed prevalence of unaccountable failures to heal, and also of merely accidental successes. For instance, doctors were accused of healing patients with no more proficiency than that of either nature or laymen: consequently, their ‘successes’ were accidental relative to their purported skill. The general form of these accusations is nicely put in *On technē*: ‘because not all are healed, the art is blamed, and those who malign it ... assert that those who escape do so through luck, and not through the art’ (IV 4-8).

In defending medicine against these accusations – viz. of being improperly vulnerable to chance, and thus of lacking the requisite mastery – the author of *On technē* offers two arguments. First, to expect medicine to cure all sick people is to expect its
omnipotence, and no skill is omnipotent. As he claims at VIII 10-13, ‘if a man demand from an art a power over what does not belong to the art ... his ignorance is more allied to madness than to lack of knowledge’. This is effectively to reiterate one of the initial criteria for the existence of a *technē*, namely that each art has a specific area of competence – with the added proviso that one’s expectations of that competence must be realistic. As the author points out later on (see VIII 28-9, XI 27-8), the body is bound to be subject to incurable diseases, and under such circumstances, medicine cannot be blamed for the unavailability of a cure. (Geoffrey Lloyd calls this an ‘all-purpose fail-safe clause’, because ‘no failure ... is allowed to count against the art’ (Lloyd 1991, 254). But on the contrary, *On technē* holds that only *inevitable* failure should not count against medicine – avoidable failure does, by contrast, undermine its status as a *technē*.)

*On technē*’s second argument is more penetrating. At VI 14 – VII 3, its author continues: ‘under a close examination, spontaneity [*to automaton*] disappears; for everything that occurs will be found to do so through something, and this “through something” shows that spontaneity is a mere name, and has no reality. Medicine, however, because it acts “through something”, and because its results may be forecast, has reality ... Such then might be the answer to those who attribute recovery to chance and deny the existence of the art’. In other words, even so-called ‘chance’ illnesses and recoveries are the product of causal regularities: it is these nomic underpinnings that are systematised by medicine, so that diseases can be predicted and treated with more *consistent* success than is possible with no treatment, or with only amateur intervention. In this way, *On technē* in effect discounts the phenomenon of chance, in the same way that other Hippocratic texts discount the notion that illnesses and cures are caused by divine action (see, for example, *The Sacred Disease* I 4-6 and *On Ancient Medicine* XIV 18-20). This, in turn, opens the way for the unchallenged application of medical expertise, as *On technē* makes clear: ‘The ... obscurity [of causes] does not mean that they are our masters, but so far as is possible they have been mastered’ (XI 4-5).¹⁷

So it seems that, in effect, a further condition of medicine’s being a *technē* has been met – viz. its affording proper *control* over its area of expertise. By explaining away

¹⁷ *On technē* suggests that the only remaining obstacle to the complete success of medicine is the uncooperativeness of patients – but this is, once again, not the fault of the art itself (see VII 10-12).
the so-called influence of ‘chance’, by rendering the telos of medicine more modest, and by ascribing most remaining ‘failures’ to the vagaries of patients’ behaviour, On technē appears to have demonstrated the possibility of genuine medical mastery. What else would have to condition such mastery? According to what was said above, an essential condition of expert control is an accurate grasp of a particular subject-matter: in this case, precise knowledge of what determines human health and illness. As On technē expresses matters, medicine must possess an ‘exact measure’ or ‘exact standard’ [orthos horos], and ‘where correctness and incorrectness each have an exact measure, surely there must be an art’ (V 30-32). What might such an orthos horos consist in?

One possibility is what the author of On Ancient Medicine [VM] calls ‘postulates’ [hupotheseis]. These consist in a limited number of causal principles [archai] – for example, ‘heat, cold, moisture, dryness’ (VM I 3) – which are conceived of as explanatorily exhaustive of all medical phenomena. Do these constitute the kind of orthos horos that could plausibly guide the practice of medicine? The author of VM thinks not, and on two main grounds. First, to affirm such a ‘rationalist’ conception of medicine (as it later came to be known) is effectively to affirm an a priori science, the ‘postulates’ of which cannot be verified directly: ‘For there is no test the application of which would give certainty’ (I 26-7). Secondly, this a priori conception of medicine looks unlikely to be confirmed indirectly either. For the ‘postulates’ that it proposes are too crude to capture the complexity of actual medical phenomena, which are explained not by some abstract schema, but by highly involved and fine-grained organic processes. On both these grounds, then, VM rejects the a priori model of analysis as incapable of delivering the kind of exactitude proper to medicine. What alternative model does it argue for instead?

In short, it argues for an inductive model, one later to be associated with the ‘empiricist’ school of medicine. Precepts refers to this model when it asserts that ‘one must attend in medical practice not primarily to plausible theories, but to experience combined with reason [tribē meta logou]’ (I 3-5). This new emphasis on tribē or empeiria (experience) is at the heart of VM’s argument, viz. that if medicine is an art, it must seek maximal accuracy – but that this is attainable only on the basis of detailed and long-term
empirical research.\footnote{This empiricist depreciation of \textit{hypotheses} may also be intended to bolster the self-sufficiency of medicine as a \textit{technē} (‘postulates’ being a notion found in physics in general).} As the text puts it at II 2-5, ‘the discoveries made during a long period are many and excellent, while full discovery will be made if the enquirer be competent, conduct his researches with knowledge of the discoveries already made, and make them his starting-point [\textit{archē}].’ Once again, then, the possibility of complete exactitude is held out – only this time it is grounded not in various ‘postulates’, but in attention to individual cases, and in the construction of case-histories.\footnote{Although empirical, the kind of medical research being adverted to here is not yet modern in form. First, because many ancient physicians thought anatomically ‘hidden’ causes were unverifiable, and in this sense unempirical (see Frede 1987, 236, 248-9). And secondly, because research was usually not conducted independently of actual clinical experience (see Edelstein 1967, 351; Lloyd 1970, 64).}

This empirically-based optimism – ‘if research be continued on the same method, all can be discovered’ (VIII 18-20) – is, however, heavily qualified. For a start, \textit{VM} admits it is difficult to know what determinate measures to use with regard to the human body. As its author maintains, ‘no measure, neither number nor weight, by reference to which knowledge can be made exact, can be found except bodily feeling … Perfectly exact truth is but rarely to be seen’ (IX 15-22). Not only are bodily states difficult to capture in positive terms, but – contrary to the optimism of \textit{On technē} – ‘bad physicians … comprise the great majority’ (IX 29-30), so any medical research into these states is likely to be flawed. Moreover, even if (\textit{per impossibile}) a wholly reliable empirical method were established, and all extant individual variations were collated,\footnote{At XX 35 f., \textit{VM} stresses how a common food like cheese can have markedly different effects on different constitutions. See also \textit{Regimen in acute diseases} XXXVI, XXXVIII, LXVI, for detailed examples of how treatment must be tailored to individual needs.} any empirical hypotheses would be open to subsequent refutation, or at least qualification. And in this way the ideal of perfectly exact, reliable medical knowledge would have to be foregone.

The author of \textit{VM} is, clearly, prepared to forego this ideal. For him, it is unreasonable to expect medical expertise to be anything more than fallible and probabilistic in nature. Its rules are rules of thumb – medicine must always be prepared to adapt to individual circumstances – and its standard of precision is thus not mathematical. Moreover, those who expect otherwise ‘blunder in what constitutes an art’ (I 9). This willingness to count as \textit{technai} practices that are grounded in inductive generalisation
may appear well-motivated, in that it does not set a standard of exactitude (and thus also of control) that is attainable only by the deductive sciences, and perhaps also by the simple crafts. Nevertheless, it is worth reflecting on the dangers inherent in this willingness. As Lloyd remarks, ‘if medicine starts from ... trial and error procedures ... at what point, precisely, it becomes a technē and is not just what everyone knows, ought to be a question for the author to take up: yet it is not one for which he has a very clear answer’ (Lloyd 1991, 256). The problem of when an empirical practice like medicine attains a level of systematism – and of completeness – sufficient to constitute a technē, is, therefore, a pressing one.

It is a pressing problem, I take it, for as soon as one allows that a technē is essentially constituted by empeiria, one must also allow that, along with exactitude and control, the three remaining marks of technē – reliability, teachability and the certifiability of the technitēs – are far less solidly grounded than one might have supposed. For a practice is only questionably reliable if it depends on rules that are open to constant revision in the light of particular cases. Likewise, such rules are difficult to teach, being inherently incomplete, and perhaps over-dependent on the particular mode of their transmission. And finally, both these considerations render the certification of a craftsman far more precarious than in the case of more tetagmenē (fixed) forms of expertise. Each of these points may hence constitute a threat to the very possibility of an empirically grounded, probabilistic technē – precisely the kind of technē that medicine, as portrayed in some important, early Hippocratic texts purports to be. Could it be that the medicine of the period was just too inexact, and thus insufficiently reliable, teachable and certifiable – in short, insufficiently masterable and masterful – to count as a genuine technē?

I raise this question not in order to answer it, but rather to indicate how the various criteria for technē outlined above impinge on the issue of whether a particular practice – in this case, that of medicine – actually counts as a technē. As has been seen,

21 Werner Jaeger notes that ‘Normally, medical knowledge descended from father to son, as son followed father in the profession’ (Jaeger 1944, 10). The more intimately personal the relation between teacher and student, the less an expertise can be transmitted mechanically from one to the other.

22 VM maintains that ‘clear knowledge about natural science can be acquired from medicine and from no other source’ (XX 11-13). But in what sense do inherently revisable, probabilistic hypotheses constitute knowledge at all? (Nussbaum 1986, 445 n.15 documents how the transition from empeiria to technē continued to present a problem for later Greek medical theory, in particular that of Galen.)
Greek medical practice in the fifth century undoubtedly had a determinate, unique *telos*, which was widely valued. Moreover, it laid claim to authority and wisdom in the execution of that *telos*. But whether its claim could in fact be substantiated is open to significant doubt, as the early Hippocratic texts bear witness. For whether it had a firm grasp of its subject-matter, and could thereby demonstrate the kind of reliability, teachability and certifiability required of the *technai*, is itself far from certain. In this way, the early Hippocratic discussion of medicine shows clearly how, even before Plato’s time, the concept of *technē* – especially in its stress on accurate comprehension, and the furthering of human control – already constituted a vital tool for assessing the credentials of diverse human practices. In chapter one, I will explore how, and to what degree *technē* played a role in a very different context: the Platonic dialogues’ quest for expertise, not in human health, but in human virtue [*aretē*].
Chapter one The Platonic background

As I said at the end of the Introduction, the main task of this chapter will be to explore how Plato’s dialogues draw on the technai in order to elucidate the nature of human virtue [aretē].¹ For it is only against this Platonic background that Aristotle’s own moral philosophical reliance on the technai will itself become comprehensible. But before embarking on this task, I want to address a more basic, preliminary question: namely, what is Plato’s conception of technē, and specifically, is it essentially continuous with the pre-Platonic conception that I outlined in the Introduction? For while it is uncontroversial that Plato makes frequent philosophical use of the technai throughout his dialogues,² exactly how and why he does so in his investigation of human aretē cannot be assessed until it is clear to what degree his understanding of technē follows that of his predecessors.

The first mark of technē – that every craft has a determinate, unique telos – seems well attested throughout the Platonic corpus. As early as the Ion,³ Socrates claims that ‘to

¹ In what follows, I will not be making a principled distinction between Socrates and Plato. This is partly because I think there is a great deal of continuity in philosophical content across the dialogues, something I hope the evidence I provide bears out. Where I take there to be significant philosophical discontinuity, I shall make this clear, and give grounds for it. Of course, in cases where I pinpoint a salient change in philosophical position, it becomes important to have a view about the chronology of the dialogues. In this regard, I shall assume what has become a broad consensus among scholars. This consensus holds that whereas we can be sufficiently confident in dividing Plato’s works into three chronological groups – primarily on stylometric grounds – there is far less reason to be confident about asserting any particular order of composition within those groups (especially within the ‘early’ group). (This view is endorsed at (eg) Kahn 1992, 91; Irwin 1995, 12; Reshotko 2006, 11.)

² As will be seen, the technai referred to are numerous and diverse: from the handicrafts, through generalship, medicine, mathematics and astronomy to the craft of the Timaeus’ dēmiourgos. Moreover, both Socrates’ enemies and his friends note his preoccupation with the technai. Take, for example, Callicles: ‘By the gods! You simply don’t let up on your continual talk of shoemakers and cleaners, cooks and doctors, as if our discussion were about them!’ (Gorg 491a). Cf Alcibiades: ‘He is always going on about pack asses, or blacksmiths, or cobbler’s, or tanners …’ (Symp 221e).

³ Of all the dialogues, the Ion contains the highest number of occurrences of ‘technē’ and its cognates.
each profession [technē] a god has granted the ability to know a certain function [ergon], and that ‘what we learn by mastering one profession we won’t learn by mastering another’ (537c-d). And this principle is reflected in many subsequent dialogues. For example, at *Euthyd* 301c Socrates speaks of ‘craftsmen [dēmiourgoi] who bring to completion whatever work [ergon] constitutes their proper business’, and at *Rep* 346a he asks: ‘doesn’t every technē differ from every other in having a different power [dunamis]?’ These ‘powers’ clearly have an epistemic component (what the craftsman knows), and a practical component (what he produces). But despite Socrates’ fondness for the handicrafts, these ‘products’ need not be separate or physical in nature. For he often refers to technai such as navigation, lyre-playing, astronomy and mathematics, which – although they have characteristic aims – do not have characteristic products.⁴

So it seems that the Platonic Socrates endorses the view that each technē is correlated with a unique, determinate end. Further evidence for this can be found throughout the dialogues. For instance, at *Gorg* 503e Socrates refers to ‘craftsmen [dēmiourgoi], each of whom keeps his own product [ergon] in view … Take a look at painters, for example … or house-builders or shipwrights … and see how each one places what he does into certain organisation’. At *Rep* 333a, he correlates farming with ‘getting produce’, and cobbling with ‘getting shoes’, while at *Rep* 438c-d he argues that ‘a particular sort of knowledge is of a particular sort of thing. For example, when knowledge of building houses came to be, didn’t it differ from the other kinds of knowledge, and so was called knowledge of building? … And isn’t this true of all technai and kinds of knowledge?’ And in line with this, at *Soph* 257c-d he holds that ‘each part of [knowledge] that has to do with something is marked off, and has a name peculiar to itself. That’s why there are said to be many technai and many kinds of knowledge’.⁵

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⁴ At a more fine-grained level, one could distinguish between crafts (a) that have a separate, physical product – eg building, medicine; (b) whose very activity or actuality constitutes their aim – eg flute-playing, dancing; (c) whose aim is to deliver various theoretical results – eg mathematics, musicology. For evidence that the Platonic dialogues understand the theoretical pursuits falling under (c) as genuine technai, see Introduction, note 2.

⁵ In the *Republic*, Socrates affirms a distinct yet related principle, which Kahn calls ‘the principle of specialisation’ (Kahn 1996, 105-6). This holds that each technites is required to practise no more than one technē. It is this principle that informs Socrates’ definition of justice as ‘doing one’s own work and not meddling with what isn’t one’s own’ (*Rep* 433a; cf Tim 17c and Laws 847a).
This view has several philosophical dividends for Socrates. First, on the assumption that a particular practice is or is like a technē, he can force his interlocutor to elucidate the ergon of that practice. For instance, having got Euthyphro to agree that a doctor’s aim is health and a ship-builder’s shipbuilding, he pointedly asks: ‘to the achievement of what aim does service to the god [ie piety] tend?’ (13e). And this technique is particularly effective against those practitioners Socrates suspects of not having a unique, delimited ergon at all. For example, just as in the Ion he manages to call into question the ergon of ‘rhapsody’, so he manages to put Hippocrates on the spot concerning the aim of Protagoras’ purported technē: ‘painters [are] wise as far as making images is concerned’, he remarks – ‘What about sophists? ... What are they expert at making?’ (Prot 312d-e). Finally, the principle of determinate erga is used constructively in the dialogues, as a framework for thinking about practices of key concern to Plato, such as statesmanship. For if there is such a thing as a politikē technē, the question then arises: what is its specific aim? This is, as will be seen, the question that lends a significant part of the Statesman its analytical focus.

Of course, on the traditional view I outlined in the Introduction, that each technē has its proper ergon is not merely a formal claim, it also has ethical content – for a craft’s function is taken to be of positive benefit. Do the Platonic dialogues uphold this view? I think they do, and that they do can be seen both at a piecemeal, and at a more systematic level. At the piecemeal level, there are many suggestions in the dialogues that the technai are essentially beneficial forms of practice. For example, at Menex 238b Socrates speaks of how the gods ‘equipped us for living, by instructing us ... in the technai for meeting our daily needs, and by teaching us how to obtain and use arms for the defence of the land’. At Laws 920d, the Athenian refers to ‘The class of craftsmen [dēmiourgoi] who have enriched our lives by their skills [technai]’, and at Tim 30b, Socrates holds that the craftsman of the universe ‘wanted to produce a piece of work [ergon] that would be as excellent and supreme as its nature would allow’.

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6 Cf Gorg 449d-e, where Gorgias, having agreed that weaving is concerned with the production of clothes, and music with the composition of tunes, is asked: ‘About which, of the things there are, is [oratory] knowledge?’ His vague reply – ‘About speeches [peri logos]’ – precipitates Socrates’ attack, the central claim of which is that ‘speeches’ does not to specify a unique, determinate subject-matter at all.

7 Cf Crit 47c, where Socrates implies that disobeying a technitēs (in this case a trainer) will lead to harm, and Lach 185d-e, where he refers to being ‘expert [technikos] in the care’ of things, particularly the soul.
These piecemeal instances are bolstered by more systematic claims and arguments for the view that the *technai* are essentially beneficial. To begin with, and as I noted in the *Introduction* (see note 15), the *Phaedrus* contains a distinction between genuine *technai* and mere *technēmata* (‘techniques’): whereas the latter necessarily form part of the repertoire of the craftsman, they do not amount to a craft *per se* (see 268a ff.) And part of the force of this distinction seems to be that whereas *technēmata*, viz. the ‘preliminaries’ of a craft (269a), can be turned to bad ends, knowing a *technē* in its fullness involves knowing how to use these preliminaries to attain the proper end of the craft. As Phaedrus affirms, the man who knows ‘treatments to raise or lower … the temperature of people’s bodies, … make them vomit or make their bowels move’, is not yet a doctor; if he claims to be one, then ‘he knows nothing of the *technē*’ (268b-c). And that the *technai* are of intrinsic benefit is bolstered by a distinction made in the *Gorgias* between mere *empeiriai* (‘knacks’) and genuine crafts (see 500a ff., 503c-d). According to Socrates, whereas the former can discern only sources of gratification or trivial pleasure, the latter are directed at true benefit or ‘improvement’ [*beltious gignesthai*].

While both the *Phaedrus* and *Gorgias* thus lend support to the view that the *technai* are intrinsically beneficial, the most concerted argument for this is to be found in the *Republic*. There Socrates holds that ‘each *technē* benefits us in its own peculiar way, different from the others. For example, medicine gives us health, navigation … safety while sailing, and so on with the others’ (346a). And rather than leaving this as a simple assertion, he tries to provide grounds for it. According to his argument, ‘there is no deficiency or error in any *technē*’ (342b), from which he infers that no craft ‘seeks its own advantage – for it has no further needs – but the advantage of that of which it is the craft’ (342c). And Socrates concludes that ‘anyone who intends to practise his *technē* well never does or orders what is best for himself – at least not when he orders as his *technē* prescribes – but what is best for his subject’ (347a).

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8 This point is reiterated vis-à-vis the arts of tragedy and harmony: writing diverse passages, or producing ‘the highest and lowest notes’ on one’s strings, does not yet qualify one as, respectively, a tragedian or a musician (see 268c-e).

9 Take, for example, Socrates’ comments at *Gorg* 500b: ‘there are some practices that … procure only pleasure, … while there are other practices that do know what’s good and what’s bad. And I placed the *empeiria* (not *technē*) of pastry-baking among those that are concerned with pleasure, and the medical *technē* among those concerned with what’s good’.
Now clearly this argument that the crafts are ‘by nature set over [things] to seek and provide what is to their advantage’ (341d) is not without its difficulties. As it stands, it seems to rely implausibly on treating the *technai* as akin to agents, who lack certain needs, and – perhaps more implausibly – have altruistic desires (see 342c). But even if this argument does not succeed, it does suggest Plato’s concern to provide the inherited view of the *technai* as beneficial forms of practice with a reasoned foundation. And this suggests, in turn, the importance of this view for his purposes as a whole. For if the *technai* are beneficial ‘by nature’, this essential feature can be invoked dialectically against those who claim to possess a craft, yet who at the same time can be shown to produce nothing of real benefit. And this is precisely what informs Socrates’ strategy, I take it, with regard to an interlocutor like Gorgias. For whereas Gorgias claims to have a genuine skill that benefits his audience (*viz.* hē *rhetorikē technē*), Socrates argues that rhetoric yields not an actual good, but mere gratification – and therefore that it is no more than a pseudo-skill.

A further mark of *technē*, as I outlined that concept in the *Introduction*, is its power to afford the *technitēs* control or mastery over his subject-matter, and thus (in many cases) over parts of the environment as well. And this was nicely illustrated by texts that present the crafts as militating against forces that undermine human control, such as chance, fate or untamed natural forces. Do Plato’s dialogues tend to bear out this traditional association between the *technai* and human control? I think they do, although as I shall go on to argue, there appears to be disagreement within the dialogues concerning the degree to which *technē* and direct divine inspiration [*entheos einai*] exclude each other.

As to the characteristic ability of the *technai* to promote human mastery, Socrates explicitly endorses the link between *technē* and control. For example, he maintains that ‘it is by virtue of this *technē* [arithmetical] ... that a man ... has under his control [hupocheirious] pieces of knowledge concerning numbers’ (*Theaet* 198b). In line with this, the opposition between *technē* and chance [*tuchē*] is also affirmed. As Polus says to Socrates, without any sign that Socrates disagrees: ‘experience ... causes our times to march along the way of *technē*, whereas inexperience causes it to march along the way of *tuchē*’ (*Gorg* 448c). And according to the Athenian in the *Laws*, ‘a professional man [*ho
echōn tēn technēn] ... could hardly go wrong if he prayed for conditions in which the workings of tuchē needed to be supplemented only by his own technē’ (709d).

As regards the relation between technē and direct divine inspiration, the dialogues do contain passages that construe this relation in terms of ineluctable opposition. Such passages are most prevalent in the Ion, where Socrates argues that Ion’s claim to possess a technē (that of ‘rhapsody’, see 530c) is ill-founded, on the grounds that the results of his purported ‘skill’ are in fact dependent on his receiving a ‘divine gift’ [theia moira]. As Socrates puts it at 533d, ‘that’s not a technē you’ve mastered – speaking well about Homer; it’s a divine power [theia dunamis] that moves you’. And he extends this thesis to cover poets, those supposed experts whose work rhapsody studies: ‘none of the epic poets, if they’re good’, he claims, ‘are so ek technēs; they are inspired [entheoi], and that is how they utter all those beautiful poems. The same goes for lyric poets’ (533e). Indeed, Socrates goes so far as to say that when a poet is inspired, he ‘goes out of his mind and his intellect is no longer in him’ (534b) – thereby definitively ruling out poiētikē as a genuine technē.10

This strong separation between being technikos and being entheos is, however, challenged in the Phaedrus. There Socrates holds that ‘The prophetess of Delphi and the priestess of Dodoma are out of their minds when they perform that fine work of theirs … they accomplish little or nothing when they are in control of themselves [sōphronousai] … otherwise [our language] would not have used the word “manic” for the finest expertise [tēi kallistēi technēi] of all – the one that tells the future’ (244b). So contrary to the Ion, from this passage it seems that divine inspiration need not exclude the possession of a craft. At the very least, certain technai, such as poetry, may presuppose inspiration and a concomitant loss of control, even if they themselves do not encompass such states.11

That some crafts coexist with inspiration is fortunate, moreover, because the very craft that Socrates sometimes claims for himself – viz. what he calls his ‘expertise at

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10 Cf the Athenian’s view that ‘when a poet takes his seat on the tripod of the Muse, he cannot control his thoughts’ (Laws 719c).

11 At Phdr 245a, Socrates claims that a decent poem cannot be composed ‘without the Muses’ madness’ – but this is consistent with the poiētikē technē’s operating subsequently to, or alongside such madness. For a contrasting, all-or-nothing view of the matter, see (eg) Phil 44c, where Socrates refers to ‘seers, who make their prophecies, not in virtue of any technē’. This stands in opposition to (eg) Rep 383b and 389d, where Socrates admits the existence of an art of prophecy [mantiikē technē].
love’ [erōtikē technē] – might be imperilled if they excluded each other completely.12 But assuming that, on Plato’s understanding, every technē does – insofar as it genuinely operates – essentially afford a significant measure of control to its practitioners,13 the question still remains: what conditions such control? In the Introduction, I maintained that the mastery characteristic of the craftsman is conditioned by his having an accurate grasp of his subject-matter. And once again, I think this view is largely borne out within Plato’s dialogues. For those dialogues have, as I hope to show, a strong tendency to ground the technai in, or to regard them as identical with species of knowledge. Indeed, according to C.D.C. Reeve, Plato inherited technē as the ‘paradigm of knowledge’ (Reeve 2003, 39), and hence his texts contain many passages that closely associate technē with epistēmē.

What are some examples of this? At Symp 198d, Socrates says to Eryximachus (using heavy irony): ‘I realised how ridiculous I’d been ... to say that I was skilful in the art of love [deinos ta erōtika], when I knew nothing [ouden eidōs] whatever of this business’. At Theaet 147b, Socrates holds that ‘a man who is ignorant of what knowledge is will not understand what cobbbling is, or any other technē’, while in the Cratylus he gives as the meaning of ‘technē’ ‘the possession of understanding [hexin nou]’ (414b). And these passages are complemented by many where technē and epistēmē are almost equated. For instance, at Theaet 146d-e, Socrates describes cobbbling as ‘just knowledge of the making of shoes’, and carpentry as ‘simply the knowledge of making wooden furniture’. Further on, at Theaet 207c, he refers to a ‘logon ... technikon te kai epistēmona’, while at Phil 58c-e, he makes several references to ‘technē’ and ‘epistēmē’ in the same breath.14

Given the strong internal relation, then, between technē and knowledge in much of the Platonic corpus, it should now be clearer why a dialogue like the Ion is keen to

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12 At least on the understanding of love presented in the Phaedrus, as involving inspiration and an abandonment of self-control. For Socrates’ reference to his erōtikē technē, see Phdr 257a. Elsewhere this craft is referred to in terms of Socrates’ grasp of ta erōtika: see Lys 204c; Symp 177e, 193e, 198d, 201d.
13 Even if the practice of a particular art involves loss of control in certain respects, this is consistent with its yielding results that subsequently afford control (eg by constituting accurate prophecies). The Ion obscures this possibility, by requiring that a technē not involve loss of control at any stage of its acquisition or practice.
14 Cf Prot 357b, Soph 253a-b, 257c-d and Rep 438d. For secondary literature that confirms the near synonymity of ‘technē’ with ‘epistēmē’ in much of Plato, see Rist 1964, 118, Gosling 1973, 56-8 and Woodruff 1990, 66. See also Introduction, note 5.
deny that poets, rhapsodes and those like them possess a craft. In short, it is because they are understood as lacking knowledge. And Socrates makes this explicit on several occasions, for example: ‘Anyone can tell that you [viz. Ion] are powerless to speak about Homer on the basis of technē or epistēmē’ (Ion 532c); ‘poets do not compose their poems with wisdom [sophiai], but by some inborn talent [phusei] and by inspiration [enthousiazontes], like seers and prophets who also say many fine things without any understanding [isasin de ouden]’ (Apol 22b-c). In this way, knowledge, technē and mastery are allied against ignorance and powerlessness. And this puts someone like Ion, I take it, in the opposite position to someone like Lysis. For Lysis knows how to read, write and play the lyre, and hence enjoys the control these technai afford him; at the same time, given his ignorance of weaving and of the norms governing his own education, he accepts his lack of control over these (see Lys 208b-10d). By contrast, Ion confidently claims a technē, and thus mastery of a particular subject, despite the fact that his (alleged) lack of knowledge deprives him of the possibility of these.

Plato’s texts do, therefore, explain how the technai afford control – they afford control in virtue of knowledge, that is, in virtue of a strong cognitive (and practical) grasp of their respective subject-matters. And this close association between technē and knowledge points to two further (and final) respects in which the Platonic mirrors the pre-Platonic conception of technē. First, given the epistemic and rational grounding of the technai, the dialogues often present them as closely related to – or even as forms of – wisdom. Besides Apol 22b-c above, take, for instance, Socrates’ rhetorical question at

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15 Cf Men 99c: ‘soothsayers and prophets ... say many true things when inspired, but they have no knowledge of what they are saying’. (The same point is made about poets at 99d.) Of course, as I argued on p. 6, the supposition that direct inspiration precludes knowledge is questionable, and is questioned in the Phaedrus. But what matters for present purposes is that the Platonic dialogues consistently uphold a strong connection between knowledge and technē, irrespective of what conditions the former.

16 As Socrates summarises matters: ‘in those areas where we really understand something [phronimoi genomēthai] ... [t]here we will be free ourselves, and in control of others [allōn archontes] ... But in areas where we haven’t got any understanding [noumē klesometha], ... there we are going to be subject to the orders of others; there things are not going to be ours’ (Lys 210a-c).

17 Socrates reminds Dionysodorus that knowledge of carpentry requires being ‘able to do leather stitching’ (see Euthd 294b), and tells Theaetetus that ‘human nature is too weak to acquire technē where it has no experience’ (Theaet 149c). Cf Rep 374d, 408d.

18 At the end of the Meno (see 97 ff.), there is the suggestion that correct opinion [orthē doxa] may be no worse than knowledge for the purpose of practical guidance. And if so, perhaps it could be inferred that the technitēs need have only orthē doxa, rather than epistēmē, in order to pursue his craft. While this is a genuine possibility, it does not affect my key point that the technai are necessarily structured by a firm grasp of their subject-matter. Consequently, I will remain agnostic on this issue.
Gorg 449e-50a: ‘Now does the medical craft [hē iatrikē] ... make people able both to have wisdom [phronein] and to speak about the sick?’ At Criti 109c, Critias links the technai with wisdom directly when he claims that ‘Hephaestus and Athena ... entered the same pursuits in their love of wisdom [philosophiai] and the arts [philotechniai]’. And at Tim 29a, Timaeus holds that the universe ‘is a work of craft [dedēmiourgētai] ... grasped by a rational account [logōi], that is, by wisdom [phronēsis]’.19

Secondly and finally, because the dialogues present the technai as essentially species of knowledge, it stands to reason that they present them also as inherently teachable (and learnable). For instance, at Lach 185b Socrates asks how one determines who is most expert [technikōtatos] at gymnastics, and replies: ‘Wouldn’t it be the man who had studied and practised the technē and who had had good teachers in that particular subject?’ (cf 185d). At Gorg 514b-c, he holds that expertise in building requires ‘that our teachers have proved to be good and reputable ones’, and at Prot 319b-c, he contends that ‘When ... the city has to take some action on a building project, we send for builders to advise us; if it has to do with the construction of ships, we send for shipwrights; and so forth for everything that is considered learnable and teachable. But if ... a person not regarded as a craftsman [dēmiourgon] tries to advise them ... they just don’t accept him ... This is how they proceed in matters to do with expertise [en technēi].’20 Teachability – a traditional mark of the technai – thus appears well-entrenched in the dialogues, along with the view that one must learn from reputable masters to be certified as a technētēs.

So all in all, it seems that Plato’s texts do mirror the traditional conception of technē as outlined in the Introduction. They affirm each technē as having a unique, determinate and beneficial telos, and although they show some disagreement over the relation between craft and direct inspiration, they further affirm that the technai deliver control in virtue of being grounded in knowledge. Moreover, they hold that this

19 For further passages that bring together technē, knowledge and wisdom, see Prot 324d, Theaet 145e and Euthd passim.
20 Cf Socrates’ reference to ‘the object regarding which we intend to become experts [technikoi] and capable of transmitting our expertise’ (Phdr 270d), and his rhetorical questioning at Men 90b-c: ‘if we wanted Meno to become a good doctor, to what teachers would we send him? Would we not send him to the doctors?’ Cf also Rep 488b: ‘each of [the sailors thinks] that he should be the captain, even though he’s never learned the technē of navigation, [and] cannot point to anyone who taught it to him’. (For corroboration of the strong relation between the technai and teaching in Plato, see Reeve 2001, 213-14.)
grounding renders the expertise of the craftsman paradigmatically authoritative, reliable, certifiable and teachable.

Having explored the Platonic conception of *technē*, and the degree to which it approximates the inherited, pre-Platonic conception, I want to go on now to the main task of this chapter: namely, to investigate whether, and if so, how (and how seriously) the Platonic dialogues apply the notion of *technē* to the problem of elucidating human virtue [*aretē*]. The first question to be addressed will take the following form: do the dialogues elaborate what amounts to a virtue-*technē*, that is, a craft that constitutes virtue, and enables its practitioners to teach it to others? In what follows, I will argue that there are two main candidates for such a virtue-*technē*, one to be found in the *Protagoras*, and the other in the *Republic*. After explicating their respective contents, I will then tackle the further and vital question of whether either of these purported virtue-*technai* can be said to receive Plato’s all-things-considered endorsement. But before embarking on these questions, I want to prepare the ground by detailing evidence from outside the *Protagoras* and *Republic* – particularly evidence from the earlier dialogues – which suggests determinate interest in the idea of a virtue-craft.

To begin with, it is evident that, in the earlier dialogues, individual virtues are often discussed as forms of knowledge. For instance, in the *Euthyphro* Socrates’ final definition treats piety as a species of knowledge, and in the *Laches* Socrates argues that just as the *technē* of farming is knowledge of the fruits of the earth, and generalship that of the affairs of war, so courage is ‘knowledge of the grounds of fear and hope’ (196d; cf 198d-e). From here it is not far, I take it, to the view that virtue itself may be constituted by knowledge – knowledge, moreover, which is embodied in a particular *technē*. And Socrates takes this extra step explicitly. As he argues in the *Crito*, just as a qualified trainer should have charge of people’s bodily well-being, so ‘one who has knowledge’ of ‘actions just and unjust, shameful and noble, good and bad’ (47c-d) should in principle determine people’s psychic well-being. And he repeats this analogy between the ordinary *technai* and a putative virtue-*technē* in the *Apology*: ‘if your [viz. Callias’] sons were colts or calves, we could find and engage a supervisor for them who would make them

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21 NB Socrates’ question to Euthyphro: ‘what do you say that piety and the pious are? Are they a knowledge of how to sacrifice and pray?’ (14c). This particular know-how is referred to at 14e as a *‘technē’, confirming once again how closely *technē* and *epistēmē* are related in the Platonic dialogues.
excel in their proper qualities, some horse breeder or farmer. Now since they are men, whom do you have in mind to supervise them? Who is an expert [epistēmōn] in this kind of virtue, the human and social kind? … Certainly I would pride and preen myself if I had this knowledge [ei̱ ἐπισταμέν ταύτα]’ (20a-c).

In this way, even the earliest dialogues maintain that the possibility of a virtue-technē is to be taken seriously (Socrates actually refers to such a technē at Apol 20c above). And this is significant, given the great value Socrates attaches to virtue in general.22 For if virtue is highly valuable, and is constituted by knowledge, and is thus teachable – NB ‘if virtue is a kind of knowledge, it is clear that it could be taught’ (Men 87c) – then a virtue-technē will be valuable not just per se, it will also enable something of great value to be passed on to others. Accordingly, someone like Meno, who is said to ‘long … to acquire that wisdom and virtue that enables men to manage their households and their cities well’ (Men 91a), would have his longing fulfilled. And a man like Pericles, who supposedly taught his sons horsemanship and gymnastics, but could not teach them how to be ‘good men’ [agathous andras] (see Men 94b; cf Prot 319e-20a), would have the means to do so. In other words, the existence of an aretē-expertise would prove one of the most valuable forms – if not the most valuable form – of expertise. All of which raises the question: do the Platonic dialogues ever decisively affirm the existence of such a technē?

Prima facie it appears they do not, owing to the scepticism with which Socrates often treats any pretension to the knowledge of, or the ability to teach virtue. For example, he ends the passage at Apol 20c above by saying ‘but I do not have knowledge of it, men of Athens’, and at Lach 196e he denies ‘any knowledge of the matter [viz. learning virtue]’. The claims of others to be teachers of virtue tend, moreover, to be given short shrift. ‘I have had no teacher in this subject’, Socrates declares, ‘[a]nd yet I have longed after it from my youth up … I did not have any money to give the sophists, who were the only ones who professed to be able to make a gentleman [kalos k’agathos] of

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22 For example, he claims to have ‘neglected all my own affairs … for so many years while I was always … approaching each one of you like a father or elder brother to persuade you to care for virtue’ (Apol 31b). He argues that living ‘with that part corrupted that unjust action harms and just action benefits’ is far worse than living with a diseased body, for ‘the most important thing is not life, but the good life’ (see Crito 47e, 48b). And the argument put forward in the Apology, to the effect that a good man cannot be harmed (see esp. 30c-d), strongly suggests that everyone has most reason to ensure his own virtue.
me, and I myself, on the other hand, am unable to discover the technē even now’ (Lach 186c; cf 201a). There are several other such passages in the corpus. But statements to the effect that no teachers of virtue can be found, or that no such teachers exist, or even that none have ever existed, do not entail (taken either singly or jointly) that a virtue-technē is impossible. And as I shall argue, there are in fact two serious contenders for a virtue-technē within the dialogues. The first (in the Protagoras) conceives of virtue as a ‘measuring expertise’ [metrētikē technē], whose ergon is to ‘produce’ maximal pleasure, while the second (in the Republic) conceives of virtue as an architectonic, second-order craft whose ergon is to integrate and order for the best all the other crafts (together with their practitioners). I shall begin by examining the first contender.

The notion that accurate understanding of a subject requires measuring, counting or quantifying seems, by Plato’s time, to have gained wide currency. We have already seen (in the Introduction) how Aeschylus’ Prometheus boasts of having invented ‘numbering … pre-eminent of subtle devices’, and this type of view is reflected in other pre-Platonic authors. The common idea in all these authors seems to be that, as Martha Nussbaum puts it, the ‘denumerable is the definite, the graspable, therefore also the potentially tellable, controllable; what cannot be numbered remains vague and unbounded, evading human grasp’ (Nussbaum 1986, 107). And this idea is clearly at work also within Plato’s dialogues. For example, Socrates holds that ‘the part that puts its trust in measurement [metrōi] and calculation [logismōi] is the best part of the soul’ (Rep 603a), on the grounds that it is most successful at grasping reality (as opposed to mere appearances): ‘don’t measuring, counting and weighing give us most welcome assistance’, Socrates asks, ‘... so that we aren’t ruled by something’s looking bigger, smaller, more numerous or heavier ...?’ (Rep 602d; cf 524a-b, 525b). Or as he puts matters in the Philebus, ‘The boundless multitude … in any and every kind of subject

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23 Eg ‘I have often tried to find out whether there were any teachers of [virtue], but in spite of all my efforts I cannot find any’ (Men 89e); ‘the wisest and best of our citizens are unable to transmit to others the virtues they possess … Looking at these things, Protagoras, I just don’t think that virtue can be taught’ (Prot 319e-20b; cf Men 94b-e).

24 For example, Homer distinguishes between the andrōn arithmos, the countable company of heroes, and the dēmos apeiron, the uncounted and hence ungraspable mass (see Iliad 2.488, 24.776). In the Odyssey, he uses the term ‘ametrētos’ in a pejorative way (see 19.512, 23.249; cf ‘ametria’ and ‘ametros’ in Democritus (Diels-Kranz 1964, Frag. B70, C3). And Gorgias, in The Defence of Palamedes, asks: ‘Who was it who made human life … ordered from disorder … discovering … measures and weights, resourceful adjudications of our dealings …?’ (30). (For further references, see Nussbaum 1986, 107-8 and n.42-7.)
leaves you in boundless ignorance, ... since you have never worked out the amount and number of anything at all’ (17e).25

If accuracy of grasp is increased by the degree to which a subject-matter is quantifiable, and if (as was argued above) accuracy of grasp is integral to technē-knowledge, it stands to reason that there be a strong connection between the technai and quantification. And this is repeatedly borne out in the Platonic dialogues. For example, Socrates asks: ‘isn’t it true that every craft and science [pasa technē te kai epistēmē] must have a share’ in the ‘inconsequential matter of the one, the two and the three ... I mean number and calculation[?]’ (Rep 522c). ‘[E]verything in any field of technē that has ever been discovered’, he asserts, ‘has come to light because of ... [the] one and many, having in its nature limit and unlimitedness ... this is the structure of things’ (Phil 16c); ‘If someone were to take away all counting, measuring and weighing from the technai, the rest might be said to be worthless’ (Phil 55e); ‘since it is measurement, it must definitely be a technē, and knowledge’ (Prot 357b). ‘[A]ll the products of the various sorts of technai share in measurement’ (Phil 285a; cf 284a-b), Socrates holds, and this is echoed by the Athenian in the Laws: ‘[the legislator] will assume it’s a general rule that numerical division ... can be usefully applied to every field of conduct ... For ... all the technai, no single branch of a child’s education has such an enormous range of applications as mathematics’ (747a-b; cf 645a, 819c).26

So it seems that the link between the technai in general and denumerability is well-established in the dialogues. The idea that measurement can give the logos of virtue in particular – and thus ground a virtue-technē – is broached as early as the Euthyphro. There Socrates asks Euthyphro: ‘If you and I were to differ about numbers as to which is the greater, would this difference make us enemies ... or would we proceed to count and

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25 Myles Burnyeat argues that Plato privileges measurability because he thinks number grants knowledge of ‘unqualified’ or ‘context-invariant’ being, as opposed to mere belief grounded in different individual perspectives (see Burnyeat 2000, 20-22, 27).

26 Cf Socrates’ claim that ‘those who are naturally good at calculation ... [are] naturally sharp ... in all subjects [mathēmata]’ (Rep 526b). This applies to (eg) the ‘motions of the body’, which ‘should be measured by numbers and called rhythms and metres’ (Phil 16d), and to flute-playing, which is said to be a very imprecise and unreliable technē, because its ‘harmonies are not found by measurement but by the hit and miss of training [meletēs stochasmōi]’ (Phil 56a). Contrast building, which Socrates says ‘owes its superior level of craftsmanship ... to its frequent use of measures and instruments, which give it high accuracy’ (Phil 56b). The link between measurement and the technai in Plato is emphasised in Roochnik 1996, 195-7, 279; see Roochnik 2003, ch.1 on the Republic in particular.
soon resolve our difference ...?’ (7b-c). Euthyphro replies that they would do the latter, recognising in effect that number [arithmos] is the locus of widespread agreement.⁷ Given this, the possibility is raised that ethics – an area of widespread disagreement – could be revolutionised if it admitted of quantification. And Socrates suggests this possibility, by posing another question: ‘[Are] the just and the unjust, the noble and the shameful, the good and the bad ... not the subjects of difference about which, when we are unable to come to a satisfactory decision, you and I and other men become hostile to each other ...?’ (7d). One is meant to infer from this, I take it, that serious conflict would be eliminated from ethical debate and practice if these were subsumed under some kind of technē of measurement.

The possibility that number and measurement might ground a virtue-technē is given no more attention in the Euthyphro, but it resurfaces in the Protagoras, where it forms the centrepiece of the dialogue. The core of the argument for such a technē is given at Prot 351b-8d,²⁸ so in what follows I shall provide an outline of this section of text, and then go on to assess how seriously we are meant to take its proposals.²⁹ Socrates begins by asking the sophist Protagoras to agree that ‘to live pleasantly is good, and unpleasantly, bad’, to which Protagoras reasonably responds that pleasure is good only if taken in ‘noble’ or ‘honourable’ things [tois kalois] (351c). But Socrates reacts to this with seeming incredulity, asking: ‘isn’t a pleasant thing good just insofar as it is pleasant, ... and ... aren’t painful things bad ... just insofar as they are painful?’ Protagoras nevertheless refuses to accept this apparent equation of pleasure with goodness, suggesting instead that they both ‘enquire into this matter, ... that pleasure and the good are the same’. This brings the first section of the argument to a close (at 351e), with Socrates agreeing to lead the enquiry.

The second section of argument, as I construe it, is relatively short (352a-d), but nonetheless crucial – for it concerns knowledge. Socrates cites here what he claims is the opinion of the majority, that knowledge can be ‘dragged around’ [perielkomenē] by other

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²⁷ As Socrates goes on to emphasise: ‘if we differed about the larger and the smaller, we would turn to measurement and soon cease to differ ... And about the heavier and the lighter, we would resort to weighing and be reconciled’ (7c).
²⁸ As Zeyl 1980 affirms.
²⁹ The Protagoras is a very controversial and widely discussed dialogue. I’ve benefited greatly from several treatments of it, including those of Rudebusch 1999 (ch.3), Reshotko 2006 (ch.4) and Wolfsdorf 2008 (51-9). As will be seen, I am in substantial disagreement with Irwin 1977 (ch.4) and Irwin 1995 (ch.6).
forces, such as desire and pleasure (352c). What this opinion amounts to is that knowledge is not necessarily action-guiding, but can be overcome by affective states within the person. But Socrates depreciates this view, recommending instead that ‘knowledge is a fine thing capable of ruling a person, and if someone were to know what is good and bad, then he would not be forced to act otherwise than knowledge dictates’. Protagoras assents to this strong rationalism, along with Socrates’ inference from it, viz. that ‘understanding [phronēsin] would be sufficient to rescue [boēthein] a person’. This prefigures, as will be seen, Socrates’ assertion at 356d-e that possessing a hedonistic measuring technē will ‘save’ [sōizein] our lives.

The third section of argument (353c-4e) supplies an argument for hedonism. But before this, there is a bridge passage (352d-3b) that further serves to motivate the ensuing argument. Socrates points out that most people will not be convinced by the strong rationalism just proposed, for they believe that one who knows what is best (and is able to do it) can be overcome by pleasure or pain, so that he ends up doing something suboptimal (352d-e). In other words, they believe in the existence of akrasia, which is incompatible with the overriding motivating power of knowledge as just outlined. Protagoras appears not to take the opinion of hoi polloi seriously, but Socrates objects: it would be better, he maintains, to undermine the majority opinion by argument, specifically argument to the effect that the experience described as ‘being overcome by pleasure’ is in fact another experience altogether (353a). And Protagoras assents to this.

Socrates embarks on the third section of argument by citing various putative cases of akrasia. For instance, an agent has sex because of the immediate pleasure it affords, but he knows at the same time that this will lead to disease in the long-term (353c-d). Using this type of example, Socrates gets Protagoras to agree that the badness of such immediately pleasurable actions consists in their producing long-term and overall pain (353e-4a). And he goes on to argue that something similar holds for cases of supposedly ‘good’ pain: a person who undergoes surgery, for instance, does so only because he knows that in the long-term it will make him healthy – health being properly construed as a form of pleasure (or at least as an absence of pain) (354a-c). In this way, Socrates manages to persuade Protagoras that so-called ‘bad pleasures’ and ‘good pains’ are such only because they yield overall pain and pleasure respectively; in other words, their
badness reduces to painfulness, while their goodness reduces to pleasurableness (354c-e). And this supplies the argument for hedonism that Protagoras requested at 351e.

What does Socrates go on to do with this hedonistic analysis of ‘good’ and ‘bad’? At first, in the fourth section of argument (354e-5d), he tries to deal a decisive blow against the believers in akrasia. He does this by pointing to an apparent absurdity [logos geloios, 355a] generated by a hedonistic reading of akrasia. For if akrasia is conceived as knowingly doing the bad, having been overcome by pleasure – and pleasure is identical with the good – then one must conceive the akratic as doing the bad in virtue of being overcome by the good. And this is incoherent. But it is at this juncture that a possible sleight of hand emerges in Socrates’ reasoning. For surely the akratic is overcome not by something pleasurable/good simpliciter, but something pleasurable/good only in the short term – and this seems quite compatible with his also knowing it to be painful/bad in the long term. It looks, that is, as if Socrates has discovered an absurdity in the akratic’s behaviour simply by using terms elliptically in his hedonistic analysis. It is this objection, I take it, which motivates Socrates’ subsequent (and pivotal) argument in section five (355d-7b).

In this section, Socrates musters two key claims in order to rebut the above objection. First, that when pleasure outweighs pain (or vice versa), it does so solely in virtue of constituting a greater amount (355e-6a); second, that pleasures or pains weigh the same, whether they occur now, or at some point in the future (356a-c). These claims, when incorporated into the hedonistic critique of akrasia, are meant to strengthen it: for now the akratic can no longer appeal to fewer short-term pleasures/goods as outweighing a greater number of long-term pains/evils. Instead, he must acknowledge that the latter outweigh the former simply owing to their greater number, and accordingly desist from his painful/bad course of action. And this leads Socrates to declare that a hedonistic ‘art of measurement’ [metrētikē technē] would enable ‘our salvation in life’ [sōteria ... tou biou] (356d), by replacing the ‘power of appearance’ [hē tou phainomenou dunamis] by the power of ‘truth’ – viz. an accurate understanding of where our overall good lies. As he puts things at 357a, ‘What then would save our life? Surely ... measurement ... In fact, nothing other than arithmetic [arithmētikē], since it’s a question of the odd and even’.
The sixth and final section of argument (357b-8d) addresses the question of why someone who knows which action will promote his greatest pleasure/good (or least pain/evil) will actually do it. In answering this, Socrates seems to rely on the claim that all desire is for the good, a claim he spells out at 358b-d. ‘[I]f the pleasant is the good’, he holds, ‘no one who knows or believes there is something else better than what he is doing, something possible, will go on doing what he had been doing when he could be doing what is better’ – and this because it is not ‘in human nature, so it seems, to want to go towards what one believes to be bad instead of to the good’.

Now if this is the case, the suggestion that one could knowingly act against one’s greatest good becomes incoherent. Moreover, combined with the measuring technē proposed in section five, this strong rationalism entails that anyone who does act for the lesser pleasure/good or greater pain/evil is acting without knowledge, that is, in ignorance (357e, 358c). And this conclusion – that so-called ‘akratic’ action is in fact action in ignorance – effectively supplies what Socrates had set out to supply in section two (353a): namely, an alternative account of what ‘being overcome by pleasure’ consists in. It consists simply, as Protagoras agrees, in being ignorant.

Now taken as a whole, this proposal of a metrētikē technē clearly conforms to the criteria for being a technē in general. It has a determinate ergon, the maximisation of pleasure (or the minimisation of pain), which is conceived as tantamount to happiness. This ergon will supposedly grant people mastery over their lives, as the notion of ‘sōteria’ implies, and will do so, moreover, in virtue of a maximally precise and reliable form of cognition – one grounded in measurement. Finally, because virtue on this conception is constituted by knowledge, virtue will be ‘eminently teachable’...
didakton], as Socrates makes clear at 361a-c. In this way, then, the Protagoras seems to have elaborated a genuine virtue-technē, precisely the kind of technē that had been broached in the Euthyphro. But does this hedonistic ‘art of measurement’ in fact constitute a viable virtue-technē, all things considered? In what follows I shall address this question, suggesting that this ‘art’ deserves to be treated with scepticism. And in doing so, I shall look both at how the Protagoras relates to other dialogues, and at its internal structure.

One key aspect of this technē is, obviously, its hedonistic nature – but is there reason to think that hedonism is not, after all, a genuinely Socratic doctrine? I take it there is, on grounds both internal and external to the Protagoras itself. Taking the former first, it is important to acknowledge that Socrates, in by far the majority of instances, attributes hedonism to ‘the many’, and/or to Protagoras. For instance, Socrates asks Protagoras: ‘Can we suppose … that they [viz. the majority] would make any other answer than that [badness consists in overall pain]?’ (353d); ‘“do you have some other criterion in view, other than pleasure and pain, on the basis of which you [the many] would call these things good?” They say no, I think. [Protagoras] And I would agree with you’ (354b-c); ‘“if the pleasant is exceeded by the painful, you have to refrain from doing that. Does it seem any different to you, my friends?” I know they would not say otherwise. Protagoras assented’ (356c). Drawing on these passages and others, Donald Zeyl documents how Socrates’ proposal of hedonism is always thoroughly oblique, and David Wolfsdorf has shown in detail that the overwhelming majority of commentators have followed Zeyl in rejecting the view that the Socrates of the Protagoras endorses ethical hedonism (see Wolfsdorf 2006, 133-4 n.38).

Why, then, does Socrates make use of hedonism in the first place? Wolfsdorf diagnoses Socrates’ use of the hedonistic hypothesis as a way of tarring Protagoras (and by implication, all sophists) with a populist brush. His argument runs as follows: Socrates views the acceptance of hedonism (for example, in the Gorgias) as tantamount to accepting the rule of the majority, whose whimsical pleasures are catered to by the demagogic orators of Athens. Since these orators are in turn trained by sophists, Socrates is showing in effect how sophists, the common people and the demagogues are complicit

in corrupting the city-state. As Wolfsdorf summarises matters: by getting Protagoras to accept ethical hedonism, Socrates is demonstrating that ‘the political craft (politikē technē) Protagoras claims to teach … is precisely the pseudo-knowledge, characterized as flattery in Gorgias, that is enslaved and dragged about by the pleasure of the people’ (ibid. 134; cf Wolfsdorf 2008, 113-14).

Now this interpretation of Socrates’ use of hedonism may be well-founded: the connections between pleasure, sophistry and demagoguery that Wolfsdorf points to are well-supported outside the Protagoras, and Socrates’ strategy within the dialogue may indeed be to reinforce them. But what seems more certain is that, outside the Protagoras, there is a widespread, concerted and evidently non-accidental attack on hedonism as a moral doctrine. For instance, in the Phaedo, Socrates holds that ‘I fear this is not the right exchange to attain virtue, to exchange pleasures for pleasures, pains for pains … the greater for the less like coins, but that the only valid currency for which all these things should be exchanged is wisdom’ (Phdo 69a-b). In the Philebus, we read that ‘Socrates … affirms that … the good and the pleasant have a different nature’ (Phil 60b), while in the Laws, the Athenian maintains that ‘these … unhealthy instincts must be canalised away from what men call supreme pleasure, and towards the supreme good’ (Laws 783a). And perhaps the clearest attack on the equivalence of pleasure and the good comes in the Gorgias, where Socrates argues (at 499a-b) that Callicles’ hedonism leads him into contradiction, and subsequently that ‘we should do … things, including pleasant things, for the sake of good things, and not good things for the sake of pleasant things’ (500a).

A further hedonistic assumption that is impugned outside the Protagoras is that all pleasures are evaluatively homogeneous. Each individual pleasure, in other words, is supposed to be equally good, so the only mark of difference in this area concerns varying quantities of pleasure. While the Republic does hint at this view once, dialogues beyond the Protagoras tend strongly and consistently to go against it. In the Laws, for example, the Athenian suggests that all pleasures are equally bad: he condemns a group of people

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34 In what follows my claims about pleasures are to be taken as applying equally (mutatis mutandis) to pains.
35 At Rep 587d-e, Socrates holds that ‘a king lives 729 times more pleasantly than a tyrant’. But this passage is relatively isolated, and may be ironic. NB Glaucon’s remark that Socrates’ calculation is ‘amazing’, along with Socrates’ significant subsequent admission that a good person’s ‘grace, fineness, and virtue’ are ‘incalculably greater’ than those of a bad person.
that ‘lusts in its heart for pleasure and demands to have its fill of everything it wants’ (714a), calling the ‘conquest of pleasure’ the noblest activity (840c; cf 633e, 636c, 798e, 934a). More often, the dialogues express Protagoras’ initial view (see 351c) that pleasures form an evaluatively heterogeneous class, so that they cannot be summed without regard to their different qualities. For example, Socrates condemns ‘violent’ pleasures that mislead the soul (Phdo 83c), and distinguishes the ‘pleasures of slaves’ from noble pleasures (Phdr 258e, Rep 582e, Laws 658e-9a). Similarly, he makes a distinction between ‘pure’ and ‘impure’ (Phil 52c), ‘rational’ and ‘irrational’ (Rep 505b, 509a, 591c), foolish and wise pleasures (Phil 12d). In short, many dialogues affirm that pleasure ‘comes in many forms that are in some way quite unlike each other’ (Phil 12c).37

Besides the issue of pleasure’s evaluative homogeneity, there is that of its measurability. On this issue, too, dialogues beyond the Protagoras express strong scepticism. For example, in the Gorgias, Socrates employs the technē/empeiria distinction to separate those practices that discern the good from those that discern sources of pleasure (see p. 4 above).38 Whereas the former are held to have a proper logos of their objects, the latter can make only unsystematic guesses as to where pleasure lies (see 500b, 501a-b, 506d). And crucially, this appears to be because pleasure is itself an inherently changeable and unstable property, which does not admit of more than imprecise and unreliable quantification.39 This is confirmed, moreover, in the Philebus, where Socrates asserts that ‘pleasure itself is unlimited’ (31a), and that ‘one could [not] find anything that is more outside all measure than pleasure ... while nothing more measured than reason and knowledge could ever be found’ (65d).

36 Cf the end of the Philebus, where Socrates relegates pleasure to the ‘fifth rank’ among goods (67a-b).
37 Cf Gorg 494e-5a, where Socrates condemns ‘the man who claims … that those who enjoy themselves, however they may be doing it, are happy, and doesn’t discriminate between good kinds of pleasures and bad …’
38 Balansard emphasises the way in which, for Socrates, being ‘craft-like’ is tied to the discernment of good, as opposed to merely pleasant ends (see Balansard 2001, 50, 141, 148, 155). But contra Balansard 2001, 155, the technē/empeiria distinction is not merely an ad hoc device used to undermine rhetoric as a craft. For Socrates employs it in other, very different contexts. See (eg) Rep 493a-b (sophistry), Phil 55e-6a (diverse technai), Laws 720b-e, 857c-e (medicine) and 938a (the law).
39 Concerning the inherent indeterminacy of pleasure, see Dodds 1959, 166, 229; Gosling 1975, 153; Roochnik 1996, 186. NB esp. Gorg 501a, where pleasure is said to be discerned ‘irrationally ... with virtually no discrimination’ [alogōs ... ouden diarithmēsamenē]. Woolf 2004 points out that Socrates suggests (at 500a) that distinguishing good from bad pleasures would require a craftsman. And this seems to undermine the view that the technai cannot discern pleasures. Perhaps, then, Socrates’ view in the Gorgias is restricted to bad pleasures, which, being grounded in the whims of the crowd, do not admit of a systematic account.
So taking together these texts on the non-equivalence of pleasure and the good, on the evaluative heterogeneity and non-measurability of pleasure, it does seem that they undermine key presuppositions of the Protagoras’ hedonistic measuring technē. Given, then, this pervasive scepticism about hedonism in the Platonic dialogues, I want to move on to discuss to what degree the purposes of the metrētikē technē are achieved by the end of the Protagoras. I have already shown the extent to which the refutation of akrasia is central to this dialogue, but this raises the question of whether that attempted refutation is actually successful. In what follows, I shall examine Socrates’ argument in more detail, expound C.C.W. Taylor’s reasons for thinking it a failure, and then proceed to ask what we should make of Taylor’s argument.

Socrates provides the core of his anti-akrasia argument at 356c-8e: he begins by stating his central view, that correct choice depends on aggregating goods and evils (qua pleasures and pains) without regard to when they occur. ‘[I]f you weigh pleasant things against painful’, he holds, ‘and the painful is exceeded by the pleasant – whether the near by the remote, or the remote by the near – you have to perform that action in which the pleasant prevails; on the other hand, if the pleasant is exceeded by the painful, you have to refrain from doing that’ (356b-c). This would appear a very quick route to the conclusion that akrasia is impossible, resting on the assertion that you ‘have to’ act [prakteon, praktea] on your judgement as to where the most pleasure (or least pain) lies. Is Socrates’ argument exhausted by this assertion?

It is not, I take it, for as Taylor notes, the gerundive in this context has the force only of being ‘ obriged’ to act – it is therefore not meant to signify what he calls a ‘universal psychological necessity, where it is literally impossible for the agent to act otherwise’ (Taylor 1976, 190). Socrates’ argument for the latter is given only later on, at 357c-e. Up to this point, what Socrates has done, effectively, is to reiterate the view that correct choice requires knowledge, viz. a correct summing of pleasures and pains. He then goes on to claim that ‘those who make mistakes with regard to the choice of pleasure and pain, in other words, with regard to good and bad, do so because of a lack of knowledge … a lack of that knowledge you [viz. Protagoras] agreed was measurement’.  

40 For secondary literature that understands the Protagoras’ core argument as motivated by Socrates’ concern to disprove akrasia and/or the disunity of the virtues, see (eg) Zeyl 1980, Kahn 1996, 234, 238-9, Russell 2005, 239-48 and Kahn 2006.
Clearly, this is to infer something highly controversial, namely, that incorrect choice is always the result of an incorrect application of the measuring technē. As Socrates puts it, a ‘mistaken act’ is always and necessarily performed owing to ‘ignorance in the highest degree [amathia hē megistē]’. This further claim is presented as a valid inference, one that establishes the impossibility of akrasia. But does it in fact establish this?

It does not, Taylor maintains, because the inference Socrates gets Protagoras to accept is a case of denying the antecedent. As Taylor explicates this fallacious move: ‘even if consistently correct choice requires the employment of a technique, it does not follow that incorrect choice … implies failure to employ a technique, since it may equally consist in failure to act on the result which is reached by correct employment of the technique’ (ibid. 192). That is, even if one accepts that correct use of the metrētikē technē is necessary for correct moral choice, Socrates has not yet established that it is sufficient, for he has failed to show that correct measurement absolutely precludes subsequent wrong action. All he can help himself to is the claim that correct measurement should not be followed by such action – but that is a long way from demonstrating the impossibility of akrasia. And if so, the central goal of his measuring craft – viz. ‘to give us peace of mind firmly rooted in the truth … and [thereby to] save our life’ (356e) – also appears unrealised.

Now Taylor’s argument here is, I submit, perfectly cogent. For Socrates’ argument, as given at 357c-e, is undoubtedly fallacious: one cannot move straightforwardly from the necessity of the measuring technē to its sufficiency. But perhaps this focus is, after all, too narrow. For if one builds into Socrates’ argument a premise which is mentioned at 345e – viz. that no one ‘willingly makes a mistake or willingly does anything wrong or bad’ – his reasoning no longer appears fallacious. Indeed, if one accepts this premise – which Taylor refers to as ‘one of the central tenets’ of Socratic psychology (ibid. 203), and whose corollary is that all desire is for the good (cf Men 78a; Gorg 468c) – then the claim that a grasp of the measuring technē (which ex hypothesi determines where one’s overall good lies) is sufficient for correct choice, looks wholly warranted. On this psychologically fuller interpretation, in other words, Socrates’ argument is rendered valid, guaranteeing our accurate pursuit of the good, and hence also demonstrating the impossibility of akrasia.
Of course, the psychological premise I referred to is very controversial. Granted, if one does accept it, the central argument of the *Protagoras* is rescued⁴¹ – but it is unclear whether, at least by the time of the *Republic*, even Plato recommends its acceptance. For as Taylor points out (at ibid. 203), *Rep* IV famously throws into doubt whether all desire is for the good. At *Rep* 439e-40b, Socrates cites the case of Leontius, whose desire to look at corpses is presented as forcing him to act ‘contrary to rational calculation [*para ton logismon*]’, ie contrary to what he knows (or at least believes) to be good. So on either construal – that of knowledge-akrasia, or that of belief-akrasia – this undermines the position expounded in the *Protagoras*, viz. that ‘no one who knows or believes there is something else better than what he is doing, something possible, will go on doing what he had been doing when he could be doing what is better’ (*Prot* 358b-c, my italics). That is, given the case of Leontius,⁴² one will have to admit (minimally) that the *Republic* severely impugns the sufficiency of a *metrētikē technē* for right action, or (maximally) that Socrates is – already in the *Protagoras* – mounting a dialectical argument against those who hold the same view.

Hence altogether, if my argument is sound, the *Protagoras*’ proposal of a *metrētikē technē* cannot ultimately fulfil Socrates’ hope for a virtue-*technē*. Its hedonistic form is directly in tension with the concerted anti-hedonism of the other dialogues, which condemn the reduction of goodness to pleasure on both metaphysical and moral grounds – not least, perhaps, because (as Wolfsdorf maintains) that reduction is characteristic of demagogues and their followers. But even if one ignores the hedonistic form of Socrates’ proposed *technē*, one is still left with the problem of how Plato’s voice could be fully and permanently behind a craft whose key claim – to have shown the impossibility of akrasia – is called into question by the *Republic*, a later and philosophically central dialogue. Nevertheless, as I maintained on p. 12, this does nothing to foreclose a further possibility: viz. that a virtue-*technē* is properly understood not as a measuring craft, but as a second-order craft that integrates subordinate crafts (together with their practitioners) for the

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⁴¹ This seems to be what motivates Irwin’s favourable treatment of the measuring *technē* in Irwin 1977, ch.4 and Irwin 1995, ch.6.
⁴² Cf *Laws* 863a-e, which seems to admit belief-akrasia, and *Laws* 689a-b, 875a-d, which appear to countenance even knowledge-akrasia.
overall good. This proposal is developed in the Republic, so it is to this dialogue that I now turn.\footnote{The craft outlined in the Republic has clear parallels with the craft of statesmanship as developed in the Statesman. But because the latter is less richly textured than the Republic, does not (unlike the Republic) attempt to explicate the epistemic grounding of its expertise at any length, and from the start concerns the craft only of a narrow political élite, I shall not deal with it directly. I shall, however, refer to it when necessary over the course of my treatment of the Republic.}

Several commentators hold that the Republic puts forward a technē, even if they disagree over exactly how it should be characterised. Rosamund Kent Sprague, for example, refers to it as a ‘second-order’ craft (see Sprague 1976, 68-70, 76), while Reeve refers to it as a ‘superordinate’ craft (see Reeve 2003, 39). And both identify this technē with that knowledge-cum-practice attributed to the guardians [phulakes] of Kallipolis, that is, with their ‘philosophy’, ‘wisdom’, or ‘epistēmē of justice’.\footnote{In line with this, Susan B. Levin refers to ‘Plato’s Defence of Philosophy as the Technē Par Excellence’ (ch.5, section 4 of Levin 2001), and Parry entitles his book ‘Plato’s Craft of Justice’ (Parry 1996). Cf also Kimon Lycos in Lycos 1987, 160, and Sarah Broadie in Broadie 1991, 212.} Is this identification justified? I shall argue that it is, and perhaps the most basic reason for affirming this is that the knowledge of the guardians is often spoken of not only as analogous to a technē,\footnote{‘[A] true captain [ie someone akin to a guardian] must’, Socrates holds, ‘pay attention to ... all that pertains to his technē, if he’s really to be the ruler of a ship’ (Rep 488d-e). Cf Rep 421e-2a, 467a.} but as a technē proper. For instance, having mentioned ordinary crafts such as medicine and cooking, Socrates asks: ‘what does the technē we call justice give, and to whom or what does it give it?’ (332d). ‘No ... tool makes anyone who picks it up a dēmiourgos’, Socrates contends, ‘unless he has acquired the requisite knowledge and has had sufficient practice ... Then to the degree that the ergon of the guardians is most important, it requires ... the greatest technē’ (374d-e).

Other passages further on in the dialogue are just as, or even more probative. For example, Socrates speaks of the guardians’ ‘philosophy’ as more exalted than the banausic crafts, but as no less a craft for all that. ‘Despite her present poor state’, he maintains, ‘philosophy is still more high-minded than these other technai’ (495d); ‘A very few might be drawn to philosophy from other technai, which they rightly despise because they have good natures’ (496b). And these passages are complemented by several whose force, although ‘dēmiourgos’ and its cognates are used instead of ‘technē’, is essentially the same. Perhaps, Socrates tells Adeimantus, ‘we must compel and persuade the auxiliaries and guardians to ... be the best possible dēmiourgoi at their own
work [ergon]’ (421b-c); ‘if [the philosopher] should come to be compelled to put what he sees [in the realm of what truly is] into people’s characters … do you think he will be a poor dēmiourgos of moderation, justice, and the whole of popular virtue? [Adeimantus] He least of all’ (500d); ‘our guardians must be kept away from all other crafts [dēmiourgiōn], so as to be the dēmiourgoi of the city’s freedom, and be exclusively that’ (395b-c).46

So it seems that the epistêmê of the guardians is identified, repeatedly and explicitly, as a craft.47 But how exactly is this a second-order, architectonic craft? In order to answer this, it is necessary to look at how the Republic explicates its ergon. We have already seen this referred to above as ‘moderation, justice, and the whole of popular virtue’ (500d), or as ‘the city’s freedom’ (395c). That is, the ‘product’ of guardianship, at least at a political level, is meant to be some sort of state of society. This state is characterised elsewhere as a ‘kind of consonance and harmony [sumphônìai tìni kai harmoniâi]’ (430e; cf 431e-2a), or as social ‘order’ and ‘measure’ (see, for example, 430e, 431c). But how is social harmony supposed to come about? The answer given in Republic IV is that such harmony is a function of justice, which is specifically defined as each of the citizens’ being ‘directed to what he is naturally suited for’ (423d), or as Socrates puts it at 433a, ‘doing one’s own work [ergon] and not meddling with what isn’t one’s own’. For, according to Socrates, it is only through each citizen’s ‘doing the one job [ergon] that is his own’ that ‘he will become not many but one, and the whole city will itself be naturally one and not many’ (423d).48

46 Cf the Athenian’s reference to ‘a really skilled dēmiourgos or guardian’ at Laws 965b. Admittedly, Socrates sometimes speaks in the Republic as if the epistêmê of the guardians were far removed from the other technai. For instance, at 433d ‘dēmiourgos’ and ‘ruler’ are mentioned as separate categories, at 476a-b he distinguishes between ‘lovers of sights, lovers of crafts [philotechnous] … practical people’ and ‘philosophers’, and at 522b he asserts that the ‘technai all seem to be base or mechanical [banausoi]’. But these examples can all be understood, I think, as reflecting a restricted use of ‘craft’, which picks out ordinary, and thus ‘low’ crafts (for a similarly restricted use of ‘techne’, see Prot 312b). They do not, in other words, preclude ‘craft’ being used less narrowly, as the other passages I have cited attest. (On the general distinction between ‘petty’ versus ‘philosophical’ technai, see Reeve 2005, 215-17; cf Whitney 1990, ch.2, 23-56 on ‘liberal’ versus ‘illiberal’ arts in antiquity in general.)

47 In the case of the Statesman, that the dialogue is meant to elaborate a craft is made more obvious, owing to its frequent references to a ‘political’ [polítikē] or ‘kingly’ [basilikē] techne. Sometimes these occur in a single phrase, eg ‘the kingly or political art’: see 267c, 274e, 280a, 289d, 291c, 311c. The ergon of the Statesman’s political craft is what the Visitor calls ‘weaving’. The ‘fabric that is the product [praxeòs] of the art of statesmanship [is]’, he declares, ‘the weaving … of the dispositions of brave and moderate people – when the technē belonging to the king brings their life together in agreement and friendship and makes it common between them’ (311b-c). For further references to the ergon of ‘weaving’,
Given all this, it should be clearer why the technē of guardianship [hē phulakikē] is a second-order craft. It is one because its job is to integrate and coordinate the technai of the entire citizenry, which, left to its own devices, would fall into a disunited (and hence unjust) condition. As Socrates puts matters, ‘Meddling and exchange between [the] three classes ... is the greatest harm that can happen to the city’ (434b), whereas ‘bringing the citizens into harmony ... by making them share with each other the benefits that each class can confer on the community’ will ‘spread happiness throughout the city’ (519e).

Before moving on to discuss why the second-order craft of guardianship may nonetheless not qualify as a genuine virtue-technē, it is worth noting that its political ergon may not be dissociable from an ergon also at the personal, individual level. For as 423d above implies, Socrates closely associates the city’s becoming ‘naturally one and not many’ with the individual’s becoming the same (cf 441d-e, 444a). And this is because political harmony has a psychological correlate, which like it is conditioned by the knowledge of the guardians: namely, harmony between the parts of the soul. As Socrates explains, ‘the desires that are simple, measured, and directed by ... understanding’ (431c) subtend a soul that enjoys a ‘community of all [its] parts’ (589b), is ‘of one mind’ and thus ceases to be ‘at war with itself’ (603c-d). Accordingly, he sees psychic integration as indicative of virtue, and psychic disintegration as indicative of vice49 – and crucially, these are conditioned by knowledge and ignorance respectively. For as Socrates further maintains, it is wisdom [sophia] or knowledge, and this alone, which ensures that ‘from having been many things [an individual] becomes entirely one, moderate and harmonious’ (443d-e).50

But what does such wisdom or knowledge consist in, exactly? What do the guardians know, that is, which enables them to ‘produce’ harmony and order in both soul and society? The Republic’s answer to this is, essentially, that they know the Form of the

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49 For the general association between goodness and integration, evil and disintegration, see (eg) Rep 445c, 470b-d, 520d, 608e and 609a-b.
50 By contrast, the Statesman dwells exclusively on the politically integrative effects of statesmanship, thereby bypassing the question of how the individual psyche is to fare best. This is of a piece, perhaps, with its lack of interest in issues concerning the consent of the governed, and its seeming indifference to the potential for abuse in one-man rule (see Schofield 2006, 176, 178). The Republic is at least somewhat sensitive to the latter, for it recommends that only those rule who are reluctant to do so (see (eg) Rep 520d).
Good. For it is this superordinate Form, as outlined at Rep 505-21, which is meant to shape their efforts to create unity and order. As Socrates claims, ‘the Form of the Good is the most important thing to learn about [megiston mathēma]’, because ‘it’s by their relation to it that just things and the others become useful and beneficial’ (505a). The trouble with this claim is, however, that the content of this megiston mathēma remains obscure. By Socrates’ own admission, ‘we have no adequate knowledge of it’ (505a), so he has to have recourse to a series of images and metaphors – Sun, Line and Cave, or what he calls the ‘offspring of the Good’ (506e) – in order to explicate it. And while these may be highly suggestive, they are by common consent hardly self-explanatory, giving no clear account of how the Form of the Good relates either to its subordinate Forms, or to the world of embodied particulars.51

Hence if we restrict ourselves to those passages that attempt to explicate the Form of the Good, the epistemic grounding of the guardians’ supposed technē is likely to remain obscure, thereby throwing into doubt whether the guardians possess a genuine craft after all. However, if we look beyond these passages, there may be grounds for optimism. For at 534b-c, Socrates holds that there is something that can give a clear logos of the Good – namely, the science of dialectic [hē dialektikē]. It is this technē, the highest craft of all, which purportedly ‘systematically attempts to grasp with respect to each thing ... what the being of it is, for all other technai are concerned [merely] with human opinions and desires’ (533b). Dialectic is thus meant to bring different subjects [mathēmata] ‘together to form a unified vision of their kinship, both with one another and with the nature of that which is’ (537b-c). And since this is precisely the epistemic analogue of what the guardians are supposed to achieve vis-à-vis the inhabitants of the polis – viz. unification and integration – it seems reasonable to conclude that dialectic forms the epistemic content of the guardians’ technē.

Even if dialectic is meant to play this epistemologically foundational role in the Republic, its method still remains substantially opaque, viz. how, exactly, it is supposed

51 In line with this, several interpreters charge that the Form of the Good remains completely impersonal, not good for anyone in particular, and thus wholly impractical (see eg) Anagnostopoulos 1994, 53-4, Annas 1997, 158 and Schofield 2006, 157, 172). Even a highly respected scholar, and one sympathetic to Plato – Bernard Williams – judges that this superordinate Form is ‘retiring and inexplicable’, and thus ultimately ‘unintelligible’ (Williams 2003, 16, 11). For older expressions of this view, see (eg) Grote 1885, 212-214 and Cross and Woozley 1964, 260-61. For a more generous treatment of the Form of the Good, one that does its best to make sense of the latter’s attendant metaphysics, see Santas 2001, ch.5.
to grasp the Good. Burnyeat argues that dialectic grasps the Good in virtue of its mathematical content, which supposedly discerns harmonies in thought (Burnyeat 2000, 45, 53), and thereby grounds harmony also in the world – the principle of which is fundamentally mathematical (ibid. 74-5).\(^{52}\) And this mathematical interpretation of dialectic has some plausibility, given the Republic’s emphasis on mathematics and geometry as technai immediately subordinate to dialectic (see Rep 522-6, 533a), and given the widespread association we have already seen between technē and quantitative exactitude. Moreover, there is further evidence, beyond the Republic, for an association between mathematics and the good of unity. For example, in the Philebus Socrates speaks of how ‘limit’ ends ‘the conflicts there are among opposites, making them commensurate and harmonious by imposing a definite number on them’ (25e). And in the Gorgias, Socrates tells Callicles that ‘wise men claim that partnership and friendship, orderliness, self-control and justice hold together heaven and earth, and gods and men, and that is why they call this universe a world-order [kosmos] ... not an undisciplined world-disorder … proportionate equality [thus] has great power among both gods and men, [but] you suppose that you ought to practise getting the greater share. That’s because you neglect geometry’ (508a).\(^{53}\)

So all in all, it seems that the Republic’s technē of guardianship may give real content to the notion of knowing the Good. As in the Protagoras, such knowledge would at root be quantitative or mathematical, except that it would be embodied not in a hedonistic measuring craft, but in a second-order craft that oversees and coordinates the ‘production’ of various subordinate goods. Is this, then, the long-awaited virtue-technē,

\(^{52}\) NB Rep 423d above, which recommends becoming ‘not many but one’. Burnyeat’s point is that this recommendation of personal and political unity, or ‘oneness’, is essentially mathematical, reflecting what he sees as Plato’s desire to render ethics mathematical, and mathematics ethical (see Burnyeat 2000, 76-7).

\(^{53}\) Cf Phil 64d-5a on how a lack of ‘measure’ produces corrupt mixtures, and Tim 32c on how the earth’s four elements make it ‘a symphony of proportion. They bestowed friendship upon it ... [bringing it] into unity with itself’. The idea that ‘due measure’, or some kind of ‘mean’ is essential to creating a unified, harmonious polis may also be central to the Statesman’s politikē technē (see Stat 283c-4e). This is suggested by Melissa Lane (see Lane 1998, 186, 191, 202), who adds that another (at least quasi-) mathematical method – that of ‘division’ – may also be central to this expertise. (For more on the Statesman’s conception of a ‘mean’, see chapter four below.) Although the Statesman never mentions the Form of the Good by name, if both the Republic and Statesman point towards mathematics as grounding their respective ruling technai, the differences between these two dialogues may not be that great after all. Contrast Malcolm Schofield, who holds that the Republic’s craft of guardianship is grounded in ‘moral wisdom’, whereas the Statesman’s political craft is grounded in ‘managerial expertise’. (See Schofield 2006, 137, 156, 163-4, 178 and Schofield 1999, 41-2.)
which Socrates confesses he ‘longed after’ from his youth up (Lach 186c)? In all salient respects it certainly appears to be. For as has been seen, it purports to have a determinate ergon – viz. social and individual harmony and order – which is of incontrovertible benefit. This ergon is supposedly grounded, moreover, in an accurate (essentially mathematical) and thus reliable grasp of the Good, which – because it is embodied in a science, the science of dialectic – is both teachable and certifiable. And given the maximally secure nature of this knowledge, together with the maximally wide-ranging nature of its ergon, the craft of guardianship looks to be the most masterful technē of all.

But despite these appearances, I think there are reasons for doubting whether guardianship actually fulfils Socrates’ hopes for a virtue-technē. An initial, if hardly decisive reason, is that guardianship is restricted to a tiny minority in Kallipolis. As Socrates affirms, ‘there will probably be only a few [philosopher-kings], for they have to have the nature we described, and its parts mostly grow in separation and are rarely found in the same person’ (503b; cf 428e-9a). On its own, this affirmation does not show that hē phulakikē is not a bona fide virtue-technē. After all, the Republic nowhere commits itself to the common attainability of virtue; if anything, Socrates enjoys relating how acquiring the relevant expertise will be an arduous, painful process, the end of which – viz. ‘seeing’ the Form of the Good – will be realised by very few individuals (see Rep 514-21). But at the very least, the Republic does restrict apprehension of the Good in a way that is not prefigured in the early dialogues, and which ends up consigning the vast majority of citizens to a position where their virtue consists simply in following the orders of their superiors.

This last point indicates a more decisive way in which guardianship fails to bear the hallmarks of a genuine virtue-technē. What I have in mind here is the fact that guardianship is essentially a political technē, one which is thus not discussed in detail or presented explicitly as a technē that can be employed in the context of people’s individual lives. It is true that, as I outlined above, there is what could be called a private correlate to the public employment of this political craft. But it is not elaborated at any length, so that Plato seems to have lost interest in the idea that a virtue-technē could be the road to happiness in private life.\footnote{This is made even more explicit in the Statesman, where such an idea is not even mooted.} In support of this, it is worth noting that the generic
description for the guardians’ craft of rule is dikaiosunē, ‘justice’, and this is by no means easily identifiable with virtue [aretē]. Moreover, given that the Republic admits the need for a long period of habituation or training prior to the practice of dialectic (see esp. Rep II-III),55 it seems that what will preserve the guardians from acting akratically is not just a grasp of their technē, but (crucially) certain non-cognitive abilities imparted by early training. And if this is the case, a vital function of the virtue-technē described in the Protagoras will not be realised by the craft envisaged in the Republic.

In conclusion, then, it seems that, despite Socrates’ fascination with the notion of a virtue-technē, ultimately the Platonic dialogues allow it to fade from view. For neither of the two genuine candidates for a virtue-technē – viz. the Protagoras’ hedonistic metrētikē technē, or the Republic’s second-order technē of guardianship – have shown themselves, all things considered, to be successful. The first candidate is undermined by its (perhaps dialectical espousal of) hedonism, together with its failure (in light of the Republic’s psychology) to provide a method of ruling out akrasia. The second candidate is undermined by the fact that – although Socrates does occasionally speak of a technē of guardianship56 – the latter appears essentially political in nature, and to rely on non-cognitive elements of training that do not constitute part of guardianship’s dialectical resources proper. Accordingly, the Platonic dialogues, despite having raised many hopes for a virtue-technē, and after having explored two candidates for the title, do not seem in the end to affirm one. In the following chapters, I shall investigate how Aristotle reacted to and transmuted this Platonic inheritance. Does Aristotle believe that virtue is, or could be constituted by a technē? And how, more generally, do the technai – together with the models supplied by them – shape his ethical analysis as a whole?

55 I shall elaborate the nature of this training more fully in chapter five.
56 Nickolas Pappas points out that whereas Republic I mentions ‘technē’ and its cognates on average once per page, in the rest of the dialogue that frequency is reduced to only 0.2 occurrences per page (see Pappas 1995, 36). This is significant, since it reinforces my claim that – once the argument of the Republic is properly under way, and the distinctively ‘Socratic’ aspirations of book I are left behind – the notion that virtue could genuinely be constituted by a technē more or less disappears from view.
In the last chapter, I argued that although the Platonic dialogues express the hope that virtue might be constituted by a \( \text{technē} \), the two positive candidates for such a craft – the Protagoras’ hedonistic measuring \( \text{technē} \), and the Republic’s architectonic \( \text{technē} \) of harmony within the state or soul – both fail, in the end, to realise that hope. Not that the dialogues ever explicitly argue against, or rule out the possibility of a virtue-\( \text{technē} \);\(^1\) it is just that they never convincingly elaborate such a craft, and the genuine possibility of one fades from view.

In this chapter, I will begin to explore Aristotle’s reaction to this Platonic inheritance. To start with, I shall document to what degree Aristotle’s use of ‘\( \text{technē} \)’ and its cognates mirrors Plato’s own usage. Following this, I shall investigate Aristotle’s reasons – summarised at \( \text{NE VI.5} \) – for rejecting the idea that human virtue might in principle be constituted by a \( \text{technē} \). Notwithstanding his explicit and uncompromising rejection of this idea, I shall then go on to outline the extent to which Aristotle’s ethical and political writings do in fact make appeal to models and examples supplied by the crafts. In particular, I shall look at his discussions of slavery and deliberation. These discussions invoke the \( \text{technai} \) in what I shall argue is an essentially illustrative, piecemeal and also unproblematic way. Against this general background, we should be in a better position to tackle arguments more central to Aristotle’s ethics in chapters three to five.\(^2\) I will maintain that these arguments, by contrast to the discussions just mentioned, are centrally motivated by models proper to the \( \text{technai} \) – and that this motivation (though largely unacknowledged) is philosophically problematic.

So to begin with, how closely does Aristotle’s conception of \( \text{technē} \) mirror that of Plato? Overall, they are, I think, highly congruent, although there are subtle changes in emphasis between the two, and Aristotle tends (as he does in general) to elaborate his position more directly and more systematically than Plato. We learn from \( \text{NE I.1} \) that, as for Plato, every \( \text{technē} \) has a determinate, unique end, which Aristotle characterises as a

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\(^1\) Cf Broadie 1991, 191: ‘The analogy of craft with virtue was the legacy of Socrates and Plato, who explored some of its problems but never to the point of official outright rejection’.

\(^2\) Namely, those centring on man’s function, virtue as a mean, and virtue as a habituated disposition.
particular ‘good’ [agathon]. ‘Every technē ... is thought to aim at some good’, Aristotle affirms, ‘[and] ... as there are many ... technai ... their ends are also many; the end of the medical art is health, that of shipbuilding a vessel, that of strategy victory, that of economics wealth’ (1094a1-9); ‘medicine does not consider how to procure an attribute that may be an attribute of anything, but to procure health; and so each of the other technai’ (EE 1218b2-4); ‘the object or end is always something good by nature, and men deliberate about its partial constituents, for instance, the doctor whether he is to give a drug, or the general where he is to pitch his camp’ (EE 1227a18-20); ‘[the good] seems different in different actions and technai; it is different in medicine, in strategy, and in the others likewise. What then is the good of each? Surely that for whose sake everything else is done. In medicine this is health, in strategy victory, in architecture a house, in any other sphere something else’ (1097a16-20).

The range of technai here is strongly reminiscent of that found in the Platonic dialogues, and indeed, it has been shown that Aristotle too invokes medicine more often than any other craft (see Fiedler 1978, 180-83). But unlike Plato, he immediately makes clear that there can be strict hierarchical relations between the crafts: where the technai ‘fall under a single capacity’, he holds, ‘... the ends of the master-arts [architektonikōn] are to be preferred to all the subordinate ends; for it is for the sake of the former that the latter are pursued’ (1094a9-16).³

In line with Plato, once again, the crafts are viewed by Aristotle as affording control or mastery over particular subject-matters, and thereby over the environment as well. But in contrast to Plato (see especially the Ion), Aristotle shows little interest in direct divine inspiration as undermining such control. Instead, he concentrates on chance [tuchē] as the salient rival to the mastery of the techneitês. For example, he quotes Polus as saying that ‘experience made technē ... but inexperience tuchē’ (Meta 981a5), and holds that ‘Those occupations are most truly arts [technikōtatai] in which there is the least element of tuchē’ (Pol 1258b35-6). Admittedly, Aristotle does hold that ‘in a sense tuchē

³ As Sir Alexander Grant maintains, this use of ‘architektonikos’ as applying to a hierarchy of crafts is not attested before Aristotle (see Grant 1885, 423), although there may be a precedent in the Statesman’s reference to ‘master-builders’ (see 259e). Having said this, the Platonic dialogues do contain the notion that the crafts form various hierarchies (see eg Euthyd 290d; Gorg 518a; Stat 281e-2a, 290b-c); it is just that the evidence for this notion is more dispersed, and less succinctly stated than in Aristotle (cf also Meta 982b4-7).
and technē are concerned with the same objects’ (1140a19), on the grounds that both chance and skill can be responsible for the realisation of the same ends (for example, health – see Meta 1034a9-10, 1049a4 and PA 640a29-30; cf Poet 1454a11). Furthermore, he maintains that chance cannot be eradicated wholesale from the crafts: ‘in matters involving technē’, he says, ‘tuchē too largely enters, for example in strategy and navigation’ (EE 1247a5-7). But it remains the case that insofar as technē is genuinely present, it does exclude chance, along with the unreliability and unpredictability associated with the latter.4

What, then, conditions the control and reliability afforded by the technai? According to the Platonic dialogues, it is knowledge [epistēmē], and in particular the accurate grasp of things made possible by measurement and quantification (see ch.1, pp. 12-13). Aristotle certainly follows his predecessor in affirming the epistemic grounding of the crafts, for technē and epistēmē are strongly associated, and often identified with each other in his works. For example, he speaks of ‘the experts and men of science [hoi techntai kai ... hoi epistēmones]’ (SE 168b6), referring to ‘all technai’ as ‘productive [poiētikai] forms of epistēmē’ (Meta 1046b3; cf 1075a1-2).5 At Prior 46a18-22, he holds that ‘it is the business of experience to give the principles that belong to ... any ... technē or epistēmē’, reiterating this point at Meta 981a3. At Meta 1074b11 he declares that ‘probably each technē and epistēmē has often been developed as far as possible and has again perished’, while at NE 1094a18 he refers to the technai he has just listed as ‘epistēmai’. Moreover, there are several passages in the Politics where Aristotle joins ‘technai’ and ‘epistēmai’ with an epexegetical ‘kai’, indicating that these terms are interchangeable (see 1282b14, 1288b10-11, 1331b37). Given all the evidence, then, it is clear, I think, that the technai are conceived by him essentially as species of knowledge.6

4 NB Aristotle’s claim that ‘if a thing can be produced without technē or preparation, it can be produced still more certainly by the careful application of technē to it’ (Rhet 1392b8). (For more on the dialectic between technē and tuchē in Aristotle, see Dunne 1993, 255-6.)

5 Lest it be thought that ‘poiētikai’ here implies that the technai produce only physical products, it should be stressed that (eg) the ‘mathematical arts’ are genuine technai for Aristotle, just as they were for Plato (see (eg) Post 71a4; Meta 981b21-4). This is somewhat obscured by Aristotle’s official definition of ‘technē’ at NE VI.4 as ‘a reasoned disposition to make [hexis ... meta logos poiētikē]’.

6 For further evidence, see NE 1097a4-6; EE 1220b26; Rhet 1392a26. (See also Joseph Dunne’s remarks on the relation between technē and epistēmē in Aristotle, at Dunne 1993, 253.) Grant points out that when Aristotle is using ‘epistēmē’ in a strict, technical sense – say at NE VI.3 – his uses of ‘technē’ and ‘epistēmē’ come apart (see Grant 1885, 423). In such contexts, the latter takes as its proper object only what
While Aristotle (like Plato) understands the crafts as epistemically well-founded forms of practice, it does not follow that he understands them (as Plato does) as closely connected with measurement and quantification. Indeed, there is evidence that he is prepared to allow the technai a good deal of imprecision. For example, he writes that ‘precision [to ... akribēs] is not to be sought for alike in all discussions, any more than in all the products of the crafts [tois dēmiourgoumenois]’ (1094b12-14). ‘[M]atters concerned with conduct ... have no fixity’, Aristotle claims, so that ‘agents ... must in each case consider when it is the appropriate time to act [ta pros ton kairon], as happens also in the art of medicine or of navigation’ (1104a8-10). In fact, he goes so far as to say that ‘virtue is more exact [akribestera] and better than any technē, as nature also is’ (1106b14-15). According to Reeve, this formal deprivileging of the technai reflects Aristotle’s view that the crafts are grounded in experience of enmattered particulars (see Prior 46a18-22 and Meta 981a3 above), which by their nature do not admit of a precise logos (see Reeve 1992, 77-8). But whatever Aristotle’s reasons here, what is salient is that he does not appear (at least in the foregoing passages) to share Plato’s aspirations for the technai as models of akribeia.

That Aristotle appears not to require a high level of precision from the technai in general should not obscure the fact, however, that (as I argued above) he does take the crafts to constitute genuine forms of knowledge. And he supports this view – as Plato did in the Gorgias (see ch.1, pp. 4, 20) – by contrasting craftsmen with those who possess mere experience [empeiria]. As he holds in Meta I.1, ‘we suppose technitai to be wiser than men of experience’ (981a25-6), because they possess ‘knowledge and understanding [to ... eidenai kai to epaïein]’ (981a24). Their craft-knowledge is grounded, as Aristotle admits, and as Reeve pointed out above, in experience of particulars (see 980b28-81a7). But it is intrinsically more valuable than such experience, because it consists in what Aristotle calls ‘universal judgements’: these go beyond judgements concerning individual

is universal, necessary, eternal and demonstrable. And this separates knowledge from the technai, which Aristotle tends to place firmly in the realm of the contingent (see (eg) 1140a1-2). But none of this undermines my basic claim, viz. that Aristotle understands the crafts as having a stable epistemic grounding, and that it is in virtue of this that they afford their practitioners a significant degree of mastery.

NB ‘The minute accuracy of mathematics is not to be demanded in all cases, but only in the case of things that have no matter’ (Meta 995a14-16). Dunne argues that among crafts, it is those that are particularly dependent on the kairos, viz. ‘the appropriate time to act’ – eg medicine and navigation (see 1104a8-10 above) – which have to forego Plato’s ideal of precision (see Dunne 1993, 254).
cases, by subsuming the latter under specific types (‘from many notions gained by experience’, he claims, ‘one universal judgement about similar objects is produced’ (981a6-7)).

And the value of such universal knowledge consists, crucially, in its affording systematic explanations of why certain types of particular behave and interact in the ways they do (for example, ‘why fire is hot’ (981b13)). As Aristotle himself puts matters, ‘men of experience know that [a] thing is so, but do not know why, while [technitai] know the “why” and the cause [to dioti kai tēn aitian]’ (981a28-30).

Aristotle takes the causal-explanatory basis of craft-knowledge to have important dividends, dividends very similar to those identified by Plato. For not only does ‘knowing the causes [tas aitias gnōrizein]’ (981b6) mean that the craftsman’s actions are more reliable than those grounded solely in experience (NB Aristotle’s opposition between technē and tuchē, detailed on pp. 32-3), such knowledge also essentially conditions the craftsman’s ability to teach his craft to others. As Aristotle comments, ‘in general it is a sign of the man who knows, that he can teach, and therefore we think technē more truly knowledge than experience is; for craftsmen can teach, and men of mere experience cannot’ (981b7-10; cf 1047b31-6); ‘the people who teach are those who tell the causes of each thing’ (982a29-30). And if it is the causal-explanatory nature of craft-knowledge that grounds both its reliability and teachability, so it is plausible, surely, to view its nature ultimately as earning the technitēs the epithet ‘sophos’ (see Meta I.1 passim.; cf Platonic precedents for this at ch.1, pp. 8-9).

In sum, therefore, Aristotle follows Plato in understanding the technai as forms of knowledge, even if Plato believes precision is attainable across a wider range of crafts

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8 Aristotle illustrates this claim as follows: ‘to have a judgement that when Callias was ill of this disease this did him good, and similarly ... in many individual cases, is a matter of experience; but to judge that it has done good to all persons of a certain constitution, marked off in one class, when they were ill of this disease ... – this is a matter of technē’ (981a7-12). Of course, it is consistent with this that ‘theory [logon] without experience’ (981a20-21) can be less effective than experience alone – craft-knowledge must be grounded in experience of particulars to succeed. But equally, experience without universal judgement is always second-best, since it lacks the kind of understanding that can be extended to similar cases.

9 Likewise, it plausibly earns the technai their reputation as systematic, professional forms of understanding and practice. For instance, Aristotle comments that ‘the teaching [the paid professors of contentious arguments] gave their pupils was rapid but unsystematic [atechnos]’ (SE 184a1), and maintains that ‘Dramatic ability is a natural gift, and can hardly be systematically [atechnōteron] taught’ (Rhet 1404a16; cf 1403b35). In line with this, he distinguishes those who ‘take a hand as amateurs [atechnos] in the same task with which dialectic is concerned’, from those who do so ‘professionally [entechnōs]’ (SE 172a34). And he notes that while some call actors “hangers-on of Dionysus”, ... they call themselves “technitai”: ... the one [expression is] intended to throw dirt at the actor, the other to dignify him’ (Rhet 1405a23-5).
than Aristotle. Moreover, they both see craft-knowledge as having key advantages over the experience of the amateur: it is systematic, reliable and teachable, thus earning those who have it the title of ‘sophoi’. But at this juncture, the question arises of whether Aristotle also follows Plato in viewing the technai as of intrinsic benefit. For it does not follow from the fact that a technē is systematic, reliable and teachable that it is also essentially beneficial. Indeed, there are texts in the Aristotelian corpus that directly impugn this view, by seeming to assimilate the crafts to what Socrates in the Phaedrus calls mere technēmata, ‘techniques’, which can be turned to either beneficial or destructive ends (see ch.1, p. 4). For instance, Aristotle writes that each technē ‘accompanied by reason [meta logou] is alike capable of contrary effects, [whereas] one non-rational power produces one effect; for example, the hot is capable only of heating, but the medical art can produce both disease and health. The reason is that epistēmē is a rational formula [logos], and the same logos explains a thing and its privation’ (Meta 1046b4-9).

While these passages do present the technai as no more than means-end techniques, when they are put in context it can be seen that Aristotle’s position here is not in fundamental tension with that of Plato. For he continues the above passage by holding that ‘such epistēmai must deal with contraries, but with one in virtue of their own nature, and with the other not in virtue of their nature; for the logos applies to one object in virtue of that object’s nature, and to the other, in a sense, accidentally’ (Meta 1046b10-13; cf EE 1246a26-31). And this thought – that using, for example, medical techniques to bring about disease is to misuse the art of medicine, ie not to respect it per se – is reiterated elsewhere. For example, Aristotle maintains that ‘science [epistēmē] enables us to do what does not belong to that science; for the same science is not similarly related to health and disease, but naturally to the former, contrary to nature to the latter’ (EE 1227a25-8); ‘while it is easy to know that honey, wine, hellebore, cautery, and the use of the knife are so, to know how, to whom, and when they should be applied with a view to

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10 For corroboration of this, see Dunne 1993, 249-53, where the method, reliability, and thus masterliness and prestige of the Aristotelian technitēs is borne out.
11 Cf ‘on the one hand, the healthy produces only health and what can heat only heat and what can cool only cold, but the scientific man [ho ... epistēmōn], on the other hand, produces both the contrary effects’ (Meta 1046b18-20); ‘Epistēmē may be used ... truly [alēthōs] or to do what is wrong [hamartēin], eg when a man voluntarily writes incorrectly, thus using knowledge as ignorance’ (EE 1246a31-3).
producing health, is no less an achievement than that of being a physician’ (NE 1137a14-17; cf 1137a23-6). So all in all, it seems that the final mark of the technai – their being directed essentially at particular benefits, and only accidentally at various correlative harms – is affirmed by Aristotle no less than by Plato.\(^\text{12}\)

In summary, I think we have seen that Aristotle’s conception of technē does not represent a marked departure from that of Plato; their core assumptions about the crafts are the same, even if they stress different aspects of them, and ground those aspects somewhat differently. They both view the technai as having determinate, unique ends, which afford control or mastery over areas specified by those ends. Such control is, they both agree, conditioned by craft-knowledge, which in turn is grounded in a systematic grasp of things that unsystematised experience alone cannot yield. Their one real difference concerns the extent to which they each value precision [akribeia] in the knowledge of the technitēs. For although Aristotle acknowledges that some crafts (for example, mathematics) will display a high degree of precision, he does not – unlike Plato – affirm a connection between all the crafts and strict quantification. Lastly, Aristotle and Plato agree that the technai are reliable, teachable and of intrinsic benefit, thus lending those who practise them authority and wisdom.

Given all these commonalities, it might be thought that the two philosophers would arrive at very similar views on whether human virtue can be embodied in a technē. But whereas Plato’s dialogues show great interest in this possibility, and never explicitly repudiate it, Aristotle makes a point of refuting it – in NE VI.5. Hence, in what follows, I will examine the four arguments he gives to refute it, and assess their force.\(^\text{13}\) I shall call these the arguments from general and particular goods, from production and action, from redundancy and from voluntary error. According to my estimation, the second argument – viz. from production and action – is the most challenging, so I shall be looking at this in most detail.

Aristotle’s first argument, from general and particular goods, runs as follows: ‘Now it is thought to be a mark of a man of practical wisdom [phronēsis] to be able to

\(^\text{12}\) While Aristotle does, contra Plato, grant technē-status to cookery and perfumery (NE 1153a24-6), and also to rhetoric, like Plato he never refers to an art of (eg) torturing, plunder, murder or theft.

\(^\text{13}\) NE VI.5 presents these arguments in summary form, so in some cases there will be a need to draw on Aristotle’s texts more widely, to gain a fuller grasp of his reasoning.
deliberate well about what is good and expedient for himself, not in some particular respect, for example about what sorts of thing conduce to health or to strength, but about what sorts of thing conduce to the good life in general. This is shown by the fact that we credit men with practical wisdom in some particular respect when they have calculated well with a view to some good end that is one of those that are not the object of any technē’ (1140a25-30). And Aristotle supplements this argument both with an illustration, and with a clarificatory definition: ‘we think Pericles and men like him have practical wisdom’, he holds, ‘… because they can see what is good for themselves and what is good for men in general; we consider that those can do this who are good at managing households or states’ (1140b7-11); ‘Practical wisdom, then, must be a reasoned and true disposition to act with regard to human goods’ (1140b20-21).

According to this argument, phronēsis – which Aristotle defines as ‘full virtue’, kuria aretē – cannot be a technē, because whereas the technai are directed at particular, circumscribed goods (medicine at health, gymnastics at strength, etc.), human virtue is directed at ‘the good life in general’. Granted, and as Aristotle implies at 1140b20-21, any instance of virtuous action will in the first analysis be aimed at a specific good, such as courage, temperance or justice. But unlike craft-goods, these virtue-ends plausibly contain intrinsic reference to a wider, unrestricted human good. This at least appears to be Aristotle’s view, and it certainly answers to the intuition that there is a contrast to be made between what Broadie calls ‘restricted goods’ (Broadie 1991, 211), viz. the determinate, unique ends of the technai, and the overarching goods of household and state, to which they are subordinated. Does this opening argument, therefore, succeed?

Its success is compromised, I would argue, for although it does reflect an intuitive contrast, it does not address the core issue of whether human virtue, with human good as its end, could be embodied in a technē. Admittedly, ordinary linguistic usage may not make reference to such a highly general, all-inclusive craft. But Plato had spent much effort on exploring the possibilities for one, and it is not clearly objectionable to suggest one of these might be realised. Moreover, Aristotle himself refers to ‘master-arts’, to

\[14\] So argue Gauthier and Jolif 1959, 470, Reeve 1992, 78 n.23 and Lawrence 2006, 43. Both Reeve and Gavin Lawrence explicitly contend that whereas the virtues are intrinsically concerned with their final cause – viz. eudaimonia, flourishing or the good life, this being the ‘mark’ at which virtuous agents ‘aim’ (1094a23-4) – the crafts are not intrinsically concerned with this wider goal. (Gauthier and Jolif further point out that Aristotle’s distinction between general and particular goods is drawn from Rep 428b-d.)
which other arts are subordinated (see 1094a9-16, quoted on p. 32); so why not allow that there could be a master-art of virtue, which covers all the individual virtues, coordinating them for the overall good? Indeed, politics, which Aristotle conceives of as a superordinate technē (see, for example, NE I.2, VI.7-8), would seem much like this, and he even goes so far as to say that ‘Political wisdom and practical wisdom are the same disposition [hèxis] of mind’ (1141b23-4). Given this, it is not clear that Aristotle’s first argument does not in effect beg the question; for it assumes that the human good could not be the object of any craft, without providing real evidence for this.  

Aristotle’s second argument, from production and action, is far more challenging (even if highly compressed). It runs as follows: ‘practical wisdom cannot be ... [a] technē … because action [praxeōs] and production [poiēseōs] are different kinds of thing … while production has an end other than itself, action cannot; for good action [eupraxia] itself is its end’ (1140b1-7). Now the conception of the crafts as productive forms of activity, viz. as having a separate product as their aim, should be familiar from p. 33, where I noted Aristotle’s definition of the technai as ‘productive [poiētikai] forms of epistēmē’ (Meta 1046b3; cf 982a1, 1075a1-2; NE VI.4; Top 157a10). What is new here is Aristotle’s claim that virtuous action is categorically distinct from this: virtuous action, or what he calls simply ‘praxis’, does not have a separate product as its end, but is an end per se. And this seems reasonable, because Aristotle opens the NE by making a complementary distinction: ‘a certain difference is found among ends’, he holds – ‘some are activities [energeiai], others are products apart from the activities that produce them’ (1094a3-5). So we seem presented with an appealingly neat view: there are two mutually

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15 One could accuse Aristotle of incoherence here: for he seems to move from treating politikē as a technē in NE I.1-2, to holding that politikē and phronēsis are identical, to arguing that phronēsis is not a technē in NE VI.5. But Aristotle actually maintains that being politically wise is not the same thing as being practically wise (see 1141b24). The former, he contends, involves specifically legislative, judicial and managerial abilities (1141b31-3), whereas the latter’s characteristic area of concern is an individual’s personal relations (1141b29-31). Moreover, as he reiterates at 1141a11 ff., technē-knowledge privileges universals (cf the passages from Meta I.1 cited on pp. 34-5), whereas practical wisdom privileges ‘the ultimate particular fact’. Given this, even if phronēsis is strongly facilitated by a just political order (see 1142a9-10), it does not follow that practical wisdom and the politikē technē are identical.

16 In line with this, Broadie maintains that Aristotle’s argument from general and particular goods is ‘superficial’, because if the ability to achieve the ‘unrestricted good’ were craft-like, then ‘of course it would count as a craft’ (Broadie 1991, 207). This view is echoed by both Terry Penner and Edward Warren, who (discussing Plato) argue that linguistic norms governing the use of ‘technē should not dictate philosophical conclusions concerning its nature (see Penner 1973, 144-5 and Warren 1989, 114).
exclusive categories of activity, craft-activity and virtue-activity, and these have what could be called ‘external’ and ‘internal’ ends respectively.

The trouble is that this view of what distinguishes the crafts from the virtues conflicts with what Aristotle says elsewhere, and in two main respects. First, he appears to admit there are instances of virtuous action that do have an external end. For example, in his discussion of the voluntary and the involuntary, he claims that action in ignorance is necessarily involuntary, especially ‘if [the agent involved] was ignorant on the most important points; and these are thought to be what he is doing [hē praxis] and with what aim [hou heneka]’ (1111a17-19). At 1112b33, he holds that ‘actions [hai ... praxeis] are for the sake of things other than themselves’, while at 1177b2-4 he avows that ‘nothing arises from [contemplation] apart from the contemplating, whereas from practical activities [tōn praktikōn] we gain more or less apart from the action [para tōn praxin]’.

And these passages are bolstered by others outside the NE. For instance, Aristotle maintains that ‘that for the sake of which we act ... [has] to do with practice [metechei praxeōs], and thus we put among things within the range of action [tōn praktikōn] both health and wealth and the acts done for the sake of these ends’ (EE 1217a36-8); ‘[man’s] actions are ... directed to ends beyond them – while the perfectly conditioned has no need of action, since it is itself an end ... action always requires two terms, ends and means’ (Cael 292b4-6).

A first pass at reconciling these passages with NE 1140b1-7 might be to say that the occurrence of ‘praxis’ in the former does not entail that specifically virtuous actions are being referred to (as they are in the latter). But this will not do, since there is no reason to think that the praxeis mentioned in the above passages are meant to be restricted to craft-activities alone. Moreover, it seems right to hold that virtuous actions can take as their aim states and objects that lie beyond them: Aristotle himself supplies the example of just action in NE V, the aim of which is equitable distribution. So there would appear a genuine inconsistency in Aristotle’s conception of virtuous action. On the one hand, he restricts the latter to forms of action that have strictly internal ends, while on

17 David Charles gives the example of someone called Bethan, who ties a ‘bean-framework’ in order that Mr Jones get winter vegetables (see Charles 1986, 123). On the view under consideration, her tying is a virtuous action aimed at an external end, viz. Mr Jones’ having winter vegetables. Cf Irwin: ‘Many events that are virtuous actions, and as such decided on for themselves, are also productions; consider, eg, a magnificent person’s efforts to have a suitable warship equipped’ (Irwin 1985, 342).
the other, he stipulates that internal ends are characteristic only of ‘perfectly conditioned’ agents, and that therefore human actions must be directed at external ends. Is there any way of salvaging his position here?

A second pass at this is elaborated by David Charles (see Charles 1986), one endorsed by Reeve (see Reeve 1992, 105). Charles notes that whereas at 1177b2-4 above Aristotle speaks of gaining things from practical activity that are \( \text{para tēn praxin} \), ‘over and above the action’, at 1112b33 he speaks instead of actions being ‘for the sake of things other than themselves \([\text{allōn}]\)’. And this change in vocabulary holds out the possibility, Charles maintains, of rendering Aristotle’s position consistent. For as he argues (p. 135), the results \( \text{erga} \) of an action can be other than \( \text{allo} \) that action, without being over and above \( \text{para} \) it: in terms of his own example, Bethan’s aiming-to-provide-Mr-Jones-with-winter-vegetables is other than her tying of the bean-framework, but it is not properly over and above the latter\(^{18}\) – it still counts as what he calls an ‘internal result’ of her action. Accordingly, virtuous actions can now be understood as having \( \text{allo} \) ends that nonetheless count as internal to them, while craft-activities can be understood as having only \( \text{para} \) ends, viz. ends that are truly over and above, or separate from them. And this both preserves the distinction made between virtue and craft at 1140b1-7, and at the same time upholds the claims made about \( \text{praxeis} \) outside NE VI.5.\(^{19}\)

This interpretation of Aristotle’s position certainly makes sense, I take it, of how a virtuous action can have an internal end that is also distinct from it. As Charles holds, ‘If these \([\text{internal}]\) results are distinct from, but not over and above \([\text{para}]\) the actions which bring them about, an action done for the sake of its logically necessary internal result may be characterised as done for its own sake rather than for the sake of anything over and above the action’ (p. 137). The problem with this solution is, however, that it requires that all craft-ends be \( \text{para} \) ends, viz. over and above the actions that bring them about.\(^{20}\)

\(^{18}\) What is properly over and above her tying is Mr Jones’ \textit{actual receipt} of winter vegetables.

\(^{19}\) It also reflects Aristotle’s usage at the opening of the NE: ‘a certain difference is found among ends’, he holds, ‘some are activities, others are products apart from \([\text{par}]\) the activities that produce them. Where there are ends apart from \([\text{para}]\) the actions, it is the nature of the products to be better than the activities’ (1094a3-6; cf EE 1219a13-17). The \( \text{para} \) ends referred to here seem, given the general context of examples taken from the \textit{technai}, to be craft-ends.

\(^{20}\) Of course, it also leaves unanswered the residual worry – shared by Irwin (see n.17 above), and others – that truly virtuous actions are not concerned merely with the realisation of ‘internal results’. But this worry, although it raises a substantive issue in moral theory, is tangential to my present concerns, so I shall not dwell on it further.
And while this does accurately reflect what Aristotle says at 1140b1-7, it fails to account for the wider conception of the technai he holds elsewhere, according to which crafts can have internal ends. For example, dancing plausibly does not have an external end, and the same could be said, for instance, of gymnastics. Neither of these technai has a para end; rather, their ends are integral to the activities that constitute them. Given this, Aristotle’s restriction of internal ends to virtuous action would seem wholly undermined, and his distinction between crafts and virtues at 1140b1-7 once more put to the question. Rather than signalling the death-knell for Aristotle’s poiēsis-praxis distinction, I think this crux points the way to a more convincing version of that distinction – one, however, which goes beyond the terms in which it is set out at 1140b1-7. For rather than picking out two mutually exclusive classes of activity in the world, craft-activity and virtue-activity, perhaps what Aristotle’s distinction points towards are two mutually exclusive modes of evaluation, craft-evaluation and virtue-evaluation. The force of craft-activity’s having ‘an end other [heteron] than itself’ (1140b6) would, on this view, amount to its end – whether internal or external – being considered and valued autonomously, in abstraction from how it is brought about. For example, we assess a dancer’s performance in abstraction from the intentions and motivations of the dancer; the latter concern us only insofar as we are interested in the virtue or vice of the performer, not in the fineness or botchedness of her performance. These two interests are fundamentally distinct, for as Broadie points out, ‘It may be right on occasion to do a botched job ... and a fine job may be a foolish or wicked action’ (Broadie 1991, 209). This illustrates nicely, I think, how craft- and virtue-evaluation can come apart, as a result of focussing on different aspects of the same overall activity.

Now even if this interpretation of Aristotle’s poiēsis-praxis distinction does go beyond the text of 1140b1-7, it does capture well what he says elsewhere about what differentiates the crafts from the virtues. We have already seen how he views the erga of the crafts as more valuable than the activities that bring them about (see p.41, note 19), a

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21 Aristotle appears to think the same is true also of mathematics: ‘the ergon of [some] things’, he maintains, ‘is just their employment [chrēsis], eg of vision seeing, and of mathematical science contemplation’ (EE 1219a16-17).

22 As John Ackrill implies is warranted (see Ackrill 1980, 93-4). If actions can be productions, and productions actions, then Aristotle’s view of these as constituting mutually exclusive classes of activity is, Ackrill maintains, reduced to incoherence.
view reiterated at EE 1219a18-19. And in line with this, he makes a point of distinguishing craft- from virtue-evaluation at NE 1105a27-b2: ‘the results [ta ... ginomena] of the technai have their goodness in themselves’, he contends, ‘so that it is enough that they should have a certain character, but if the acts that are in accordance with the virtues have themselves a certain character, it does not follow that they are done justly or temperately. The agent must also be in a certain condition when he does them; ... he must have knowledge, ... choose the acts ... for their own sakes, and ... his action must proceed from a firm and unchangeable character. These are not reckoned in as conditions of the possession of the technai, except the bare knowledge’.

If these passages are taken as an illuminating gloss on what Aristotle is driving at in his poiēsis-praxis distinction, then not only, I suggest, is his distinction fundamentally coherent, it also has great plausibility. For surely it is true that in craft-evaluation we tend to concentrate on ‘results’ (whether internal or external), treating their psychological antecedents as (at most) of instrumental worth. In virtue-evaluation, by contrast, we do not maintain such a ‘restricted focus’ (Broadie 1991, 211), looking far more to the intentions and character of the agent involved. In this way, it appears that Aristotle has pinpointed a crucial distinction between the crafts and the virtues, one, moreover, which may throw light on Plato’s search for a virtue-technē. For as was seen in chapter one, both candidates for a virtue-craft that are put forward in the Platonic dialogues effectively instrumentalise virtue. The Protagoras’ measuring craft makes virtue instrumental to pleasure, while the Republic’s second-order craft makes it instrumental to political order. In either case, the technē model on which Plato relies forces him to privilege a specific ergon over virtue itself, thereby (at least on Aristotle’s view) denaturing virtue from the start.

Aristotle’s third argument for ruling out phronēsis as a technē is, like his fourth and final argument, very tersely expressed. It runs as follows: ‘while there is such a thing

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23 Both Broadie 1991, 202-212 and Bostock 2000, 82 affirm this reading. Clearly, doing so requires rejecting the view that the poiēsis-praxis distinction is reducible to the kinēsis-energeia distinction made at Meta 1048b18-36. For kinēsēis (‘movements’, ‘processes’), as Aristotle outlines them, have exclusively para ends, which (as I argued above) Aristotelian technai have not. For commentators who assert the reducibility of one distinction to the other, see Gauthier and Jolif 1959, 459 and Joachim 1951, 205-6.

24 It may well be that it was this property of the technē model that encouraged Plato, in the end, to abandon the search for a virtue-technē. The view that Plato was led inevitably to instrumentalise virtue by the technē model can be found at Klosko 1986, 95-6 and Balansard 2001, 9-10, 51, 163-4.
as excellence [aretē] in technē, there is no such thing as excellence in practical wisdom’ (1140b21-22). Earlier I termed this the argument from redundancy, because Aristotle’s claim here seems to be that whereas we can legitimately speak of, for example, good navigators, or good generals – in virtue of there also being bad instances of these – in the case of phronimoi (viz. fully virtuous people) it makes no sense to speak of ‘good phronimoi’, because the practically wise are necessarily, and by definition good. Gauthier and Jolif agree with this reading, citing a parallel text in the Magna Moralia (‘every science has its excellence, but wisdom has no excellence, but, as it seems, is itself an excellence’, 1197a18-20; see Gauthier and Jolif 1959, 473). And Broadie and Rowe also affirm this interpretation. But it could be objected, surely, that – although Aristotle’s claim here marks a nice linguistic distinction – if there were a genuine virtue-technē, there would also be people who were good and bad at it. Again, as in argument one, Aristotle could thus be accused of citing facts about current linguistic usage, and relying on these to determine issues of philosophical substance. Is this fair?

It is not fair, I take it, because it could be responded that, assuming the existence of a virtue-technē, those who are vicious are precisely not trying to be ‘good at’ virtue in the first place. They do not participate in the craft at all, so cannot be judged successes or failures at it. And this seems a powerful response, since according to Aristotle in NE III, only those who are akratic – viz. those who aim at virtue, but fail to ‘hit the mark’ – can be described as engaging in vicious behaviour, while also trying to be virtuous. By contrast, the truly vicious are those who aim at vice, ignoring virtue altogether. To this it could be responded, in turn, however, that there is a class of people who are ‘bad at’ virtue: namely, those who aspire to virtue, but who are precisely not ‘skilled’ at it. For example, the well-meaning husband who gives his wife the wrong perfume for the fifth time; or akratics, who, although not inept at judging what virtue involves, commit themselves to virtue and then continually backslide. Both these types of agent are surely candidates for the description ‘bad at virtue’, while others more adept than they might be

25 See Broadie and Rowe 2002, 369. It should be noted that Gauthier and Jolif do consider and reject another reading, to the effect that whereas the technai need to be guided by virtue, practical wisdom does not (in virtue of being identical with full virtue). But this reading, although perhaps philosophically respectable per se, seems hard to square with the text, which speaks positively of there being ‘excellence of craft [technēs ... aretē]’, rather than of craft’s intrinsic lack of virtue.
described as ‘good at virtue’. And if this were the case, then Aristotle would once more be put on the defensive, and his argument from redundancy shown not to be probative.

At the very least, then, Aristotle’s third argument shows there to be some infelicity in referring to people as good or bad at virtue, even if it does not succeed in showing that these ways of speaking are (respectively) redundant and contradictory. Aristotle’s fourth and final argument, that from voluntary error, is continuous with the argument from redundancy, but it approaches the same material from a different angle. It runs: ‘in technē he who errs voluntarily is preferable [hohekôn hamartanôn hairetôteros], but in practical wisdom, as in the virtues [tas aretas], he is less so [hētton]’ (1140b22-4). The reasoning here seems to be that in the technai, making deliberate mistakes – such as making a deliberate grammatical error, in order, for example, to test students – is indicative of one’s possession of the skill in question. As Broadie puts matters, to misuse a skill is still to exercise craft-knowledge (see Broadie 1991, 205), and thus in effect to demonstrate one’s skill. By contrast, in the context of the virtues, to ‘go wrong’ deliberately – for example, knowingly to defraud someone of their inheritance – amounts to intentional vicious behaviour, and is intuitively a lot worse than setting out to go wrong in the crafts. If so, this is surely the case a fortiori for practical wisdom, which Aristotle defines as ‘full virtue’ [kuria aretē].

Now this contrast between craft and virtue is clearly in part a response to Plato’s Hippias Minor, in which Socrates raises the view that a skill is demonstrated whether or not it is used for its proper end. An example of this is Hippias’ own skill at memorising [to ... mnēmonikon ... technēma, 368d], which is evident whether he uses it to tell truths or falsehoods, because telling either of these presupposes that skill. Socrates’ novel move at this point is to suggest that if the virtues are grounded only in knowledge, virtue-knowledge is essentially no different from craft-knowledge, for it is demonstrated equally in the choice of both virtuous and vicious ends. For instance, ‘the truthful person is no better than the liar’ (367d), because both possess the same knowledge, and merely choose to exercise it in different ways.26 The only distinction to be made in this area is, Socrates moots, between both the truthful person and the liar on the one hand, and those who

26 Cf Rep 333e-4b, where Socrates distils the argument of the Hippias Minor: ‘A just person has turned out, ... it seems, to be a kind of thief ... [and] justice seems to be some sort of craft of stealing’.
involuntarily or unintentionally tell truths or falsehoods on the other. For the latter group betrays a lack of knowledge, where the former does not, and hence the latter group counts as ‘worse’. As Socrates himself puts things, ‘the one who voluntarily misses the mark and does what is shameful and unjust ... if there is such a person ... would be [no less than the voluntarily just person] ... the good man’ (376b).

Evidently, this conclusion is unsettling, and Aristotle is keen to criticise the premises that generate it. He does so as follows: ‘men think that that acting unjustly is characteristic of the just man no less than of the unjust, because he would be not less but even more capable of doing each of these acts; for he could lie with a woman or wound a neighbour; and the brave man could throw away his shield and turn to flight in this direction or in that. But to play the coward or act unjustly consists not in doing these things, except incidentally, but in doing them as the result of a certain state of character’ (1137a17-23). What this last sentence suggests is, I think, that by taking the technai as a model, and thus by dwelling solely on the strictly epistemic features of virtue and vice, Socrates misses the crucial difference between these: namely, that the virtuous man is disposed against vice, whereas the vicious man is disposed in favour of it. And it is owing to these contrary moral dispositions (not knowledge alone) that neither agent can choose virtue or vice indifferently, but primarily only those actions that correspond to their respective moral characters. To ignore this is to affirm what Aristotle calls ‘a false result of induction’ (Meta 1025a10).27

This diagnosis of the defect at the heart of the Hippias Minor, namely the failure to see that virtue requires not merely knowledge, but also the right moral dispositions, seems well-taken. Moreover, it is echoed by Aristotle elsewhere: ‘If ... all the virtues are kinds of knowledge’, he maintains, ‘one might use justice also as injustice, and so one would be unjust and do unjust actions from justice ... But if this is impossible, it is clear that the virtues are not species of knowledge’ (EE 1246a35-b1). One might nevertheless want to question whether this sharp cleavage between knowledge (which supposedly exhausts the crafts) and moral dispositions is, even by Aristotle’s lights, defensible. After

27 Of course, none of this should be taken as a comment on Plato’s own intentions in the Hippias Minor. By making Socrates hold back from affirming the existence of voluntarily unjust people (see 376b above), it is highly probable that Plato intends to suggest that the right moral character dispositions always supplement, or are somehow built into the knowledge of justice, thereby preventing those with such knowledge from engaging in injustice.
all, as was seen on p. 36, Aristotle himself holds that ‘epistēmai must deal with contraries, but with one in virtue of their own nature, and with the other not in virtue of their nature’ (Meta 1046b10-12). And at the level of craftsmen (rather than crafts), Aristotle denies that, for example, the doctor who poisons is acting ex officio, or that what he does is in any way worthy of his occupation. It follows that the craft-knowledge/virtue dichotomy is highly idealised, and goes against much of what Aristotle actually says. 28

Given this, the prospect for a virtue-technē need not, I suggest, be as bleak as his fourth argument makes out. For if Aristotelian teachai are each orientated not towards a value-neutral pair of opposite outcomes, but towards a single beneficial end, the notion of a technē directed at the good simpliciter would not constitute such a radical departure.

Aristotle’s argument from voluntary error thus completes his critique of the notion of a virtue-technē. 29 How successful is that critique overall? His argument from general and particular goods effectively begs the question against a technē of the human good, for it assumes that every craft must have a restricted end. His argument from redundancy holds that whereas ‘good craftsman’ is informative, ‘good phronimos’ amounts to a tautology. But I argued that this may be too quick, because the possibility of people being good or bad at a virtue-technē is not straightforwardly inadmissible. And his argument from voluntary error, while providing a sophisticated analysis of why deliberate mistakes are preferable in certain idealised craft-contexts, as opposed to most virtue-contexts, 30 does not demonstrate that this would apply specifically to a virtue-technē. In comparison with these three arguments, Aristotle’s argument from production and action does, I think, powerfully impugn the notion of a virtue-technē. For as I construed it, it shows that craft-evaluation essentially values only the ergon of an activity, thereby instrumentalising the motivations that underlie it. And if this is the case, then a virtue-

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28 The dichotomy draws sustenance from seemingly morally neutral examples, such as the grammarian who makes deliberate mistakes. But no technē, properly considered, operates in a moral vacuum. And Aristotle recognises this explicitly: ‘that which is made [to poiēton],’ he holds, ‘is not an end in the unqualified sense … only that which is done [to prakton] is that; for good action is an end, and desire aims at this’ (1139b2-4).

29 Annas thinks that he also proposes a fifth argument, viz. that whereas ‘a purely reasoned disposition [hexis meta logou monon] … may be forgotten, practical wisdom cannot’ (1140b28-30; see Annas 2003, 17 n.5). But unlike (perhaps) mathematics, most crafts are not constituted, I take it, by such purely rational hexeis, ie dispositions that have no practical component whatsoever. Aristotle’s contrast here, in other words, does not capture the majority of technai, nor is it meant to.

30 NB Aristotle claims that voluntary error in craft-contexts is only ‘preferable’ [hairetōteros] to involuntary error, not that it is of positive value, or to be recommended.
technē would likewise instrumentalise virtue, thereby undermining the strong value we intuitively attach to the latter.31

Having documented Aristotle’s concerted and philosophically trenchant criticisms of the notion of a virtue-technē, for the remainder of this chapter I shall begin to explore how illustrations and analogies derived from the technai nevertheless pervade his ethical thought. After a brief look at how these dominate the opening chapters of the NE, I shall concentrate on how they also play a role in his discussions of slavery and deliberation. In each case, it will be my aim to show not that Aristotle contradicts himself by affirming a virtue-technē after all, thereby reneging on what he argued in NE VI.5. Rather, it will be to show that he never abandons the crafts as a source of political and moral philosophical reflection. At the same time, I hope to show how notions borrowed from the technai can enrich and deepen his arguments, without in any way forcing him towards philosophically questionable conclusions. This should prepare the way for chapters three to five, in which I shall argue (by contrast) that, through letting craft-models play a vital and determining role in certain of his key arguments, Aristotle is led to embrace philosophically problematic conclusions.

As I noted in the Preface, ‘technē’ is in fact the second word used in the opening chapter of the NE. ‘Every technē and every enquiry’, Aristotle declares, ‘and similarly every action [praxis] and choice [prohairesis], is thought to aim at some good’ (1094a1-2). This signals immediately, I take it, that concepts central to Aristotle’s ethics – praxis and prohairesis – will be treated on an analytical par with technē. The latter will not constitute a marginal concept, one confined to the Platonic past, along with aberrations such as the Form of the Good. Instead, it will be called on to illuminate discussion at key points, explicitly and without apology. And this is brought out by the way in which Aristotle structures the rest of NE 1.1. For having referred to the fact that ‘there are many actions, technai and sciences’ (1094a6-7), with many ends, his illustrations of this fact draw solely on the crafts: medicine, shipbuilding, generalship and economics. Moreover,

31 True, this would not concern a consequentialist. But someone who claims, as Aristotle does, that ‘good action itself is its end’ (1140b7), does not appear to be a consequentialist. In chapter three I will examine passages in the NE and EE which suggest, to the contrary, that Aristotle does understand the moral virtues as instrumental to a higher good, namely contemplation [theòria]. But even if these passages represent Aristotle’s considered view, theòria itself still counts as a virtue, indeed the highest virtue, which is not instrumental to anything else.
when he goes on to explicate the idea that activities are arranged in hierarchies, which subordinate certain ends to certain others, it is again technē-examples to which he exclusively appeals (see 1094a9-18).

In NE I.2, the crafts once more play a salient role, this time in explicating the nature of politics. Aristotle begins by comparing the ‘chief good’ \([\text{to ariston}]\) to a target: just as an archer can maximise his success only if he knows what to aim at, so humans in general, Aristotle maintains, can attain the chief good only if they have a grasp of their ethical target (see 1094a22-4). He then argues that this ‘target’, being the highest and most general aim of human activity, must be the proper concern of the highest and most general art. This is politikē, which, we are told, ‘ordains which of the sciences should be studied in a state, and which each class of citizens should learn, and up to what point they should learn them’ (1094a28-b2). This ‘master-art’ thus oversees and arranges all activities within the polis – but when Aristotle comes to illustrate this claim, it is again standard craft-examples to which he turns: generalship, economics, rhetoric (see 1094b3). Clearly, although Aristotle makes sure in NE VI.5 to undermine and refute Socrates’ hope for a virtue-technē – in terms that are far more uncompromising than anything found in the Platonic dialogues – he is fully prepared to adopt the Socratic habit of taking technē as the general conceptual frame in which to think about ethical and political issues.

In NE I.3, this philosophical habit is once more to the fore. Here Aristotle uses examples from the crafts to illustrate his view that ‘precision [\(\text{to } \ldots \text{ akribēs}\)] is not to be sought for alike in all discussions’ (1094b12-13). Taking the examples of mathematics and rhetoric, he points out that whereas the former is capable of supplying ‘demonstrative proof’ \([\text{apodeixis}]\), the latter is not, so it would be a mark of intellectual obtuseness to expect the rhetorician to live up to standards of akribeia expected from the mathematician. Aristotle employs this argument to deflate those who expect ethical and political debate to show a degree of rigour and fine-grainedness of which it is incapable. ‘We must be content, then’, he adjures, ‘in speaking of such subjects and with such premises to indicate the truth roughly and in outline, and in speaking about things which are only for the most part true and with premises of the same kind to reach conclusions that are no better’ (1094b19-22). Once again, examples from and analogies with the
technai help Aristotle make a substantive philosophical point, with a degree of trenchancy and vigour that otherwise might be lacking.

Craft-models are also at work, I shall argue, in Aristotle’s discussion of slavery. In what follows, I shall outline his general account of what makes a slave a slave, and then go on to explain how an analogy with the crafts helps him convey his view with clarity and efficiency, even if it does nothing to support his general argument. Aristotle holds that ‘From the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule’ (Pol 1254a22-3); ‘It is clear’, he maintains, ‘that some men are by nature [phusei] free, and others slaves, and that for these latter slavery is both expedient and just’ (Pol 1255a1-2). Not that he is unaware of claims to the contrary, viz. that the institution of slavery is essentially ‘unnatural’ and unjust. ‘Others affirm’, he admits, ‘that the rule of a master over slaves is contrary to nature [para phusin], and that the distinction between slave and freeman exists by convention [nomōi] only, and not by nature; and being an interference with nature is therefore unjust’ (Pol 1253b20-23). But while Aristotle allows that some slaves – for example, those captured as prisoners of war – are such only by convention, ‘it must be admitted’, he says, that ‘that some are slaves everywhere, others nowhere’ (Pol 1255a30). How does he ground this strong claim upholding the naturalness of slavery?

It might be thought that he grounds it in the different physical capabilities of slaves and freemen, for he asserts that ‘Nature would like to distinguish between the bodies of freemen and slaves, making the one strong for servile labour, the other upright ... useful for political life’ (Pol 1254b25-30). But he goes on to say that ‘the opposite often happens ... some have the souls, and others have the bodies of freemen’ (Pol 1254b32-4), thereby acknowledging that a physical criterion is inadequate to sort slaves from freemen. Alternatively, it might be thought that Aristotle views the difference in kind between slave and free as simply an instance of a more general metaphysical duality: ‘for in all things that form a composite whole and ... are made up of parts’, he contends, ‘... a distinction between the ruling and the subject element comes to light’ (Pol 1254a28-31). And he gives as examples the relations between soul and body, mind and the passions, man and the other animals, males and females (see Pol 1254b4 ff.) But while it is true that Aristotle understands the master-slave relation as a relation between
ruler and subject, this does not specify *eo ipso* the particular reasons for slaves being rightfully subject to their masters. What is it about slaves in particular, then, which makes them naturally suited to their subordinate social role?

Aristotle’s answer to this is that ‘slave[s] ha[ve] no deliberative faculty [*to bouleutikon*] at all’ (Pol 1260a12), which is in turn a function of their being rationally deficient. As he puts matters at Pol 12545b20-22, ‘he who can be, and therefore is, another’s, and he who participates in reason enough to apprehend, but not to have, is a slave by nature’. This distinction between having reason and being able merely to ‘listen’ to it is found early on in the *NE* (at 1098a3-5), and is reiterated elsewhere: for example, ‘the appetitive and in general the desiring element [of the soul] in a sense shares in [reason], insofar as it listens to and obeys it’ (1102b30-31); ‘the soul of man is divided into two parts, one of which has a rational principle in itself, and the other, not having a rational principle in itself, is able to obey such a principle’ (Pol 1333a16-18); ‘the parts of the soul partaking of reason are two, but ... they partake not in the same way, ... the one by its natural tendency to command, the other by its natural tendency to obey and listen’ (EE 1219b28-31). So it appears that, according to Aristotle, slaves are natural subordinates in virtue of having no autonomous reasoning capacity. The best they can hope for is to find masters with such a capacity, and thence to obey them: as he puts things at Pol 1252a31-b1, ‘that which can foresee by the exercise of mind is by nature lord and master, and that which can with its body give effect to such foresight is a subject, and by nature a slave’.

Now the first thing to note here is that although Aristotle considers slaves’ reasoning powers lower than women’s, he does not think this precludes their enjoying some measure of well-being. For even if he labels the master-slave relation ‘tyrannical’, and views it as essentially for the masters’ benefit (see 1160b29-31, *Pol* 1278b34-7), he does think it benefits slaves as well. This is because ‘it is better for them, as for all inferiors, that they should be under the rule of a master’ (Pol 1254b20-21). While masters gain from their slaves’ labour, slaves gain from their masters’ superior rational powers,

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32 Women, according to Aristotle, possess a deliberative faculty – albeit one ‘without authority’ (see *Pol* 1260a13-14) – and thus do not, as slaves do vis-à-vis their masters, form a mere ‘part’ of their husbands. For more on the differences between slaves and women in the Aristotelian corpus, see Fortenbaugh 1977 and Deslauriers 2003.
and thereby each group shares an essential community of interest (see Pol 1252a34, 1278b32-4). As Aristotle holds at Pol 1255b10-15, ‘The abuse of ... [masterly] authority is injurious to both; for the interests of part and whole ... are the same; and the slave is a part of the master, a living but separated part of his bodily frame. Hence, where the relation of master and slave ... is natural, they are friends, and have a common interest, but where it rests merely on convention and force the reverse is true’.

So it seems that despite Aristotle’s dim view of slaves’ rational powers, he does grant them some share in well-being. It remains the case, nevertheless, that their well-being falls well below that which can be expected by those whose rational faculties are intact. As he comments at 1177a8-11, ‘no one assigns to a slave [andrapiōi] a share in eudaimonia ... For eudaimonia does not lie in such occupations, but ... in virtuous activities’. And this brings home the fact that, as Jonathan Lear puts it, ‘A natural slave, for Aristotle, is a naturally deficient human being. He is born without a rational principle in his soul to rule over his appetites, passions ... The master is, as it were, completing nature: helping nature along with one of its deficient products’ (Lear 1988, 199). One indication of this complete subordination of slave to master lies in something we have already seen: namely, Aristotle’s willingness to speak of slaves simply as ‘parts’ of their masters (cf EE 1241b19-20, Pol 1254a12-13). And this talk of slaves as ‘parts’ of their masters is reinforced by a powerful metaphor borrowed from the technai.

The metaphor I am referring to is found in the NE, EE and Politics, and consists in viewing slaves as the ‘living tools’ of ‘craftsmen’, viz. of their masters. ‘[S]ince there is the same relation’, Aristotle holds, ‘between soul and body, artisan and tool, and master and slave, between each of these pairs there is no partnership; for they are not two, but the first term in each is one, and the second a part of this one ... the slave is as it were a part and detachable tool of the master, the tool being a sort of inanimate slave’ (EE 1241b17-24); ‘the slave is a living tool and the tool a lifeless slave. Qua slave, then, one cannot be friends with him. But ... there can ... be friendship with him insofar as he is a man’ (NE 1161b4-7); ‘Now instruments are of various sorts; some are living, others

33 Cf Aristotle’s claim that ‘the master ought to be the source of [the] virtue [specific to] the slave, and not a mere possessor of the art of mastership which trains the slave in his functions. That is why they are mistaken who forbid us to converse with slaves and say that we should employ command only’ (Pol 1260b3-6).
lifeless ... in the arrangement of a family, a slave is a living possession ... And a possession may be defined as an instrument of action, separable from the possessor’ (Pol 1253b28-4a17); ‘the relation ... of master and servant is that of a technē and its tools’ (EE 1242a28-9).

While Aristotle’s invocation of the technai here does not affect the content of his argument, it does, I submit, reinforce the argument he has already made, for it gives graphic expression to the idea that the natural slave stands in absolute, ineluctable need of rational guidance from his master. And furthermore, it points up the way in which master and slave, although sharing a community of interest, cannot in the end be friends, in virtue of the radical disparity of status that characterises their relationship. So although the crafts do play a merely supplementary and illustrative role in this context, it cannot be said that that role is without significance. Finally, I want to turn to Aristotle’s analysis of deliberation [bouleusis]. As in the previous cases I have cited from NE I and Aristotle’s discussion of slavery, his analysis of bouleusis is not shaped in any fundamental way by models derived from the crafts. But the crafts do play a role both in setting up the problem of deliberation, and in elaborating its solution.

The problem I have in mind centres on Aristotle’s claim that ‘We deliberate not about ends, but about what contributes to ends [tōn pros ta telē]’ (1112b11-12), or as he puts it later on, ‘the end cannot be a subject of deliberation, but only what contributes to the ends [ta pros ta telē]’ (1112b33-4). These claims are reiterated, moreover, in the EE: ‘Now about the end’, Aristotle maintains, ‘no one deliberates – this being fixed for all [toto keitai pasi] – but about the things that tend to it [tōn eis touto teinontōn]’ (1226b9-11); ‘those who have no fixed aim [hois mētheis keitai skopos] have no inclination to deliberate’ (1226b29-30).34 And these passages are reflected in and underlined by a further passage, which makes a direct analogy with the technai: ‘We deliberate not about ends, but about what contributes to ends. For a doctor does not deliberate about whether he shall heal, nor an orator whether he shall convince, nor a statesman whether he shall...

34 Cf ‘since in deliberating one always deliberates for the sake of some end, and he who deliberates has always an aim [skapos] by reference to which he judges what is expedient, no one deliberates about the end; this is the starting-point [archē] and assumption [hypothesis]’ (EE 1227a5-9). Cf also 1141b12-14, where Aristotle speaks of the deliberator as ‘aiming [at an end] in accordance with calculation [stochastikos kata ton logismon]’, and 1113b3-4, where he holds that ‘The end ... [is] what we wish for, the things contributing to the end [tōn pros to telos] what we deliberate and choose’.
produce law and order, nor does anyone else deliberate about his end. Having set [themenoi] the end, they consider how and by what means [pōs kai dia tinōn] it is to be attained’ (1112b11-16). What is problematic with this claim – sometimes summarised as ‘deliberation is not of ends’ – and specifically with the way in which it is explicated using examples taken from the crafts?

The core problem with it is, surely, that it seems straightforwardly false to claim that people do not (or worse, cannot) deliberate about ends. For although no one tends to deliberate about, for example, whether to heal, once he has become a doctor, or whether to mend shoes, once he has become a cobbler, it seems highly implausible to claim that – prior to settling on a particular profession – no one deliberates about which to pursue. As J.O. Urmson comments, ‘The question arises whether to aim to be a doctor, or lawyer ... or baker ... This issue might well be thought to require at least as much careful deliberation as the problem how to achieve one’s chosen end’ (Urmson 1988, 54). No doubt it is true that, once one’s initial deliberations about one’s career are over, one need attend only to how best to realise it. But Aristotle’s claim appears different from this, and completely untoward, viz. that one’s wider ends are never subject to deliberation; instead, they are simply ‘set’, and deliberation begins from there. Yet this restrictive hypothesis about the possible range of deliberation seems simply unwarranted.

In response to this problem, Urmson proposes another reading of Aristotle’s claim that deliberation is not of ends (see ibid. 55-6). He argues that it should be read in the light of Aristotle’s earlier analysis of ‘choice’ [prohairesis], which in at least one key respect parallels his analysis of deliberation: namely, that choice is not of ends, but only of what contributes to ends. For example, Aristotle holds that ‘wish [boulēsis] relates ... to the end, choice to what contributes to the end [tōn pros to telos]’ (1111b26-7); ‘choice is concerned with what contributes to the ends’ (1113a13-14).35 Rather than leaving this at the level of mere stipulation, however – as he does in his analysis of deliberation – Aristotle actually provides grounds for this restrictive conception of choice. For he explicitly says that a person chooses ‘only the things that he thinks could be brought about by his own efforts’ (1111b25-6), and that ‘choice seems to relate to things that are

35 Cf ‘no one chooses an end, but things that contribute to an end’ (EE 1226a7-8); ‘it is the end that we specially wish for, and we think we ought to be healthy and happy … wish and opinion pertain especially to the end, but choice does not’ (EE 1226a13-17).
in our own power \( [\text{eph'}\text{hēmin}] \)’ (1111b29-30). In other words, according to Urmson, choice cannot be of ends, because it is not in the power of human agents to guarantee their successful attainment.\(^{36}\)

Now there are several things to recommend this reading. First, choice and deliberation are genuinely linked, according to Aristotle, for deliberation is understood by him as supplying the particular content of choice. As he puts matters, ‘The object of choice being one of things in our own power that is desired after deliberation, choice will be deliberate desire [\text{bouleutikē orexis}] of things in our own power’ (1113a9-11; cf \( EE \) 1226b8-9, 15-17). Secondly, Aristotle explicitly holds that, like choice, deliberation takes as its proper objects only ‘things that are in our power and … can be done by [our] own efforts’ (1112a31-4). And thirdly, there is more than one passage on the subject of choice that admits of Urmson’s interpretation. For instance, Aristotle writes that ‘we wish to be healthy, but we choose the acts that will make us healthy, and we wish to be happy and say we do, but we cannot well say we choose to be so’ (1111b26-9); ‘no one chooses to be in health, but to walk or sit for the purpose of keeping well; no one chooses to be happy, but to make money or to run risks for the purpose of being happy’ (\( EE \) 1226a7-11). Neither health nor happiness is an end that we can easily or simply attain, I take it, and in this way Urmson’s interpretation gains some force.

The trouble with this interpretation of the claim that deliberation is not of ends is that, although it is coherent \( \text{per se} \), it appears incompatible with two of the passages I began with on p. 53. The passages I am referring to occur in the \( EE \), and run as follows: ‘no one deliberates [about the end] – this being fixed for all [\text{toute keitai pasi}] – but about the things that tend to it’ (1226b9-11); ‘those who have no fixed aim [\text{hois mētheis keitai skopos}] have no inclination to deliberate’ (1226b29-30). These passages strongly suggest that the sense in which our ends cannot be chosen is not that we cannot guarantee our attainment of them, but rather that they are somehow already determined, and thus not properly ‘up to us’ (another rendering of ‘\( \text{eph'}\text{hēmin} \)’). In other words, they are our ends willy-nilly, prior to any choice or deliberation we may engage in. And this not in the

\(^{36}\) As Urmson puts it, ‘we can deliberate about and choose a course of action that we hope, and perhaps expect, to be successful, but we cannot deliberate or choose whether to be successful’. For example, ‘Once one has become a physician, one no longer needs to deliberate about whether to treat patients, though one could; what one cannot do is to choose to be successful in curing them’.
(absurd) sense that we are somehow predestined to become, say, cobblers, shipbuilders or what not, but rather in the strictly logical sense that all choice or deliberation presupposes some end or other. For without an end to aim at, these would have to occur, per impossibile, in a teleological vacuum.

If this reading is well-founded, it follows that we must reconstrue Aristotle’s analogy to the technai at 1112b11-16 (see pp. 53-4). For the point of this analogy is not that agents cannot choose or deliberate about whether to become doctors, orators, statesmen or any other kind of technitēs. Rather, the technai are invoked here as paradigmatically fixed practices, which supply ends in the absence of which any choosing or deliberating would lose its rationale. And this points up the fact that, even when one is choosing which profession to follow, this presupposes a higher fixed end in light of which one’s deliberation takes place: namely, one’s own fulfilment as a technitēs. In this way, Aristotle’s invocation of the technai points towards what is in effect the most fixed end of all, against which any deliberation must take place – viz. our highest good, eudaimonia. It is in this sense, then, that he holds ‘we cannot well say we choose to be [happy]’ (1111b29): not in the sense (pace Urmson) that happiness is difficult to attain, but rather that happiness forms the necessary background against which all choice is ultimately made possible.37

So it appears that Aristotle’s analogy to the crafts here, far from precluding deliberation about ends simpliciter, precludes deliberation only about our highest end, eudaimonia, together with its constituent parts (such as health and, plausibly, the virtues). But I would contend that Aristotle is willing, in a sense, to allow deliberation even about this final end. For despite his analogy’s suggestion that deliberation is simply about finding means to a pre-given end,38 the phrase he uses elsewhere for such means – ta pros to telos, ‘things contributing or pertaining to the end’ – suggests, on the contrary, that the ‘means’ he has in mind are not logically independent of their end. Rather, they give eudaimonia determinate form in particular sets of circumstances, thereby providing what

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37 NB Aristotle’s claim at the start of the NE that ‘the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim’ (1094a2-3). In the context of human action, this good is identical to eudaimonia. And health, which Aristotle emphasises is not subject to choice (see 1111b26-9 and EE 1226a7-11 above), is not ‘up to us’ as an end precisely because it is an element of eudaimonia.

38 ‘Having set the end’, Aristotle writes, ‘[craftsmen] consider how and by what means it is to be attained’ (1112b15-16).
Troels Engberg-Pedersen calls an ‘articulation’ of their end (see Engberg-Pedersen 1983, 219, 223). And in this way, deliberation can itself be seen as contributing to an articulation of eudaimonia, that is, as supplying its particular components, instead of merely determining its causal antecedents.

This notion of deliberation as yielding ‘component’ or ‘constitutive’ means to eudaimonia seems well-taken, for as David Wiggins comments, good actions do not stand to the good life as ‘causally efficacious’ mechanisms (see Wiggins 1980, 226-7). And indeed, ever since L.H.G. Greenwood first proposed this analysis of means pros to telos, it has become widely accepted. But this analysis depends not only on a plausible construal of a Greek phrase, it is grounded in Aristotle’s texts more widely; texts, moreover, which once again draw strongly on examples from the technai. For example, Aristotle maintains that ‘the object or end is always something good by nature, and men deliberate about its partial constituents [kai peri ou kata meros bouleuontai], for instance, the doctor whether he is to give a drug, or the general where he is to pitch his camp’ (EE 1227a18-20). Similarly, he holds that ‘Warmth in the body ... is either a part of health or is followed ... by something that is a part of health; and [rubbing], viz. that which produces the part, is the last step [in deliberation]’ (Meta 1032b26-9). And at Rhet 1362a18-19, he says that ‘the deliberative orator’s aim is utility: deliberation seeks to determine not ends but the means to ends, ie what it is most useful to do. Further, utility is a good thing’. Again, the implication is that, in life generally, as in the practice of the technai, something can be simultaneously both a ‘means’ and constitutive of one’s end.

All in all, therefore, I think we have seen that Aristotle’s explication of his claim that deliberation is not of ends is generally helped (even if initially it is somewhat hindered) by his appeals to the crafts. It is initially hindered, because the passage at 1112b11-16 (see pp. 53-4) suggests that the ends he has in mind are in each case logically independent of the means used to bring them about. Ends are simply ‘set’, he holds, and means are subsequently chosen to realise them. And this suggestion is reinforced by his

comparison of deliberation to a ‘geometrical construction [diagramma]’ (1112b21), wherein each deliberative step appears separate from the end to be realised. But examples from the crafts also provide Aristotle invaluable assistance in clarifying his claim. For as the passages in the previous paragraph show, the crafts supply many instances of means that are constitutive of their ends, thereby showing how deliberation can, in a sense, be of ends after all. Without illustrations from the crafts, then, the sense in which this is so would be far more obscure.

In conclusion, I have argued that the technai are employed within the opening chapters of the NE, and in Aristotle’s discussions of slavery and deliberation to differing effects. They are used to illustrate, to clarify, and to provide abstract argument with more vivid articulation. In general, their use is thus philosophically wholly beneficial, and points up the way in which Aristotle – despite wanting to free himself from Socrates’ search for a virtue-technē – remains decisively wedded to Socratic method, insofar as it privileges the crafts as models for thinking about virtuous activity. In the following chapters, I shall investigate three further areas of Aristotle’s ethics, which I take to be at once absolutely central to his work, and also far more crucially indebted to models deriving from the technai. For instead of playing a merely illustrative and clarificatory role within his argumentation, it will be my claim that these models come to play an essential and determining role therein. The first of the three areas I mentioned is Aristotle’s function argument, so it is to this that I now turn.
In the last chapter, I began by detailing how Aristotle’s conception of technē is largely congruent with that found in Plato’s dialogues. I went on to elaborate how, despite this broad congruence, Aristotle constructs four arguments that are designed definitively to rule out the possibility – one seriously canvassed, but never realised within the Platonic dialogues – of a virtue-technē. Despite the general trenchancy and sophistication of these arguments, I argued that only one of them, the argument from production and action, succeeds in undermining the notion of a virtue-craft. Notwithstanding this explicit critique, I further argued that illustrations from and analogies with the crafts are noticeably present in Aristotle’s ethical and political writings: for example, in his discussions of slavery and deliberation. In the following chapters, I want to pursue and amplify this argument, showing that the technai constitute a significant, yet under-recognised influence on central arguments and concepts within Aristotle’s ethics. And in doing so, I will also aim to show how this influence is philosophically more problematic than has hitherto been acknowledged.

A good place to begin this investigation is with Aristotle’s function argument, which occurs early on in the NE (at I.7, 1097b22-8a18). Aristotle introduces this argument with the purpose of giving a ‘clearer [enargesteron] account’ of happiness [eudaimonia], which he identifies as the ‘chief good’ [to ariston]. He intends hereby to give more content to the notion of happiness, which so far has been subject to a merely formal account. But even after the function argument has been given, Aristotle emphasises that he has still provided only an ‘outline of the good’, a rough sketch whose details will be filled in later (1098a20-22). So when tackling the argument given at NE I.7, it should be borne in mind that what Aristotle says will have to be supplemented from elsewhere in the text. In recognition of this fact, I will proceed by first giving a barebones rendition of his argument, the details and implications of which I will fill in subsequently.¹

¹ In particular, I shall be concerned with the function argument as extended and completed in NE X. Clearly, by embarking on an argument with such a wide purview (basically, the entire structure of Aristotle’s account of happiness), I am opening myself up to debates to which there have been manifold contributions in the scholarly literature, and to which therefore it is relatively difficult to respond.
As I construe the function argument, it moves through five basic stages, which
can be summarised as follows: (1) Craftsmen [*technitai*] and bodily organs have
functions [*erga*], so it is reasonable to think that ‘man’ (viz. any human) has a function
(1097b25-33); (2) This function must be peculiar [*idion*] to man (1098a1); so (3) Man’s
function cannot be self-nutrition or perception, which are common to other forms of life.
Rather, it must be ‘activity of the soul in accordance with, or not without, rational
principle’ (1097b34-8a8); (4) Being a good or virtuous man consists in performing this
function well (1097b26-7, 1098a8-12); (5) If a man is virtuous, he will *ipso facto* attain
the human good [*to anthrōpinon agathon*] (1098a16-17). Now, not all these stages are
equally salient for the purposes of this chapter, even if they do raise philosophical
problems *per se*. So what I propose to do is briefly to address the least salient, and then
spend the rest of the chapter tackling those stages that are of direct relevance to my
project.

The claim at stage (1) appears to be a wholly unwarranted induction. Why should
man *per se* have a function or characteristic activity,2 just because flute-players, sculptors
or other craftsmen have? The inference seems equally weak in the case of bodily organs,
such as eyes, hands or feet. Perhaps Aristotle is relying here on a fallacy of composition:
namely, if x’s parts each have a function, then x as a whole must have a function. Or he
may be relying on a more subtle fallacy, one that Bernard Suits refers to as the ‘fallacy of
irrelevant privilege’: if x’s (inferior) parts each has a function, then *a fortiori* x as a
(superior) whole must have a function.3 In either case, the weakness of these arguments is
clear, and this has led critics like David Bostock to dismiss stage (1) as a failed induction
(see Bostock 2000, 225). But this is, I think, too quick. Precisely because stage (1) is so
weak as an argument, it is more sensible to take it as offering two analogies, the purpose
of which is to make the notion of man’s having an *ergon* more intuitive. This is, at least,

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2 The translation ‘characteristic activity’ seems suitable, not least because Aristotle refers to ‘*ergon*’ and
‘*praxis*’ in the same breath. Several commentators approve of this translation: see (eg) Clark 1972, 272,

a possible interpretation – one recommended, indeed, by Terence Irwin⁴ – and I see no harm in adopting it for present purposes.

Stage (4) consists in the claim that, as Aristotle puts matters, ‘the good and the “well” is thought to reside in the function’ (1097b26-7). I take this to be the straightforward claim that for any x possessing a function, x is ‘good’ if and only if it performs that function well. This holds equally for artefacts, craftsmen, organs and (ex hypothesi) humans.⁵ Now I think this claim is unproblematic, because in effect it is tautological: Aristotle is giving expression to a formal truth about how we assess the goodness or badness of functional items.⁶ And it is a truth he reiterates elsewhere in his ethical writings. For instance, he holds that ‘every excellence [aretē] both brings into good condition the thing of which it is the excellence and makes the function of that thing be done well; for example, the excellence of the eye makes both the eye and its function good; for it is by the excellence of the eye that we see well’ (1106a15-19); ‘excellence is the best state or condition or faculty of all things that have a use and function. This is clear by induction; for in all cases we lay this down: a garment, for instance, has an excellence, for it has a function and use … Similarly a vessel, house, or anything else has an excellence; therefore so also has the soul, for it has a function’ (EE 1218b38-19a5).

By contrast, stage (5) appears problematic, in that it purports to derive the good for man from what it is to be a good man. But why should fulfilling my function well entail my flourishing? Being, for example, a good knife, sculptor or kidney does not have to be good for any of these items – and the same would seem to hold also for humans. This objection has been raised in Glassen 1957, Siegler 1967 and Wilkes 1980: Glassen, for one, accuses Aristotle of equivocating on the sense of ‘good’ [agathos] in order to reach his conclusion. Others have responded, in turn, that Aristotle simply takes it as self-evident that the good man sets the standard for human flourishing (see Hutchinson 1986, 68-72), or, alternatively, that we necessarily derive most pleasure from our characteristic

⁴ See Irwin 1988, ch.16 n.37. Cf Broadie and Rowe 2002, 276, who maintain that, at stage (1), Aristotle presents illustrations of the concept of characteristic activity, not an inductive argument.

⁵ This might be thought problematic, because whereas artefacts have their function in virtue of being designed for a function, the other items here are (at least ostensibly) not products of design. But as several scholars point out, Aristotle’s concept of function here does not presuppose design (see eg Sorabji 1964, Hutchinson 1986, 59, White 1992, 149 and Santos 2001, 241).

activity (see Santas 2001, 254-5). Another response, which draws on Aristotle’s metaphysics, is to be found at Whiting 1988, 35-7, where it is argued that Aristotle restricts the inference made at stage (5) to natural kinds: these are said to be correlated with certain ‘categorical goods’, which attach to the exercise of a particular kind’s function. But this is a tangential issue for my purposes, so I won’t elaborate on it further.7

From the point of view of this study, the crucial stages of the function argument are (2) and (3). Assuming that man’s \textit{ergon} must be peculiar or unique [\textit{idion}] to him as a species, it could nonetheless immediately be objected that Aristotle’s specification of man’s function at stage (3) is arbitrary. For surely laughing, for example, is unique to humans – as Aristotle himself admits at \textit{PA} 673a9 – yet he will not allow that laughing constitutes the human \textit{ergon}.8 Worse, not only morally trivial activities appear licensed by the criterion of distinctive function, this criterion would seem to admit even morally reprehensible activities as the human \textit{ergon}. For only humans wreak havoc with the natural environment, say, or murder their fellow creatures for amusement’s sake.9 To this objection I would respond in two steps. First, as Aristotle sets out his function argument, it seems evident that he understands the distinctiveness of various species as relative only to (what he takes to be) lower forms of life.10 After all, plants share the activity of nutrition with animals, the lower animals share perception with humans, and humans are said to share rationality with those higher beings called gods. But these facts do not prevent Aristotle from assigning to plants, the lower animals and humans the \textit{idia erga} of nutrition, perception and rational activity respectively. So Aristotle’s notion of being \textit{idion} does not entail absolute distinctiveness.

Secondly, with regard to the claim that even the criterion of relative distinctiveness underdetermines the functions Aristotle attributes to plants, the lower animals and humans, it has to be admitted that this criterion is indeed insufficient to identify the kind of activity he has in mind when he refers in this context to an ‘\textit{idion}’

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7 Santas points out that the inference from functioning well to flourishing was strongly entrenched in Greek medical theory and practice (see Santas 2001, 246-7). It may be medicine, then, that lies behind the notion that ‘to do well and to live well is ... identical with being happy’ (\textit{EE} 1219b1-2). At the very least, the above inference seems no less plausible than one from desire-satisfaction to flourishing, a form of inference not uncommon in modern moral philosophy (see Santas 2001, 247-8).
8 See Williams 1972, 63 for this objection.
9 The examples are Williams’. See Williams 1972, 59 (cf Hurka 1993, 11).
10 Santas notes this at Santas 2001, 237.
activity. For, to use the examples given above, laughing, systematic destruction of the environment and gratuitous murder are all logically possible human functions, even given the relativisation of ‘distinctive function’ to lower forms of life. Nevertheless, it is not clear that this objection goes very deep. For all three of the above activities appear rational in form, or at least presuppose the possession of rationality, and thus presuppose the property that Aristotle identifies as characteristically human. If rationality is centrally involved in each of these activities, then citing them as counterexamples to Aristotle’s identification of the human function may be less convincing than it first appears. Moreover, according to Aristotle’s logic, the differentia of a species is not only distinctive of it, but also essential to it: an individual substance ceases to be the substance it is if it loses its differentia, and without its specific difference a species cannot be identified among the rest of its genus.11 Given this, rationality would seem a more promising candidate for the human idion ergon than any of the three activities listed above. For even if laughing, gratuitous cruelty, etc., constitute important aspects of being human, they do not show the broad-based essentiality that rationality arguably does.12

Thus I have argued that stages (2) and (3) of the function argument are unobjectionable, if ‘idion ergon’ is understood as picking out an activity that is not only unique to (qua relatively distinctive of), but also essential to man – viz. rational activity.13 But at this juncture it could further be objected: why does Aristotle assume a single human ergon in the first place? For surely he could preserve both essentiality and uniqueness while positing a conjunctive or disjunctive set of human erga. Humans manifestly engage in a multiplicity of activities, and some of these are arguably both essential and unique to them as a species. So why insist on singleness of function at all?14

11 See Santas 2001, 244 on this point.
12 No doubt the ability to laugh, for example, is a proprium of humans – viz. ‘[a] property that does not indicate the essence of a thing, but yet belongs to that thing alone, and is predicated convertibley of it’ (Top 102a18-19) – but it does not specify an essential human property, and so does not qualify as ‘idion’ in Aristotle’s sense. Whiting 1988, 37-8 affirms this essentialist reading of ‘idion’. Reeve 1992, 126 questions her textual basis for doing so, but agrees that her essentialist interpretation of ‘idion’ must be what Aristotle intends at stage (2). Further support for this interpretation can be found at Anagnostopoulos 1980, 112, Kraut 1989, 318 and Santas 2001, 243-4.
13 Aristotle does view both humans and gods as essentially rational (see (eg) DA 414b18-19 and Meta XII.9). But they have distinct essences, because they partake in rationality in different ways, and to differing degrees (see Kraut 1979, 472-3 and Reeve 1992, 145-9 for this point).
This is, I think, a serious objection – for Aristotle’s seeming inference from uniqueness to singleness does appear a *non sequitur*. Man’s having a single *ergon* will remain plausible, I take it, only if man’s ‘characteristic activity’ is construed as a characteristic *kind* of activity. For while man clearly engages in many specific activities, they all (arguably, and in line with the above examples) fall under the genus ‘rational’: not only the activity of laughter, say, but even the way humans feed themselves – with careful deliberation over foodstuffs, and taking delight in culinary expertise – is related to rationality in a way not characteristic of plants or the lower animals. So in this generic sense, a single human *ergon* – that of ‘rational activity’ – could be defended (cf the defences offered in Korsgaard 1986 and Nussbaum 1995). By contrast, if ‘characteristic activity’ is construed in an ordinary, specific or discrete sense – on a par with playing chess, for example – Aristotle’s positing of a single *idion ergon* for man will lose plausibility. In what follows, I will argue that – despite the above objection – Aristotle does tend to affirm a specific, narrow construal of ‘rational activity’. And afterwards, I will go on to investigate what might have influenced him to adopt this construal.

The debate between what I have called the wide and narrow, or generic and specific construals of ‘rational activity’ has been characterised differently in the secondary literature. Beginning with *Aristotle’s Ethical Theory* (Hardie 1968), the debate has been characterised as between an ‘inclusive’ and a ‘dominant’ reading of man’s function: whether, that is, man’s function includes a whole range of rational activities – everything from rational contemplation [*theōria*] to all those activities covered by practical reason [*phronēsis*] – or whether it is dominated by rational activity *sensu stricto*, viz. just by *theōria*. David Keyt has since refined the debate by distinguishing two versions of dominantism, which he calls ‘moderate’ and ‘strict’ intellectualism (see Keyt 1983). According to the former, rational contemplation is the focus of but does not exhaust man’s function (or therefore man’s happiness either). According to the latter, rational contemplation does exhaust man’s function, and thus also what it is for him to be happy. With this apparatus in place, I want first to canvas the general evidence in favour of inclusivism, and secondly to see what support it can glean from the function argument itself.

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15 Lawrence 2006, 48, 64 shares this view, and, as will be seen, so do many others.
Part of the general evidence in favour of inclusivism has already been touched on – viz. the way in which rationality plausibly informs almost all human activities. As Santas puts matters, the ‘scope and depth’ of rationality in relation to human behaviour is enormous (Santas 2001, 245).\(^{16}\) This is because human cognitive capacities are essential not only to our theoretical grasp of how the cosmos operates, but also to our practical navigation of the world: our capacities to cultivate the land, to construct artefacts and to live communally are all far more sophisticated than those of other animals, and this primarily in virtue of our practical rationality. Aristotle himself judges that ‘man is more of a political animal than bees or any other gregarious animals’ (\textit{Pol} 1253a8-9), and he ties man’s political nature to the fact that ‘man is the only animal that has the gift of speech’ (\textit{Pol} 1253a9-10). If speech is essential to human rationality, it follows that man’s political nature is also essentially indebted to his rationality. And crucially, this political operation of man’s rationality is necessarily practical, not merely theoretical. For as scholars stress, it is practical reason that allows us to realise goals in the first place.\(^{17}\)

Given the centrality of rationality to human life in general, it is tempting to agree with Kathleen Wilkes that dominantism is highly implausible \textit{ab initio}.\(^{18}\) For by restricting man’s function (at least primarily) to theoretical reasoning, wouldn’t Aristotle be restricting man’s genuine flourishing to an essentially apolitical, and perhaps even solitary activity?\(^{19}\) Not only could very few people attain this good,\(^{20}\) but such a position also flies in the face of the strong intuition that humans usually do find their genuine good in political and communal activity. Modern philosophers like Christine Korsgaard favour this intuition, as might be expected\(^{21}\) – but Aristotle himself also bolsters it. Indeed, he devotes two whole books of the \textit{NE} to the good of friendship (\textit{NE} VIII-IX),

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\textit{See (eg) Whiting 1988, 41-5; Hutchinson 1986, 63. Irwin points out that it is reason in its practical role that allows us to conceive of action under the aspect of the ‘final good’ (see Irwin 1980, 44-5).}
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\textit{See Wilkes 1980, 347-8, 354-6.}
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\textit{Gauthier and Jolif 1959, 53 argue that \textit{theòria} is not a solitary activity. Lawrence 2006, 67 maintains that the evidence for its being solitary or communal remains ambiguous.}
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\textit{See Hughes 2001, 46-7 on this point. Such elitism is both problematic \textit{per se}, and seemingly inconsistent with texts such as the following: ‘if what was said in the “Ethics” is true, that the happy life is the life according to virtue ... then the life which is in a mean, and in a mean \textit{attainable by everyone}, must be the best’ (\textit{Pol} 1295a35-8, my italics).}
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more space than he devotes to any other topic. ‘The man who is to be happy’, he holds, ‘will ... need virtuous friends’ (1170b17-18).

This regard for friendship is of a piece with Aristotle’s repeated emphasis on the moral virtues [ēthikai aretai] as a vital part of the human good. Speaking of the courageous man, he says that ‘the more he is possessed of virtue in its entirety ... the happier he is’ (1117b10). At 1169a8-11, he declares that ‘if all were to ... strain every nerve to do the noblest deeds, everything would be as it should be for the common good, and everyone would secure for himself the goods that are greatest, since virtue is the greatest of goods’. No mention here, then, of the surpassing good of contemplation: Aristotle seems firmly committed to moral virtue, and to this as affording the greatest of goods.22 And this commitment seems most unequivocal at 1144a6-7, where Aristotle avows that ‘the function of man is achieved only in accordance with practical wisdom as well as with moral virtue’. If dominantism were true, this could mean only that moral virtue is instrumentally necessary in creating the kind of conditions in which theōria, the most valuable activity, can take place. But this in turn seems difficult to square with Aristotle’s claim that if action is to exhibit moral virtue, it must be pursued per se, and not merely per accidens.23 Not only Aristotle’s emphasis on the moral virtues, therefore, but also his own philosophy of action appears to be in tension with dominantism.

Another problem for dominantism is what could be called the problem of maximisation. While certain interpreters may be right in holding that Aristotle never explicitly endorses a maximising conception of the good for man,24 it does seem that if rational contemplation is the highest good, then one would be justified in trying to engage in it as much as possible. And indeed, certain passages in the NE and EE lend support to this maximising conception. For instance, Aristotle holds that ‘no function of man has so much permanence as virtuous activities … the most valuable [of these] are more durable because those who are blessed spend their life most readily and most continuously in these’ (1100b12-16); ‘What choice ... or possession of the natural goods ... will most

22 Cf ‘the man who does not rejoice in noble actions is not even good’ (1099a17-8); ‘the happy man ... will do and contemplate what is virtuous, and he will bear the chances of life most nobly’ (1100b18-20).

23 NB ‘The agent must be in a certain condition when he [acts, in order to be virtuous] ... he must choose the acts ... for their own sakes’ (1105a30-32); ‘in order to be good one must be in a certain state when one does [one’s acts] ... ie one must do them as a result of choice and for the sake of the acts themselves’ (1144a18-20).

produce the contemplation of god, that choice or possession is best; this is the noblest standard, but any that ... hinders one from the contemplation and service of god is bad’ (EE 1249b16-21). As the interpreters mentioned above point out, however, this maximising conception may open the door to immoralism. For if I were a maximising contemplator, and were faced with a situation in which I could either attend to a moral emergency or engage in further contemplation, why would I not be justified in taking the latter course? This problem looks like another thorn in the side of dominantism, especially since Aristotle himself is clearly opposed to the justification of immoral acts.

In sum, then, I have argued that all the evidence considered so far favours an inclusive ergon for man. This is because rationality has great scope and depth vis-à-vis human behaviour, informing both our theoretical and practical engagement with the world. Genuine and widespread good seems to be found in political and communal activity, something supported by Aristotle’s concentration on the good of friendship, and his commitment to the moral virtues. Moreover, Aristotle’s requirement that morally virtuous actions be done per se, together with the problem of maximisation, both add further weight to the inclusivist case. With all this said, however, we have still to consider whether the function argument itself, together with its sequel in NE X.7-8, favours inclusivism or not. It will be my argument that, contra the general evidence cited, it does not, and that this generates a disturbing tension at the heart of the NE. But before embarking on my argument, it is worth examining the inclusivist interpretation of the function argument, in order to see exactly what case there is to answer.

Nussbaum notes that, at lines 1098a7-8, Aristotle explicitly defines the function of man as ‘an activity of soul in accordance with, or not without, rational principle’. And she takes this to support inclusivism, on the grounds that Aristotle does not refer to man’s ergon simply as the activity of reason, but rather as an activity ‘kata logon’ – this permitting a wider conception of rational activity. Moreover, by adding the qualification ‘or not without logos’, Aristotle seems to be gesturing at the practical part of the rational soul that, instead of actually employing reason, is merely ‘obedient to’ [epipeithes] it (see

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25 See Ackrill 1980, 32 and Roche 1988, 176.
26 In the case of ‘unjust, cowardly, and self-indulgent action’, Aristotle maintains, ‘[i]t is not possible ... ever to be right with regard to them; one must always be wrong’ (1107a19, 14). See also Keyt 1983, 368-9.
Nussbaum amplyﬁes her case by highlighting the way in which Aristotle refers to the lives of nutrition, perception and reason with the generic phrase ‘x-ikē zōē’.28 Citing John Cooper, she argues that, according to Greek usage, this phrase must be taken to mean a life focussed on, or organised around x – rather than a life of x-ing. So even philology, according to Nussbaum, supports an inclusive interpretation of man’s ergon.

Nussbaum’s case is seemingly bolstered by other aspects of the function argument. To begin with, stage (2) of the argument – which posits an idion function for man – would seem to favour inclusivism. And this because a life devoted to both theoretical and practical reason would be absolutely unique to man, unlike a life devoted to purely theoretical reason, which is (according to Aristotle) shared – at least to a degree – with the gods.29 And if ‘idion’ in this context reaps dividends for inclusivism, the same seems to apply to the adjective ‘teleios’, the standard meaning of which is ‘full’ or ‘complete’. For at the end of the function argument, Aristotle writes that the ‘human good turns out to be activity of soul in conformity with virtue, and if there are more than one virtue, in conformity with the best and most complete [teleiotatēn]’ (1098a16-18). Surely, maintain interpreters like J.L. Ackrill,30 ‘teleiotatēn’ here should be taken in its standard sense, to mean ‘most comprehensive’ – thus picking out a virtue that somehow includes all the rest, rather than merely the intellectual virtue of the theorētikos. And if so, inclusivism looks all the more justiﬁed.

Ackrill’s interpretation of ‘teleiotatēn’ receives support not only from the dictionary, but also from elsewhere within Aristotle’s works. Notably, the sense of ‘teleios’ used in the EE version of the function argument is clearly supportive of inclusivism.31 Aristotle holds there that ‘since happiness was [held to be] something teleon, and living is either telea or atelēs, and so also virtuous – one virtue being a whole, the other a part – and the activity of what is atelēs is itself atelēs, therefore happiness would be the activity of a teleia life in accordance with teleia virtue’ (EE 1219a35-9). This passage, with its reference to virtue qua part or qua whole, uncontroversially

28 See Nussbaum 1995, 115-6. The phrase is found at 1098a1-3.
29 Both Ackrill 1980, 27 and Roche 1995, 134 point this out.
30 See Ackrill 1980, 21-3, 28.
31 Even a strong advocate of dominantism within the NE, Anthony Kenny, acknowledges this (see Kenny 1978, 203; Kenny 1992, 103, 119, 129).
favours inclusivism. And the same can be said, moreover, for passages within the *NE* itself. For instance, Aristotle maintains that ‘[s]ince happiness is an activity of soul in accordance with *teleia* virtue, we must consider the nature of virtue; for perhaps we shall thus see better the nature of happiness’ (1102a5-7). Having said this, he immediately goes on to mention the ‘true student of politics’, who, he says, ‘is thought to have studied [happiness] above all things; for he wishes to make his fellow citizens good and obedient to the laws’ (1102a8-10). Given this, it seems that the sense of ‘*teleia* virtue’ above must be inclusive of the moral virtues.32

While the standard acceptations of *idion* and *teleios* favour inclusivism, the same cannot be said for *autarkēs*, the usual meaning of which is ‘sufficient for a man by himself, for one who lives a solitary life’ (1097b8-9). If man’s characteristic activity were meant to be *autarkēs* in this sense, then surely *theōria* would qualify better than rational activity construed in a wider, moral sense. But just before the function argument, Aristotle is careful to redefine ‘to *autarkēs*’ as ‘that which when isolated makes life desirable and lacking in nothing’; ‘such’, he continues, ‘we think happiness to be ... [for] we think it most desirable of all things, without being counted as one good thing among others – if it were so counted it would clearly be made more desirable by the addition of even the least of goods’ (1097b14-18). With *autarkēs* redefined in this way, *theōria* comes to seem far less plausible a candidate for what constitutes human happiness. For surely a life ‘lacking in nothing’, one not ‘made more desirable by the addition of even the least of goods’, would have already to include all genuine goods, rather than consist in one good alone. This is, at least, the claim of inclusivist interpreters, and it is a claim strongly represented in the secondary literature.33

Having detailed the inclusivist interpretation of the function argument, I shall now argue that, in the end, it does not stand up, and that dominantism is far better supported by the evidence. First, let’s take Nussbaum’s claim that inclusivism is favoured by man’s *ergon* being described as an activity *kata logon*, or ‘not without logos’ (1098a7-8). Admittedly, the phrase ‘*kata logon*’ allows an inclusivist construal; indeed, as Gauthier

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32 Further examples of ‘*teleios*’ used in an inclusive sense can be found at 1100a4-5, 1101a14-16, 1129b25 f. and *Rhet* 1366b1-3.
33 See Ackrill 1980, 21-3, 28; Whiting 1988, 74-5; Roche 1988, 191 n.29; Burger 1995, 84; Santas 2001, 231.
and Jolif show (see Gauthier and Jolif 1959, 59), when the phrase occurs elsewhere, it occurs in contexts dealing with the moral virtues. For instance, Aristotle holds that ‘to the incontinent, knowledge brings no profit; but to those who desire and act \textit{kata logon}, ... [it] will bring great benefit’ (1095a8-11); ‘that we must act \textit{kata ton orthon logon} is a common principle and must be assumed’ (1103b31-2); ‘[all men define virtue as] that state which is \textit{kata ton orthon logon}’ (1144b22-3; cf 1138b22-5). But more salient than this verbal point is the fact that this description of man’s \textit{ergon} occurs before Aristotle’s follow-up to the function argument in \textit{NE} X.7-8. It is there, as I shall argue, that Aristotle closes down the options that he deliberately leaves open in \textit{NE} I.7. So by citing 1098a7-8 as definitive support for inclusivism, Nussbaum is in effect assuming that the argument given in book I exhausts what Aristotle has to say on the matter. And I provided reasons against this assumption on p. 59.34

Nussbaum’s further claim that Aristotle’s use of the phrase ‘\textit{x-ikē zōē}’ favours inclusivism is, I think, more directly vulnerable. It is true that Cooper takes the phrase ‘\textit{x-ikos bios}’ to pick out an entire mode of life, one centred around \textit{x} – as opposed simply to a life of \textit{x-ing}. But as Nussbaum admits,35 Cooper actually thinks this construal irrelevant to \textit{NE} I.7, where the phrase Aristotle uses (only four times) is ‘\textit{x-ikē zōē}’. Moreover, even if Cooper’s analysis of ‘\textit{x-ikos bios}’ holds equally of ‘\textit{x-ikē zōē}’, it is not clear why this excludes a dominantist interpretation. For surely it would do so only if a ‘\textit{logikē zōē}’ had to be centred on a \textit{kind} of activity, rather than on a specific activity (viz. contemplation). If the former were true, the phrase would pick out a life organised around many activities, so long as these were generically rational. But if a ‘\textit{logikē zōē}’ can be centred on a specific, discrete activity – viz. contemplation36 – then this phrase is straightforwardly consistent with a dominantist interpretation. It does not seem that Nussbaum’s philological evidence37 is, therefore, sufficient in the end to rule out the latter reading, and hence her argument here does not appear probative.

34 Gauthier and Jolif maintain that Aristotle effectively holds his conclusion ‘in reserve’ [à l’arrière-plan], thereby displaying ‘calculated reticence’ about it (see Gauthier and Jolif 1959, 59). Kraut adds that this reticence is perfectly reasonable, given that Aristotle has first to delineate the various moral and intellectual virtues, before any fully considered conclusion can be arrived at (see Kraut 1999, 88).
35 See Nussbaum 1995, 115 n.46.
36 That Aristotle counts \textit{theōría} as a \textit{bona fide} ‘activity’ [\textit{praktikē tis}, 1098a3] is confirmed at \textit{Pol} 1325b16-23, where he holds that ‘the directing mind is most truly said to act [\textit{prattein}]’.
37 See Nussbaum 1995, 116 n.47 and n.50.
Moving on from Nussbaum’s arguments, it is time to tackle the inclusivist interpretations of ‘idion’, ‘teleios’ and ‘autarkēs’, as these are used in the function argument. Inclusivists claim that if man has an idion ergon, and this ergon is rational activity, then the latter must be construed as including practical activity. And this because practical rational activity is properly idion to man, unlike theoretical rational activity, which is shared (at least to a degree) with the gods. Now this appears a strong point, because practical reason is not only unique to man, it is also plausibly taken as essential to him. But notwithstanding the apparent strength of this point, it should be observed that it does not force an inclusivist construal of man’s proper function. Ceteris paribus, it may make such a construal attractive, especially if one has already settled on a view of the human good as centring on practical activity. But as I argued on p. 62, the function argument requires that the respective functions of plants, lower animals and humans be unique relative only to lower species – it does not require that they be absolutely unique, as the inclusivist interpreter here supposes.

As regards Aristotle’s use of ‘teleiotatēn’ at 1098a16-18, inclusivists hold that this must pick out a ‘complete’ virtue, in the sense of one that includes all other virtues. And this owing not only to the standard dictionary sense of ‘teleios’, but also to Aristotle’s use of the term elsewhere in his writings, especially at EE 1219a35-9. But these instances are surely overridden by the fact that Aristotle explicitly defines ‘haplōs ... teleion’ at 1097a30-34 as ‘that which is always desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else’. It is this definition, moreover, which is fulfilled at 1177b1-4, where Aristotle declares that ‘this activity alone [viz. contemplation] would seem to be loved for its own sake; for nothing arises from it apart from the contemplating, while from practical activities we gain more or less apart from the action’ (cf 1177b19-20). Given Aristotle’s definition of ‘teleios’ as final or supreme, therefore, and his subsequent explicit identification of teleiotatē aretē with the activity of theōria, that ‘teleios’ means ‘complete’ elsewhere becomes of secondary importance.38

Further corroboration of the dominantist reading of 1098a16-18 can be found in the following two considerations. First, taking this passage as a whole – ‘[H]uman good

38 This is endorsed at (eg) Cooper 1987, 199-200 and Reeve 1992, 128, 130. Kenny makes the point that just because the function argument is finally concluded in book X, it does not follow that 1098a16-18 refers to that book. Rather, it paves the way for the conclusions drawn there (see Kenny 1992, 86-8).
turns out to be activity of soul in conformity with virtue, and if there are more than one virtue, in conformity with the best and teleiotatê’ – how do inclusivists understand Aristotle’s use of ‘aretê’ here? It seems they must understand him as shifting from a mass-noun sense, to a count-noun sense, and back to a mass-noun sense, within a very short space. And this is implausible. 39 Secondly, at 1099a29-31, Aristotle holds that ‘all these properties [viz. maximal nobility, goodness and pleasure] belong to the best activities; and these, or one – the best – of these, we identify with happiness’. This passage not only echoes the structure of 1098a16-18, it also crucially identifies happiness (and consequently also man’s ergon) with one discrete activity. Accordingly, it becomes even odder to maintain that the human function consists in exercising one, comprehensive virtue, which covers a plurality of such activities. 40

If attention to Aristotle’s idiosyncratic usage in NE I.7, together with sensitivity to NE X.7-8, argues for a dominantist reading of ‘teleiotatên’, the same applies to ‘to autarkês’. As I maintained on p. 69, inclusivists claim that if happiness consists in living a life ‘lacking in nothing’ [mêdenos endea, 1097b15], then a happy life will have to include all genuine goods. But this on its own does not entail inclusivism. For a closer look at NE I.7 shows that Aristotle defines ‘to autarkês’ in terms of being teleios: ‘the teleion good’, he holds, ‘is thought to be autarkês’ (1097b7-8). In other words, he takes being ‘lacking in nothing’ to consist in being teleion, viz. in being sought per se, not for the sake of other goods. Given Aristotle affirms that the only activity never engaged in for the sake of anything else is theôria (see 1177b1-4 on p. 71 above), it follows that theôria is also the most autarkês activity available to man. So not only is rational contemplation most self-sufficient in the usual sense of requiring the fewest resources, 41 it is also most self-sufficient in Aristotle’s sense of being most ‘final’.

It may still be objected, however, that it is impossible to understand a genuinely happy life, one lacking in nothing, as exhausted by theôria. For apart from the intrinsic goodness of practical activity, how would a fulfilled life be possible without some

40 A dominantist interpretation of 1099a29-31 (the ‘Delian passage’) is affirmed at Kenny 1977, 30, Kraut 1979, 469-70, Devereux 1981, 253 and Kenny 1992, 19, 30. Gauthier and Jolif point out that the structure of both 1098a16-18 and 1099a29-31 is reproduced elsewhere: eg ‘whether the activity ... of all our states or that of some one of them is happiness’ (1153b10-11); ‘If happiness is activity in accordance with virtue, it is reasonable that it should be in accordance with the highest virtue’ (1177a12-13). Cf 1176a24-5.
41 As 1178b33 ff. makes clear.
engagement with the moral virtues? Aristotle’s response to this is, I think, to make a distinction between what is essential to, and what is necessary for a happy life.42 True, the moral virtues may be necessary for a happy life of contemplation, as are external goods.43 For without the latter, contemplation would not be possible, and without the former, contemplation may not run smoothly or efficiently. But it does not follow from this that either the moral virtues or external goods are essential components of happiness, rather than merely necessary instruments to it. As Kraut puts matters, both the moral virtues and external goods may ‘sustain’ the life of contemplation, without being valuable per se (see Kraut 1999, 86). With this distinction in place, then, the autarkeia of theōría could be said to consist in its lacking nothing essential to happiness. But that there are other prerequisites for happiness Aristotle can readily admit.44

Finally, although nothing before NE X.7-8 entails that happiness is exhausted by contemplation, there are strong hints in this direction already in NE I. For just as Aristotle holds in book X that eudaimonia involves the activity of ‘the most divine element in us’, viz. our intellect, which ‘take[s] thought of things noble and divine’ (1177a15-16; cf 1179a22-32), so Aristotle associates happiness with divinity in book I. He writes: ‘happiness seems … to be among the most godlike things; for that which is the prize and end of virtue seems to be the best thing and something godlike and blessed’ (1099b14-18); ‘what we do to the gods and the most godlike of men is to call them blessed and happy. And so too with good things; no one praises happiness as he does justice, but rather calls it blessed, as being something more divine and better’ (1101b23-7); ‘[happiness] is a first principle; for it is for the sake of this that we all do everything else, and the first principle and cause of goods is, we claim, something prized and divine’ (1102a2-4). When taken together with the evidence cited above, these passages do, I suggest, add significantly to the dominantist case.45

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42 This distinction is drawn explicitly at EE 1214b11-27, where Aristotle distinguishes between the ‘elements’ of happiness and its ‘indispensable conditions’. It is reiterated at Pol 1328a21-b4 and 1329a34-9.
43 For Aristotle’s admission that at least some external goods are necessary for happiness, see 1178a24-5, 1178b3-5 and 1179a1-16.
44 Employing Aristotle’s essential versus necessary component distinction in this context finds clear support in the secondary literature. See, for example, Kenny 1992, 28-9, 36-8, 40-41; White 1992, 142-3; Hughes 2001, 41; Santas 2001, 248-9; Lawrence 2006, 53.
45 This point is made especially clearly by Geert van Cleemput (at van Cleemput 2006, 154-5).
So all in all, it appears that the function argument, when placed in the proper context of *NE* X.7-8, strongly favours a dominantist conception of man’s *ergon*. Whether with regard to Nussbaum’s evidence, or Aristotle’s idiosyncratic definitions of ‘*teleios*’ and ‘*autarkēs*’, it seems clear that the function argument is an argument for man’s *ergon* as lying in the activity of contemplation. And yet this clearly goes against the general evidence I cited on pp. 65-7, evidence taken from outside the function argument at 1097b22-8a18. Can these two bodies of evidence be reconciled? Many scholars have tried to reconcile them, usually by retreating to a ‘moderate intellectualist’ version of dominantism (defined at p. 64). In what follows, I shall briefly outline this attempted *via media*, and then argue why I think it is an unstable compromise, one incapable of overcoming the rift between Aristotle’s strict intellectualist inclinations and the rest of the *NE*.

Moderate intellectualists emphasise that, in *NE* X.7-8, Aristotle refers to the happiness of the intellectual life as ‘*teleia eudaimonia*’, viz. ‘complete happiness’.46 They infer from this, in turn, that happiness comes in degrees,47 *theōria*-happiness being more fulfilling than happiness derived from a life of moral virtue. And this seems to be borne out by Aristotle’s characterisation of the latter as ‘secondary’ [*deuterōs*] happiness (1178a9-10). From this it appears, then, that Aristotle denies that happiness is exhausted by contemplation, allowing that a life devoted to the moral virtues also partakes in *eudaimonia*. The trouble is, however, that this allowance is undermined by Aristotle’s subsequent, unequivocal declaration that ‘Happiness extends ... just so far as contemplation does ... Happiness must be some form of contemplation’ (1178b28-32). This strong claim is reinforced, moreover, by Aristotle’s statement that ‘none of the other animals is happy, since they in no way share in contemplation’ (1178b27-8).48 These strong claims – which are consistent with the moral virtues as mere instruments to, rather than actual elements of happiness – make moderate intellectualism look less plausible than it might otherwise.

46 See 1177a17, 1177b24-5, 1178b7. These passages are highlighted by (eg) Keyt 1983, 382, Cooper 1987, 206 and Roche 1988, 185.
48 NB how this stands in stark contrast to 1099b32-1100a1, where Aristotle denies that the lower animals can be happy, but on the grounds that they cannot do ‘noble acts’.
Even if, for the sake of argument, a moderate intellectualist reading here is accepted, it surely remains an unstable position to adopt. For if a life of moral virtue is only secondarily *eudaimôn*, why would I not be justified in doing everything possible to achieve primary *eudaimonia*? And if so, why should I not leave the moral virtues behind, or at most view them as mere necessary conditions, rather than integral parts of my flourishing? To this moderate intellectualists have various responses. Chief among these are that *theōria* is not a maximising good,\(^{49}\) that the intellectual life needs the moral virtues to remain stable,\(^{50}\) that the latter have independent value (even if overall they are inferior),\(^{51}\) that theoretical reason is best because it situates practical activity in its proper context,\(^{52}\) and that the general superiority of *theōria* does not entail its superiority in every case.\(^{53}\) Are any of these responses convincing?

In the end, I think they are all fundamentally *ad hoc*. As I maintained on pp. 66-7, it does seem that *theōria* is a maximising good, something further supported at 1177a21-2 and 25-6.\(^{54}\) Maybe the moral virtues are necessary for a stable life of contemplation, and maybe they have independent value, but in Aristotle’s final words on the matter (in *NE* X.7-8) they are shunted to the periphery. Indeed, the latter chapters tend to depreciate the moral virtues, viewing them as at best only necessary conditions, rather than proper parts of flourishing (see for instance 1178b3-7). *Contra* this, Whiting holds that all Aristotle is doing in praising a life of *theōria* is recommending that we not restrict ourselves to the moral virtues.\(^{55}\) But A.W.H. Adkins is surely closer to the mark in suggesting that, given the surpassing good of *theōria*, the latter would properly be interrupted only for tiredness or bad health.\(^{56}\) And this is the case *a fortiori*, seeing that, as *Meta* XII.9 makes clear, the divine objects apprehended in *theōria* are – although objects of desire – apprehended by *sophia*, not *phronēsis*, and are thus irrelevant to practical life.

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\(^{49}\) See (eg) Kenny 1992, 38 and Richardson Lear 2004, 201, 203-4.


\(^{52}\) See (eg) Burger 1995, 82 and Hughes 2001, 49-51.

\(^{53}\) See (eg) Heinaman 1988, 53.

\(^{54}\) Aristotle maintains here that the activity of contemplation is ‘the most continuous, since we can contemplate truth more continuously than we can do anything … philosophy is thought to offer pleasures marvellous for their purity and their enduringness’.

\(^{55}\) See Whiting 1986, 90.

\(^{56}\) See Adkins 1978, 300-301, 306-7. Adkins further points out that all Aristotle’s criteria for being the best activity – viz. using the best part of us (intellect), having the best objects (divine and unchanging), being most pleasant, final and self-sufficient – are amoral in nature (see 312).
So a genuine rift seems to have emerged between the function argument as completed in book X on the one hand, and the bulk of the NE on the other (especially owing to the latter’s emphasis on the moral virtues, and the good of friendship). Moderate intellectualists, responding to the latter, and finding it very plausible that practical activity is essential to happiness, have tried to repair the above rift. But if my argument is cogent, they end up affirming a dubious compromise. What, then, might have influenced Aristotle to affirm a single, discrete activity as exhausting man’s *ergon*? Given the implausibility of this idea, both inherently and in light of the rest of the NE, this is a pressing question. In what follows, I shall suggest two possible answers to it, argue against them, and then put forward a solution of my own.

One possible answer as to why Aristotle ends up confining man’s *ergon* to a single, specialised activity lies in his biology. For Aristotle’s biology makes widespread use of the notion of organic function, and at stage (1) of the function argument Aristotle cites the functions of bodily organs as at least analogous to the function of man (see 1097b30-34). Is this analogy at the root of what could be called Aristotle’s ‘assumption of specialism’? In one respect it could be, for bodily functions clearly consist in discrete activities, such as seeing, smelling and pumping blood. But in the crucial respect of number it can’t be, because Aristotle often allows that one organ can have a plurality of functions. For instance, he writes that although ‘the mouth has one universal function in all animals alike’, that of alimentation, in some it serves also as a weapon, an organ of speech or of respiration: ‘[a]ll these functions’, he holds, can be ‘thrown upon one single organ’ (*PA* 662a21-4). Elsewhere, he maintains that the tongue is used for both tasting and articulating (*DA* 420b17-19; cf *PA* 660a20-25), the larynx for both respiration and vocalisation (*PA* 664b1-2), and the kidneys for both evacuation of fluid and circulation in the blood vessels (*PA* 664b1-2). The list goes on, thereby demonstrating that Aristotle’s assumption of specialism cannot be derived from his biological conception of function.

Admittedly, Aristotle does say that ‘[w]henever … nature is able to provide two separate instruments for two separate uses, without the one hampering the other, she does so …’ It is only when this is impossible that she uses one organ for several functions’ (*PA* 665b9-11 on the multiple functions of teeth, *PA* 659a21-4 on how nature follows ‘her wonted plan of using one … part for several purposes’ in the case of the elephant’s trunk (cf *PA* 682b36-3a1), *PA* 660a2-3 on the ‘two distinct operations’ of the lips, and *PA* 687b6 on the hand’s *erga*.

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57 See, for example, *PA* 655b9-11 on the multiple functions of teeth, *PA* 659a21-4 on how nature follows ‘her wonted plan of using one … part for several purposes’ in the case of the elephant’s trunk (cf *PA* 682b36-3a1), *PA* 660a2-3 on the ‘two distinct operations’ of the lips, and *PA* 687b6 on the hand’s *erga*. 

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This alleged natural preference for singleness of function is mirrored, perhaps, in Aristotle’s occasional suggestion that a single organ can have only one ergon. For example, he writes that in birds, ‘the mouth fails to perform its ergon [viz. mastication]’ (PA 674b20-21). At PA 694b14-15, he holds that ‘nature makes the organs for the function, and not the function for the organs’. And in On Sleep he claims that ‘all organs that have a natural function must lose power when they work beyond the time for which they can work; for instance, the eyes tire of seeing, and must give it up; and so it is with the hand and every other member that has a function’ (454a26-9). But even if these few passages seem to presuppose singleness of organic function, Aristotle’s actual, detailed survey of bodily organs shows that he accepts a plural account.

If Aristotle’s assumption of specialism is not grounded in his biology, perhaps it can find support in his metaphysics. As has been seen, Aristotle recognises that bodily organs can have multiple functions, and that this is compatible with their being identifiable as single, discrete organs in the first place. But Aristotle also shows a strong tendency to assume that if an item is identifiable as a specific x, it must be so in virtue of having a single essence [ousia]. And he often correlates essences with functions. For example, he holds that ‘[w]hat a thing is is always determined by its function: a thing really is itself when it can perform its function; an eye, for instance, when it can see’ (Meteor 390a10-11; cf PA 655b21-2). At Pol 1253a22-3 he writes that ‘things are defined by their function and power’, so that, for example, a severed hand is a ‘hand’ only homonymously. At GA 731a25-6 he maintains that ‘to the essence of plants belongs no other function ... than the production of seed’, and at Somn 454b24 he says that ‘an animal is defined as such by its possessing sense-perception’ (cf Sens 436b11-13). And Aristotle’s most explicit correlation of essence with function comes at DA 416a5-6, where he declares that we ‘distinguish and identify organs according to their functions’.

If Aristotle’s assumption of specialism finds support in his metaphysics of essence, this support seems bolstered by his notion of a ‘final cause’ or ‘final end’ [telos]. For final ends appear also to be single, and to correspond to single functions. For

58 NB ‘A definition is a phrase signifying a thing’s essence’ (Top 101b35-6).
59 The essence-function correlation is affirmed also at Meta 1036b31-2, 1045b32-4 and PA 640b30-1a5. For confirmation of this correlation in the secondary literature, see Irwin 1980, 37-8 and Irwin 1981, 210-11. ‘Essence’ corresponds, of course, to ‘substance’ (both translate ousia), and this is borne out (eg) at PA 648a16-17, where Aristotle refers to ‘the substance and the functions of the several animals’.
example, Aristotle holds that ‘the function of anything is its end’ (EE 1219a8), and that ‘everything that has a function exists for its function’ (Cael 286a8-9). He illustrates this claim by citing houses – ‘the final cause is the function [a house] fulfils’ (Meta 996b6) – and saws: just as a saw is for the sake of sawing, so, Aristotle avers, ‘the whole body’ is ‘for the sake of some complex action’ (PA 645b16-17). Aristotle affirms this correlation between final ends and functions also elsewhere, and together with singleness of metaphysical form [eidos], his metaphysics would seem to be what is behind his idea of a single, specialised human ergon.

In the end, however, I think his metaphysics can be seen not to play this crucial role. For whereas Aristotle’s biology presents functions as activities, which yet can be multiply instantiated in one organ, Aristotle’s metaphysics assumes single functions, which yet need not be activities. Hence for all Aristotle’s metaphysical emphasis on singleness of function, nothing above commits him to man’s ergon as a discrete, specific activity (such as contemplation). Indeed, everything above is consistent with his affirming a single kind of activity instead (such as generically rational activity) – a far more plausible option, surely, given the diverse nature of man’s functioning, and the salience of practical rational activity within human life. What we need to identify is, then, a conception of function within Aristotle’s works – one neither biological nor metaphysical – that imports both the above criteria, namely singleness and being a discrete, specific activity. This conception will, furthermore, have to be entrenched in Aristotle’s wider concerns and philosophical method. What might this conception be?

I suggest that an answer to this is hinted at right at the beginning of the function argument, at stage (1). There Aristotle writes that ‘just as for a flute-player, a sculptor, or any technitēs, and, in general, for all things that have an ergon or praxis, the good and the “well” is thought to reside in the ergon, so would it seem to be for man, if he has an ergon. Have the carpenter, then, and the tanner certain erga or praxeis, and has man none? Is he naturally functionless?’ (1097b25-30). On pp. 60-61, I suggested that this not be taken as an argument, but rather as an analogy – and I still think this is the most plausible construal of the foregoing passage. But it is consistent with this construal to add

60 See, for example, DA 415b15-16, GA 778a32-4 and Meta 1050a21-3.
61 That essence, substance and form are inter-entailing is affirmed at Meta 1035b14-18. Irwin notes this inter-entailment, which includes the concept of telos, at Irwin 1980, 40.
that, as an analogy, this passage contains a conception of function that would support Aristotle’s conclusion. For a craftsman (*qua* craftsman) is an agent who is devoted, paradigmatically, to a single activity, and an activity, moreover, which is specialised in nature (for evidence of this in Aristotle specifically, see ch.2, pp. 31-2). Granted, Aristotle (like Plato) does countenance the existence of complex, second-order crafts – the limiting case of which is politics – which take simpler, more basic crafts as their subject-matter. But such complex crafts still constitute specialised activities, I take it, because they do not have the all-informing, generic nature of, say, ‘rational practice’.62

That Aristotle is influenced by the crafts to think that man must have an *ergon* that is single and specific, is evidenced not only in the strength of the formal analogy between the *technitēs* and the *theōrētikos*. It is evidenced also in Aristotle’s general reverence for and philosophical reliance on the crafts. We have seen such reverence and reliance at work already, in chapter two, where Aristotle’s discussions of slavery and deliberation were seen to be indebted to models supplied by the *technai*. But it is in evidence also in *NE* I.7, where Aristotle opens and closes his chapter on the human *ergon* with references to the crafts. He begins by claiming that the good ‘seems different in different actions and *technai*; it is different in medicine, in strategy, and in the other *technai* likewise’ (1097a16-18). And he ends by saying that ‘time is a good discoverer or partner in [carrying on and articulating what has been well outlined]; to which facts the advances of the *technai* are due; for anyone can add what is lacking’ (1098a23-6).63

These passages surely bolster the claim that, on both analytical and textual grounds, Aristotle’s conception of man’s *ergon* is influenced, in its formal aspect, by the *technai*.64

62 It should be noted that the crafts Aristotle invokes at 1097b25-30 are all relatively simple in nature: flute-playing, sculpting, carpentry and tanning. While each of these may comprise several tasks – take, for example, the various stages of the tanning process – none of them shows the kind of complexity characteristic of generalship, or politics.

The central point remains, nonetheless, that even politics – which is maximally wide-ranging as a craft, taking all other crafts as its object – is distinguishable from what I have been calling ‘generic’ forms of activity. For a politician, when he is at home and no longer attending to politics, still engages in generically rational activity (in virtue of being a human involved in practical relations with other humans). Notwithstanding the fact that his *technē* is the most wide-ranging of all, therefore, *politikē* still fails to cover significant areas of human activity. It is in this sense, I take it, that even politics remains essentially specialised.

63 Soon after, at 1098a29-32, he refers to carpenters and geometers.

64 In terms of its content, it is clearly influenced by Aristotle’s theology. For that man’s proper activity is to contemplate owes not a little to Aristotle’s conception of *theōrēia* as divine. For this conception, see, for example, *Meta* XII.9, *NE* 1177a14-18, 1179a22-30 and *PA* 686a29.
Before moving on to consider further evidence for this, on the basis of the *Republic*’s function argument, it is worth dealing with three possible objections to what I have argued so far. First, it could be pointed out that although Aristotle’s analogy at 1097b25-30 is to craftsmen, he immediately goes on to make a further analogy to bodily organs: ‘as eye, hand, foot, and in general each of the parts evidently has a function’, he asks, ‘may one lay it down that man similarly has a function apart from all these?’ (1097b30-33). Since the analogies to craftsmen and bodily parts occur so close together, and have the same force, what grounds are there for privileging the analogy to craftsmen in particular? In response to this, I would say that despite the fact that Aristotle refers here – with seeming indifference – to both craftsmen and bodily organs, his actual analysis of bodily functioning (see pp. 76-7) belies this indifference, since it unequivocally rejects a one-one correlation between organs and functions. True, in *NE* I.7 this rejection is not uppermost in Aristotle’s mind, and he invokes human organs that have, at least *prima facie*, only one function. But this should not distract us from the fact that this invocation is inconsistent with his positive biological theory, and it is the latter that counts when considering whether it is Aristotle’s notion of specifically biological function that informs his *ergon* argument.

Secondly, pressure might be put on the idea that craftsmen have to be engaged in single activities in the first place. Granted, Aristotle does maintain that crafts themselves have determinate, unique ends, but it does not strictly follow from this that craftsmen cannot each practise more than one, single activity. For instance, are there not singer-songwriters, and actor-directors? If Aristotle wants to rule these professionals out as somehow not *bona fide*, he would have to invoke what I called (see ch.1, p. 2, note 5) the ‘principle of specialisation’, viz. the principle that no one person should pursue two jobs. But there is no sign, at least in *NE* I.7, that Aristotle accepts this principle. To this objection I would respond that, although each craft’s having a single function does not strictly entail each craftsman’s having the same, the latter follows naturally from the former, given that a *technité* is defined by the *technē* he practises. And in point of fact, the crafts I mentioned above (which Aristotle never refers to) are not *technai* proper, but rather amalgams of different *technai*, between which professionals must divide their time and efforts. Given this, invoking pseudo-crafts comprising more than one activity fails to
undermine my claim that craftsmen, properly speaking, do have single, specific functions.\textsuperscript{65}

Thirdly, it could be objected that, even if I have managed to show a correlation between the single, specific \textit{erga} of the crafts (and craftsmen) on the one hand, and the single, specific \textit{ergon} of man on the other, so far I have not shown definitively that the latter is influenced by the former. Perhaps there is a merely formal correlation here, with no more to be said; or perhaps another influence, or set of influences, is at work. But \textit{contra} this hypothesis, I think it unlikely that a philosopher like Aristotle, who shows himself – both in \textit{NE} I.7 and more generally – to be deeply influenced by models derived from the \textit{technai}, is not thus influenced also in this case. I have already demonstrated that, whatever influences are at work here, they cannot derive from Aristotle’s biological or metaphysical conception of function. And where a technical notion like ‘function’ is in play, I take it we are \textit{entitled} to ask how its particular use is structured, and the way(s) in which it has been shaped. Moreover, I think this is the case \textit{a fortiori}, since a single, specific function for man is by all accounts an odd notion, which stands in need of explanation. While I am not claiming the explanation I have given is exhaustive, I also believe that, so far as it goes, it is the best available – after all, no comparably economical explanation, with such wide resonance in the rest of Aristotle’s philosophy, has come to light.

If Aristotle is influenced by the crafts in arguing for a human \textit{ergon} constituted by a single, specific activity, it is worth asking what conception of man’s \textit{ergon} is adopted in Plato’s \textit{Republic}, and what its argumentative underpinnings are. For it is well known that in \textit{NE} I.7 Aristotle draws on the Platonic notion of function, which is outlined at \textit{Rep} 352d-4a. Indeed, Grant goes so far as to say that Aristotle’s function argument ‘comes almost verbatim from the \textit{Republic}’ (Grant 1885, 192). Even though this judgement is, as will become clear, an exaggeration, it remains the case that, as Gauthier and Jolif put matters, ‘For a proper understanding of [\textit{NE I.7}], in which [the notion of “function”] is central, it is indispensable to have Plato’s text to hand’ (Gauthier and Jolif 1959, 54).\textsuperscript{66} In

\textsuperscript{65} Moreover, it is likely that, as will be seen later on, Aristotle inherited a commitment to the principle of specialisation from Plato’s \textit{Republic}.

\textsuperscript{66} A more recent addition to the secondary literature takes the same line, and also does more to substantiate it: see Rachel Barney’s ‘Aristotle’s Argument for a Human Function’ (Barney 2008).
what follows, then, I shall examine the relevant sections of Plato’s text, with a view to establishing what light they can shed on my explanatory account above.

The crucial second stage of Aristotle’s function argument – which states that man’s *ergon* must be unique [*idion*] to him (1098a1) – seems prefigured in the argument of *Republic* I, where it is affirmed several times that each thing has a ‘particular function’ [*ergon ti*], and owing to this also a ‘peculiar virtue’ [oikeia aretē]. But in fact Socrates does not anticipate Aristotle’s stage (2) *simpliciter*. Instead, he affirms a disjunctive definition of function: ‘the function of a horse or of anything else’, he maintains, is ‘that which one can do only with it or best with it’ (352e2-3). Accordingly, while Aristotle effectively narrows the definition of ‘*ergon*’ down to Socrates’ first disjunct,67 Socrates adopts a more capacious definition, one that embodies two disjunctive criteria: uniqueness and optimality. And this looks like a significant difference from Aristotle, in that it seems to open the door to a wider array of functions than is allowed within *NE* I.7. For instance, Socrates identifies the function of a ‘pruning knife’ [*drepanon*] as to prune, not because this is the only thing that can prune, but because other knives that can prune – for example, daggers and carving knives – are not as good at the job (see *Rep* 353a).68

Does this use of disjunctive criteria to determine a thing’s function actually mark a significant difference from Aristotle? I think not, for although Socrates, unlike Aristotle, proposes a disjunctive definition of *ergon*, he seems never to doubt that the function of an eye, horse, soul or anything else is *single*. Granted, the test he introduces for an object’s function is bifurcated: an object performs its characteristic activity, he maintains, either exclusively or optimally. But the function determined by these disjunctive criteria is not itself bifurcated – it is always single in number: for example, seeing for eyes, hearing for ears, pruning for pruning knives. Indeed, Socrates appears to go further than Aristotle here, for whereas Aristotle allows that bodily organs can have multiple functions (see pp. 76-7), Socrates appears not to allow this. Given, then, this

67 This is noted at Lawrence 2001, 449 n.10. As Santas points out, however, Socrates’ first criterion for ‘*ergon*’ – ‘what one can do only with [something]’ – suggests that functions are absolutely unique to object-types, rather than merely relatively unique (as in Aristotle). This leads Santas to label Socrates’ first criterion for function ‘exclusiveness’ of activity, as opposed to Aristotle’s criterion of ‘distinctiveness’ (see Santas 2001, 237).

68 I am assuming here, along with Santas, that the optimal function of an object is not something it can do better than any other task, but rather something it can do better than any other (kind of) object can (in this case, pruning). See Santas 2001, 72 on the ambiguity attaching to the notion of ‘optimal’ function.
emphasis on singleness on Socrates’ part, what single function does he attribute to the human soul?

Socrates arrives at an answer to this using his exclusive conception of function. ‘Is there some function of a soul’, he asks, ‘that you couldn’t perform with anything else ...?’ (353d). And he responds to this with examples: ‘for example, taking care of things [to epimeleisthai], ruling [archein], deliberating [bouleuesthai], and the like? Is there anything other than a soul to which you could rightly assign these, and say that they are its peculiar [idia] function?’ (353d). Admittedly, the criterion of absolute uniqueness here underdetermines Socrates’ specification of the human function. For clearly there are things that human souls, and human souls alone can achieve, which he does not even consider. But if certain essentialist side-constraints are added to this criterion – as they are, mutatis mutandis, in NE I.7 – Socrates’ conception of the soul’s ergon looks entirely defensible. After all, taking care of things, ruling and deliberating are all activities that are, arguably, exclusive to humans.69

We seem presented, then, with a single function for the human soul, which is absolutely unique (and plausibly essential) to it.70 On this basis, Socrates goes on to posit the virtue of the human soul, which he refers to at 353e as ‘justice’ [dikaiosunē]. An obvious objection to this would be to accuse Socrates of importing ethical criteria into his conception of human virtue: for why assume that, for example, ruling well, deliberating well, or even living well need amount to anything so highly moralised as acting justly? As Annas remarks, we might equally give a means-end construal of ‘well’ here, so that human virtue would entail ruling, deliberating and living ‘efficiently’ (see Annas 1981, 54). Moreover, although Socrates asserts at 353e that ‘we agreed that justice is a soul’s virtue, and injustice its vice’ – to which Thrasymachus gives his taciturn assent – it is unclear that such a claim has yet been argued for. Nevertheless, I want to bypass these

69 It might be objected that what Socrates provides here is a list of three distinct functions, not one unitary function. But as I shall argue in more detail shortly, the examples Socrates chooses are appropriately construed as falling under, and pointing to one generic activity. This is supported by the fact that the ‘kai’ with which Socrates conjoins his three examples appears epexegetic, something reinforced by his closing tag, ‘and the like’ [kai ta toiauta panta]. The immediate context makes clear, moreover, that what Socrates is after is some one function of the soul, to which there corresponds one virtue (see following).

70 Socrates also specifies ‘living’ as a function of the soul (at 353d; cf EE 1219a23-5). I take it that this refers to a specific type of life, viz. one that centrally includes taking care of things, ruling, etc. For as Aristotle holds, ‘Life seems to be common even to plants, but we are seeking what is peculiar to man [to idion]’ (1097b33-4).
problems, in order to concentrate on what I take to be a more central issue for this chapter: namely, is the activity of living in accordance with justice specific or generic in nature?

Everything points, I think, to its being a generic form of activity. For if one attends to Socrates’ initial characterisations of acting *dikaiōs* – as taking care of things well, ruling well, or deliberating well – these all seem to operate at a generic level. That is, they are generic descriptions of human behaviour, which are designed to cover a plethora of specific activities. For one could be, for example, a carpenter, tanner, astronomer or musician and still fall under the description ‘someone who takes care of things well and deliberates well’. And if this is the case for Socrates’ initial characterisations of activity in accordance with justice, it is so *a fortiori* for his subsequent characterisation of it as ‘living well’. For this description is so general in application as to cover any conceivable specific activity, so long as that activity is pursued in a morally virtuous fashion. In this way, I take it, Socrates effectively pinpoints human virtue as what Aristotle calls ‘moral virtue’ [*ēthikē aretē*]. He does not restrict it, therefore, to within the bounds of a specific activity like contemplation, or even drop hints (as I argued Aristotle does) that he will recommend such a restriction later on.\(^71\)

So all in all, what can we learn by comparing Aristotle’s function argument with its predecessor in *Republic* I? While Aristotle abandons the *Republic*’s disjunctive definition of *ergon*, and favours distinctiveness over exclusiveness as the core criterion for function, he follows Socrates in assuming there is only one human function. Nonetheless, if my argument over the course of this chapter has been cogent, we have also seen that Aristotle makes a radical departure from Socrates in what he takes the human function to be. For instead of viewing it as a generic form of activity, viz. activity in accordance with moral virtue, Aristotle ultimately views it as exhausted by a single, specific activity – that of contemplation. What might explain this radical departure?

\(^71\) To this one could object that ‘*dikaiosunē*’ is the term Socrates uses to refer to the virtue of the guardians, viz. Kallipolis’ political élite. If so, then surely here too he must be picking out (not generic virtue, but) that specialised virtue embodied in the political craft, precisely that *technē* which I expounded in chapter one. In answer to this, I would draw attention to the fact that in *Rep* I there is no mention of a political craft. The whole discussion proceeds in early ‘Socratic’ fashion, using ‘*dikaiosunē*’ to refer to virtue in general, ie to what Aristotle calls ‘*phronēsis*’. And while *Rep* I does refer to *dikaiosunē* as a craft at 332d, this is in a loose sense, which does not import the specialised connotations of a *politikē technē*.
One might think that a sufficient explanation here lies in the fact that Aristotle rejects Socrates’ notion of exclusive function in favour of distinctive function. For whereas activity in accordance with justice is plausibly exclusive to humans, contemplation, according to Aristotle, is not: it distinguishes humans only relative to lower species. But this explanation is clearly insufficient, because although relative distinctiveness allows contemplation as the human function, it by no means entails it as such. Morally virtuous activity is equally distinctive of humans relative to lower species, so Aristotle’s reliance on the latter criterion can hardly be explanatory of his rejection of such activity as the human function. Rather than this, I think we should look to a key addition that Aristotle makes in his elaboration of the function argument: namely, the addition of analogies to the technai. For whereas Socrates makes no mention of crafts or craftsmen within his function argument, Aristotle, of course, does (see pp. 78-9); indeed, he pointedly begins his argument by invoking the functions of different craftsmen, and NE I.7 as a whole is punctuated by further references to the technai (see p. 79).

These additions bolster, I take it, my general claim that craft-analogies form an underestimated influence on Aristotle’s function argument. He deliberately introduces these into an argument that previously lacked them, and this in and of itself is a noteworthy fact. Now, I would not want to argue, further, that just as craft-analogies influence Aristotle to affirm a single, specific ergon for man, the lack of these influences Socrates not to do so. This would be a clear case of denying the antecedent, and I have no wish to speculate here as to what motivates Socrates to specify just action as the human function. Furthermore, I do not wish to deny that the role of the crafts in the rest of the Republic may have influenced the development of Aristotle’s argument. In particular, Socrates’ commitment to the principle of specialisation – according to which each citizen’s function in the polis is to pursue no more than one craft, viz. no more than one specific activity (see ch.1, p.2, note 5) – may have influenced Aristotle to think of man’s function as similarly single and specific in nature. But the principle of specialisation is not contained in Republic I, let alone in Socrates’ function argument, so even if Aristotle is influenced in this way, he is so not in virtue of anything in Socrates’ argument per se.72

72 Pappas holds, nevertheless, and with some reason, that the notion that each citizen functions well by doing a single, partly class-determined job, is continuous with Socrates’ notion of exclusive (and perhaps
In conclusion, then, I hope I have shown both that the outcome of Aristotle’s function argument is more indebted to analogies with the *technai* than is generally recognised, and that that indebtedness does not derive from the form that argument takes in *Republic* I. Although the former point has been touched on in passing by some commentators – Santas, for instance, remarks that ‘artefacts, roles, and occupations’ are the ‘logical home’ of the function argument (Santas 2001, 240) – the latter point still seems generally unacknowledged. Indeed, even a careful critic like Santas makes the mistake of claiming that ‘[b]oth Plato and Aristotle illustrate their definitions of function with ... roles and occupations’ (ibid. 238). In fact, however, the Platonic Socrates in *Republic* I does not do so, and this is a significant point to bear in mind for the purposes of understanding Aristotle’s argument. In the next chapter, I shall investigate Aristotle’s concept of the mean. There, too, I hope to show both how the *technai* constitute a vital (yet questionable) influence on Aristotle’s argument, and how that influence is intimately related to Aristotle’s Platonic inheritance.

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also optimal) function in *Republic* I (see Pappas 1995, 47). It is also worth pointing out that, although Socrates does not identify contemplation as the human function in *Republic* I, in *Republic* VII he does suggest that the guardians will continually be tempted by the goods of *theoría*. It could be said, then, that whereas for Aristotle the temptation to defect from the human function will be a temptation to defect *from* the contemplative life, for Socrates it will be a temptation to defect *to* that life.

Barney notes, in contrast to Santas, how the examples of function cited in *Republic* I and *NE* I.7 are importantly different (see Barney 2008).
In the last chapter, I began by examining Aristotle’s claim in *NE* I.7 that humans as a species have an *idion ergon*, a proper function, which distinguishes them from lower species. Given that this claim remains plausible only if such activity is construed as generic, not specific in nature, I then went on to investigate whether Aristotle’s function argument – including its sequel in *NE* X – in fact favours this inclusive view of the human *ergon*. After surveying the evidence, I concluded that a dominant view is better supported by the text, and, moreover, that attempts by moderate intellectualist interpreters to effect a compromise between strict intellectualism and inclusivism remain unconvincing. The question then arose as to what may have influenced Aristotle to affirm this implausibly narrow understanding of the human *ergon*. Having rebutted the claim that the relevant influence lies in either Aristotle’s biology or his metaphysics, I argued that it is to be found, rather, in the formal properties of the *technai*. For not only does Aristotle inherit, and affirm the view that the latter have single, specific *erga*; he is likely also influenced by the view – expressed in the *Republic*, but beyond the confines of Socrates’ own function argument – that each individual ought to practise no more than one *technē*.

In this chapter, I shall explore what is sometimes referred to as Aristotle’s ‘doctrine of the mean’. Although in the *NE* Aristotle refers to the mean for the first time at II.2, his central elaboration of it begins at II.6, where he introduces his topic with a brief recapitulation of his notion of the human function. ‘[T]he virtue of man’, Aristotle reminds us, ‘will be the disposition that makes a man good, and that makes him do his own *ergon* well’ (1106a22-4). Human well-functioning, in other words, is dependent on human virtue, but this still leaves much room for further specification of the nature of virtue (1106a25-6). As Aristotle goes on to make clear, the mean, in all its manifold detail, is meant to provide this further specification, ie to say what virtue – in particular, moral virtue [*ēthikē aretē*] – consists in. This notion is hence a crucial building-block within Aristotle’s ethics, something testified to in part by the prodigious amount of space he devotes to its exposition and analysis. After a synopsis of the mean at *NE* II.6-9, he returns to it at III.6-12, and subsequently it becomes central to his presentation of the
particular virtues in *NE* IV-V. The mean is also, as will be seen, essential to Aristotle’s analysis of justice in *NE* V. So it is evidently a notion Aristotle believes to be moral philosophically vital, one he thinks he cannot do without.¹

In what follows, I will start by documenting the origins of Aristotle’s *mesotēs* or *meson* doctrine in Plato’s dialogues, in particular in the *Statesman* and *Philebus*. For although the notion of the mean clearly has a pre-Platonic history (see, for example, Grant 1885, 252 and Gauthier and Jolif 1959, 143), it remains the case that these two dialogues are the most immediate, and most important sources for the Aristotelian ethical mean. (There are significant differences between how the mean is expounded in the *Statesman*, and how it is expounded in the *Philebus* – differences that, as I shall argue, throw light on Aristotle’s own doctrine.) After investigating this Platonic background, I will go on to explicate exactly how the mean is applied within Aristotle’s ethics, and to discuss the difficulties to which its application gives rise. While commentators virtually all agree that the mean generates problems for Aristotle, they disagree as to their extent and depth, and whether they are confined to his particular employment of it, or whether they extend to any possible employment of it. Finally, having carved out my own position in this debate, I will put forward an account of the doctrine of the mean’s ultimate provenance, which I think explains both why it generates the problems it does, and why Aristotle is not noticeably concerned to address these.

First of all, then, how does the notion of the mean make its appearance in Plato’s *Statesman*? It occurs centrally at 283c-5c, in the course of an attempt by the Visitor and the Young Socrates to pinpoint the nature of statesmanship, using what has come to be known as the ‘method of division’. The Visitor begins by invoking what he calls ‘the art of measurement’ [*hē metrētēkē*], which he presents as dealing with ‘excess and deficiency in general [*pasan tēn te huperbolēn kai tēn elleipsin*]’, and thus as capable of discerning (among other things) the proper length of philosophical discussions (283c-d). Immediately after this, however, he asserts that *hē metrētēkē* must be divided into two ‘parts’: ‘one part will relate to the association of greatness and smallness with each other,

¹ A comparable amount of space is devoted to the mean in the *EE*. In addition to the common books, Aristotle devotes *EE* II.3 and 5, together with the whole of *EE* III to it. Moreover, the mean plays a significant role outside his ethical works, in particular in the *Metaphysics*, *Physics* and the biological writings. I shall give a brief overview of these non-ethical versions of the mean later on.
the other to what coming into being necessarily is’ (283d7-9). So far the nature of this division is obscure, but by the end of 283e, the Visitor has begun to clarify it. The first kind of measurement, he maintains, concerns items that are designated ‘great’ or ‘small’ only ‘in relation to each other [pros allēla]’; by contrast, the second kind of measurement compares items ‘in relation to what is in due measure [pros to metrion]’. It is in virtue of attaining due measure, he holds, as opposed to displaying mere greatness or smallness, that both speech and action are labelled ‘good’ (283e3-6).

Now this contrast between two forms of *metrētikē* is not, as yet, wholly clear – but at least the following seems clear. The first form appears an entirely relative form of assessment: as soon as I have picked a certain number of apples, say, someone who has picked more apples than me will have picked a ‘greater’ amount, whereas someone who has picked fewer than me will have picked a ‘smaller’ amount. This follows straightforwardly from the number of apples I picked in the first place. But so far nothing has been said about how many apples I *should* have picked. This, it appears, is the task of a distinct form of assessment, namely the second form identified by the Visitor. This, by contrast, can take place only in the light of a non-arbitrary standard or norm: for instance, that someone of my age and ability should be picking around five hundred apples a day. If I pick under that amount, my performance will be deficient, and thus bad; if I pick over that amount, it will be excessive, and thus bad. Only if I pick the right amount, or what is in ‘due measure’, will my performance be good and laudable. As Melissa Lane puts matters, this second form of assessment, even if it uses some of the same terms as the first, can thus be seen to introduce a new, ‘normative dimension’, one that goes beyond tautological comparisons between set amounts, by affirming ‘substantive’ judgements of rightness and wrongness (see Lane 1998, 128).

This interpretation of the distinction between the two forms of *metrētikē* outlined by the Visitor is confirmed by what he goes on to say at 284a, where he elaborates that distinction more fully. ‘[We posit] as one part of [the art of measurement]’, he says, ‘all those sorts of expertise [*technas*] that measure the number, lengths, depths, breadths and speeds of things in relation to what is opposed to them, and as the other, all those that

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2 As several scholars point out, the Greek for ‘more’ and ‘less’, ‘*mallon*’ and ‘*elattōn*’, can also be translated ‘too much’ and ‘too little’. See Gauthier and Jolif 1959, 137-8, Taylor 1971, 221-2 and Hursthouse 2006, 97.
measure in relation to what is in due measure, what is fitting [to prepon], the right moment [ton kairon], what is as it ought to be [to deon] – everything that removes itself from the extremes to the middle [to meson]’. Once again, the contrast seems to be between a purely relative form of assessment, and one that incorporates and is grounded in a prior, normative conception of a standard to be attained. What this passage adds is that this standard, that of ‘due measure’, is in fact multi-dimensional – or as Lane puts it, the ‘abode’ of different kinds of standard.3 Only when all of these have been attained, can it be said that to meson – a term introduced here for the first time, and used later by Aristotle – has truly been achieved.

If this construal of the Visitor’s two forms of metrētikē is broadly correct, it still remains unclear how the second, normative form of assessment relates to ‘what coming into being necessarily is’ (283d8-9). Although taken on its own this phrase is opaque, the Visitor goes on to clarify it in terms of what conditions the employment of the technai. Without normative assessment, he claims, ‘we shall destroy … both the various sorts of technē themselves and their products’, for it is ‘by preserving measure [to metron] … that they produce all the good and fine things they do produce’ (284a-b). In other words, the technai cannot bring their characteristic erga into being unless the practices they embody are governed by definite, non-arbitrary norms. For instance, musicianship depends on employing slow rhythms at the right times, and in the appropriate ways (see 307a-b), and statesmanship depends on calling on the services of either temperate or courageous citizens, as and when they are needed (see 309a ff.)4 In this way, the Visitor sheds light on what at first appeared a bizarre claim: for ‘coming into being [genesis]’ is necessarily conditioned by the existence of to metrion, in the sense that any skilled activity must assume determinate standards and norms in order to achieve the results proper to it.5

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3 See Lane 1998, 131. Although the Visitor presents to metrion, to prepon, ho kairos and to deon as on a logical par, it would seem reasonable – given the privileged status of to metrion in the rest of the dialogue – to understand ‘due measure’ not as coordinate with, but as incorporating the other three dimensions. As Kenneth Sayre remarks, to prepon, ho kairos and to deon ‘might be considered subdivisions of the mean’ (Sayre 2005, 22). For further elaboration of this issue, see Sayre 2006, ch.9.

4 Lane argues that it is a grasp of ho kairos, in particular, that is essential for successful statesmanship, for to rule is primarily ‘to govern the initiation of action in time’ (Lane 1998, 196; see also 131-5, 195-9).

5 Something analogous may hold also of natural ‘products’. Although these are not governed by human standards and norms, they do display regular patterns and mixtures, without which the contents of the natural world would take on a very different form. For more explicit development of this idea, see Gorg 506d-8a, and the Philebus passages immediately below. See also Wolfsdorf 2008, 110-21.
Before moving on to the *Philebus*, it is worth making two final observations on how the ‘two distinct classes of measurement’ (285b8-c1) outlined above relate to each other. First, they do not exclude each other: having identified, for example, the right time $t$ to intervene in a dispute, intervening too soon will always occur before $t$, while intervening too late will always occur after $t$. In other words, purely relative comparisons between different times remain the same, no matter which particular time is singled out as *ho kairos*. It is just that the ‘rightness’ of *ho kairos* is logically independent of these comparisons, it is not itself a function of them – for it embodies a normative dimension of assessment they do not supply themselves. Secondly, the distinction between relative and normative assessment should not be thought cognate with that between quantitative and qualitative assessment. For although the Visitor does speak of quantities such as length, depth, breadth and speed at 284e4-5, judgements of relative hotness or coldness, say, might be wholly qualitative in nature, and thus make no appeal to any underlying quantities. Nevertheless, such judgements would remain purely relative in nature. Likewise, the ‘fittingness’ or appropriateness of an item often turns out to be an inextricably quantitative matter: for example, which shoe size to pick, or how much wool is needed for a sweater. But in either case, which quantities are chosen remains an essentially normative issue (viz. an issue of which I *should* choose).\(^6\)

The conception of the mean put forward in the *Philebus* has clear similarities to that found in the *Statesman*, but, as will be seen, it is also importantly different. Socrates’ central exposition of it occurs at 23c-7c, but he begins by referring back to a previous passage (16c-d): ‘everything in any field of *technē* that has ever been discovered has come to light because of this … [viz.] that whatever is said to be consists of one and many, having in its nature limit [*peras*] and unlimitedness [*apeirian*]\(^7\). As in the *Statesman*, then, we are alerted to a deep connection between Socrates’ topic and the *technai*, and this time that connection is explicitly grounded in a bold claim about the very ‘structure of things’ (16d). The structure Socrates has in mind is sketched briefly at 23c-d, where he holds that ‘what is’ can be divided into four basic kinds [*eidē*]: *peras*

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\(^6\) Yvon Lafrance is thus mistaken in labelling the first, relative form of assessment ‘quantitative’, and the second, normative form ‘qualitative’ (see Lafrance 1995, 95). That this is too simple a way of distinguishing them is pointed out by Sayre (see Sayre 2005, 22-3), and by Xavier Márquez (see Márquez 2006, 4). Both affirm that relative assessment may concern qualities, while normative assessment may concern quantities.
(limit), *apeiron* (the unlimited), the mixture of these, and the cause of their mixture. And the first of these kinds he tackles is the *apeiron*, an instance of which, he says, is ‘the hotter and the colder’ (24a). This pair of opposites, along with, for example, ‘stronger’ and ‘gentler’ (24c), instantiate what Socrates calls the ‘more’ [*mallon*] and the ‘less’ [*hētton*]. And it is their instantiation of these properties, he continues, that effectively makes them ‘endless’ [*atelē*], and thus ‘entirely unlimited’ [*pantapasin apeirō*] (24b).

Now taken in isolation, this account of the *apeiron* is not immediately transparent. But given an acquaintance with the *Statesman*’s first form of *metrētikē*, the terms of description used here should not be unfamiliar. For as in the *Statesman*, Socrates’ ‘more’ and ‘less’ seem to be serving as generic designations for purely relative, or comparative terms: these do not pick out particular, definite quantities or qualities, but rather gain their content only on the assumption that such have already been picked out.7 Moreover, their content is necessarily vague: for even assuming that x is, for instance, stronger than y, it is unclear as yet exactly how strong x is in absolute terms. It is in both these senses, I take it, that ‘hotter’ and ‘colder’, ‘stronger’ and ‘gentler’ are instances of the *apeiron*: they are ‘unlimited’ because, as Dorothea Frede puts it, such terms in and of themselves express ‘no definite measure or degree’ (Frede 1993, xxxiii). And this is confirmed, in effect, by what Socrates goes on to say: ‘[w]herever [relative or comparative terms] apply’, he contends, ‘they prevent everything from adopting a definite quantity [*poson*]; by imposing on all actions the qualification “stronger” relative to “gentler” [for example], or the reverse, they procure a more [*pleon*] and less [*elatton*], while doing away with *poson*’ (24c).8

It turns out, therefore, that when understood in the light of the *Statesman*’s first form of *metrētikē*, Socrates’ talk of the *apeiron* in the *Philebus* is not so obscure after all. ‘Unlimited’ properties are characteristically ones that are covered by relative or comparative terms, and hence that – although they lie along particular dimensions, such

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7 For example, to say ‘the fridge is colder’ is not yet to express a claim having sense. Only when a definite comparison has been introduced – eg ‘the fridge is colder than my electric blanket’ – do we recognise an item of sense. Cooper endorses this, taking as an example the notion of a ‘high’ note: ‘no fixed sound is determined’, he holds, ‘by the notion of being high’ – for ‘highness’ is an essentially comparative term (see Cooper 1999, 330).

8 Essentially the same point is made at 24d, using a different pair of comparatives: ‘The hotter and the colder are always in flux and never remain, while *poson* means standstill and the end of all progression. The upshot of this argument is that the hotter, together with its opposite, turn out to be *apeiron*’.
as temperature or length – are essentially indefinite. As Frede comments, ‘Anything that can retain its identity through a change in quantity belongs to this category’ (Frede 1993, xxxv). Thus it follows, more or less straightforwardly, that that which brings an end to such indefiniteness, or unlimitedness, is itself the opposite of anything *apeiron* – viz. *peras*, or limit. As Socrates holds at 25d-e, *peras* is the ‘kind that … puts an end to the conflicts there are among opposites … impos[ing] a definite number [\textit{arithmon}] on them’.

‘Limit’, that is, is the source of precisely those properties anything ‘unlimited’ stands in need of: definiteness, determinacy, and consequently – in some sense – stability, and the resolution of conflict between opposites. In this way, it would appear that an essential property of the *Statesman’s metrion* – viz. not only determinacy, but also the normative property of determinate *rightness* – is also an essential property of the *Philebus’ peras*. Is this in fact so?

I think it is, although Socrates in the *Philebus* describes the nature of ‘limit’ somewhat differently to how the Visitor in the *Statesman* describes the nature of ‘due measure’. Where both clearly agree is in viewing these as loci of great value. As I maintained at p. 90, note 3, the Visitor refers to *to metrion* as covering what is fitting [*to prepon*], the right moment [*ton kairon*], and what is as it ought to be [*to deon*] (Stat 284a). Similarly, Socrates associates *peras* with various optimal outcomes, for when limit is applied to the unlimited, the resulting mixture is, he holds, ‘commensurate and harmonious [*summetra de kai sumphōna*]’ (25e1). When, for example, *peras* is applied to the high and low, fast and slow, it creates different kinds of musical perfection (26a3-4), and when applied to the extremes of temperature, it produces ‘seasons and all sorts of fine things of that kind [*hosa kala*]’ (26b1-2). *Peras* generates health, beauty and strength in the body (26b4-5), while in the soul it ensures that ‘boundless’ pleasures are subject to ‘law and order [*nomon kai taxin*]’ (26b9-10), thereby ‘saving’ them. Evidently, Socrates understands ‘limit’, as the Visitor understands ‘due measure’, as the source not only of determinacy, but also of correctness and goodness.

Where *peras* differs from *to metrion* can be summarised, I think, under three heads. First, whereas the latter forms the basis of one division of *metrētīkē*, and thus designates, but does not seem to generate what is in due measure, the former appears to have certain generative powers of its own. Hence Socrates can speak of the mixture of
limit and the unlimited as ‘a coming-into-being [genesin] created through the measures [metrōn] imposed by peras’ (26d8-9), and Protarchus can judge that ‘from [the] mixture [of peras and apeiron], certain generations [geneseis] result’ (25e3-4). 9 Secondly, whereas the Statesman does not specify exactly how due measure arises, the Philebus emphasises how ‘limited’ mixtures characteristically result from the imposition of peras on pairs of opposites. For example, Socrates asserts that ‘in sickness the right combination of … opposites generates the state of health’ (25e7-8), and that the same holds for music and the seasons (see above, 26a-b). Although the details here are obscure, these examples suggest that limit can achieve not only static, unitary results – for example, the right temperature, length or weight – but also dynamic balances and blends. For example, fast and slow musical rhythms that occur together to good effect, or hot and cold seasons that succeed each other in pleasing fashion. 10

The third, and, as I shall argue, most important respect in which peras and to metrion differ (at least from the point of view of interpreting Aristotle), lies in their respective relations to quantification. To metrion, as has been seen, encompasses dimensions of normative assessment such as fittingness, timeliness and general rightness (see Stat 284a). While timeliness can easily be cashed out in quantitative terms (for example, ‘one should never be more than fifteen minutes late’), the other dimensions listed do not so easily admit of a quantitative interpretation. How, for instance, can one express in purely quantitative terms the fittingness of not betraying a confidence, or of bravely persevering in battle? By contrast, the way in which Socrates explicates peras relies strongly on the possibility of quantification and measurement. We have already seen this in his emphasis on achieving the correct poson, or definite quantity (see p. 92 above). And this emphasis recurs elsewhere: for example, limit, Socrates holds, covers ‘all that is related as number to number [arithmon], or measure to measure [metron]’ (25a8-b1); ‘[if one lets] quantity [to de poson] and measurement [to metrion] take a foothold in the domain of the more and the less … [the latter] will be driven out of their

9 The weather supplies an example of this, according to Socrates: ‘once engendered [egggenomenē] in frost and heat’, he says, ‘limit takes away their excesses [to men polu lian] and unlimitedness, and establishes moderation and harmony [to de emmetron kai hama summetron] in that domain’ (26a6-8; cf 27b7-9).
10 In this way, Socrates leaves room for mixtures that are composed by opposites not simultaneously, but sequentially (see Frede 1993, xxxiv, xxxvii).

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own territory’ (24c6-d2); ‘The kind that contains equal and double [viz. peras] … impos[es] a definite number [arithmon] on [opposites]’ (25d11-e2).

So although it is the Statesman’s metrion, not the Philebus’ peras, which bears a direct semantic relation to measurement, I would contend that it is in fact the latter that is more intimately associated with the notion of rightness qua correct quantity. Indeed, at times, it seems almost as if Socrates treats the imposition of definite quantity as a good per se. For example, he speaks of ‘making [opposites] commensurate and harmonious by imposing a definite number on them’ (25e1-2), and closely associates definiteness with perfection and beauty (see esp. 26a), indefiniteness with degeneracy and disease. The notion seems lost here, then, that the normative and the quantitative are logically independent dimensions of assessment. Even if they do not exclude each other, the Statesman makes it very clear that they amount to different forms of appraisal: quantitative judgement may be involved in normative judgement, but in and of itself it does not entail any normative conclusions. In the Philebus, by contrast, this strict division between the two forms of metrētikē is obscured – indeed, they seem almost conflated.11

This near-conflation is, as I will argue later on, significant when it comes to understanding Aristotle’s doctrine of the mean.12

Before moving on to investigate how Aristotle draws on, yet also alters the Platonic notions of metrion and peras, it is worth dwelling briefly on how these are made use of in dialogues beyond the Statesman and Philebus. I shall take their occurrence in broadly non-ethical contexts first. The Philebus’ notion of the mean qua mixture or balance is used to shed light on several physical phenomena, especially that of health. Eryximachus holds that ‘medicine [is meant to] … produce concord between … opposites’, such as hot and cold, wet and dry (Symp 186d-e; cf 188a), and Timaeus maintains that ‘[one should] have one friendly element placed by another [in the body], and so bring about health’ (Tim 88e-9a; cf 82b, 86a-b). Earlier in the Timaeus, the mean

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11 The reason for this is, I think, that whereas in the Statesman the dimension of ‘more’ and ‘less’ involves determinate quantities or qualities, in the Philebus the same dimension excludes these (for the apeiron is indeterminate by definition). Given this, and given the fact that the Philebus views indeterminacy as bad per se, it follows that goodness be strongly associated with determinate quantity.

12 Significant, too, is Socrates’ identification of the cause of the mixtures of peras and apeiron: ‘the craftsman [dēmiourgoun] who produces all these must’, he declares, ‘be the fourth kind, the cause [tēn aittian]’ (27b1-2). As I argued in the Introduction (see pp. xiv-v) and in ch.1 (see pp. 12-13), and as I shall argue further on, there is reason to think the crafts a paradigmatic locus of quantification and measurement.
is given a more exalted, metaphysical role: the ‘world’s soul’, Timaeus claims, is an ‘intermediate \[mesōi\] form of being’, mixed from ‘the being that is indivisible and always changeless, and the one that is divisible and comes to be’ (35a; cf 41d). And there are more mundane instances of the mean, as embodied, for instance, in Hippias’ recommendation that Socrates and Protagoras ‘steer a middle course \[meson ti\]’ between excessively brief and verbose forms of discussion (see Prot 338a-b).

In explicitly ethical contexts, the mean plays, if anything, a more central and less ad hoc role. We have seen already, in chapter one, Socrates’ attraction to an ‘art of measurement’, which he characterises as ‘the study of relative excess and deficiency and equality’ in the choice of pleasures and pains (Prot 357b; cf Laws 792c-d). But it is in the Republic that the mean – qua harmonisation between different parts of the soul – is given an ethically crucial role. For in order to be happy, Socrates declares, ‘we must always know how to choose the mean \[meson\] … and how to avoid either of the extremes \[ta huperballonta\]’ (619a-b). Doing this involves ‘harmonis[ing] the three parts of [one]self like three limiting notes in a musical scale’ (443d), thereby generating ‘desires that are simple, measured \[metrias\] and directed by rational calculation’ (431c). Such desires will be directed not at ‘wealth without limit’, which yields ‘unlimited evils’, but rather at an appropriate amount of money (591d-e; cf Laws 728e-9a). And in general, the harmonious soul will generate desires that are said to display not a ‘lack of due measure’ \[ametrian\], but rather ‘what is measured’ \[emmetriai\] (486d).

So all in all, the notions of peras and to metrion can be seen to resonate widely within the Platonic dialogues, in both ethical and non-ethical contexts. The same could be said vis-à-vis the Aristotelian corpus, although, as I hope will become clear, it is in his ethical works that Aristotle makes the most detailed and sophisticated use of the notion of the mean. Outside these works, his use of it is, nevertheless, not negligible. For instance,

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13 It is worth noting that this alignment between rationality and the mean is evident also in the Philebus. Reason is our ‘king’ (28c), Socrates avers, for it rules the ‘world-order’ \[kosmos\] (28d; cf 30d), causing order and limit in months, years and seasons (30c). And at the human level, reason stands opposed to pleasure, because ‘[nothing] is more outside all measure \[ametrōteron\] than pleasure and excessive joy, while nothing more measured \[emmetrōteron\] than reason and knowledge could ever be found’ (65d).

14 For suggestions outside the Republic of an ethical mean constituted by harmony between opposing elements, see (eg) Soph 228b and Tim 88b-c. Instances of a non-dynamic ethical mean can be found at Menex 247c-8a – ‘[the good man] will be seen neither to rejoice nor to grieve too much’ – and at Laws 791d, where the Athenian recommends an upbringing that avoids both the extreme of ‘luxury’, and that of ‘savage repression’.
he shows some interest in the idea of the ‘great and small’, which, though he recognises its pre-Platonic (particularly Pythagorean) lineage, he treats mainly in its Platonic form. These dimensions of the great and the small, which he sometimes refers to as the ‘two infinites’ [apeira], or as the ‘indefinite dyad’ [hē duas aoristos], are canvassed as partial explanations for various phenomena, in particular for the existence of number. Aristotle considers, for example, whether ‘number comes from the one and the indefinite dyad’ (Meta 1081a14). He is wholly unsympathetic, however, to such purported explanations: theorists ‘make no attempt to explain’, he adjoins, ‘how number can consist of the one and plurality [viz. the indefinite dyad]’ (Meta 1085b4-6). Peras, as an explanatory hypothesis within mathematics, is thus given short shrift.

In his psychological and biological works, by contrast, Aristotle often relies on the hypothesis of various naturally occurring means. There is, he holds, in the case of each sense, a ‘sensitive mean’ [aisthētikē mesotēs], each sense ‘being a sort of mean between the opposites that characterise the objects of perception’ (DA 424a4-5). Blends of contrary properties, or of what start out as such – for example, hot and cold – are generally pictured as having beneficial effects, as are balances between the contrary internal states of individual organisms. Admittedly, this emphasis on the good of mean states leads Aristotle to some unwarranted conclusions: conclusions concerning, for example, the location of the heart, and the condition of the blood. But since (as I hope to show) the ethical mean is distinct from any natural mean – contra Tracy 1969’s theory of the former as a homoeostasis, or ‘dynamic equilibrium of opposites’ (cf Terzis 1995) – applying criticisms of the latter to the former is unjustified. Indeed, Aristotle explicitly holds that “having a middle” is used in several ways (Top 149a35), and that

15 See (eg) Phys 187a16-19, 192a11-12, 203a15, 206b27-9, 209b33-5; Meta 987b25-6, 988a13-14, 26, 1087b7-10.
16 Cf Meta 987b20-22, 1081a22, b21, 26, 1082a13, b30, 32, 1083b24-5, 36, 1091a3-5, 24-5.
17 Cf Meta 1091a6-12: ‘All this is absurd … the very elements – the great and the small – seem to cry out against the violence that is done to them; for they cannot in any way generate numbers other than those got from one by doubling’.
18 Cf DA 424b1, 426a30-b2, 431a10-11, 435a22.
19 See (eg) Phys 246b4-7; GC 327b26-31, 328a29-32, 334b10-11, 26-7; DA 426b6-7; Sens 439b31-40a1; PA 661b10-12; GA 767a16-20.
20 See (eg) Top 145b8-9; PA 652a31-3, b16-21.
21 He claims, for instance, that the ‘middle [meson] cavity’ of the heart contains blood that ‘as regards quantity and heat, is intermediate [mesai] between the other two’ (see PA 667a1-4). And he alleges that, since the heart is the most important organ, it ‘must be situated midway [meson] between what is called “before” and “behind”’ (see Juv 467b28-8a1). Cf HA 496a20-22, 521a32-b4.
“intermediate” and “mean” are capable of more than one application’ (Cael 312b2). Accordingly, it would be far too hasty to assume that problems facing the mean in one area (viz. biology) must apply also to another area (viz. ethics).

How, then, does Aristotle elaborate his conception of the ethical mean? He begins (at NE 1106a24-b7) by describing how, in the realm of moral virtue, the mean is not something absolute. ‘In everything that is continuous and divisible’, he holds, ‘it is possible to take more [pleion], less [elatton], or an equal [ison] amount, and that either in terms of the thing itself [kath’auto] or relatively to us [pros hēmas]’ (1106a26-8). The ethical mean is, he continues, pros hēmas, which is notable in itself, since none of the means outlined above – mathematical, psychological or biological – is classified in this way. Nonetheless, the distinction between means kath’auto and pros hēmas is not immediately clear, so Aristotle goes on to explicate it further. ‘By the intermediate [meson] in the object I mean that which is equidistant from each of the extremes [tōn akrōn], which is one and the same for all men; by the intermediate relatively to us that which is neither too much nor too little [mēte pleonazei mēte elleipei] – and this is not one, nor the same for all’. And to illustrate this, he provides an analogy: whereas the mean amount of food for most people is six pounds, it does not follow that a professional athlete should consume six. The mean for him might be eight pounds, given his stage of training – and this form of relativity, Aristotle suggests, applies equally to the moral virtues.

What is noticeable here, to begin with, is that the relative mean, unlike to meson kata to pragma (‘the mean taken in terms of the object’), is normative: instead of lying midway between two set amounts (polla (‘many’) and oliga (‘few’)), it lies between what are – relative to a particular agent – polu (‘too much’) and oligon (‘too little’). And this echoes the Statesman’s distinction between, on the one hand, a non-normative ‘more’ and ‘less’, and, on the other, a normative metrion. Aristotle’s analogy thus has a certain intuitive appeal, insofar as it seems to give content to the idea that the ethical mean is both normative, and relative at the same time. But on closer inspection, exactly what kind of relativity applies in the context of the moral virtues seems unclear. After all, the

22 As Rosalind Hursthouse remarks, the notion of a relative mean ‘is proper to the Aristotelian ethics, not a variant on the doctrine of the mean to be found in his other works’ (Hursthouse 2006, 101).
normative dimensions put forward in the *Statesman* – to prepon, ho kairos and to deon – make no explicit mention of agent-relativity, and the same could be said of the *Philebus*’ *peras*. Granted, it makes sense for Milo to eat more than an amateur athlete, owing to his athletic ambitions and current physique. But agents’ ethical aims do not seem to display this kind of relativity: I am required to be courageous and temperate, for example, and should not be satisfied with less, whether I want to realise these virtues or not. So the analogy between moral virtue and athletic ambition seems, at least if read in this subjectivist way, to be misconceived.

I would contend that the relativity Aristotle has in mind is not subjectivist in nature, but centrally concerns the different kinds of expression individual agents give the moral virtues. For example, the temperate person who can hold his drink will usually have more drinks than the temperate person who cannot. Or to take one of Aristotle’s own examples, ‘liberality resides not in the multitude of the gifts but in the state of the giver, and this is relative to the giver’s substance. There is therefore nothing to prevent the man who gives from being the more liberal man, if he has less to give’ (1120b7-11; cf 1122b23-6 on the virtue of ‘magnificence’). The sense in which the ethical mean is pros hēmas, then, is not that it is dictated by the contingent passions or characters of particular agents, but rather that, for any given choice, it is determined by all the moral and material circumstances relevant to that choice.

So thus far I have argued that Aristotle’s ethical mean is relative, and this in a sense that is both coherent and commonsensical. The mean is also determinate, for as Aristotle maintains, ‘it is possible to fail in many ways … while to succeed is possible only in one way … For men are good in but one way, but bad in many’ (1106b28-35). This notion of the determinacy of the ethical mean is reinforced by Aristotle’s conception of it as akin to a skopos, or target: ‘to miss the mark [is] easy’, he declares, ‘to hit it difficult’ (1106b31-2); ‘there is a target to which the man who possesses reason looks’

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23 The example is C.C.W. Taylor’s (see Taylor 2006, 104 n.16).
24 Eg the lecher who thinks that only one seduction a month is a good target for him, even though it would not count as good for his more strait-laced neighbour.
25 The view that relativity pros hēmas should be construed as relativity to the morally and materially relevant circumstances, including facts about the particular agents involved, is affirmed at Hardie 1968, 135, Brown 1997, 86, Bostock 2000, 41, Hursthouse 2006, 103-5 and Taylor 2006, 103-4 n.16.
All of this suggests that, as Nancy Sherman puts it, the doctrine of the mean allows little ‘discretionary latitude’ in the execution of moral choice (see Sherman 1997, 331), something further suggested by Aristotle’s comment that ‘the determinate [to d’hōrismenon] is of the nature of the good’ (1170a20-21). Admittedly, a few passages (all of them outside the context of the ethical mean) indicate a less strictly determinate conception of ‘meson’ and ‘mesotēs’.27 But as I maintained on pp. 97-8, these terms need not be used univocally, and moreover, Aristotle explicitly holds that their usage is not univocal.

If the ethical mean has the formal properties of relativity and determinacy, this is informative so far as it goes, but it says nothing about what the mean actually consists in. Aristotle offers the beginning of an answer to this at 1106b16-18, where he asserts that moral virtue is ‘concerned with passions [pathē] and actions [praxeis], and in these there is excess, defect and the intermediate [to meson]’. From this, it would appear that intermediacy is not a brute feature of virtue, but is derivative, rather, from the feelings and actions with which virtue is associated. And this is confirmed further on, where Aristotle maintains that ‘virtue is a kind of mean [mesotēs tis], since it aims at what is intermediate [stochastikē ge ousa tou mesou]’ (1106b27-8, my italics); ‘[virtue] is a mean [mesotēs] between two vices … because the vices respectively fall short of or exceed what is right in both passions and actions, while virtue both finds and chooses that which is intermediate [to meson]’ (1107a2-6, my italics; cf 1109a20-24). What these passages indicate, I take it, is that, in Broadie’s words, virtue ‘is intermediate only derivatively, through a relation to something else that is primarily intermediate’ (Broadie 1991, 97) – viz. pathē and praxeis.28 Hence the question arises of how, and how cogently Aristotle explicates the alleged primary intermediacy of passions and actions.

Taking pathē first, the idea that individuals should feel various emotions to the right degree – where this lies between contrary poles of excess and deficiency – has a great deal of plausibility. As Aristotle claims, ‘fear and confidence and appetite and anger

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26 NB also that ‘meson’ can refer – and at 1109a25 does refer – to the centre of a circle. This is pointed out at Hursthouse 2006, 109 and Taylor 2006, 123.
27 Eg ‘the proper number [of people in a city] is presumably not a single number, but anything that falls between certain fixed points’ (1170b52-3); ‘the mesotēs in temperature is] of considerable extent, and is not indivisible’ (GC 334b29).
28 This reading is endorsed by (eg) Annas 1993, 59 and Rapp 2006, 115. It is denied, however, by Urmson 1980, whose position I will outline and criticise later on.
and pity and in general pleasure and pain may be felt both too much [mallon] and too little [hētton], and in both cases not well' (1106b18-21). Indeed, ordinary language bolsters the intuition that such affects lie along specific scales: for instance, a person can be said to feel pity too often, or to have too big an appetite, or to lack the required degree of confidence in public-speaking. Aristotle thus seems quite justified in holding that ‘we stand badly with respect to anger [for example] if we feel it strongly or weakly, but well if we feel it mesōs’ (1105b26-8). Not that a particular pathos will necessarily be identifiable as instantiating a specific quantity, or degree of intensity. It would seem more realistic (and sufficient for practical purposes) merely to identify a pathos’ ordinal position along various dimensions, and to admit that its cardinal value, as it were, is not precisely determinable. But bearing this qualification in mind, the notion that emotional mesa form part of the mesotēs that is virtue, seems thoroughly reasonable.

The reasonableness of this notion depends in large part on its restricted application: if, Aristotle seems to be saying, one ought to experience a particular affect, one should do so only in a mean. But in fact, the role he ascribes to medial pathē in his theory of moral virtue is far more ambitious. For having classified passions as ‘in general the feelings that are accompanied by pleasure or pain’ (1105b21-3), he then goes on in the EE to claim that ‘all the moral virtues and vices have to do with excesses and defects of pleasures and pains’ (1222b9-11). And this universal claim is difficult to sustain. For example, it is difficult to see why the virtue of truthfulness, or its correlative vices (mock-modesty and boastfulness), need have an emotion, or emotions associated with them. The same might be said, at least in the case of certain individuals, of the virtue of friendliness, and its correlative vices of obsequiousness and contentiousness. This criticism applies with particular force, moreover, to the virtue of justice, which Aristotle examines in NE V. For although he holds that injustice is characterised by pleonexia, viz.

29 Eg ‘S used to be quite calm, but now he flies into rages’, as opposed to ‘S used to display anger of intensity 4.5, but now he hits on average 8.5’. I take it that this does not contradict the ethical mean’s being strictly determinate, for the latter is a metaphysical claim, which is consistent with the meson’s being, to some extent, epistemically opaque. As George Anagnostopoulos has argued, Aristotle’s strictures concerning the inexactness of ethics – eg ‘matters concerned with conduct and questions of what is good for us have no fixity’ (1104a4-5; cf 1094b14-22) – apply only to the accounts [logoi] offered of ethical phenomena, not to those phenomena themselves (see Anagnostopoulos 1994, esp. 154-5, 170).

30 See NE IV.7 and EE II.3.

31 See NE IV.6 and EE II.3.
greed or the desire for more than one’s fair share (see, for instance, 1129b1-2, 1130b3-4), it seems that unjust behaviour could equally be motivated by bias towards a friend, carelessness or simply an insensitivity towards considerations of justice. And none of these, it appears, need involve a particular pathos, or even any pathē at all.32

Still on the subject of medial passions, Aristotle acknowledges that not every nameable passion admits of a mean, and he cites as examples Schadenfreude [epichairekakia], shamelessness [anaischuntia] and envy [phthonos] (1107a10-11). These, he asserts, ‘imply by their names that they are themselves bad, and not the excesses or deficiencies of them’ (1107a12-14). This suggests, then, a failure in the schema of huperbolē, elleipsis and meson to apply to all emotions without exception. But in what follows, Aristotle makes it clear that the reason certain emotions do not admit of a mean, is that they already instantiate particular excesses or deficiencies.33 And this implies, in turn, that Aristotle remains committed to the view that, as Taylor puts it, there are no ‘types of motivation which are per se good or bad, irrespective of considerations of the degree to which they are felt’ (Taylor 2006, 113). This is, clearly, a controversial view to hold, for emotions such as malevolence do appear bad per se, and not to admit of decomposition into extreme pathē. Nevertheless, it does seem a view that is inescapable once one has accepted – as Aristotle appears to accept – that the triadic division between excess, deficiency and mean applies to pathē universally.34

To summarise the challenges facing Aristotle’s analysis of medial pathē: first, not all virtues are associated with mean emotions, and secondly, not all emotions, it appears, can be subsumed under Aristotle’s triadic schema. Either way, the basic criticism is not that the idea of a mean emotion is without application, but rather that it is over-applied. If this is the case for medial pathē, what is the case for medial praxeis? As several

32 This criticism of Aristotle’s analysis of justice [dikaiosunē] has been well-formulated in many places: see (eg) Hardie 1968, 202, Williams 1980, Bostock 2000, 67-9 and Broadie and Rowe 2002, 35. Urmson 1980 draws a helpful contrast with Hume. Justice is, according to Hume, an ‘artificial’, not a ‘natural’ virtue, for it essentially involves the conformity of one’s behaviour to certain social rules of distribution. Hence any emotions accompanying just or unjust behaviour are, on a Humean account, purely accidental. (For less critical accounts of Aristotle on pleonexia, see Irwin 1988, 429 and Kraut 2002, 157-160.)
33 There is not, Aristotle holds, ‘a mean of excess and deficiency’ (1107a25-6), thereby implying that emotions such as Schadenfreude, shamelessness and envy already count as emotional extremes.
34 Support for this interpretation, viz. that Aristotle effectively rules out the possibility of ‘pure vices’, can be found at (eg) Urmson 1980, 165, Broadie 1991, 102, Bostock 2000, 43 and Hurka 2001, 103.
commentators point out, the notion that actions can lie in a mean applies quite straightforwardly within the context of certain virtues, especially those that involve ‘aiming at’ specific quantities. For instance, the virtue of liberality \(\textit{eleutheriotēs}\), as outlined at \textit{NE} 1107b8-21, involves proper expenditure: the \textit{eleutherios} spends and receives the right amounts, whereas ‘the prodigal exceeds in spending and falls short in taking, while the mean man exceeds in taking and falls short in spending’ (1107b11-14).\footnote{At \textit{NE} IV.1 and \textit{EE} III.4, by contrast, Aristotle emphasises the motivational aspects of liberality: ‘the man who is more pleased than he ought to be with every acquisition and more pained than he ought to be at every expenditure is illiberal; he who feels less of both than he ought is lavish; he who feels both as he ought is liberal’ (\textit{EE} 1231b29-32).} Vis-à-vis liberality (ie generosity), then, the idea that action can be in a mean – in this case a quantitative mean, relative to particular situations – seems perfectly cogent.

Another virtue eminently hospitable to the notion of medial \textit{praxeis} is that of ‘particular’ justice, viz. distributive and rectificatory justice, which Aristotle delineates at \textit{NE} V.3-4. Rectificatory justice, for example, tries to establish ‘the intermediate between loss and gain’ (1132a19): having determined the extent of a victim’s loss, the judge tries to correct that loss by compensation and/or by penalising the perpetrator. Aristotle presents this as a strictly calculable restoration of \textit{to meson} (using ‘arithmetical proportion’), and insofar as this turns out to be the case, the notion that rectificatory justice is a virtue aimed at actions in a mean appears well-founded. For once again, we have a sufficiently clear notion of the scale along which \textit{huperbolē}, \textit{elleipsis} and \textit{meson} are to be determined. The difficulty here is, however, that it is unclear how far this type of case can be extended to other types of virtuous action. For many virtuous actions, such as temperate or courageous actions, do not seem to – or at least need not – display the quantitative features found in the contexts of either liberality or corrective justice. And even if one looks beyond the quantitative, to other sorts of dimension, it is hard to see in principle how these could capture all the various forms of ‘rightness’ characteristic of virtuous action.\footnote{The forms of ‘rightness’ (or more literally, ‘oughtness’ [\textit{hōs dei}]) Aristotle specifies at 1106b21-2 are: ‘at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right aim, and in the right way’. Only the first item on this list seems straightforwardly scalar.}

In response to this problem of pinning down the sense in which actions can be said to be ‘in a mean’, several commentators have suggested that Aristotle envisages

\footnote{See (eg) Hardie 1968, 132, Adkins 1970, 187 and Annas 1993, 60.}
medial praxeis as deriving their ‘degree’ from the degree of emotion they exhibit.\textsuperscript{38} In other words, actions in a mean are to be understood in terms of correlative medial pathē, and given that degrees of emotion are easier to grasp than degrees of action, this looks \textit{pro tanto} to be a satisfactory solution. But the trouble with this proposed solution is that it assumes that virtuous (and vicious) actions are necessarily correlated with emotions – and it was precisely against the truth of this assumption that I argued on pp. 101-2. On the contrary, there are a significant number of such actions that have no emotional correlates at all. In the end, then, I think it should be admitted that Aristotle’s notion of medial praxeis, although it does apply within the context of a few virtues, does not convincingly gain application beyond them. And in this way, this notion, like that of medial pathē before it, appears – however helpful it is in some cases – simply over-applied.

In sum, then, I have argued that although Aristotle explicitly grounds the intermediacy of the moral virtues in the intermediacy of passions and actions, his analysis is undermined by the limited applicability of the notions of medial pathē and medial praxeis. Many virtues do, at least characteristically, require emotional responses that can be conceived as lying along different continua – but some, as I have maintained, do not, thus directly contradicting Aristotle’s claim that ‘all the moral virtues and vices have to do with excesses and defects of pleasures and pains’ (\textit{EE} 1222b9-11).\textsuperscript{39} Moreover, Aristotle’s actual elaboration of particular triads of emotional response sometimes appears forced: take, for example, the supposed triad of envy, righteous indignation [\textit{nemesis}] and \textit{schadenfreude}.

\textsuperscript{40} As to medial praxeis, some virtues are strongly associated with actions of a scalar type – for example, the virtues of liberality and particular justice. But many, or perhaps most virtues, are not so associated, and this drawback in Aristotle’s theory is compounded by the fact that certain key action-triads

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\item\textsuperscript{38} See Ross 1923, 196, Adkins 1970, 187 and Taylor 2006, 106.
\item\textsuperscript{39} Cf 1104b13-15: ‘[all] virtue is concerned with pleasures and pains’.
\item\textsuperscript{40} Aristotle holds that ‘the man characterised by righteous indignation is pained at undeserved good fortune, the envious man, going beyond him, is pained at all good fortune, and the \textit{schadenfroh} man falls so far short of being pained that he even rejoices’ (1108b3-6). But as Taylor comments, ‘there is no one feeling such that [envy] is too much of it and [\textit{Schadenfreude}] too little … [rather,] both reactions express an underlying malevolence, which is why they are typically found in the same person’ (Taylor 2006, 120-21; cf Gauthier and Jolif 1959, 160).
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are not explicated convincingly within it. So it seems that, by making actions and passions foundational to his ethical mean, Aristotle has rested the latter on items that, as it were, cannot bear its weight.

In response to this set of difficulties, some commentators have suggested that, notwithstanding Aristotle’s actual doctrine of the mean, a less vulnerable version of that doctrine can be arrived at, while remaining true to the spirit of Aristotle’s theory. Urmson, the first and most celebrated proponent of this interpretative strategy, holds that rather than actions and passions constituting the primary meso within Aristotle’s theory, ‘what is primarily in a mean is a settled state of character’ (Urmson 1980, 165). In other words, the intermediacy of mean dispositions is in fact substantive, not derivative, this having the upshot that actions and passions are in a mean if and only if they exhibit such dispositions. And this view, that what are properly basic for Aristotle are mean dispositions, not dispositions towards a mean, looks promising. After all, he presents the virtues as each occurring between two vices, one of excess and one of deficiency, and this has great intuitive appeal, at least for central examples such as rashness-courage-cowardice, or self-indulgence-temperance-insensibility. If the grounding Aristotle gives these phenomena is insufficiently general, perhaps they can be understood in other terms, while preserving the triadic structure he himself helps uncover. This appears, at least, a suitably charitable approach, and thus one well worth pursuing.

If this approach is to work, we will have to determine, of course, which scale or scales is or are meant to capture virtuous and vicious dispositions. Bostock suggests that a good candidate is frequency, viz. ‘the number of occasions, or better the number of types of occasion, on which the emotion in question is felt’ (Bostock 2000, 42). And this does seem to fit passages such as the following, where Aristotle introduces his doctrine of the mean: ‘The man who flies from and fears everything, and does not stand his ground against anything, becomes a coward; the man who fears nothing at all but goes to meet every danger becomes rash. Similarly, the man who indulges in every pleasure and

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41 NB Aristotle’s claim that ‘the man who acts unjustly has too much, and the man who is unjustly treated too little, of what is good’, while just action constitutes a mean between these (1131b19-20; cf 1133b30-33, 1134a12-13, 33–4, 1138a29–31). As several scholars point out, not only does being unjustly treated not constitute an action, what it involves – namely, getting less than one’s fair share – might well be considered a virtue (as suggested, indeed, at 1136b20–21). See Ross 1923, 213, Kelsen 1967, 119, Urmson 1980, 165, Bostock 2000, 68 and Young 2006, 190, 192.
abstains from none becomes self-indulgent, while the man who shuns every pleasure, as boors do, becomes in a way insensible. Temperance and courage, then, are destroyed by excess and deficiency, and preserved by the mean \([tēs mesotētos]\)’ (1104a20-27). Here it is clear that what is at stake is not the degree or intensity of the emotions felt, or the extensive quanta that inform the actions performed. Rather, the scale being invoked is that of frequency, and this seems not only relatively easy to determine, but also unobjectionable per se.

Bostock’s suggestion is, nevertheless, not without its problems, and these are, I think, at least threefold. First, and least problematically, his suggestion goes against Aristotle’s main exposition of the ethical mean, which dwells on actions and passions themselves, not on their frequency.\(^{42}\) But since Bostock does rely on a passage within the \(NE\), and one relevant to Aristotle’s doctrine of the mean, this objection does not carry much weight. Secondly, although the proposed scale of frequency is promising \(simpliciter\), it seems less promising when it is recalled that what are being assessed for their frequency are \(pathē\). For this once again presupposes that each virtue is associated with an emotion, or set of emotions, a presupposition I have already argued is unsustainable. Virtues central to Aristotle’s ethics have no clear connection to the emotions, so to affirm an account of the mean that entails a denial of this is precarious. Moreover, to invoke actions here as a substitute for passions would, I take it, be even more precarious. For what would be required is not a straightforward analysis of the frequency of particular types of action, but rather a specification of an aspect of action that could be judged as occurring too much, too little or to the right degree. And it is unclear what, in general – apart from emotion – this might consist in.\(^{43}\)

Thirdly, and I think most importantly, Bostock’s suggestion suffers from a defect that is shared with all the accounts of the ethical mean offered so far: namely, that the schema of excess, deficiency and mean is presented as capturing all relevant normative dimensions, whereas in fact this is far from evidently the case. Taking the dimension of frequency, it can no doubt be held that one should not, for example, become angry on too

\(^{42}\) This reluctance to respect what Aristotle himself deems central is evident also in Urmson’s account. For criticism of this interpretative move, see Peterson 1988, 235 n.6; Annas 1993, 59; Welton and Polansky 1995, 80, 90; Young 1996, 93-4, esp. n.25.

\(^{43}\) In the cases of liberality and particular justice, a plausible candidate does appear available: viz. how much money is taken or given. But this answer will not be available for most virtues.
many or too few occasions, but only on the appropriate number of these. And this stipulation could be supplemented by other scalar-type claims, to the effect that on such occasions, one should be angry, for instance, to the right degree. But even given such supplementation, it remains unclear how central dimensions of moral appropriateness – such as with whom one should be angry, with what aim, and with regard to which objects – could in principle be captured along any particular scale or scales. These dimensions require the specification not of certain degrees, amounts, intensities or frequencies, but rather of certain types of person, aim and object. And crucially, these types do not appear scalar in nature.

Now this criticism would hardly be damaging, if Aristotle held that *huperbolē*, *elleipsis* and *meson* – rather than constituting an exhaustive schema, one capable of capturing all forms of rightness and wrongness – were merely a useful heuristic device, with somewhat limited application. But in fact the opposite seems to be the case. For after having referred to his triadic schema, Aristotle continues on several occasions as if that schema could explicate even non-scalar normative dimensions. I have already cited one key instance of this (see p. 103, note 37), and another occurs soon afterwards, at 1109a24-9: having defined moral virtue as ‘aiming at’ *to meson* in passions and actions, Aristotle declares that ‘it is no easy task to find *to meson* … [by contrast,] anyone can get angry – that is easy – or give or spend money; but to do this to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right aim, and in the right way, that is not for everyone, nor is it easy’.44 From this it appears that, as Broadie puts matters, “intermediate” seems virtually a synonym for “right” and it includes every category of rightness’ (Broadie 1991, 101). But despite this artefact of usage, it remains unclear how *to meson* could cover such a wide categorial range in the first place.

This problem is widely recognised in the secondary literature. Broadie, for instance, notes that Aristotle lets ‘too much’, ‘too little’ and the mean ‘do duty for a whole gamut of dimensions in which a response might go wrong’ (Broadie and Rowe 2002, 20). But as she contends elsewhere, ‘although some responses are wrong because

44 Further examples can be found throughout *NE IV*, a particularly good one being Aristotle’s analysis of ‘good temper’ [*praotēs*]. ‘Good temper is’, he maintains, ‘a mean [*mesotēs*] with respect to anger … The man who is angry at the right things and with the right people, and, further, as he ought, when he ought, and as long as he ought, is praised. This will be the good-tempered man, then, since good temper is praised’ (1125b26-33).
they are too high or too low on some scale or other, not all wrong responses can be faulted in such a way’ (Broadie 1991, 100). In line with this, Hursthouse claims that wrongness of object, in particular, cannot usually be understood in terms of excess, deficiency and the mean (see Hursthouse 1999, 109, 119). As Christof Rapp illustrates, ‘we get things wrong when we are afraid of the wrong things, when we are angry for negligible reasons, when we spend money under inappropriate circumstances, etc.’ (Rapp 2006, 119) – and none of these species of wrongness need be capturable in scalar terms. It follows that, as Taylor holds, ‘the key notion [in Aristotle’s analysis] seems to be that of inappropriate, not excessive or deficient response to the demands of the situation’ (Taylor 2006, 112).

If the above critics have a strong case – as they certainly appear to – it becomes all the more pressing to see in what ways Aristotle’s doctrine of the mean can be defended. Perhaps the quickest way of going about this, though also the least satisfactory, is to deny that Aristotle intends the ethical mean to be interpreted literally. This is, I take it, Hursthouse’s view: she holds that Aristotle’s doctrine is not ‘a doctrine of “the mean”, as we understand that phrase in English, ie as something lying between excess and defect. Taken out of its context, which indeed bristles with references to excess and deficiency, it reads naturally as suggesting, not an image of something intermediate between two other things, but the very image Aristotle gives us at … 1109a25, namely that of the centre of a circle’ (Hursthouse 2006, 107). According to Hursthouse, then, ‘meson’ should essentially be understood metaphorically, as requiring that actions and passions be ‘spot on’ – viz. done or experienced at the right times, for the right reasons, with regard to the right objects, etc. – and thus not be either ‘short of the mark’, or ‘over the top’. Once we have ‘got this great insight clearly in our sights’, she concludes, ‘we can discard as simply distorting effects the surrounding talk of excess and deficiency’ (ibid. 108).

This approach, of taking the doctrine of the mean non-literally (ie as non-scalar), is not original to Hursthouse. Whitney Oates, for instance, judges that it should be taken as a mathematical metaphor, designed to make Aristotle’s ‘system … understandable’ (Oates 1936, 393). Hans Kelsen claims that Aristotle’s doctrine can gain wide application

\[\text{NB NE V.3’s reliance on the notion that distributive justice is }\text{kat'axian, ‘according to merit’, or that it is }\text{kata ton analogon, ‘proportional’. Although Aristotle seems to equate these properties with being in a mean, it is difficult to see how they are reducible to any scalar property or set of properties.}\]
only if the notion of ‘distance’ from a norm is understood metaphorically (see Kelsen 1967, 105). And Broadie notes that ‘not all wrong responses can be faulted in [a scalar] way, unless metaphorically’ (Broadie 1991, 100). But if this is the only way of salvaging Aristotle’s doctrine, I suggest it will inevitably be in trouble. For as Rapp trenchantly argues, a metaphorical reading of the mean ‘would reveal a serious inconsistency in the doctrine, since the scheme of deficiency, excess and the mean was precisely justified by the argument that the subject matter of ethical virtue is continuous and divisible in a literal sense [see 1106a24 ff.]’ (Rapp 2006, 114). This is incontrovertibly correct, I take it, for it is very difficult to see how continuity and divisibility could be understood in anything but a literal sense, or how Aristotle himself could envisage their being so understood. Hence, if Aristotle’s doctrine is to preserve its force, it will, I think, have to be read non-metaphorically.46

A second way of defending the mean is outlined by Howard Curzer (in Curzer 1996). Curzer argues that although not all ‘parameters’ of moral rightness and wrongness can be understood in terms of excess, deficiency and the mean, it may nonetheless be the case that non-scalar parameters have, in each case, got scalar correlatives. For example, take acting for the wrong reason: ‘[p]erhaps a disposition to have wrong reasons is’, Curzer holds, ‘always accompanied by a disposition to be excessive and/or deficient with respect to other parameters’ (135). For instance, imagine a person who decides to get divorced, on the grounds that his or her spouse is incapable of making chicken casserole in the manner to which he or she is accustomed. This decision surely does demonstrate insufficient solicitude for one’s marriage partner, and could well be judged as displaying too exacting a concern with culinary skill. In this way, as Curzer puts it, wrong reasons – even if they are not scalar per se – can be seen to ‘infect’ various scalar parameters, and perhaps the same holds for other species of non-scalar wrongness. If so, the argument runs, the doctrine of the mean can be upheld as very widely, or even as universally applicable.

Although Curzer’s defence of Aristotle’s doctrine is ingenious, it is not, I think, persuasive. A similar defence is considered and rejected by Broadie, who cites the case of

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46 At the very least, it will have to be read non-metaphorically in a significant number of central applications. And I have already argued that even this is not possible.
someone who sells secrets to a foreign power (see Broadie 1991, 100). Assuming this is a bad thing to do, Broadie goes on to ask: ‘What does a person do too much or too little of when he agrees to sell secrets to a foreign power? He may act with insufficient loyalty or from excessive desire for wealth, but’, she presses, ‘neither of these is the treacherous response itself which the example is about’. In other words, even though the action in question may be associated with various scalar-type faults, those faults in and of themselves are inadequate to capture the particular wrongness constituted by treachery. Treachery is inappropriate and wrong whether or not it is associated with those faults, so to present the latter as what treachery somehow consists in is misleading. And to drive her point home, Broadie maintains that the same criticism applies also to good actions, those that on Aristotle’s account are ‘in a mean’. ‘[T]he person who says “No” to the enemy agent’s suggestion’, she avers, ‘probably does not do so because accepting it would be going too far or not far enough on some scale: such a reason may be nowhere near his mind’.

A third defence of the ethical mean, and perhaps the most promising, is that as a doctrine it is deliberately modest in extent, showing a narrower scope than is usually supposed. Hardie 1968, chapter VII puts forward a view along these lines, and there are at least prima facie reasons in its favour. For Aristotle admits that justice is ‘a kind of mean but not in the same way as the other virtues’ (1133b32-3), which suggests that there may be virtues that are quasi-means, or means in only a partial or analogous sense. Moreover, in the EE, Aristotle concludes II.5 by declaring that ‘[i]t is clear, then, that all, or at least some, of the virtues will be connected with means [esontai tôn mesotētōn]’ (1222b13-14). This suggests that the ‘doctrine’ of the mean is not without exceptions, and that consequently any critique that seeks to fault it because it does admit of exceptions is ill-founded. But although these passages need to be taken seriously, in the end I do not think they add up to a convincing defence of the ethical mean as presented in the NE and EE. Why not, exactly?

First of all, Aristotle repeatedly defines the moral virtues as lying in a mean, rather than presenting virtue and the mean as merely contingently connected. For instance, having claimed that excess and deficiency are naturally destructive, and proportionality naturally beneficial, he goes on to say that the same is true ‘in the case of
temperance and courage and the other virtues’ (1104a18-19). In *NE* II.6, he introduces the mean as explicating no less than the ‘nature of virtue’ (see 1106a25-6), and as I emphasised above, he claims at *EE* 1222b9-11 that ‘it is clear that all the moral virtues and vices have to do with excesses and defects of pleasures and pains’ (see pp. 101, 104). True, in *NE* V, justice is held to be a mean in a non-standard sense, but the reason Aristotle cites for this is that it ‘relates to an intermediate amount [*hoti mesou estin*]’ (1133b33), something that does not clearly distinguish it from a virtue like liberality. And crucially, Aristotle stands by his claim that justice is a mean with regard to the *pathos* of *pleonexia* (a claim I disputed on pp. 101-2). Most importantly, however, Aristotle repeatedly presents the mean as providing an exhaustive account of what it is to act and feel with regard to the right objects and/or persons, with the right aim, in the right way, etc. (see p. 107). And I hope I have shown that this claim to exhaustiveness is misguided. Moral rightness and wrongness cannot be exhaustively captured by any number of scalar descriptions, even if the latter capture the former to a limited extent.

So all in all, it appears that, while the mean can be applied to some dimensions of ethical ‘rightness’, it does not have the universal reach that Aristotle assumes it has. Neither Hursthouse’s metaphorical reading, nor Curzer’s notion of associated parameters can restore this universality, and Hardie’s attempt to reconstrue Aristotle’s doctrine as having deliberately limited application does not succeed. The ethical mean thus fails, despite its initial promise, to achieve what it sets out to achieve. But it does not follow from this that it is trivial, or simply tautological, as some critics have maintained.47 Far from it: as Rapp contends, ‘the doctrine of the mean structures and systematises the analysis of the various virtues’ (Rapp 2006, 112), and with some illuminating results. It reveals moral failures that are not particularly common or obvious, such as the vice of ‘insensibility’ [*anaisthēsis*] (see 1107b8), and reveals virtues that are similarly ‘nameless’ [*anōnumos*], such as that of ‘good temper’ [*praotēs*] (see *NE* IV.5).48 Moreover, as I noted on p. 102, the doctrine of the mean rules out the possibility of pure vices, something that, although questionable as a piece of theory, is hardly trivial.

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47 Kelsen accuses the mean of tautology (at Kelsen 1967, 108), and Tom Hurka holds that – in Aristotle’s formulation, at least – it ‘verges on tautology’ (see Hurka 2001, 111). See also Williams 1985, 36.

48 For the notion of nameless dispositions, see (eg) 1107b1, 7-8, 30, 1108a16-17.
Nonetheless, it remains the case that, as a whole, the ethical mean is far too ambitious a doctrine, and the question therefore arises as to why Aristotle believes the schema of excess, deficiency and the intermediate can play the all-encompassing role he assigns it. Bostock, for one, judges that Aristotle ‘thought he could discern a general pattern that applied to all virtues: a virtue can always be regarded as something that lies between two opposing vices’ (Bostock 2000, 44). But I would judge that this observation, although true, stands in need of explanation itself, given that Aristotle retains palpable confidence in the mean, despite the problems it generates. Perhaps, then, as Bostock further speculates, Aristotle was over-influenced by ‘conventional wisdom’, such as that embodied in the inscription at Delphi, viz. ‘nothing to excess’ (see ibid. 43). This seems, however, to belittle both Aristotle’s philosophical commitment to the mean, and the sophistication with which he elaborates it – even if, at some level, such conventional wisdom might play a part in making that commitment appear reasonable. Rather than either of these explanations, I think the most salient influence on Aristotle’s doctrine is likely to be – at least in the first instance – the way in which the mean is promoted and given shape by his main philosophical predecessor, Plato.

As I argued at the beginning of this chapter, Plato’s dialogues contain two main expositions of the mean, one in the Statesman, and one in the Philebus. The former dialogue makes a clear distinction between the dimension of ‘more and less’, and that of the normative mean, or metrion, which covers properties such as fittingness, timeliness, and general appropriateness. Crucially, although the latter dimension can, in certain contexts, be spelt out in scalar terms – for instance, ‘the shoes she ought to have are size four’ – it need not be so spelt out. Hence there is room in the Statesman for means that are simply appropriate, proportional, etc., without also falling somewhere on a particular scale or scales. By contrast, the Philebus does not appear to make room for a mean that is both normative and non-scalar. For it brands the dimension of ‘more or less’, the apeiron, as indeterminate, indeterminacy being understood as inherently bad; in contradistinction to this, peras (or ‘limit’) is presented as ridding the apeiron of indeterminacy, and thus as something inherently good. In this way, I argued, the Philebus effectively runs together
the notions of determinacy\textsuperscript{49} and goodness, presenting \textit{peras} as good almost as if this followed from its imposition of determinacy alone.

Given this Platonic inheritance, it is significant, I think, that when Aristotle comes to develop his own conception of the ethical mean, he does not advert to the \textit{Statesman}’s model, but rather to that of the \textit{Philebus}. ‘[I]t is possible’, he maintains, ‘to fail in many ways (for evil belongs to the class of the unlimited [\textit{tou apeirou}], as the Pythagoreans conjectured, and good to that of the limited [\textit{tou peperasmenou}]), while to succeed is possible only in one way (for which reason one is easy and the other difficult – to miss the mark easy, to hit it difficult); for these reasons also, then, excess and defect are characteristic of vice, and the mean of virtue’ (1106b28-34). Admittedly, there is no direct reference to Plato or to the \textit{Philebus} here, but it is more than likely that Pythagorean ideas were mediated to Aristotle largely by his reading of Plato, especially in a context in which a Pythagorean idea had become part of Plato’s own thought.\textsuperscript{50} If so, this would explain why Aristotle assumes the mean must embody some determinate amount, degree or intensity, on either side of which lie unacceptable extremes. For he would already have affirmed Socrates’ view in the \textit{Philebus} that this is a necessary feature of the mean, there being no possibility of a mean that is both good (or fitting) and non-scalar.

So far as this analysis goes, I think it is correct; the reference to the Pythagorean conception of good and evil in \textit{NE} II.6 is too reminiscent of the \textit{Philebus} to be dismissed as an irrelevant aside. Nevertheless, even if the \textit{Philebus}’ account of the mean is uppermost in Aristotle’s mind here, this still leaves the question of why it is that account in particular which he took as authoritative. After all, the \textit{Statesman}’s account was presumably also available to him, but it does not seem to be this account, primarily, from which he takes his philosophical bearings. In order to answer this question, I suggest we look back to the ways in which the \textit{Statesman} and the \textit{Philebus} identify the mean as essentially connected with the \textit{technai}. As I outlined on p. 90, the \textit{Statesman} speaks of \textit{to metrion} as essential to the coming-into-being of the crafts and their products, while the \textit{Philebus} refers to the cause of the mixture of \textit{peras} and \textit{apeiron} as a ‘dēmiourgos’ (see p.

\textsuperscript{49} In particular, determinate quantity or ‘\textit{poson}’ (see pp. 92, 94-5).
\textsuperscript{50} For information on the Pythagorean background in general, see (eg) Huffman 1993 and Kahn 2001. For a good treatment of Pythagoreanism specifically in the \textit{Philebus}, see Meinwald 1998.
Clearly, then, both dialogues view the mean as intimately related to the crafts. But only the Philebus restricts the activity of the dēmiourgos to finding and implementing not just what is fitting or appropriate, but what is so *qua* instantiating some particular quantum. If it can be shown, then, that this model of the crafts – as involving strict, quantified determinacy – is the one that independently finds favour with Aristotle, this would provide sufficient reason for his choosing the Philebus’ account of the mean as the one on which to build.

That Aristotle does, in fact, favour this conception of the crafts is evident from the way he contextualises the ethical mean in *NE* II.6. We have already seen, on p. 98, that the central analogy he uses to explicate the latter is drawn from the regimen of a particular athlete, Milo (see 1106a24-b7). But he goes on to draw lessons from this analogy that go beyond dietetics or physical training, to cover any kind of craft. And the passage in which he does this is worth quoting at length, owing to its explicit highlighting of the technai as embodying a type of mean that is isomorphic with the ethical mean. ‘[A] master of any art [pas epistêmôn]’, Aristotle writes, ‘avoids excess and defect, but seeks the intermediate [meson] and chooses this – the intermediate not in the object, but relatively to us. If it is thus, then, that every epistêmê does its work [ergon] well – by looking to the intermediate and judging its works [erga] by this standard (so that we often say of good works of art [ergois] that it is not possible either to take away or to add anything, implying that excess and defect destroy the goodness of works of art [to eu], while the mean [tês de mesoiêtos] preserves it; and good technitai, as we say, look to this in their work), and if, further, virtue is more exact and better than any technê … then it must have the quality of aiming at [stochastikê] the intermediate [tou mesou]’ (1106b5-16).

Hardie judges that this passage amounts merely to ‘a popular illustration, a lecturer’s aside, rather than an essential part of the exposition’ (Hardie 1968, 136). But on the contrary, I think it is an essential, indeed a pivotal part of Aristotle’s exposition of the ethical mean. For it is here that he gives expression to the view that the technai are a paradigmatic locus of determinacy. Not only do they depend on determinate quantities, degrees and intensities being realised in their erga – which, after all, could equally be said of natural ‘products’; they also characteristically supply the forms of measurement
that are used to determine whether an artefact has adequately embodied these dimensions. For instance, the norms governing building and navigation are almost always specifiable in terms of correct quantities or qualities, on either side of which there lie various degrees of error. And these quantities or qualities are subject to forms of measurement and assessment peculiar to those technai themselves, forms developed owing to the specific exigencies generated by and within them. It is because of this, I take it, that the tight relation between quantified determinacy and goodness posited in the *Philebus* turns out to be of such appeal to Aristotle in his development of the ethical mean – for it is wholly in line with the view he holds of the normative structure of the crafts.

If the technai in general, with their reliance on correct mean quantities and qualities, are a strong influence on the ethical mean, do any of them stand out as more influential than others? I think one in particular can be shown to stand out, and that is medicine [ἡ ἱατρικὴ ἀρχή] – for Aristotle often has recourse to the medical art in explicating the doctrine of the mean. Besides the Milo example above, take, for instance, the following passages: ‘both excessive and defective exercise destroys the strength, and similarly drink or food which is above or below a certain amount destroys the health, while that which is proportionate both produces and increases and preserves it’ (1104a15-18); ‘since the doctor has a standard by reference to which he distinguishes what is healthy for the body and what is not … while if less or more is done health is the result no longer, so in regard to actions … the good man should have a standard both of disposition and of choice and avoidance with regard to excess or deficiency of wealth and good fortune, the standard being … as reason directs’ (*EE* 1249a21-b5); ‘the unlikeness or likeness to the mean is not always of the same kind … for example, in regard to body, excess in exercise is healthier than defect, and nearer to the mean, but in food defect is healthier than excess’ (*EE* 1222a25-30).51

Despite this evidence, however, it might be objected that Aristotle’s references to medicine here are no more than part of his general tendency to draw analogies with

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51 Cf ‘it is indeed true to say that we must not exert ourselves nor relax our efforts too much nor too little, but to an intermediate extent and as right reason dictates; but if a man had only this knowledge he would be none the wiser – eg we should not know what sort of medicines to apply to our body if someone were to say “all those which the medical art prescribes, and which agree with the practice of one who possesses the art”’ (1138b26-32); ‘Moral virtue is destroyed by defect and excess … And the same is the case with food and drink. For if too much is taken, health is destroyed, and also if too little, but by the right proportion strength and health are preserved’ (*MM* 1185b14, 19-21).
medical practice.\textsuperscript{52} After all, Aristotle’s father was a doctor (see Jaeger 1957, 55), and medicine \textit{qua technē} was traditionally an object of intellectual enquiry (as I outlined in the \textit{Introduction}). Is there any reason, then, to think that medicine, of all the \textit{technai}, particularly influenced Aristotle’s conception of the ethical mean? I think there is, and this in at least two distinct, yet related ways. First, medical dosages, treatments, etc., are – like the ethical mean – clearly relative to the intricacies of people’s individual constitutions and circumstances. And secondly, partly because of this relativity, medicine – like the discipline of ethics, according to Aristotle – can give only an imprecise account of where the mean lies in general, even if particular means are perfectly determinate.

As we saw on p. 98, Aristotle argues that the ethical mean is \textit{pros hēmas}, ‘relative to us’, and he underscores this with a medical analogy towards the end of the \textit{NE}. He writes: ‘individual education has an advantage over education in common, as individual medical treatment has; for while in general rest and abstinence from food are good for a man in a fever, for a particular man they may not be’ (1180b7-10). And this emphasis on the relativity of the medical mean is matched by a concomitant emphasis on the inexactness of medical expertise. For example, Aristotle holds that ‘matters concerned with conduct and questions of what is good for us have no fixity, any more than matters of health … The agents themselves must in each case consider what is appropriate to the occasion, as happens also in the art of medicine’ (1104a3-10). As with the ethical mean, therefore, particular medical cases require individual discernment \textit{[aisthēsis]} of the mean (on this parallel, see Wehrli 1951, 40-41 and Fox 1990, 98). And this involves ‘aiming’ at the mean without always being sure of one’s target – as Aristotle comments, ‘it is no easy task to find \textit{to meson}’ (1109a24).\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{52} This tendency is widespread in the \textit{NE}: see (eg) 1102a18-21, 1143b24-33, 1145a7-9, 1180b25-8. It is apparent also elsewhere: see (eg) \textit{Phys} 194b32-5a3; \textit{PA} 639b15-19; \textit{Meta} 1032b1-29. For interesting commentary, see Seidler 1978, ‘The medical paradigm in Aristotle’s ethics’. Of course, the use of medical analogies to illuminate ethical discussion is also prevalent in the Platonic dialogues. Socrates’ favourite analogy is between bodily health and justice in the soul, viz. between physical and psychic virtue. See (eg) \textit{Phil} 26b; \textit{Rep} 444c-e, 591b; \textit{Laws} 631c-d.

\textsuperscript{53} Medicine’s relativity and imprecision are already themes within the Hippocratic corpus. For instance, in \textit{VM} the author notes that ‘the constitutions of … men differ’ (XX 40-41), and that their ‘structural form’ (organs, limbs, etc.) vary significantly (XXIII). The same author further remarks that ‘no measure, neither number nor weight, by reference to which knowledge can be made exact, can be found except bodily feeling’ (IX 15-18); ‘Perfectly exact truth [in medicine] is rarely to be seen’ (IX 21-2; cf XII 7-8, 12-16). Two late Platonic dialogues also acknowledge the imprecision of medicine (see \textit{Phil} 56a-b; \textit{Laws} 720, 857c-e). But owing to Plato’s stringent epistemic requirements for ethics, this imprecision, as Douglas
Given, then, the medical technē’s well-attested relativity and imprecision – yet also its wide-ranging practical usefulness – it seems more than likely that the medical mean is a central influence on Aristotle’s ethical mean.54 And this influence has not gone unnoticed in the secondary literature.55 As Santas maintains, ‘Aristotle was simply taking over both parts of th[e] theory of the mean in medicine: its theoretical lack of precision … and its success in practice for the expert doctors. The parallel for ethics is a theoretical lack of precision … and the success in practice for people of practical wisdom’ (Santas 2001, 286). But notwithstanding the neatness of this parallelism, Santas goes on to argue that Aristotle’s indebtedness to the medical technē also explains weaknesses within his conception of the ethical mean. A virtue like temperance, Santas holds, ‘is instructive. For [standards of] healthy nutrition and exercise … may … be [specifiable]. The relativity of the mean here is not necessarily to an individual, but rather to a body type: and this can be measured … there are indeed many variables, but their number is finite and their relations discoverable. For [a virtue like] courage it is difficult to see how such a thing is possible’ (ibid. 287).

What Santas is pointing to, I take it, is the fact that, even where a virtue can be explicated (partially) in terms of various scalar properties, knowing how to go about this will be far less obvious, and far more open to dispute than in a typical medical case. For medical cases are typically more hospitable to assessment in terms of excess, deficiency and the right amount (or degree), and the procedures developed for arriving at such assessments are, if not perfect, as least more reliable and sophisticated. Moreover, the non-scalar dimensions invoked by Aristotle – for instance, acting with regard to the right objects, with the right aim, or for the right reasons – are characteristically more readily determinable in medical than in virtue-contexts. Given the delimited nature of iatrikē as a practice, it is not hard to determine that its proper objects are sick people (of one type or

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54 The idea of a medical mean appears entrenched already in the Platonic dialogues (see p. 95), and even in the Hippocratic writings: eg ‘[m]edicine … is … subtraction of what is in excess, addition of what is wanting’ (Breaths I 134-7); ‘[in a certain case] nothing was administered that was either more or less … than it ought to be’ (VM V 28-9); ‘if a man takes insufficient food, the mistake is as great as that of excess, and harms the man just as much’ (VM IX 6-9); ‘each of all the component parts of man has its extreme … they are injurious to him’ (VM 29-31).

55 See (eg) Gauthier and Jolif 1959, 143; Hutchinson 1988; Santas 2001, 286-7; Hursthouse 2006, 111.
another), its aim is to restore them to health (as far as possible), and its motivation is the good of curing them. By contrast, each of these dimensions will, characteristically, itself be the subject of controversy in the context of the virtues. Aristotle does tell us that discernment of the ethical mean should be guided by orthos logos, and be practise as the phronimos would practise it. But it remains unclear whether these stricures provide enough content to avoid the kind of moral disputes that I adverted to above.

In conclusion, then, I think that if Aristotle’s doctrine of the mean does find its inspiration in the technai, and specifically in the medical technē, we are enabled better to appreciate both its advantages and its faults. The crafts are generally open to being conceived of in terms of excess, deficiency and the mean, and insofar as this is true of individual virtues, Aristotle has thrown light on their nature and structure. Medicine, in particular, is helpful in this regard, for while it too is open to various scalar analyses, its acknowledged relativity, imprecision and practical worth make it a useful analogue for moral virtue. At the same time, by taking the technai in general as his model, Aristotle strongly overestimates the applicability of excess, deficiency and the mean in the sphere of moral passion and action. And by taking the technē of medicine as his specific model, he is led to underestimate the difficulty of determining the virtues’ various non-scalar dimensions, which, given the moral disputes they tend to generate, cannot be pinned down in the relatively straightforward manner characteristic of medical practice.
In the last chapter, I began by outlining the Platonic background to Aristotle’s ethical mean, and by explicating the latter’s formal properties, viz. its agent-relativity and determinacy. With regard to its content, I argued that Aristotle presents the moral virtues as derivative mesotētes – for they are said to ‘aim’ at passions and actions that are themselves intermediate. While this analysis was seen to capture several virtues, I maintained that it fails to capture a significant number, thereby showing Aristotle’s schema of excess, deficiency and the mean to be over-applied. Following this, I then outlined four defences of the mean: that it is to be understood metaphorically, that it applies to the virtues only indirectly, that it is of only limited application, and that it applies to the virtues non-derivatively. But I argued that none of these defences is, ultimately, fully sustainable. In light of this, I ended by arguing that Aristotle’s strong adherence to the mean is to be explained by the influence of Plato’s Philebus, which is in turn a reflection of Aristotle’s having been influenced by the methodology of the technai – in particular, by that of medicine.

Whatever criticisms can be levelled at the mean, however, Aristotle’s fundamental commitment remains clear: viz. that an essential mark of moral virtue consists in ‘aiming’ to ‘hit’ mean amounts or degrees of both passion and action; in short, that ‘virtue is a kind of mean, since it aims at what is intermediate [mesotēs tis … estin hē aretē, stochastikē ge ousa tou mesou]’ (1106b27-8). But what, it might be asked, enables a moral agent to aim at the intermediate, and subsequently to hit it? Aristotle’s answer to this is, in the first instance, that the ‘mean relative to us … [is] determined by reason and in the way in which the man of practical wisdom [phronēsis] would determine it’ (1106b36-7a2). In other words, practical wisdom is needed in order to discern and realise the mean in both passions and actions. But what, exactly, enables an agent to become practically wise in the first place? So far, this question has not been tackled – but it is not a question that Aristotle ignores. In fact, his response to it constitutes a key element of his ethical theory, a response that is contained in his account of moral ‘habituation’ [ethismos]. It is this account that I shall explore and examine in this fifth and final chapter. In particular, I will be concerned with the following question: does Aristotle
manage to present an intelligible and unified account of the virtuous person’s transition from *ethismos* to *phronēsis*, and thereby provide an integrated account of moral development?

The plan of this chapter is as follows. To begin with, I outline what the process of *ethismos* involves, together with Aristotle’s elucidation of it in terms of craft-learning. I then outline three respects in which, as the foundation of Aristotle’s account of moral learning, habituation appears very promising. After this, I specify two respects in which it nonetheless invites criticism. First, the way Aristotle initially expounds the process of habituation looks viciously circular, since it seems to require the virtues in those who are only on the way to acquiring them. Having shown this objection to be defeasible, I go on to delineate the second and central criticism of Aristotle’s theory: namely, that it appears to posit too great a distance between habituation – grounded in non-rational desire – and practical reasoning, in which the good is chosen *per se* and by means of rational deliberation. In this way, it makes it difficult to understand how moral learners progress from non-rational habits to the possession of fully rational virtue, viz. practical wisdom. Although several modern commentators have given sophisticated accounts of how Aristotle can bridge this gap – accounts that draw on his conceptions of pleasure and practical cognition – I argue that, on closer scrutiny, these accounts are less robust than those commentators maintain. I then turn to the sources of this weakness in Aristotle’s theory, identifying them as lying in Plato’s *Republic* and, crucially, in his over-assimilation of moral habituation to training in the *technai*.

Aristotle provides the core of his account of habituation at *NE* II.1 (cf *EE* 1220a22-b20). Here he holds that virtuous dispositions [*hexeis*] are developed by habituating moral learners to partake in various virtuous activities: as he puts it, ‘dispositions arise out of like activities’ (1103b21-2). But what is the content of this claim, exactly? To clarify his claim, Aristotle contrasts moral dispositions with what he refers to as natural capacities [*dunameis*]. Whereas, for instance, we are naturally capable of using our senses from birth, nature does not endow us with innate virtues: ‘rather, we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit [*teleioumenois de dia tou ethous*]’ (1103a23-6). That is, whereas we possess natural capacities innately, virtuous dispositions develop at best only gradually, and only given repeated engagement
in virtuous acts. As Aristotle pithily remarks, ‘virtues we get by first exercising them … for the things we have to learn before we can do, we learn by doing’ (1103a31-3). And he goes on to provide an illustration of this: ‘by doing the acts that we do in our transactions with other men, we become just or unjust, and by doing the acts that we do in the presence of danger, and being habituated [ethizomenoi] to feel fear or confidence, we become brave or cowardly’ (1103b14-17).¹

Aristotle further elucidates the process of habituation by appealing to how the technai are characteristically learnt. He writes: ‘the things we have to learn before we can do, we learn by doing, for example men become builders by building and lyre-players by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts’ (1103a32-b2); ‘men will be good or bad builders as a result of building well or badly. For if this were not so, there would have been no need of a teacher, but all men would have been born good or bad at their craft. This, then, is the case with the virtues also’ (1103b10-14). These texts are reinforced by others in the Politics and Metaphysics, where the direction of inference is from the crafts to other forms of activity, in particular virtuous activity. ‘[F]or the exercise of any faculty or technē, Aristotle holds, ‘a previous training and habituation [propaideuēsthai kai proethizēsthai] are required; clearly therefore also for the practice of virtue [dēlon hoti kai pros tas tēs aretēs praxeis]’ (Pol 1337a18-21); ‘it is thought impossible to be a builder if one has built nothing or a harpist if one has never played the harp; for he who learns to play the harp learns to play it by playing it, and all other learners do similarly’ (Meta 1049b30-32).

Now by specifying habituation as what generates moral virtue, Aristotle is, I want to argue, putting forward an account that is very promising in at least three general respects. First and foremost, it is promising as a response to the claim – usually attributed to the early Socrates – that virtue is constituted simply by knowledge. As Aristotle comments, ‘[Socrates] thought all the virtues to be kinds of knowledge [epistēmas], so that to know justice and to be just came simultaneously’ (EE 1216b6-8; cf 1144b28-30).

¹ The tightness of the relation between habituation and the virtues of character can be seen in Aristotle’s positing an etymological connection between them. The term ἔθικη, viz. ‘moral’ or ‘pertaining to character’, is, he claims, ‘one that is formed by a slight variation from the word for “habit” [ἔθος]’ (1103a17-18; cf EE 1220a39-b1).
But this Socratic claim is, as generally acknowledged, hard to defend. For if ‘knowledge’ here is taken in a strictly intellectualistic sense, it is difficult to see how the virtues of character could gain a foothold in people’s behavioural and emotional responses, especially in those of the young, whose capacities for absorbing and responding to purely intellectual instruction seem quite limited. Rather than accusing Socrates of a straightforwardly false theory of virtue, then, Aristotle appears to be accusing him – and with good reason – of an incomplete theory, one that ignores the moral development of the virtues. And this turns out, indeed, to be the heart of his criticism: ‘[Socrates] enquired what virtue is’, he maintains, ‘not how or from what it arises … Now to know anything that is noble is itself noble; but regarding virtue … not to know what it is, but to know out of what it arises is most precious’ (EE 1216b9-21).

Secondly, as Burnyeat points out (see Burnyeat 1980, 71), Aristotle’s developmental account reflects the fact that moral education comes in stages. This is implicit in Aristotle’s notion that ‘we learn some things by habit and some by instruction’ (Pol 1332b11), and that ‘it is clear that in education practice must be used before theory’ (Pol 1338b4). Moreover, it is explicit in his educational programme, which stipulates that the ‘first stage of life’ (viz. infancy) should be devoted to bodily conditioning (for example, to enduring the cold (Pol 1336a3-21)); the second stage (to age five) should be devoted to play, exercise, and listening to appropriate stories (Pol 1336a23 f.); and the remaining stages (to age seven, puberty, and age twenty-one) should concentrate on training for future occupations (Pol 1336a35-9). This theory of stages seems to capture the intuitive idea that moral education must mould itself to moral learners’ developing capacities. And in this way, it seems once again to fall in line with craft-learning: for it is true that most crafts are learnt incrementally, with the more difficult stages coming only after the easier stages have been mastered.

Thirdly, Aristotle’s conception of ‘learning by doing’ is empirically plausible, for there is empirical evidence that moral dispositions are attainments characteristically developed over long periods of time, attainments that require repeated involvement in corresponding activities. As Peters documents, although certain moral dispositions can be

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Something testified in much modern writing on the philosophy of education. For example, R.S. Peters holds that young children are generally ‘impervious’ to ‘higher order rational instruction’ (Peters 1963, 55; cf Peters 1979, 277). He is followed in this by Joel Kupperman (see Kupperman 1983, 155).
created de novo – for example, those dispositions generated by puberty, or other comparable developmental ‘spurts’ (Sherman 1989, 159-60) – such dispositions are comparatively rare (see Peters 1979, 278). And as John Alexander Stewart notes, although certain extraordinary situations may elicit extraordinarily virtuous acts from individuals with no practice in moral heroism, it would be unwise to rely on such behaviour as evidence that they had thereby developed virtuous characters (see Stewart 1892, 184). Granted, Aristotle does (in On Memory) countenance the possibility that dispositions can be instilled by only one experience, rather than by repeated activity. But while this may be true of memories, it is unlikely to be true of (at least most) moral dispositions, and Aristotle does not seem committed here to affirming that it is. Rather, when it comes to such dispositions – or to their analogue, proficiency in the crafts – what Aristotle goes on to say seems far more plausible: namely, that ‘frequency creates nature’ (Mem 452a30).

If these three points are well-founded, Aristotle’s choice of habituation as the method of development of the moral virtues looks highly promising. Still, it remains to be seen whether his actual delineation of the process of habituation in NE II.1 and elsewhere is open to objection. And in this regard, I think two objections stand out. First, it could be objected that Aristotle’s account is viciously circular, because it seems to picture the employment of virtuous hexeis as a necessary condition of their creation. For example, Aristotle asserts that ‘virtues we get by first exercising them’ (1103a31); ‘the things we have to learn before we can do, we learn by doing’ (1103a32-3); ‘[we] did not come to have [the senses] by using them’, but (by implication) we do come to have the virtues in this way (1103a30-31). In all these instances, Aristotle positively courts the accusation of circularity, or to license what Sherman labels the ‘paradox of habituation’ (Sherman 1999, 254-5). That he is not committed to this paradox is clear, however, from what he goes on to say. For he goes on to refine his account, maintaining that we are not enjoined (absurdly) to exercise virtuous dispositions before and in order to attain them, but rather that we are enjoined to partake in certain activities in order to attain the appropriate,

3 ‘It is a fact’, he maintains, ‘that there are some movements, by a single experience of which persons take the impress of custom more deeply than they do by experiencing others many times; hence upon seeing some things but once we remember them better than others which we may have seen frequently’ (Mem 451b13-16).
corresponding virtuous motivations. For instance, he holds that ‘by doing the acts that we
do in our transactions with other men we become just or unjust’ (1103b14-16). And this
non-circular hypothesis is grounded in the principle already adverted to, namely, that
‘dispositions arise out of like activities’ (1103b21-2).

A more powerful objection nevertheless remains to be dealt with. Notwithstanding Aristotle’s suggestion that there is a seamless transition from engaging in certain behaviours to becoming virtuous – for example, ‘we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts’ (1103a34-b2) – it is less clear how such a transition is meant to take place. For by Aristotle’s own admission, the morally immature are incapable of choice [prohairesis]: that is, they are incapable of deciding to do the good qua good, and thus of being fully and properly motivated by the knowledge that something is the virtuous thing to do.4 Given this, habituation cannot make use of what Aristotle conceives of as fully rational, phronetic desire for the good per se. Instead, it must draw on the pre- or sub-rational desires of the moral learner, which are presumably for pre- or sub-rational ends: for example, to give back one’s friend’s toy, not because it is the just thing to do and thereby contributes to one’s eudaimonia, but rather because it would (say) please mother, or avoid incurring father’s disapproval. And this raises the question of how such adventitious desires and motivations are transformed into their practically rational, prohairetic correlates.5

More basically, the question I am raising points to a deep issue concerning the effects of behavioural repetition and practice. For although I noted above that Aristotle’s hypothesis concerning the moral need for such practice is plausible, it does not follow that it is well-founded. In fact, it is not clear why repeated engagement in virtuous-type acts should not remain at the level of trying to gain the approval of one’s educators, or, worse, serve merely to reinforce an initial dislike of acting in the morally appropriate way. As Grant comments, Aristotle appears thus not to address the issue of how and why

4 Aristotle holds that children, who are paradigmatically morally immature, ‘share in moral action, but not in choice’ (1111b8-9); ‘in the case of man, each is thought to be the friend of himself; but not so with the other animals … Nor are children, till they have attained the power of choice’ (EE 1240b31-4).
5 Hursthouse gives the example of reprimanding a young child, by telling it not to touch ‘that nasty, dirty thing’ (Hursthouse 1988, 213-14). This reprimand indicates to the child that his parent disapproves of his touching something, and it may be sufficient to get him to stop doing so. But how and why should this adventitious motivation be transformed into the rational desire to avoid touching a particular kind of thing, on the grounds that doing so is bad per se?
virtuous acts purportedly ‘reproduce’ themselves (see Grant 1885, 486). And this apparent gap in Aristotle’s account is widened by broader structural features of his ethical and political writings. In terms of textual sequence, his treatment of *ethismos* in *NE* II.1 and II.4 is clearly and strongly discontinuous with his investigation of practical reason [*phronēsis*] in *NE* VI. And this discontinuity of treatment is paralleled by a further, theoretical contrast he makes between the irrational and the rational soul.\(^6\) In light of these structural discontinuities, and the motivational gap which they seemingly reinforce, it is unclear how, exactly – viz. at a theoretically detailed level – Aristotle understands this gap as being bridged.

It is at this juncture that the modern commentators I mentioned on p. 120 claim that Aristotle supplies the materials for a cogent alternative to the view outlined so far – with its apparent implication that moral learners move, unaccountably, from habit and unreason to the rational type of motivation characteristic of *phronēsis*. In what follows, then, I will expound their interpretation of Aristotelian *ethismos*,\(^7\) at the level of both affect (or *pathos*) and cognition. This way of proceeding is, admittedly, somewhat artificial, because there is good evidence that Aristotle thinks the affective and cognitive aspects of habituation never properly separable. For instance, he speaks of anger as an inextricable mixture of desire and cognition: ‘[a]nger may be defined as a desire’, he maintains, ‘accompanied by pain, for a conspicuous revenge for a conspicuous slight at the hands of men who have no call to slight oneself or one’s friends’ (*Rhet* 1378a30-33). And he implies that the experience of *mousikē* intimately combines both feeling and mindfulness: ‘Since … *mousikē* is a pleasure, and virtue consists in rejoicing and loving and hating rightly, there is clearly nothing which we are so much concerned to acquire and to cultivate [through hearing and watching imitations of character] as the power of

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\(^6\) For instance, Aristotle writes: ‘there are two parts of the soul, the rational and the irrational, and two corresponding states – reason and appetite. And … the irrational is prior to the rational. The proof is that anger and wishing and desire are implanted in children from their very birth, but reason and understanding are developed as they grow older’ (*Pol* 1334b18-25); ‘[animals] have not desire and reason opposing one another, but live by desire; but man has both, that is at a certain age, to which we attribute also the power of action [*to prattein*]; for we do not use this term of the child, nor of the brute, but only of the man who has come to act through reason [*dia logismon*]’ (*EE* 1224a26-30).

\(^7\) The commentators I have in mind are Myles Burnyeat, Nancy Sherman, C.D.C. Reeve, John McDowell and Iakovos Vasiliou. The centrally relevant texts here are Burnyeat 1980, Sherman 1989 (ch.5), Reeve 1992 (48-61), McDowell 1996 and Vasiliou 1996. Although differing in emphasis, their writings on this topic are for the most part, and in all central respects, mutually reinforcing. When an idea or argument is found in one or more writers in particular, I will make this clear.
forming right judgements [to krinein orthōs], and of taking delight in good dispositions and noble actions’ (Pol 1340a14-18). But I shall proceed, nonetheless, in the piecemeal way I outlined above, for it will make the task of exposition easier, and allow me to put forward my criticisms of the following interpretation with greater clarity.

As I just mentioned, those scholars who argue for a smooth, intelligible transition between *ethismos* and *phronēsis* acknowledge that the process of habituation must draw on both the affective and cognitive capacities of moral learners. And at the level of affect, they maintain that this process draws on one desire in particular – viz. the desire for pleasure [hēdonē]. This is because, in the first instance, ‘children … live at the beck and call of appetite, and it is in them that the desire for what is pleasant is strongest’ (1119b5-7). This strong desire has, Aristotle notes, ‘grown up with us from our infancy’ (1105a2), so provides the surest route to influencing children’s behaviour and dispositions, given that ‘moral virtue is concerned with pleasures and pains; it is on account of pleasure that we do bad things, and on account of pain that we abstain from noble ones. Hence we ought to have been brought up in a particular way from our very youth … so as both to delight in and to be pained by the things that we ought; for this is the right education [*orthē paideia’*] (1104b8-13).

This moral rationale for engaging with and shaping children’s desire for pleasure is elaborated further elsewhere. Aristotle argues that pleasure ‘accompanies all objects of choice; for even the noble and the advantageous appear pleasant’ (1104b35-5a1); indeed, ‘one who is a human being is ready and on the road for [the agreement of the absolutely good with the absolutely desirable] … but the road is through pleasure; what is noble must be pleasant’ (*EE* 1237a3-7). In other words, habituation is largely a process of getting moral learners to take pleasure in noble [kala] forms of action, while ensuring that indulgence in baser forms has painful consequences. But this still leaves it unclear, I take it, how getting people to take pleasure in noble types of action will bring it about that they come to take pleasure in nobility of action *per se*. For *ex hypothesi* habituation must...

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8 NB Aristotle’s claim that ‘wondering implies the desire of learning, so that the object of wonder is an object of desire’ (*Rhet* 1371a32-3). In line with the above passages, Sherman argues that seeing and feeling are for Aristotle ‘deeply intertwined’, so that ‘learning virtue is neither a mindless nor purely intellectual matter, and … reason and desire work … in tandem throughout’ (Sherman 1989, 171, 199). Cf McDowell: ‘we need not take the intellectual and desiderative aspects of excellence of character … to be even notionally separable components of a composite state’ (McDowell 1996, 27-8).
make use of learners’ morally undeveloped desires, which are for ends that are not kala: for example, deriving pleasure from one’s parents’ approval, or from receiving a small monetary reward for one’s good behaviour. How are such sub-moral, non-prohairesetic ends meant to generate the fully rational motivations, grounded in properly directed pleasures, which are characteristic of the phronimos?

To this question, interpreters of Aristotle have perhaps no immediately compelling answer. But it does seem that a psychologically plausible answer lies in the vicinity. For if one learns to take pleasure in actions performed initially for extrinsic, viz. purely instrumental reasons, there appears no positive barrier to these developing into intrinsic reasons – if those in charge of the habituation process know how to direct their pupils’ desires with subtlety, showing them how pursuing noble ends is intrinsically enjoyable, without heavily interposing their own personalities at the same time. As McDowell puts matters, ‘the concept of the noble … crystallises the pleasure that an agent has learned to take in certain actions into the form of a reason for undertaking them’ (McDowell 1996, 28). Given this supposed ‘crystallisation’ of their pleasurable pathē, moral learners will not only practise, but also grasp and feel the good of virtuous activity, and thus realise their true end, eudaimonia. In the absence of such crystallisation, they will at best become enkratic agents, practising virtuous acts, but without finding their proper fulfilment in them. And at worst they will become vicious agents, since ‘the man who has been ruined by pleasure or pain … fails to see any [noble practical principle] … for vice is destructive of the principle’ (1140b16-19).

Although this account purports to explain how agents progress from immature to mature virtue, we may still legitimately doubt whether it does so. For McDowell’s notion of ‘crystallisation’ here is somewhat obscure, giving us a metaphor instead of a clear account of how habituated virtue develops into its phronetic equivalent. Nevertheless,

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9 Cf 1151a17-19. Pleasure appears not only the main vehicle for grasping correct practical principles, it is also said to foster more fine-grained judgement in general. As Aristotle maintains, ‘an activity is intensifiﬁed by its proper pleasure, since each class of things is better judged of and brought to precision by those who engage in the activity with pleasure’ (1175a30-32). A good example of this is the way in which moral learners learn more quickly, and with greater accuracy, if they take pleasure in watching imitations [mimēseis] of noble characters. ‘[Man] learns at ﬁrst by imitation’, Aristotle declares, ‘[a]nd it is …natural for all to delight in works of imitation … gathering the meaning of things, eg that the man there is a so-and-so’ (Poet 1448b8-18); ‘The habit [ethimōs] of feeling pleasure or pain at mere representations is not far removed from the same feeling about realities’ (Pol 1340a23-5). Cf Pol 1340a38-b12, 15-17; Rhet 1371a31-b10.
since such moral transformation does seem to occur, and pleasure is a plausible affective vehicle for it, I suggest this account be temporarily accepted – at least for the sake of argument. On this assumption, then, it seems reasonable to affirm that, as Burnyeat puts it, ‘the prominence given to pleasure in [the above] passages is key to [the] problem about how practice can lead to [practical wisdom]’ (Burnyeat 1980, 76). For the kinds of exhortation, encouragement, reward and punishment that constitute ethismos are typically designed to show the moral learner that certain types of action are just, noble, etc., while others are unjust, base, etc. That is, they are meant to point to these types as, respectively, intrinsically valuable and intrinsically disvaluable. But even if a moral neophyte assents to such claims, his assent will leave him cold if it remains at the level of what could be called ‘bare cognition’. In order for cognition to be motivationally effective, it must become appreciative cognition – and what achieves this is, allegedly, pleasure.

Notwithstanding the plausibility of this account, I think there are grounds for questioning its overall cogency. To begin with, it overestimates the extent to which Aristotle presents pleasure as the affective means of inculcating desire for and appreciation of virtue. For what his work reveals is, rather, a frequent emphasis on the role of pain as a deterrent from vice. And this calls into question the view outlined above, viz. that habituation relies solely on moral learners’ deriving increasing pleasure from the repetition of virtuous acts, until they come to appreciate the latter as intrinsically valuable. This view does not square with the fact that Aristotle appears often highly suspicious of people’s natural inclination to pleasure. For instance, as we have already seen on p. 126, he believes ‘it is on account of pleasure that we do bad things’ (1104b10-11). And this is reinforced by his claim that ‘we tend more naturally towards pleasures, and hence are more easily carried away towards self-indulgence than towards propriety’ (1109a15-16). In fact, he goes so far as to hold that ‘[i]n most things the error seems to be

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10 As Burnyeat summarises Aristotle’s account: ‘To … appreciate the value [virtuous actions have] … I must learn for myself to enjoy them, and that does take time and practice – in short, habituation’ (Burnyeat 1980, 78). Cf ‘[P]ractice would be neither necessary nor sufficient for acquiring states and abilities if it did not yield derivative pleasures’ (Sherman 1989, 184); ‘To grow in the fine, to be ethically subtle and discriminating … we must take pleasure in doing fine things’ (Reeve 1992, 54).

11 In the following paragraphs, I am indebted to Curzer’s article, ‘Aristotle’s Painful Path to Virtue’ (Curzer 2002).

12 Cf Reeve’s conception of habituation: ‘things first pursued for adventitious ends (pleasing Mum and Dad) come to be enjoyed for their own sakes’ (Reeve 1992, 61).
due to pleasure; for it appears a good when it is not’ (1113a33-4); ‘in everything the pleasant or pleasure is most to be guarded against; for we do not judge it impartially ... if we dismiss pleasure ... we are less likely to go astray’ (1109b7-13).

Even if these claims are somewhat exaggerated, perhaps in deference to certain popular views of pleasure, they are too consistently made to be written off as irrelevant. True, Aristotle does believe that ‘[t]hings familiar and things habitual belong to the class of pleasant things; for there are many actions not naturally pleasant which men perform with pleasure, once they have become used to them’ (Rhet 1369b15-19; cf 1179b35-6). But he goes on shortly afterwards to inform his audience that ‘I count among pleasures escape from painful or apparently painful things, and the exchange of a greater pain for a less’ (Rhet 1369b26-8). This opens the way, I take it, for habituation as a largely punitive process, with moral learners being dissuaded from their natural inclinations often by pain, rather than being led into the path of virtue simply by positive pleasures. And this is confirmed in the Politics, where Aristotle holds that ‘learning is no amusement, but is accompanied with pain’ (1339a29-30).

So it seems that, contra the view outlined above, Aristotelian ethismos does not involve moral learners’ being led to the good only by the positive use of pleasure; it also involves what Curzer calls ‘the familiar mechanism of internalising ... punishments’ (Curzer 2002, 159). And this is a qualification that, as I shall go on to suggest, is not without significance for Aristotle’s theory as a whole. It must be admitted, however, that – as the passages on p. 126 and in note 9 attest – pleasure remains the affective focus of Aristotle’s account of moral development. He is committed, after all, to the view that – once such development is complete – agents will experience virtuous action as pleasant. As was seen on p. 126, he holds that the ‘right education’ includes preparing people to ‘delight in .. the things [they] ought’ (1104b12-13), and he maintains that ‘that which is virtuous is pleasant or free from pain – least of all will it be painful’ (1120a26-7). ‘[J]ust acts are’, he affirms, ‘pleasant to the lover of justice and in general virtuous acts to the

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13 As Annas maintains (see Annas 1980, 290-92).
14 Admittedly, Aristotle believes ‘children start with a natural affection and disposition to obey’ their fathers (1180b5-6), which suggests the need for punishment and admonition will be minimal in most cases. But when it is recalled that the irrational soul ‘listens’ to the rational soul as a child listens to its father (see 1102b30-3a1, EE 1219b27-31), and that the rational soul gives ‘advice ... reproof and exhortation’, obeying one’s father seems – although natural – no longer something obviously accompanied by pleasure.
lover of virtue … the lovers of what is noble find pleasant the things that are by nature pleasant’ (1099a10-13). These passages raise, once again, therefore, the wider and more fundamental question: what is it about *ethismos* that is meant to ensure that doing the right actions will come to be experienced as pleasant by the moral learner?

This is a pressing question, I take it, which so far has not received a convincing answer. Granted, so long as virtuous-type acts are accompanied by extrinsic rewards, it is relatively straightforward to explain why they would be pleasant – pleasure here being a function of self-interest. But it is quite a step from this form of moral consciousness to one that appreciates virtuous actions non-instrumentally. Why shouldn’t the practice of virtuous-type behaviour simply remain, in other words, at the level of instrumental behaviour, where the intrinsic good-making properties of virtuous acts never come to be appreciated? Or – a scenario that seems just as likely, given Aristotle’s emphasis on the moral learner’s need for punishment – why shouldn’t the repetition of virtuous-type acts elicit not a neutral or favourable response, but one of active distaste, so that such acts are only ever endured, rather than enjoyed? Aristotle may stipulate that virtue is a ‘natural state of being’, towards which we move with increasing enjoyment (see note 15), or that ‘those … will be pleasures that appear so to [the virtuous man], and those things pleasant that he enjoys’ (1176a18-19). But whether this actually explains moral development, as opposed simply to asserting that it takes place, is hardly obvious. 16

In response to this line of argument, it might be said that the transition from instrumental to non-instrumental motivation clearly does occur, even if in many cases it does not. True, it fails to occur among *hoi polloi*, who, Aristotle admits, ‘do not by nature obey the sense of shame, but only fear, and do not abstain from bad acts on account of

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15 NB also the claim that ‘[it is] pleasant for the most part to move towards a natural state of being’ (*Rhet* 1370a3-4), virtue itself being a (supposedly) ‘natural state of being’, given that we are ‘adapted by nature’ to receive it (1103a24-5).

16 Some scholars maintain that pleasure-taking may be evidenced crucially at the physical level, eg in neural networks. Hardie, for example, thinks such an account may have Aristotle’s backing, for the *De Anima* suggests many psychical dispositions are dependent on the body (cf also *Mem* 450a27-32, 453a20-23), and the *NE* holds that passions such as fear and shame (see 1128b13-15) are correlated with ‘bodily conditions’ (see Hardie 1968, 110-12, 114). NB also Aristotle’s comment that pleasure has ‘grown up with us all from our infancy; this is why it is difficult to rub off this pathos, dyed as it is into our life’ (1105a2-3). Even with all this apparatus in place, however, there seems no reason why virtuous-type behaviour should not generate pain rather than pleasure, and thereby establish a tendency to aversion.
their baseness, but through fear of punishment’ (1179b11-13). But the very existence of such cases, it might be contended, does not show that pleasure (with an admixture of pain) cannot achieve the moral development to which Burnyeat et al. refer. Indeed, we recognise the way in which, for example, a temperate appetite is inculcated at first by reward and punishment, and then develops – however exactly it does so – into a non-instrumental appreciation of smaller-sized portions. But in response to this counter-objection, I would argue that the transition from instrumental to non-instrumental motivation is only the first hurdle that Aristotle’s account has to overcome. For phronetic motivation is not merely non-instrumental, it is also (and crucially) motivation *under a description*: for example, ‘I’ll do x because it is the just/temperate/courageous thing to do’. And if there is no necessary transition from instrumental to non-instrumental pleasure-taking, then *a fortiori*, I would maintain, there is no necessary transition from the latter to taking pleasure in actions *qua* just, temperate, courageous, etc.18

So all in all, at the level of *pathos*, it remains doubtful whether Aristotle provides a convincing account of how habituation leads, transparently and without undue discontinuity, to practical wisdom. The two ‘hurdles’ I adverted to above are substantial, and it is unclear whether Aristotle’s affective account overcomes either (especially the second). At the level of cognition, by contrast, the prospects for a continuous development from *ethismos* to *phronēsis* look a good deal better. To begin with, it is clear that moral learners, at least during the early stages of their education, cannot draw on a repertoire of explicit moral principles or guidelines when embarking on a navigation of the practical world. Indeed, their conceptual range is inevitably very limited; if they display any virtuous tendencies, these will thus amount to the display of what Aristotle calls mere ‘natural’ virtue, which is far removed from fully developed, ie deliberative, prohairetic virtue. It would nevertheless be wrong to infer from this that such learners are unable to grasp any of the morally relevant features of their environment. They may be unable to formulate these features with conceptual sophistication, but they can grasp

17 As Curzer points out, Aristotle believes most people fail to graduate from habituated to full virtue. The category of ‘the many’, therefore, ‘includes not only children, but also the majority of adults, for these adults are morally childish’ (Curzer 2002, 155).
18 It is true that Aristotle understands pleasure in an activity as helping to focus our attention on that activity (see note 9). Accordingly, pleasure might focus our attention on an action’s specific virtue-properties. But whether we actually take pleasure in virtuous actions in the first place is, clearly, a separate matter.
them at least *qua* particular events or episodes. To use an example given by Burnyeat, and elaborated by Vasiliou, when a child is tells by his parents that what he has just done is ‘not nice’, ‘horrible’, or ‘shameful’, he realises that this particular action is disapproved of by those in authority, and hence should not have been done. 19

Now Aristotle does not leave this kind of scenario at the level of inchoate intuition – he gives it structure, and introduces terminology with which to describe it. In Aristotle’s terms, moral particulars are grasped under the generic description of *hoti*, or particular ‘that’s’: for instance, a moral learner grasps *that* stepping on her brother’s newly baked cake earns her deep disapproval, or *that* helping her sister to ride a bicycle is generally well-received. Clearly, grasping the *hoti* in these cases does not yet amount to a realisation of *why* such acts are condemned or praised. The moral learner is still, in Aristotle’s terms, far from understanding the *dioti*: viz. that she should not step on her brother’s cake *because* to do so is brutal and callous, or that she should help her sister *because* to do so is generous and part of family duty. Nonetheless, a grasp of the *hoti* is usually practically effective, so is granted significant moral weight by Aristotle. Indeed, he goes so far as to say that ‘the *hoti* is the starting-point [archê], and if it is sufficiently plain to [someone brought up in good habits], he will not need the *dioti* as well’ (1095b6-7); ‘Nor must we demand the cause [or explanation, *tēn aitian*] in all matters alike; it is enough in some cases that the *hoti* be well established, as in the case of the *archai*; the *hoti* is a primary thing [prōton] or archê’ (1098a33-b3).

In his elaboration of the cognitive journey from *ethismos* to *phronēsis*, Vasiliou makes much of this distinction between the *hoti* and the *dioti*, but his construal of it is different from mine. According to Vasiliou, ‘when a person can recognise an individual action as belonging to a particular ethical kind, he then possesses “the that”. The grasping of “the that” involves a perception which has some significant ethical content. The well brought up student [thus] has at his command the ability to point correctly to specific examples of acting justly, temperately, unjustly, and so on over a range of cases’ (Vasiliou 1996, 784). 20 In this way, Vasiliou is committed to moral ‘that’s’ having more

19 See Vasiliou 1996, 780. Hursthouse gives a similar example (see p. 124, note 5 above).

20 In terms of Burnyeat’s example above, the child’s bad action falls under the kind ‘shameful’, which, once realised, will enable the child to grasp that other actions – viz. ones of the same kind – are shameful too. Troels Engberg-Pedersen refers to this as the ‘implicit universalism’ of Aristotle’s theory of moral
sophisticated moral content than I maintained above – so sophisticated, in fact, that it borders on a grasp of the ‘because’. As Vasiliou himself claims, ‘to see that an action is [for example] shameful is to see why it should not be done’ (ibid. 789, note 41). But this claim that, as he puts it, ‘one who possesses “the that” … must already have a grasp of “the because”’, or that “the that” and “the because” coincide” (ibid. 789), seems to undermine the force of Aristotle’s cognitive taxonomy. For Aristotle’s point above was precisely that those who firmly grasp the *hoti* ‘will not need the *dioti* as well’, and hence that a grasp of the former does not entail a grasp of the latter.\(^2\)

If possessing the ‘that’ does not presuppose a possession of the ‘because’, we are left with the problem of determining how moral learners progress from the former, cognitively primitive stage, to the latter, cognitively sophisticated stage. And this is a pressing problem, since there still appears a real gap between realising that certain actions are required of one, or are the right thing to do, and the further (phronetic) realisation of why they are so. Unfortunately Aristotle, in his ethical writings, gives no substantial treatment of the relation between the *hoti* and the *dioti*, leaving this task to the first chapter of the *Metaphysics*, where he speaks about it in the context of craft-learning. It is here that he provides a detailed account of how cognitive states form a hierarchy: sensation or perception of particulars is, he maintains, superseded by the ability to remember those particulars; ‘many memories of the same thing produce … the capacity for a single experience [empeiria]’ (980b29-1a1); and experience, which is knowledge of individuals, is finally superseded by universal or generic judgement, which marks individuals off in classes. Aristotle ends *Metaphysics* I.1 by claiming that this cognitive hierarchy corresponds to a hierarchy of types of agent. The man of experience, he holds, ‘is thought to be wiser than the possessors of any perception whatever, the technitēs wiser than the men of experience, [and] the master-worker [architektōn] than the manual worker [cheirotechnou]’ (981b30-2a1).

That all this is relevant to the transition from habituated to rational virtue may not be immediately clear, but becomes so on closer inspection. For not only does Aristotle

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\(^2\) Cf the criticism of Vasiliou’s reading at Curzer 2002, 145 n.13.
hold that ‘With a view to action, experience seems in no respect inferior to technē’ (981a12-13), thereby echoing his claim that good moral ethē are adequate for practical purposes (see 1095b6-7, 1098a33-b3 on p. 132); he also distinguishes manual workers from master-workers in terms of the former’s acting ‘through habit’ [di’ethos, 981b5], while the latter are said to act through knowledge of causes. As Aristotle puts matters, directly paralleling what he says about moral learners in contradistinction to phronimoi: ‘men of experience know that the thing is so, but do not know why, while [technitai proper] know the dioti and the cause. Hence we think that master-workers in each technē are more honourable and know in a truer sense and are wiser than the manual workers (… [the latter] act without knowing what they do … through habit’) (981a28-b5). Clearly, then, the cheirotechnitai are being presented here as analogous to those undergoing moral habituation, who equally lack proper, explanatory knowledge of what they do, acting merely di’ethos. How, then, does Metaphysics I.1 explain the transition from this suboptimal cognitive condition, to the condition of those who grasp the dioti, the latter supposedly affording ‘knowledge and understanding’ (981a24)?

The answer to this is, in short – it does not explain this transition. And this is disappointing, considering Metaphysics I.1 is the only place where Aristotle gives an extended account of the ‘that’ and the ‘because’. What Aristotle does, instead, is to reinforce the gap between habituated action and rational action, by separating those who partake in these into two discrete groups, which are depreciated and lauded respectively. But he gives no general account of how possessors of the hoti intelligibly progress until they become possessors of the dioti. The former seem stuck, essentially, at the level of inculcated rewards and punishments, while the latter are presented as graced with rational and explanatory insight. And this cognitive lacuna in Aristotle’s account mirrors, I take it, the affective lacuna I outlined earlier. The consistency, then, with which Aristotle apparently fails to ‘join up’ ethismos with phronēsis – at either the affective or the cognitive level – is, I think, evident. In what follows, I shall expound what I take to be the immediate reason for this failure, namely Aristotle’s having been influenced by Plato.

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22 These groups are presented as discrete, even though their participants participate, in each case, in the same craft (as 981a28-b5 above makes clear). And this suggests a similar severance in the context of moral learning between neophytes and the practically wise, these two groups also being engaged in the same overall practice.
and in particular by Plato’s Republic. And I shall bolster this diagnosis with what I shall argue is a deeper reason, viz. Aristotle’s being under the impress of models of action and learning proper to the technai.

One of Plato’s key philosophical legacies to Aristotle is the notion that habituation plays an essential role in moral education. While the early, ‘Socratic’ dialogues are almost completely dismissive of this notion, by the time of the Republic it seems to have been embraced wholeheartedly. For example, Socrates recommends imitating virtuous people, for ‘imitations practised from youth up become part of nature and settle into habits [ethē] of gesture, voice and thought’ (395d). It is this commitment to the importance of early rearing, moreover, which grounds Socrates’ stringent requirement that the guardians ‘send everyone … over ten years old into the country. Then they’ll take possession of the children, who are now free from the ethos [tōn ēthōn] of their parents, and bring them up in their own customs and laws’ (540e-1a). Indeed, Aristotle’s picture of virtuous habits generating virtue proper is found almost verbatim at Rep 444c-e – although Aristotle replaces Socrates’ analogy to health with an analogy to the crafts. Just as ‘Healthy things produce health, unhealthy ones disease’, Socrates asks, ‘… don’t just actions produce justice in the soul, and unjust ones injustice? … don’t fine ways of living lead one to the possession of virtue, shameful ones to vice?’

The trouble is that the seamless transition from ethos to mature virtue postulated here is not given clear support in the rest of the Republic. At the level of affect, we find that the natural vehicle for such moral development – viz. pleasure – is treated as (at best) morally unreliable, or (at worst) morally pernicious. And this suspicion of pleasure as a propaedeutic to moral reason is bolstered by the Republic’s definitive innovation in moral psychology, viz. the tripartition of the soul. For whereas the logistikon or rational part is said to seek the Good, the epithumētikon or irrational part – which develops earlier, and is

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23 Cf the Meno, in which Socrates, although he mentions it, does very little to explore the possibility that virtue is the result of ‘practice’ [askēsis].
24 Cf Laws 792e, where the Athenian holds that early childhood is ‘the age when habits, the seeds of the entire character, are most effectively implanted’.
25 For example, Socrates declares that ‘If you admit the pleasure-giving Muse, whether in lyric or epic poetry, pleasure and pain will be kings in your city instead of law or the thing that everyone has always believed to be best, namely reason’ (607a). ‘[I]n the case of sex, anger, and all the desires’, he contends, ‘[viz.] pleasures and pains that … accompany all our action, poetic imitation … nurtures and waters them and establishes them as rulers in us, when they ought to wither and be ruled [by reason]’ (606d).
thus key to moral education – is directed specifically at base pleasures. For instance, Socrates announces that ‘We’ll call the part of the soul with which it calculates the rational part, and the part with which it lusts, hungers, thirsts and gets excited by other appetites the irrational appetitive part, companion of certain indulgences and pleasures’ (439d). And at 571c, he refers to the epithumētikon as the ‘beastly and savage part [of the soul], full of food and drink, [which] casts off sleep and seeks to find a way to gratify itself. You know there is nothing it won’t dare to do at such a time, free of all control by shame or reason’ (cf 591c).

In this way, the Republic makes it difficult to see how the pleasures of the epithumētikon can lead reliably to a proper appreciation of moral virtue, let alone of the Good per se. And this points to a discontinuity between moral education and the perfected virtue of the guardians that likely had some influence on Aristotle’s theory: for, as I maintained on pp. 128-9, Aristotle’s theory also shows suspicion of pleasure. But more important than this inherited suspicion is the fundamental problem that – even if one is prepared to allow that pleasure is a valuable tool in moral education – it remains unclear why the repetition of virtuous-type acts should yield pleasure in the first place. In order to understand why Aristotle does not consider this a problem, we will have to go beyond the Republic, and look at his own theory of craft-learning. For as I noted above, whereas Socrates makes an analogy between learning the virtues and becoming healthy, Aristotle replaces the latter component of this analogy with becoming proficient in the technai. When taken together with the fact that Aristotle’s whole conception of ethismos is elucidated in terms of craft-learning (see p. 121), what this suggests is that – if we want to discover what motivates Aristotle’s view that pleasure is a natural concomitant of moral learning – we would do well to reflect on whether this constitutes a common phenomenon in the crafts.

That incremental pleasure-taking is a common phenomenon in craft-learning can, I would argue, be seen in either of two ways. First, it does seem that many technai – even mainly cerebral ones, like mathematics – require an initial stage of rather gruelling

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26 This view of the epithumētikon is mirrored in the Timaeus. Take, for example, Socrates’ claim that ‘this part of the soul [is] not going to understand the deliverances of reason, and … even if it were … to have some awareness of them, it would not have an innate regard for any of them’ (Tim 71a); ‘[it is] totally devoid of opinion, reasoning or understanding, though it does share in sensation, pleasant and painful, and desires’ (Tim 77b).
practice, which only later gives way to enjoyment and proper understanding. As Aristotle himself suggests in *Metaphysics* I.1, the *cheirotechnitai* – viz. those analogous to moral learners – are at the beck and call of their superiors, the master-workers; indeed, the work of the *cheirotechnitai* is the very opposite of leisured (see 981b20-25). By contrast, the master-workers, although engaged in the same overall type of work, can enjoy and appreciate it from a synoptic point of view, having achieved an explanatory grasp of its materials and procedures. As applied to moral development, however, this pattern is, I think, less well-founded: for there is no clear moral equivalent to the craftsman’s transition from painful to pleasurable activity, founded on having finally (and arduously) achieved mastery of a particular practice. In other words, Aristotle’s account of *ethismos* fits craft-learning significantly better than virtue-learning: for learning a craft does eventually yield enjoyment (or at least painlessness), whereas there seems no clear or necessary parallel to this in the case of moral learning.

Secondly, even if an apprentice manages to progress, without pain, to being a craftsman proper, his deriving pleasure therefrom is, I would maintain, straightforwardly intelligible. For he has managed to master a *technē*, and perhaps also the principles that underlie it. That is, his increasing practical-cum-cognitive grasp and facility amply explain his deriving increasing pleasure from the process of *technē*-learning. He has managed, after all, to exert growing mastery over various materials, and the control this represents naturally affords satisfaction. By contrast, there is no similar story to be told in the case of moral learning. For the practice of virtuous-type acts does not obviously yield satisfaction, certainly not in any comparably clear or intelligible way. I suggest, accordingly, that it is the straightforward intelligibility of the craftsman’s affective journey which leads Aristotle to believe that coming to take pleasure in virtuous action is a similarly unproblematic process.27

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27 David Oderberg professes to find no problem in this assimilation of moral learning to craft-learning. ‘[R]epetition’, he writes, ‘inclines the agent towards the act concerned, since easy and efficient performance is intrinsically satisfying, reinforcing among other things the agent’s confidence in his own skill and ability. Why, in the sphere of the good life as such, should things be any different?’ (Oderberg 2000, 45). But in the context of the moral virtues, ‘easy and efficient performance’ should not be the source of one’s enjoyment; rather, as Aristotle maintains (see pp. 129-30), one should take delight in virtuous acts *per se*. The trouble is that, in contrast to *technē*-learning, it is difficult to see why repetition of virtuous-type acts should generate delight in the first place. And this leads, in turn, to the suspicion that Aristotle has assimilated the latter to the former.
At the level of cognition, the influences on Aristotle’s theory of moral learning parallel those outlined above. For the Republic courts the accusation of discontinuity not only in its account of the development of moral affect, but also in its account of the development of moral cognition. This is apparent, at a structural level, in Socrates’ stark contrast between the rational [logistikon] and the irrational [alogiston] parts of the soul, as well as in his choice of light and darkness to signify the contrasting cognitive conditions of (respectively) those who have gained, and those who have yet to gain knowledge of the Good (see 514a-22a). And these structural discontinuities are mirrored at a more fine-grained level, where Socrates makes it clear that the cognitive powers of those undergoing ethismos are distinctly inferior to, if not wholly different in kind from the cognitive powers of those who have achieved moral knowledge. For instance, he maintains that, while the virtues of the soul are ‘akin to those of the body, for they really aren’t there beforehand but are added later by habit and practice ... the virtue of reason seems to belong ... to something more divine, which never loses its power’ (518d-e). And this view has ramifications for habituation through music and poetry, which turns out, according to Socrates, to be ‘just the counterpart of physical training. It educated the guardians through habits [ethesi]. Its harmonies gave them a certain harmoniousness, not knowledge ... and its stories ... cultivated other habits ... But as for [an education in virtue], there’s nothing like that in music and poetry’ (522a-b).

This strong disjunction between habit and knowledge is reinforced, moreover, by Socrates’ conceiving of these as occupying two, distinct stages of moral development: the habitual stage, and the far later stage of dialectic. Indeed, he recommends that philosophical dialectic not be engaged in by the guardians until the age of thirty (see 537d), and that they be precluded from a full grasp of the Good until the age of fifty (see 540a). In this way, he postpones ‘the reason’ for their education until well after most of it is completed.28 And this reflects a strict division between habitual and rational moral learning, which – as I shall argue shortly – is difficult to defend. In partial defence of

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28 ‘[H]aving been educated in this way’, Socrates holds, ‘[the moral learner] will welcome the reason [for his upbringing] ... and recognise it easily because of its kinship with himself’ (402a). Cf the Athenian’s avowal that ‘I call “education” the initial acquisition of virtue by the child, when the feelings of pleasure and affection, pain and hatred that well up in his soul are channelled in the right courses before he can understand the reason why. Then when he does understand, his reason and his emotions agree in telling him that he has been properly trained by inculcation of appropriate habits [ethôn]’ (Laws 653b).
Socrates, it should nonetheless be acknowledged that he does provide detailed and explicit content for the second stage of moral education, viz. the stage of dialectic: content which I explored in chapter one (see pp. 27-8). By contrast, although Aristotle inherits and is committed to the contrast between pre-rational, habituated virtue, and rational, mature virtue, he does not supply clear, substantive content for the latter. In fact, he deliberately depreciates the content supplied by Socrates, in and through his attack on the Form of the Good (see *NE* I.6). So it could be said that Aristotle compounds the problem he inherits: not only does he affirm a genuine disjunction and disparity between *ethismos* and *phronēsis*, he fails to say what, exactly, the latter adds to the former that is distinctive, and distinctively valuable.29

Once again, the *Republic*’s influence on Aristotle is strongly bolstered, I think, by the influence of the model of craft-learning. For, as was seen above, Aristotle makes it clear in *Metaphysics* I.1 that master-workers, viz. those analogous to the practically wise, possess ‘knowledge and understanding’ (981a24), whereas manual workers (viz. those analogous to moral *hoi polloi*) have experience only of particulars, the explanatory interrelations of which they remain cognitively unaware of. As Aristotle puts matters, ‘we think the manual workers are like certain lifeless things that act indeed, but act without knowing what they do, as fire burns – but while lifeless things perform each of their functions by a natural tendency [*phusei tini*], the manual workers perform them through habit [*di’ethos*]’ (981a30-b5). Even if this passage betrays a certain rhetorical exaggeration, it does highlight the significant cognitive gap between manual and master-workers, which clearly points – given Aristotle’s explicit analogy between moral education and craft-learning – to a cognitive gap between those agents demonstrating only habituated virtue, and those who have attained the status of *phronimoi*.

The problem with this parallelism is that, yet again, it forces the development of moral cognition into a mould that fits craft-learning a good deal better. For it is more plausible to hold there is a strict separation between habituation and reasoning in the context of *technē*-learning, than in the context of learning the virtues. After all, it is not difficult to conceive many *technai* as incorporating a long initial period of more or less

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29 In the *Conclusion*, I shall outline a possible defence of Aristotle here, one elaborated in far more detail, and with great skill, by Dunne (in Dunne 1993, ch.9).
routine, largely imitative learning, in which apprentices are made to follow practical instructions without being apprised of the theoretical information that would shed light on their activity at a cognitively more sophisticated level. By contrast, it is not easy to envisage such a strict separation applying in the case of moral learning. For in the latter context, there seems no equivalently strict division between theory and practice, and hence no equivalent to the way in which craft-learners can adequately navigate the complexities of their respective technai, without having been exposed (in any way) to their specific dioti. As Vasiliou maintains, in ethical contexts, the ‘that’ and the ‘because’ go ‘hand in hand’ (Vasiliou 1996, 790) – for without a grasp of particular acts as forbidden because they are ‘shameful’, ‘brave’, ‘cruel’, etc., moral learners will find it hard to navigate the moral world in even a rudimentary way. But given his deference to models derived from the crafts, Aristotle ends up obscuring the lack of such a cognitive gap in ethical contexts, thereby ultimately reinforcing a theoretical tendency that is, as I have argued, already present in Plato’s Republic.

Before moving on to the Conclusion, it is worth pointing out that the way in which Aristotle understands technē proper as primarily a cognitive achievement – one that demonstrates ‘knowledge and understanding [to eidenai kai to epaïein]’ (981a24), thereby leaving mere experience or empeiria behind – is of central concern to Joseph Dunne. Whereas I argued that a relatively sharp separation between theory and practice fits technē-learning better than moral education, Dunne is keen to argue that, even as an account of craft-learning, Metaphysics I.1 separates elements that cannot so easily be disjoined. ‘It is a weakness in Aristotle’s position here’, he writes, ‘… that he does not show how techne and experience can link up fruitfully in order to provide a masterly practice. He is left with a stark separation between a theoretical techne and a mindless manipulation of actual material’ (Dunne 1993, 285).

In criticising this aspect of Aristotle’s account, Dunne is, I think, justified: for Aristotle does draw too sharp a line between ‘a knower whose intentional object is poiēsis [making]’, and ‘a maker whose real object is a poiēton (an actual product)’ (ibid. 318). All I wanted to argue above, however, is that – even if the sharp division Aristotle posits does not capture technē-learning adequately – it captures the development of craft-abilities better than it captures the development of moral virtue. And this reflects my
general thesis that – whatever the merits of Aristotle’s understanding of the crafts and craft-models _per se_ – it is in the application of these to the sphere of the virtues that their cogency definitively gives way.
Conclusion

In what follows, I want to accomplish two main tasks. First, I will address a possible criticism of my whole approach to the relation between ethics and technē in Aristotle’s philosophy; a criticism that, if well-founded, would be devastating to my overall thesis. Secondly, having argued against the well-foundedness of this criticism, I will maintain that – notwithstanding my general critique – the three moral arguments detailed in chapters three to five can all, ultimately, be defended. Granted, in order for this to be achieved, those arguments must be revised, and in at least one case, revised wholesale. But the upshot of this will be, I hope, to show that arguments which lie at the core of Aristotle’s moral philosophy – viz. the argument for a human function, for an ethical mean, and for habituation as key to moral virtue – each demonstrate a fundamental cogency. Before embarking on these two tasks, however, I think it would be helpful to give an overview of my thesis as a whole, and to recapitulate its relation to extant interpretations of Aristotle’s ethics.

In the Introduction, I began by expounding the defining marks of technē, as witnessed by various pre-Platonic sources (in particular, the early Hippocratic corpus). In chapter one, I argued that Plato largely affirms this inherited conception of technē, and then went on to ask whether – given the Platonic dialogues’ marked interest specifically in the notion of a virtue-technē – such a technē is ever fully and viably developed by Plato. But having investigated the two main candidates for such a craft, viz. the Protagoras’ measuring craft and the Republic’s second-order craft of justice, I concluded that neither of these properly fulfils the brief of a virtue-technē. In chapter two, having shown that Aristotle more or less adopts Plato’s conception of technē (bar his reduced emphasis on the need for precision in the crafts in general), I provided a detailed overview of his four arguments against the possibility of a virtue-technē (as summarised in NE VI.5). One of these, the argument from production and action, was shown to have considerable force. And I noted that, compared to anything in Plato, Aristotle’s arguments here clearly amount to an explicit and concerted rejection of the very notion of a virtue-craft.

Despite this explicit rejection, I proceeded to argue that models derived from the crafts actually play a significant role in Aristotle’s ethics as a whole. In chapter two, I documented the way in which Aristotle uses technē-models to clarify and add colour to his analyses of slavery and deliberation. But whereas these piecemeal uses
of models proper to the crafts are philosophically helpful and largely unproblematic, I went on, following chapter two, to argue that such models exert a questionable influence on three central building-blocks of Aristotle’s moral philosophy. I tackled the function argument first, in chapter three, arguing for an interpretation of it as favouring contemplation as the human ergon. I then explored what conception of ergon might have influenced Aristotle’s somewhat implausible, strictly intellectualistic position. And I concluded that – rather than a biological or metaphysical conception – one derived from the crafts best fits a human ergon that turns out to be both single and specialised in form. By contrast, Plato was seen to affirm an inclusivist, generic conception of the human function, and at the same time (perhaps tellingly) not to invoke examples from the technai in his function argument.

In chapter four, I addressed Aristotle’s so-called ‘doctrine of the mean’. Since the notion of an ethical mean has clear antecedents in Plato’s Statesman and Philebus, I began first by outlining this notion as it appears in those dialogues. Next, I expounded the Aristotelian mesotēs, and argued that although it is illuminating in some respects, Aristotle over-applies the schema of excess, deficiency and the mean within the domain of passion and action. Enquiring why this over-application occurs, I made the case that Aristotle is influenced by the Philebus’ idea that the good is always a function of peras, viz. ‘limit’, where this is understood in strictly quantitative terms. And I argued, further, that this is of a piece with his being under the impress of quantitative methods typical of the crafts, especially the craft of medicine. In chapter five, I investigated Aristotle’s account of moral habituation or ethismos. Notwithstanding the promising nature of this account, I held that it leaves opaque the crucial transition from habituated to full, phronetic virtue. Having expounded two supposed ‘bridges’ between these forms of virtue, at the level of both affect and cognition, I argued that they still leave an explanatory gap in Aristotle’s account. And I ended by diagnosing this gap both as an inheritance from Plato’s Republic, and (more saliently) as an artefact of the way Aristotle understands the affective and cognitive components of craft-learning.

All in all, then, I hope my argument has shown that the usual picture of Plato as the devotee of craft analogies in ethics, and Aristotle as straightforwardly divorcing virtue from technē, is, if anything, the opposite of the truth. This picture is, of course, not wholly without substance: the early Platonic dialogues, especially, make liberal use of craft illustrations and analogies, and although it steadily fades from view, the
dialogues never seem entirely to lose sight of the notion of a virtue-technē. By contrast, Aristotle makes an explicit point of arguing that phronēsis cannot be a technē. But although Aristotle rejects any understanding of full virtue as a craft, it does not follow from this that models at home in the crafts do not have a marked influence on the way he understands and explicates central features of his ethical theory. Indeed, I hope the foregoing study has demonstrated that such influence is real and incontrovertible.

At this juncture, it is worth pausing briefly to note that the claim that Aristotle rules out the possibility of a virtue-technē is (surprisingly) not universally accepted. Matt Stichter argues that Aristotle ends up endorsing a conception of virtue that lies very close to being that of a skill. True, Stichter contends, NE VI.5 tries to separate virtue from craft definitively – but the notion of ‘craft’ at work here is specifically a Socratic one. That is, Aristotle is rejecting virtue qua purely intellectual achievement, which first and foremost enables virtue-experts to grasp the unifying principles underlying their skill, and to give an account of their skilled actions. But this does not mean that Aristotle is rejecting virtue as a technē simpliciter. Far from it, Stichter maintains: given Aristotle affirms the idea that virtue is acquired via habituation, and that it is masterable even though grasped by an imprecise logos, what Aristotle is suggesting, in effect, is that virtue is a non-Socratic, non-‘intellectualist’ form of expertise. In other words, he is proposing that virtue is an ‘empiricist’ skill, whose primary purpose is not intellectual but practical, enabling agents to act appropriately in a context that does not admit of precise, codifiable, ‘rule-case’ principles.

However, this is unconvincing. To defend this non-standard reading, Stichter would have to insulate his own empiricist conception of moral skill from the arguments of NE VI.5. For none of these presupposes a notion of technē that is specifically and exclusively intellectualist, and thus all of them apply equally against empiricist technai. Hence although I think Stichter’s basic intuition – that Aristotle’s ethics are strongly indebted to technē-models – is correct, he mislocates this debt, and ends up affirming an equivalence between Aristotelian virtue and skill that is indefensible.

1 See his ‘Ethical Expertise: The Skill Model of Virtue’ (Stichter 2007).
2 The arguments referred to here are those from general and particular goods, from production and action, from redundancy and from voluntary error. I discuss these in ch.2, pp. 37-48. As Stichter admits, virtue cannot be an empiricist skill tout court, since in moral contexts we are required not just to act, but also often to explicate and justify our actions. So the intellectualist/empiricist distinction is too blunt, at least as applied to phronēsis.
The reader might well be tempted to object at this point that, even if Stichter’s equivalence thesis is clearly unfounded, I have not yet managed to vindicate my own claim that craft-models exert a significant and determining influence on Aristotle’s ethics. For surely there is another construal of the ethics-technē relation in Aristotle’s work that is perfectly coherent, and moreover, that is better supported by the texts. This construal holds that craft-models perform a more minimal role in Aristotle’s ethics than I have allowed: instead of shaping key parts of the argument, they serve merely as an expository and explanatory propaedeutic, that is, they are intended to introduce somewhat rarefied, difficult topics in a way that is both concrete and comprehensible. But they should not be given more weight than that – for to do so would be to misinterpret Aristotle’s philosophical method, and with baleful consequences for understanding his substantive views.

This criticism certainly has prima facie force. For not only do Aristotle’s discussions of slavery and deliberation make use of technē-models in more or less the way just outlined; there are several texts that explicitly endorse the idea that less easily intelligible should be introduced by more easily intelligible material. At the start of the *NE*, for instance, Aristotle holds that ‘while we must begin with what is familiar [*tōn gnōrimōn*], things are so in two ways – some to us [*hēmin*], some without qualification [*haplōs*]. Presumably, then, we must begin with things familiar to us’ (1095b2-4). In the *Posterior Analytics*, he maintains that ‘Things are prior and more familiar in two ways … I call prior and more familiar in relation to us what is nearer to perception, prior and more familiar *simpliciter* what is further away. What is most universal is furthest away, and the particulars are nearest’ (71b33-2a5). And at the opening of the *Physics*, he declares that ‘The natural way of [determining the principles of the science of nature] is to start from the things that are more knowable and clear to us, and proceed towards those that are clearer and knowable by nature [*phusei*]’ (184a16-18).

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3 Not to mention his use of these models in elucidating his theory of natural teleology. I have not dealt with the latter, but only because it is developed outside Aristotle’s ethical and political writings.

4 Cf ‘In the order of nature, deduction through the middle term is prior and more familiar, but deduction through induction is clearer to us’ (*Prior* 68b35-7); ‘learning proceeds for all in this way – through that which is less intelligible by nature to that which is more intelligible … one must start from that which is barely intelligible [per se] but intelligible to oneself, and try to understand what is intelligible in itself, passing, as has been said, by way of those very things which one understands’ (*Meta* 1029b3-12). Cf also *Top* VI.4 passim.
This methodological principle, which distinguishes between what is intelligible to us, and what is intelligible haplōs or phusei, is thus well-entrenched in Aristotle’s works. It is hardly interpretative sleight of hand, therefore, to suggest that this principle applies also to the way in which Aristotle refers to technai and technitai when constructing arguments in ethics. Indeed, at 1104a11-14 he explicitly invokes it in just such a context: ‘it is in the nature of [matters of conduct]’, he avers, ‘to be destroyed by deficiency and excess, as we see in the case of strength and of health (for to gain light on things imperceptible we must use the evidence of sensible things)’. Could it be, then, that – far from letting technē-models influence his argumentation unduly – Aristotle has these perfectly under control, never allowing them to perform more than an ancillary and pro tempore role in his overall argumentative strategy?

While this interpretation is attractive in the abstract, I think it fails to capture the actual structure of the arguments I explored in chapters three to five. To take the function argument first, although in NE I.7 Aristotle mentions craft erga in a merely analogising and introductory fashion, it was my claim that this belies the potential explanatory power such erga have. For it is only a technē-centric conception of ergon, I argued, which makes sense of a human function that is both single and specialised in form. Other conceptions of function do not, that is, yield the formal properties technē does, and this formal congruence between craft-functions and the human function is unlikely simply to be a matter of coincidence. In the case of the Aristotelian mesotēs, the direct and thorough-going influence of craft-paradigms is more obvious. For when Aristotle holds that the ‘master of any art avoids excess and deficiency, but seeks the intermediate [meson] and chooses this – the intermediate not in the object, but relatively to us’ (1106b5-7), it turns out that this schema applies to ethical matters not roughly or analogously, but literally and without qualification. The only detective work, as it were, which Aristotle leaves up to his audience, is to discover the joint influence on the mean of both the Philebus and the craft of medicine. But these influences only point up the unmediated and unqualified way in which technē shapes ethical theory in this case.5

5 If there is any ‘roughness’ in the application of craft-model to virtue here, it lies in the fact that, according to Aristotle, ‘virtue is more exact and better than any technē’ (1106b14-15). But this can mean only that the schema of excess, deficiency and the mean applies more rigorously to the virtues than to the crafts; it does not mean the schema fails to apply, or applies only vaguely or in part.
When it comes to *ethismos*, once again craft-models serve Aristotle not only as an initial, inadequate pedagogical resource, but also as a significant determining force within his account. This is the case, as I argued in chapter five, in at least two respects. First, craft-models help explain why Aristotle assumes that the repetition of virtuous-type acts should yield increasing enjoyment: precisely because this is what happens in craft-learning, where apprentices derive enjoyment from their increasing mastery and skill. Secondly, *technē*-models throw light also on the worrying cognitive gap between *ethismos* and *phronēsis*. For if one inspects *Metaphysics* I.1’s account of the move from the *hoti* to the *dioti*, it is clear that Aristotle fails to provide a bridging mechanism between these disparate cognitive states. It is reasonable to infer, then, that he imports this model (taken from craft-learning) into his theory of moral learning, thereby creating a corresponding gap between habituated and full virtue. Once more, then, a *technē*-model manages to throw significant, direct explanatory light on Aristotle’s analysis of moral development. And this confirms, I take it, the way in which *technē*-models function within Aristotle’s ethics in general as more than a mere propaedeutic.

To summarise: I hope I have shown that, rather than affording theoretical understanding merely ‘in relation to us’, Aristotle’s references to the crafts (in the cases I’ve outlined) play an analytically more determining and substantive role than is usually acknowledged. Taking this on board, for the remainder of the Conclusion I want – in face of the *technē*-influenced problems I have raised – briefly to investigate the prospects for an Aristotelian ethics from which the excessive influence of craft-models has been removed.

In the case of the function argument, the *technē*-influence I argued for in chapter three consists in Aristotle’s determining the human function as contemplation, where this amounts to a single, specialised activity – viz. exactly the kind of activity characteristic of the *technitēs*. If this determination is implausible, in terms of both form and content – as the appeal of the (textually less well-founded) inclusivist interpretation indicates – I suggest the immediate way of rendering the argument plausible is to alter its conclusion.⁶ Instead, that is, of affirming *ōrēia* as the human function, Aristotle should argue (as I maintained Plato does) that the human *ergon* consists in rational activity, where this is construed in a generic, non-specialised sense.

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⁶ Assuming, of course, that the very notion of a human function is plausible to begin with. But I won’t be questioning this fundamental datum in what follows.
— viz. as morally virtuous activity. Now in order to achieve this result, it will be necessary, I take it, to rely on a different paradigm of function to one deriving from the sphere of craft-activity. It will be necessary, in other words, to employ a conception of function that is more capacious, i.e., one that encompasses forms of activity that are single, yet generic in nature. What conception of function do I have in mind?

Drawing on my argument in chapter three (see pp. 77-8), Aristotle clearly supplies a notion of *ergon* that is commensurate with the kind of activity I have outlined: namely, metaphysical *ergon*. This paradigm allows functions that are both single and generic, for (as I maintained at p. 77, note 59) metaphysical functions are correlated with essences [*ousiai*], which can cover a variety of generically similar specific activities. It is in this spirit that Aristotle holds, for example, that ‘an animal is defined as such by its possessing sense-perception’ (*Somn* 454b24; cf. *Sens* 436b11-13). Animals, that is, have perception as their essence — whatever specific perceptual activities they engage in — and from this it follows that perception is also their generic *ergon*. With this conception of function in place, Aristotle could leave behind the analogies he makes in *NE* I.7 between man’s *ergon* and the *erga* of carpenters and tanners, etc., and go on to elaborate an account of the human function that is grounded in humans’ essential rationality. But this time, rather than construing the latter in an implausibly narrow sense, he could construe it in generic sense — thereby yielding a philosophical anthropology that is at once plausible, and consistent with his overall ethical argument.

This change represents no fundamental loss. Indeed, if Aristotle wanted to preserve the idea that contemplative activity constitutes humanity’s highest achievement, and therefore also its highest good, he could still argue for this — merely on other grounds; for example, on the grounds that its objects are divine, and are thereby capable of raising man up to a divine level. While still lacking plausibility, this argument would, at least, avoid dependence on a conception of function whose proper home is the crafts. And it would, moreover, be easier to reconcile with the inclusivist force of Aristotle’s ethics as a whole.

Moving on to the mean, I argued in chapter four that Aristotle’s delineation of it is flawed, because he over-applies the *technē*-derived schema of excess, deficiency and the mean to moral virtue in general. More specifically, he applies this schema to actions and passions — but some of his passion-triads are unconvincing, not all virtues
involve passion, and few virtuous actions admit of a mean in any straightforwardly scalar sense. So it looks as if, although the Aristotelian mesotēs is not a wholly failed piece of theory, it is over-ambitious, and cannot fulfil the central role Aristotle ascribes to it. How, then, can the schema of excess, deficiency and the mean be reconfigured to make it theoretically more robust, and more widely illuminating?

One promising option open to Aristotle would, I suggest, be the following. If one construes ‘mean’ here not in terms of the scalar, quantitative means of the crafts, but more liberally as what is ‘proportionate’ [summetron, analogon], and allows that the objects of actions and passions can have intrinsic, independent value and right- or wrong-making properties, then Aristotle’s claim that the mean is applicable across a wide range of dimensions may be justifiable. For acting towards the ‘right people’, for instance, would consist in acting towards those who deserve some specified good, rather than those who fail to deserve it for some reason or other (and thus would not be good objects of one’s action). Acting with regard to the ‘right objects’ would entail acting with regard to objects holding the requisite value (in a particular context), as opposed to those whose value is lacking or beyond one’s powers. And acting in the ‘right way’ would involve refraining from actions that have wrong-making properties, such as being an unacceptable lie. In all these cases, if one holds certain contextual factors constant, proportionality vis-à-vis the objects in question will – albeit in a non-strict, non-quantitative, and hence un-technē-like way – be preserved.

I want to turn, now, to the final locus of technē-inspired difficulty in Aristotle’s ethics: viz. Aristotle’s account of moral habituation. In chapter five, I argued that this encounters problems at two basic levels, the affective and the cognitive. At the affective level, it remains obscure why repeating virtuous-type acts should generate virtuous dispositions – something that is (mutatis mutandis) less obscure in the technai, where the pleasure derived from increasing mastery explains more readily the transition from apprentice to technitēs. At the cognitive level, Aristotle fails in his account of craft-learning to explain how grasp of the hoti leads to grasp of the dioti, so we can reasonably speculate that this is why a similar explanatory gap exists in his account of moral learning. With these problems once

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7 As Aristotle sometimes does himself, though he does so consistently only in the context of analysing justice. See (eg) 1104a17-18, 1106a35-6, 1131b11-12, 1136a1-3, 1158b29-33.

8 Whether Aristotle could accept a key presupposition of this view – viz. that objects have intrinsic, independent value – is, I think, open to question. For it is unclear whether (by his lights) there are intrinsic goods independent of agents’ eudaimonia. For interesting discussion of this issue, see Richardson Lear 2004, 17-20, 65-9.
more on the table, I think a solution to them can nonetheless be found, at least at the cognitive level. And solving them will, once again, involve moving away from models derived from the technai, and attending instead to the moral phenomena themselves.

A helpful account of how Aristotle could move away from technē-models in his account of moral habituation is supplied by Dunne. Dunne begins, essentially, with the observation that Aristotle’s analysis in *Metaphysics* I.1 renders fully developed technē ‘aloof’ from the experience of craft-learning (see Dunne 1993, 284). And this analysis is particularly unhelpful, Dunne maintains, when applied to moral learning, since whereas the achieved knowledge of the technitēs has clear and determinate content, Aristotle seems never to supply explicit, distinctive content for phronēsis. It seems reasonable, therefore, to understand such content as imparted in and through the process of moral habituation itself. And indeed, this is the conclusion for which Dunne argues. He maintains that instead of looking for phronetic knowledge that is wholly distinct from the experience of the person undergoing ethismo, we should understand the former as growing out of the latter, without ever – unlike technē-knowledge – transcending it. As Dunne puts things, ‘phronesis does not ascend to a level of abstraction or generality that leaves experience behind … It is … the insightfulness – or, using Aristotle’s own metaphor, “the eye” – of [moral] experience, and the insights it achieves are turned back into experience, which is in this way constantly reconstructed or enriched’ (Dunne 1993, 293).

This suggestion that phronēsis could fruitfully be understood as generated from within ethismo, without ever transcending the latter, represents a nice counterpoise to the technē-inspired view that bona fide knowledge must leave mere habituated experience behind. Rather, what we are offered on Dunne’s view is the claim that experience gained through moral habitation is incorporated in the moral learner’s higher, reflective capacities, which in turn modify the deliverances of his habituated moral experience. But at no point does phronetic reflection leave that experience behind. In this way, Dunne’s account (in Dunne 1993, ch.9) manages, I think, to supply an answer to the problem of how phronēsis cognitively draws on, yet is more advanced than ethismo, without at the same time falling into the trap of Aristotle’s technē-driven assumption that cognitive development is a matter of wholly transcending ethos. Admittedly, Dunne’s account is weakest vis-à-vis the development of moral affect, since we still lack a detailed explanation of how,
exactly, moral learners progress from instrumental, to non-instrumental, to properly phronetic motivation. But overall, I suggest Dunne’s delineation of the journey from *ethimos* to *phronēsis* is, at least with regard to the cognitive aspect of that journey, very promising.

In sum, then, I hope I have shown that, although Aristotle’s over-reliance on *technē*-models creates real problems for his ethics, none of these is completely insuperable. If he were to accept an inclusivist human *ergon*, a conception of the mean *qua* proportion to independently valuable objects, and a notion of moral habituation less indebted to craft-learning, each of these elements of his ethical theory could retain its real and, in my view, unsurpassed value.
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