

## ***Virtue, Skill and Vice***

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### **ABSTRACT**

It is widely accepted among philosophers and developmental psychologists that the acquisition of a virtue of an Aristotelian type can be illuminated by the acquisition of a practical skill. This model does not seem to fit the acquisition of a vice. The paper examines the issues involved and ways in which the skill model does and does not fit the acquisition of vice.

### **KEYWORDS**

Virtue, vice, skill, habituation, aspiration.

In recent years, as is familiar, there has been a flow of work on virtue in many fields, and notably in philosophy, mostly in the area of virtue ethics. Here I want to take up a point which is quite surprising, namely that this intense focus on virtue has not similarly focussed on vice. Once you notice this, you scan complex works on virtue in vain for anything comparably developed on vice.<sup>1</sup> It seems to be assumed that an account of virtue does not need also to provide an account of vice for it to be adequate as an account of virtue. I have been as guilty of this as anyone, and it may be that this assumption is not arbitrary. Aristotle, for example, tells us that we are studying virtue not for the sake of it, but to become better people<sup>2</sup>, and we can see why study of virtue alone would suffice for that, bringing in vice only insofar as we need to understand it to understand virtue.

However, vice is of interest, certainly to me, insofar as an account of virtue raises puzzles about the nature and structure of vice. This is especially so for those of us who defend an Aristotelian (or neo-Aristotelian) account of virtue, in which it is prominent that virtue is acquired in a way analogous to the way in which a practical skill is acquired. For such an Aristotelian account, it is central to the account of virtue that its structure, and so the way it is taught and learned, resembles that of a practical skill. Yet this does not carry over unproblematically

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<sup>1</sup> Theologians do not share this neglect to the same extent, but it is often difficult to make use of their work if you do not share the relevant tradition of understanding the idea of sin. Aquinas, for example, understands vice partly in terms of sin, which makes his work on vice less accessible to non-religious philosophers than his work on virtue.

<sup>2</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* II 2, 1103b26-30.

to vice. This would not be a worry, of course, if we did not expect vice to be anything like virtue in its structure. But we do think of vice as being, in some respects, more like virtue than either is like other ethical states, and so we are faced by a problem: why do we think this if vice does not have the structure of a skill? What is the structure of vice? Some vices at least seem to display intelligence and application; how is this related to practical skill?

I hope to broach a topic which deserves more attention than it has had. I am not aiming to give anything like a complete account of vice, and there are many issues about vice and the vices which I must leave untouched. In order to get a handle on understanding vice I am focussing on the skill analogy for virtue, the question of its fit for vice and how we are to understand the intelligence often shown by the vicious.

I will begin with a brief account of an Aristotelian account of virtue, familiar though it is, in order to have a clear view of what it is that vices are being contrasted with. This account lays out the main features, and is obviously not a definition of any kind. A virtue is a disposition of a specific kind, to think, reason, feel and act in certain ways, namely the virtuous ways. This disposition has a specific history, namely of being built up through experience by selective and intelligent habituation, where this is guided by learning from those who, in the culture, already have the relevant virtues. (This can take the form of role models, books, movies, and so on.) What makes these dispositions virtues is that they aim at the good. When we are old enough to reflect on the virtues we have learned from our culture, we are able to revise our positions as to whether these virtues do, in fact, aim at the good, or are merely conventional, or even deeply misguided. There are various ways of interpreting the good that is aimed at, and in this paper I shall be assuming that we are dealing with a secular interpretation, where the good aimed at is that of a flourishing human life.<sup>3</sup> The 'skill analogy' comes in because the habituation in virtue takes the form of the kind of education in acting that you get in making and acting when you learn a practical skill.

It's important for this conception of virtue that virtue be a stable disposition, different from a mood or temporary commitment. It's also important that habituation forms and educates our emotive and feeling, as well as our cognitive, aspects. Aristotle puts this in a striking way when he says that it is a mark of the virtuous person that she performs virtuous actions with pleasure rather than pain. What he envisages is the difference between, on the one hand, doing a generous act, but with a conscious effort, awareness of being pulled to do something else and with felt regret afterwards; and, on the other hand, just doing it readily and effortlessly. The virtuous person will just do it; her intelligent and educated disposition encounters no block from unwillingness, and so she experiences the

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<sup>3</sup> This is particularly important when focusing on vice, since non-secular views of flourishing often understand vice in terms of a non-secular concept like sin.

kind of pleasure in activity that Aristotle is concerned with. This is of course not the kind of pleasure that we think of as a perceptible feeling, but the kind of pleasure taken in effortless activity, whose hallmark is that it encounters no obstacle from contrary motivations on the agent's part.<sup>4</sup> Virtue is *motivationally unconflicted* in a way that contrasts with the person who does the right thing but unwillingly and so effort fully. Using Aristotle's convenient term, we can call this latter person the enkratic. The enkratic person succeeds in doing the right thing, but has to combat contrary motivation in order to do so, and is not acting from an unconflicted state.

We also take it, along with Aristotle, that there is a similar contrast between the person who just does something cruel or mean without felt conflict or regret, and the person who does it, but whose action registers with him as a lapse from the conviction that this is the wrong thing to do, and who subsequently does feel regret. Again using Aristotle's convenient term, we can call the latter person the akratic, and the former vicious.

Here we meet a point which needs to be considered in contemporary discussions of vice. The above contrasts take over Aristotle's contrasts between virtue and vice on the one hand, and enkrateia and akrasia on the other – but do we actually understand Aristotle's conception of vice? In contemporary society we are discouraged from being 'judgmental', and the idea of vice is often trivialized, so that people will say that their vices are indulgences like food or buying shoes. This might not matter much, as it does not much matter that we do not in ordinary conversation use the term 'virtue' much: we still recognize virtues like bravery and generosity, and we still recognize vices like cowardice and cruelty. So we might retain the concept of vice, but in the form of recognizing vices rather than that of trying to take over the common usage of the term 'vice'.

An objection remains, however. We use the term 'vicious', but no longer use it to cover all or even most of the vices. We talk of people as vicious when they are cruel or aggressive; it sounds odd to us to say that cowardly or selfish people are vicious. This might suggest that there is a deeper problem than our use of 'vice' in finding unity among the vices. We could, it seems, recognize the vices without finding any common structure in them. If so, then virtues would have a shared structure, but vices would not, so that aiming to give a common account of the vices would be misguided.

This is a serious objection, but there are two powerful points against it. One is that much the same kind of objection could have been (and sometimes was) brought against study of virtue as a unified entity before the rise of interest in virtue and virtue ethics. In contemporary life ordinary discourse about virtue and the virtues had been philosophically ignored for over a century, so it is no surprise

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<sup>4</sup> Obstacles from outside the agent are another matter; here I am concerned with the lack of *internal* conflict in the virtuous.

that clear distinctions, and clear outlines of virtue ethics, were not to be found on the surface. After forty years of philosophical and psychological exploration, we now do have a clear view of the many different options there are for virtue and for the role of virtue in ethical theory. (They are still, of course, very disputed.) Vice has not been the object of this kind of intensive and extended discussion, so the fact that our present discourse does not deliver clear results about vice may well not be philosophically significant; it may indicate no more than that ordinary discourse reflects an uncritical cultural tendency to associate using vice terms with being ‘judgmental’, which is acceptable only in cases of clear harm to others. This may be no more philosophically significant than the fact that before the rise of discussion of virtue, many people associated that term with prudery about sex, something now seen as obviously culture-bound and no longer relevant.

Rehearsing Aristotle’s contrasts makes us realize that, independently of ordinary discourse, we do recognize the difference between the person who does not help but later regrets it, and the person to whom it does not even occur to offer help, and we also realize that this lines up with the difference between the person who helps but has to overcome reluctance in order to do so, and the person to whom it does not even occur not to help. We recognize, that is, a state that corresponds to virtue in being unconflicted, but contrasts with virtue in being unconflicted about doing the wrong thing rather than the right thing. We are implicitly recognizing a concept of vice which so far corresponds to Aristotle’s: it is internally unconflicted by contrast with the states of the people who act in ways that express motivational conflict. This gives us something important to begin from: virtue and vice are more stable than the motivationally conflicted states.<sup>5</sup>

One obvious implication of the discussion so far is that vice will be a character trait. Will it be the same kind of character trait as virtue? The vicious equally with the virtuous act in accordance with their settled and motivationally internalized convictions as to what they should do. Virtue, however, is a state which is the result of a certain kind of history; it can’t be acquired by reading books or by sheer will-power, but requires a specific kind of education, namely habituation through experience acquired in an intelligent way by learning from the virtuous. This is what is illuminated by the model of practical skill; virtue involves more than skill (especially its orientation to the good), but we cannot do better than Aristotle’s famously mundane view that, since things that we learn to do have to be learned by doing them, learning to be just is like learning to be a builder: you learn to do what the experts do, and in so doing you learn to do it in the right way, the virtuous or expert building way. You acquire not a routine but the right training and grasp of the skill or virtue. If vice is a character trait like virtue, then, we

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<sup>5</sup> I am using ‘state’ here in a generalizing way to cover all four of the conditions I am concentrating on; this does not imply being static as opposed to being dynamic.

would expect it to result from a history of learning along the lines of a practical skill. However, this does not go smoothly.

Two aspects can be picked out of the skill analogy for virtue: I have called these the *need to learn* and the *drive to aspire*.<sup>6</sup> The need to learn is the more obvious; I don't learn to build by foolishly starting from scratch, but by learning from people who already know how to do it. With virtue I cannot choose to learn from scratch, since I begin learning when very young, before I am in a position to learn critically. I learn from various sources in the culture: role models, books, in large part my parents and local peers. Some people, whether in real life or other parts of the culture, are role models from whom I learn, in various ways, to try to be and to act like them.

Here at the start there is a disanalogy with vice. We don't look up to cowards and dishonest people and try to be like them. We don't make movies honouring famous cowards, with film stars competing for the role; cowards feature as butts in comic movies in which they are the objects of derision. We don't use well-known cowards as sources of understanding to be conveyed to eager learners; people aim *not* to become well known as cowards.

The drive to aspire also does not seem to fit vice. The learner in virtue (ideally) comes to understand the point of what she learns to do, to come to acquire the skill in a way which is hers and not just mere imitating, and to keep improving at doing what she has learned.<sup>7</sup> In all these ways she moves beyond merely doing what a teacher or role model does, and comes to grasp what the point of it is, so that she will respond to a new situation in a way which will probably be *different* from what she has learnt in being a different type of action, but also the *same* as what she has learnt in being an exercise of the same virtue that she learnt in the previous type of situation. All of these points lead to absurdity when we think of vice. We do not ask ourselves whether an action really responded to the situation in an appropriately cowardly way. We don't ask if we were as cowardly as the situation demanded (indeed it sounds absurd to think of the *demands* of cowardice). We don't ask, after the action is done, whether we were cowardly enough. We aren't praised for the cowardice of our behaviour and encouraged to improve on this by making the next action an even better example of cowardice.

These points suggest that vice is not the same kind of character trait as virtue. Obviously people do learn to be dishonest, greedy and cowardly, but it can't be in the kind of way that they learn to be honest, temperate and courageous. This is significant for the structure of virtue and of vice, since the issue of how we learn to be virtuous is not separable from the issue of what virtue is. A virtue is a disposition which has come about as a result of a certain kind of history, and its

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<sup>6</sup> I develop these in chapter 3 of my book *Intelligent Virtue*, Oxford – New York, Oxford University Press, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> These three aspects of the drive to aspire are explored further in *Intelligent Virtue* (n.6).

nature can't be understood independently of that history. We expect the same to be true of vice; but it can't be the same kind of history.

Yet vice is a character trait, a disposition, which, as we acquire it, ends up with our being motivationally unconflicted in a way comparable to that of the virtuous. Perhaps it is a mistake to apply the skill analogy to vice? Perhaps the history that leads to the character trait of vice is different from the history that leads to the character trait of virtue and does not involve anything to which the skill analogy is appropriate.

One answer which I will not explore here is that vice is a positive aspiration to evil in a way that mirrors virtue's aspiration to good. This can be articulated in ways other than the one just rejected (aspiration to be cowardly, stingy and so on). I am leaving this aside in this paper because I am thinking of vice in terms of an account of virtue which is broadly Aristotelian in structure, in which, as we have seen, positive aspiration to evil does not fit. A full account of vice would explore this option.

A common and widely appealing way of thinking of vice is that is *falling for temptation*. The coward knows that she should not run away, but is unable to stand by that conviction because the thought of reaching her own safety tempts her to run, and she gives in the temptation. This account recommends itself for greed; the person is fully convinced that he should not have more to eat, but 'gives in' or 'falls for' the temptation to have that extra piece, and so acts greedily. Dishonesty is also readily seen on this pattern. The person knows that she should not swindle an easily fooled client, but 'can't help herself' going for so easy a profit, and so falsifies the papers. This account, however, does not fit all vices equally well, such as cruelty or envy. In any case, independently of that it has a problem right at the start: it makes vice a matter of failing to stick to what you are convinced is the right thing to do, and this fails to distinguish adequately between vice and *akrasia*. There are cowards who just run away, gluttonous people who just take another piece of pie and dishonest people who just go ahead with the swindle, with no motivational discomfort, no idea of being tempted to go against what they think they should do. These look like people whose vice is not *akratic*; they seem to have a settled and unconflicted character trait of some kind.

In ancient ethical thinking there is a running temptation to think of the vicious person as the person who simply goes for what she most *wants*, neglecting overall priorities. This can be seen as a version of the 'giving in to temptation' interpretation of vice. The ancient model of reasoning is often the reasoning which takes in a life overall, as opposed to wants and desires which are focussed only on their own gratification, and this sometimes suggests the model of the vicious person as someone who goes only for what gives them *pleasure* at the time, without taking account of the priorities of their life as a whole. This picture, however, is inadequate for an account of vice as a whole, as opposed to the particular vice of

intemperance.<sup>8</sup> Firstly, the objectives of the vicious need not be short-term gratifications: they might be as lengthy as Inspector Javert's years-long vindictive pursuit of Jean Valjean. They need not have anything to do with indulgence; Javert is hardly a model of self-indulgence in his gruelling pursuit. The problem is not that the vicious are aiming at getting self-indulgent gratifications, but that they are going for the wrong things, whether these are what they most want at the time or not. Secondly, it is exaggerated to think that the greedy or dishonest person will have no, or weak, overall values and priorities. Being greedy for money is compatible with running your life overall in a perfectly competent manner, one focussed on getting money, rather than giving money its appropriate place in your life.

As we can see from the above examples, it is not giving in to temptation that is at the heart of vice, but going for the wrong things. Is getting what to pursue wrong what most characterizes vice? In one way this has to be correct, because the virtuous person is the person whose disposition is to get things right – to make the right practical decisions in all their aspects, evaluative and mundane. There is an initial appeal, then, to this idea of vice as failure to do what the virtuous succeed in doing. The coward fails to grasp which kinds of things are really to be feared and which are not; similarly the gluttonous failed to grasp limits to indulgence in food, and the dishonest fails to grasp which things are to be thought of as others' and not your own. They are failures at being courageous, temperate and honest.

This idea also does not fit all vices equally well, but again there are deeper issues. Firstly, the general idea of failure will not do enough work here. Vicious people may turn out to have failed to learn something crucial, but vicious and bad people are not reasonably thought of as being blunderers, or dull and stupid. Becoming virtuous is not a course in which they get a failing grade. Some bad people are highly intelligent, and some vicious activities require intelligence, application and imagination. Vice is then not well characterized in terms simply of failure; it is a character trait, and a character trait can't be made up just of failures.

The vicious are getting something important wrong which the virtuous get right. Vices, however, may display, and some may require, intelligence and foresight, in this being like the virtues. (The importance of this may differ among different vices. Dishonesty will not develop very far without considerable intelligence; laziness is clearly different.)<sup>9</sup> The obvious way in which the vicious differ from the virtuous is that they get things wrong about value. The dishonest businesswoman thinks immediate gain is more important than running her

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<sup>8</sup> Aristotle's remarks on vice are coloured by the fact that he focuses on intemperance as a paradigm vice. For this and other illuminating points see Terence Irwin's interpretation of Aristotle on vice: 'Vice and Reason,' *Journal of Ethics* 5 (2001) 73-97.

<sup>9</sup> Matthias Haase has suggested that the same vices may come in an intelligent version and an unintelligent or stupid version, an idea worth further exploration.

business honestly. The coward thinks that immediate safety is more important than doing what will warn others. And so on. The vicious show, in a traditional formulation, ignorance of the good. They are mistaken in their priorities; they get wrong what matters in life, in ways that distinguish them from the virtuous.

An account of vice has to hold together, and do justice to, the following points about vice. It is a character trait, the state of the person who does the wrong thing and is characteristically (as a matter of character) unconflicted about it. It involves getting wrong matters of goodness and value which the virtuous get right. And (to varying degrees) it involves practical intelligence, something which also characterizes the virtuous. As a character trait, vice should be learnable in the way that virtue is learnable. But, as we have seen, the vicious do not have the same values as the virtuous, and so do not have the ethical aims that the virtuous aspire to as they learn to be virtuous. How then can the vicious learn to exercise the kind of practical intelligence that they often display? A cruel person may have as sensitive and practically intelligent a view of others' psychology as a tactful person, but may use this to hurt rather than to support.

Since we do seem to learn to be cruel as well as learning to be tactful, let us return to the skill analogy for virtue despite the problems aired above. There has often been a temptation to think of vice in terms of skill in a different way. Perhaps, it is suggested, virtue and vice both have the structure of a skill, and differ merely in the ends that they have. The cruel and the tactful learn the same practical skill, but apply it to different ends, the cruel to hurting and the tactful to supporting. The cruel, after all, can adjust means to ends, be aware of the different kinds of issues salient in a situation and deliberate skillfully; these are aspects of skill that can be learned and exercised systematically. How does this work out in terms of the skill analogy?

Here are two examples, one from productive and one from performance skills. A painter becomes skilled in her art, and can produce great paintings. But since these do not sell well, she produces kitschy paintings which sell for large sums of money. A cricketer becomes a skilled batsman, but makes money from spot-fixing during matches. (Spot-fixing is taking money from betting syndicates for deliberately playing badly at a certain agreed point in a game; people bet on the results of parts of a game as well as the result of the whole.)<sup>10</sup> These are clearly examples of having a skill and putting it to a mistaken end; they come from the point that ordinary skills, as has often been noticed, have the feature that the person who can paint well can also choose to paint badly, and the person who can play to win can also choose to play to lose. This use of skill to illuminate virtue and vice runs into problems with virtue, since it presents aspiring to be virtuous as detachable from the intelligent building-up of the virtuous disposition. But even

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<sup>10</sup> It is a form of cheating without necessarily affecting the result achieved by the whole team, and is thus hard to track. It clearly requires skill.

apart from that we can see that it is inadequate to explain the nature of vice, since nothing in it corresponds to the unconflicted nature of vice as opposed to *akrasia*. The painter and the cricketer might be perfectly happy with the use to which they are putting their skill, or they might be torn and internally conflicted. We have, then, not yet found the nature of vice.

However, if we return to the examples, they suggest a more subtle way in which we might find how we learn to be vicious. Instead of thinking of the painter and the cricketer as having the formed skill which they then apply to a wrong end, think of someone *learning* to do what they do – apply the skill instrumentally to achieving some other end. A painter learns to paint, but only to produce kitschy pictures which will sell well; a cricketer learns to play only in ways that focus on spot-fixing, and so learns to play badly as much as to play well. They haven't learnt to do the same thing as the expert painter and cricketer, since their exercise of skill is limited, and they cannot yet (and perhaps never can) paint or play as well as the expert painter and player do. On the other hand, it's clearly false that they haven't learned to paint, or to play cricket; they may be making lots of money for painting, or playing, the way they do. What is going on?

In their case the acquisition of the skill involves a misdirection as it is learnt. The pupils learn to do what painters and players do, but not in the way that painters and players typically do – that is, aspiring to acquire the skill. A skill has standards intrinsic to it, which a pupil has to respect if she wishes to acquire the skill. This is most obvious when a pupil comes to see that she won't succeed in reaching these because of lack of strength, aptitude and so on. Someone may, however, have the capacity to reach them, but instead of regarding doing this as a goal to be pursued for its own sake – for the sake of having the skill – regards reaching them merely as a means to something else, for example money. The painter will feel no need to practice beyond what she can do to produce money-making pictures; the cricketer will practice to lose as much as to win and so will not feel the need to develop the attitude of being part of a winning team. Their acquisition of the skill is limited, because it has been misdirected.

Making this distinction between reaching the standards of a skill, and learning the skill only for other purposes, does not imply that acquiring a skill should be 'above' thinking of uses to which it should be put. Of course a painter, and a cricketer, need to make money, and can reasonably hope that their work will be appreciated and famous. The important difference is between acquiring the skill, and then applying it to make money among other things, and misdirecting the acquisition of the skill towards those things *as it is learnt*. The standards of a skill both guide and constrain what the skilled person does with it. A skilled painter will aim to make money by exercising her skill, not by exercising her skill in a way that involves no respect for the standards of her art. A skilled cricketer, and other athletes, will aim to make money by exercising their skill to win, not by exercising it to lose. The pupils who have learnt the misdirected skill have in a sense not fully

acquired that skill, since they have no idea of what it is to exercise that skill in a non-instrumental way, a way in which the standards of the skill guide and constrain the way the skill is exercised. They have learned in a way that is indifferent to the standards of the skill, and to the extent that they are satisfied with this result they are mistaken about what it is to reach those standards. If, for example, the painter making her living from kitschy paintings feels thoroughly self-satisfied, she is mistaking what it is to be a painter, to strive to satisfy the standards of her skill. (This is not to say that we are in a position to blame her; skills have a different role in life than virtues do.) Similarly if the cricketer is thoroughly self-satisfied he has mistaken what it is to be a cricketer, as opposed to someone exploiting cricketing skills.

Does this illuminate the difference between learning to be virtuous and learning to be vicious? Take a young person whose father has run a business honestly for many years and been successful.<sup>11</sup> The son learns the business from him, but at every point his emphasis is on how much money is made. Focussing on this he notices not only ways in which more money could be made in the honest ways assumed hitherto, but also dishonest ways in which money could be made, or ways that never occurred to his father. Going for getting the most money he proceeds to cheat unsuspecting clients. The difference between him and his father is *not* that his father was uninterested in money; it's that for the father the pursuit of money was guided and constrained by honesty, whereas for the son it is not. The son thus does not aspire to be honest as his father did; he holds a value which honest people see to be mistaken. However, as far as the running of the business goes, the son has learned from his father the kinds of actions an honest person would have learned (by way of business expertise, marketing skills and so on). It was while he was learning them, not after, that the son learned to make money in ways not guided or restrained by honesty. In learning to run the business in ways focussed only on making money he is like the cricketer who learns to play in a way focussed on making money by spot fixing. Both of them are missing something important about the whole endeavor they are occupied in, but they can exercise cleverness in the ways they act.

Here as often we can learn from Aristotle, who contrasts practical intelligence with another ability, which he calls cleverness (*deinotes*).<sup>12</sup> This is involved in practical wisdom, since practically wise people not only have the right aims but are intelligent in the ways they achieve them, but it can also achieve ends in a way detached from aspiring to the right ends. We would all, of course, prefer to be intelligent rather than to be slow or dull; there is nothing to be rejected about cleverness in itself. But someone who is *merely* clever can end up pursuing money,

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<sup>11</sup> I add this point to remove the idea that the son might be reacting against deficiencies in what his father has been doing.

<sup>12</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1144a20-b1.

success, status or other such aims in ways that are detached from concern with virtue. This is most obvious with money, but it is easy to think of other examples: a writer who achieves success by writings which make hurtful revelations about other people, an academic who exploits the work of others without acknowledgement, and so on. There are of course people who do this sort of thing once, or occasionally, and feel conflicted about it. However, we are thinking of people who act like this because they have *learnt* to pursue their aims in ways that are detached from the ethical values which guide and constrain the way the virtuous pursue them. And this seems promising as an account of vice. These are people who are not conflicted – they act without internal struggle because they have learnt to act this way and have got used to feeling positively about it. They do not share the aims of the virtuous: they are not aiming to be honest, or compassionate. At the same time, they are not aiming to be *dishonest* or mean. They are not aiming to be any kind of person at all. They are just aiming at having money, status or whatever, and they have learned to do this in the same ways that the virtuous have, and may be good at it. In their case they have limited their lessons to ways of achieving things like money and status, ignoring the considerations which guide and constrain the virtuous as they achieve the same aims, considerations which enable the virtuous to aspire to become honest, brave and so on.

This account of vice meets the desiderata mentioned above, that vice is an unconflicted character trait, that the vicious get wrong about value what the virtuous get right, and that the vicious can nevertheless display a kind of practical intelligence in exercising the vices. The intelligence in practical matters which the vicious display may overlap with that of the virtuous, as with the cruel person who is as good as reading people's reactions as the tactful person. But the virtuous have developed this practical intelligence while, and in the course of, learning to aspire to be a certain kind of person – tactful, honest and so on – while the vicious have learned it in a way detached from these aims. There is truth in the idea that the intelligence of the vicious is limited, and that because of this narrowness of scope and vision it may end up undermining, rather than furthering, the person's goals. The 'smart' vicious person may trip herself up because of failing to comprehend what is beyond her limited range. However, this idea, which has often served to make virtuous people feel better about worldly failure, should not be pushed too hard; some of the vicious do die prosperous and successful.

The present account of vice also accounts for the point that the cowardly are not aspiring to be cowardly; vice turns out not to be an aspiration to be vicious, but to go for the same everyday things in life that the virtuous go for – money, success and so on – but in a way detached from what the virtuous take to be important. What is this 'detachment', and how does it relate to the traditional thought mentioned above, that the vicious are ignorant of the good? Here it is helpful to bear in mind that for vice to be a character trait which is relevantly like

virtue in being unconflicted, it has to have been developed in ways which involve not only the building up of beliefs but the formation of our emotional and affective side. The virtuous person learns that it is right to do the fair thing, and learns through experience and teaching not to feel resentful about a fair distribution which disadvantages him. The vicious person is the person who does feel resentful, and who does not come to see the point of respecting fairness. She develops in a way that tries to evade fairness or to exploit occasions where fairness is demanded, feeling resentful when she is forced to be fair and pleased when she can get away with being unfair to her own advantage. We may say that she is ignorant or mistaken about fairness; she gets it wrong about what fairness is and what its value is, where the virtuous gets it right. Or we may say that she is indifferent to these things.<sup>13</sup> With someone who is vicious (rather than akratic) these are not alternatives; both are right. The virtuous person comes to feel less and less impeded in virtuous action by contrary feelings or inclinations, as he comes to be more and more confident that the virtuous aim is worth aiming for. Similarly the vicious person comes to feel more and more indifferent to considerations of virtue as he becomes more and more confident that the virtuous aim is silly, or for losers, and the like. Ignorance of the good, and insensitivity to it, are mutually reinforcing, just as are true beliefs about the good, and increasing motivation to pursue it. In one case we may be struck by someone's indifference to, say, suffering, and in another case it is the person's misconception of what is worth doing that we notice. But indifference and ignorance of value go together; both are involved in a developed vice, for the same reason that practical intelligence and positive motivation are in the case of virtue.<sup>14</sup>

This account of vice also goes some way towards accounting for another point. Since virtues all involve practical intelligence, which is not compartmentalized by the different areas it deals with, there is a tendency for virtues to be integrated or unified by the exercise of practical intelligence in them. This does not go over to vices, however. The practical intelligence in a vice is, as we have seen, cleverness, focussed on getting various ordinary aims in life, such as money and status, in indifference to considerations of virtue, which might restrain the cleverness in some directions, and guide it in others. The focus of cleverness on one such aim, such as money, has no tendency in itself to unify its pursuit with others in the person's life, such as having a family, or being famous. This myopia of cleverness means that a vice can develop without integration from other character traits (except those whose exercise is instrumentally required to achieve the end of making money). Insofar as the person's life is unified by the pursuit of a single end

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<sup>13</sup> For interesting remarks about indifference in the context of vice see Neera Badhwar in chapters 6 and 7 of her *Well-Being*, Oxford – New York, Oxford University Press, 2014.

<sup>14</sup> In this paper I do not go into the details of how the vicious' characteristic way of getting it wrong about value involves ignorance and mistake; I hope to extend work on the vices I this direction.

like money, this pursuit produces a unification which is generally regarded, in the wider culture and not merely in philosophy, as artificial and forced. Lives of the vicious, in fact and fiction, are often represented as compartmentalized in this kind of way; the all-consuming pursuit of money in particular is generally recognized as producing a life which is unsatisfactory in its structure.

Further, the disunified way in which vices can develop in the person means that the life of the vicious can be internally conflicted in ways that have nothing to do with the internal conflicts of the enkratic and the akratic. Cowardice will tend to interfere with cruelty, arrogance with ambition, stinginess with greed. Moreover, vices are unlikely to develop on any scale without the assistance of two virtues which have been labelled ‘executive’ virtues, courage and temperance. If you are unable to stand up for your projects or to resist short-term gratifications, you are unlikely to achieve anything either virtuous or vicious on a large scale. To the extent that vices do develop on a large scale, then, there is likely to be an internal conflict with the recognition of the value of resisting danger and temptation.<sup>15</sup>

I have argued that we can give an account of vice which shows how it is similar to virtue in being an unconflicted character trait, which is learned in the same way as a virtue is learned, but in a way which is misdirected because indifferent to and mistaken about the kind of person to aspire to be as we learn to exercise our practical intelligence. I’ve also suggested that the account fits well with some aspects of vice. There is more to be said about vice, both within an account of virtue of an Aristotelian kind and beyond it to other types. I have stressed the skill analogy in this paper because it is so important to an account of virtue which is Aristotelian in structure, and because, at least at first, it appears to offer problems for a corresponding account of vice. I hope to have shown that the development of a practical skill is as useful for giving an account of vice as it is for giving an account of virtue.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> It may be objected that executive virtues are just traits that can be harnessed to any end, and so not in themselves virtues. However, insofar as courage and temperance import the value of being a brave and self-controlled person they do import the idea of a virtue trait as worth having in itself, not just instrumentally to achieving some end.

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