POST-*PHRONETIC* PAIN

KRISTJÁN KRISTJÁNSSON

1. INTRODUCTION

THIS article is about post-*phronetic* pain (hereafter: PPP): namely, residual pain or psychological discomfort after a fully *phronetic* moral decision has been made.[1] As David Carr correctly notes, the *phronetic* person is "no more blessed than others with prescience", nor fully immune to factual errors and miscalculations;[2] hence an apparently sound moral decision may turn out be faulty, and/or have grave, but unforeseeable, consequences, causing the agent pain. Here, however, I am not concerned with such cases of averse "moral luck", but rather with ones where the decision was morally impeccable and had the intended consequences; yet the agent feels pain after making it.

To be more precise, I am thinking here of moral decisions where the agent has identified and conceptualised the moral problem adequately, aligned her emotions with reason, considered the situation in the light of an understanding of what is conducive to flourishing, and arbitrated well between competing values and virtues. The image portrayed here is of the meta-virtue of *phronesis* synthesising and harmonising various factors and considerations, in

k.kristjansson@bham.ac.uk, Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, School of Education, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, B15 2TT, United Kingdom.

[1] Historically, *phronesis* has been translated into English as "practical wisdom" or "prudence", less commonly also as "good sense", "practical reason" or even just "intelligence". However, given that the term *phronesis* is making a comeback within professional ethics and character education in the English-speaking world, there may be less need than before to translate it (C. DARNELL, L. GULLIFORD, K. KRISTJÁNSSON, P. PARIS, Phronesis *and the Knowledge-Action Gap in Moral Psychology and Moral Education: A New Synthesis?*, «Human Development», 62/3 (2019), pp. 101-129). In the empirical work on *phronesis* conducted in my own research centre, we have noticed that ordinary people do not seem to be familiar with the word "prudence" or link it to *phronesis*. Somewhat surprisingly, there may thus be more need nowadays to explain the meaning of "prudence" as referring to *phronesis*, rather than the other way round.

[2] D. CARR, *Virtue, Mixed Emotions and Moral Ambivalence*, «Philosophy», 84/1 (2009), pp. 31-46, p. 41.

Aristotle's model of *phronesis* as the locus and terminus of advanced ethical decision-making.[3] The reason for setting the discussion in the context of Aristotelian theory is simply that, with a few notable exceptions (such as Russell;[4] Grossmann *et al.*[5]), contemporary explorations of practical wisdom seldom amount to more than helpful footnotes to Aristotle; hence, it is important to note what "the Philosopher" said or would have said about the subject. However, the motivations behind this article are essentially revisionary with respect to Aristotle's own views, rather than exegetical, and thus remain "neo-Aristotelian" in a very expansive and rhapsodic sense.

From the perspective of standard Aristotelian theory, my title contains an oxymoron. The very *raison d'etre* of *phronesis* is that of a vehicle for psychological unity: an antidote to moral and emotional ambivalence. In contrast to the vicious, as well as to the incontinent and continent (the levels at which most people are at),[6] and even to the successfully habituated but as yet non-*phronetically* virtuous (who all are variously awash with moral turmoil and emotional conflicts), *phronesis* signals not so much the permanent absence of such psychological disunity as its presently successful mitigation.[7]

The key to this understanding of *phronesis* lies in Aristotle's cognitive emotional theory,[8] a distinctive feature of which is the assumption that emotional reactions are essential ingredients in virtues. Emotional dispositions can, no less than action dispositions, have an "intermediate and best condition [...] proper to virtue" – a condition in which the relevant emotions are felt "at the right times, about the right things, towards the right people, for the right end and in the right way".[9] If a relevant emotion is "too intense or slack" for its present object, we are badly off in relation to it, but if it is intermediate, we

[3] K. Kristjánsson, B. Fowers, C. Darnell, D. Pollard, Phronesis *(Practical Wisdom) as a Type of Contextual Integrative Thinking*, «Review of General Psychology», 25/3 (2021), pp. 239-257.

[4] D. C. Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2009.

[5] I. Grossmann, N. M. Weststrate, M. Ardelt, J. P. Brienza, M. Dong, M. Ferrari, M. A. Fournier, C. S. Hu, H. C. Nusbaum, J. Vervaeke, *The Science of Wisdom in a Polarized World: Knowns and Unknowns*, «Psychological Inquiry», 31/2 (2020), pp. 103-133.

[6] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. T. Irwin, Hackett, Indianapolis 1985, 1150a15. From now on, references to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (*EN*) will be made addressing Bekker page number.

[7] Fowers argues, for example, those who have not found such an arrangement are "likely to experience frequent, paralyzing conflicts, frustration, and a disorienting tendency to lurch back and forth" (B. J. Fowers, *Virtue and Psychology: Pursuing Excellence in Ordinary Practices*, American Psychological Association, Washington dc 2005, p. 63).

[8] K. Kristjánsson, *Virtuous Emotions*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2018, chap. 1.

[9] *EN* 1106b17-35.

are "well off".[10] And persons can be fully virtuous only if they are regularly disposed to experience emotions in this medial way. Hence, the role of *phronesis* is not only to direct actions but also to guide emotions: more specifically, to regulate them in accordance with reason – not in the sense of suppressing them but rather in infusing them with reason.

Some of our morally justifiable emotions have "negative valence", i.e. they are painful. So a virtuous reaction to a situation which the agent is incapable of altering may be painful; for example, compassion (*eleos*) as pain at somebody's undeserved bad fortune. However, if a discrete decision is called for, which involves a trade-off between that emotion and some other virtue or consideration, and the agent takes such a decision *phronetically* and is able to enact it, she should feel a sense of satisfaction at the decision without ambivalence or pain. That is because, *ex hypothesi*, the decision has brought the emotion into harmony with reason, issuing in a state of virtuous psychological unity. Any residual pain attached to the decision *per se* would, according to this theory, be indicative of a lack of virtuous unity and hence be symptomatic of something less than a *phronetic* decision having been made.

This is why my title appears oxymoronic, at least if understood as restrictively as it is meant to be here. A fully fledged *phronimos* can, of course, experience warranted pain about various remaining contextual facets of situation *S*, after taking a *phronetic* decision related to *S*, as well as about various actions required by that decision.[11] However, if she continues to experience pain about the *content* of the soundly made decision itself, then something is amiss with her *phronesis*.[12] In the context of true *phronesis*, PPP therefore does not exist.

Aristotle himself nowhere formulates the non-PPP claim explicitly. It is commonly assumed in contemporary virtue ethics that this was his view, giv-

[10] *EN* 1105b26-28.

[11] This would be the standard explanation of Aristotle's claim that the virtue of bravery is "painful" (*EN* 1117a33-b16). It is not the content of the brave decision that is painful, because that decision aims at an "end" that "seems to be pleasant". Yet the bravery calls for various actions that may be painful.

[12] Admittedly, the distinction between the *content* and *context* of a decision is not always crystal-clear. Why should the circumstances of the decision and the foregone alternatives not register in the content of the decision? That would, at first sight, seem to fit well with Aristotle's own emphasis on the particularity of practical decisions. Aristotle's text does, indeed, make plenty of room for the possibility that, although the *phronimos* never regrets the fact that she made the decision that she did under the circumstances, she is and continues to be pained by having been faultlessly embroiled in circumstances that made it the case that the right decision was a difficult one. Nevertheless, I take it that there is a distinction to be made between this sort of pain and feeling (residual) pain over the content of the decision itself. Otherwise, all difficult decisions would, *ex hypothesi*, be painful, content-wise, because that is then what defines them as difficult in the first place. An important, if subtle, conceptual distinction would thus be lost.

en on the one hand the strict distinction he wants to draw between virtuous decisions (as fully harmonising with reason and psychologically unified) versus continent ones, and on the other hand his claim that virtue has "its pleasure within itself".[13] However, it could be argued that there is no ground for supposing that "harmonising with reason" carries an additional entailment that says that the decision is totally painless and to the agent's liking. Moreover, the unique pleasure of virtue does not entail that it is exclusively or smoothly pleasant. As noted, I am not engaged in Aristotelian exegesis, and eschew claims about what may have been Aristotle's own measured view.[14] It suffices for present purposes that the non-PPP claim is typically assumed in current Aristotelian virtue theory.[15] I refer to it in what follows, therefore, simply as an "Aristotelian assumption".[16]

This assumption of full post-*phronetic* psychological unity and a lack of anguish distinguishes Aristotelian moral decision-making in many ways from its Kantian and utilitarian competitors. For Kantians, far from psychological unity signalling full moral maturity, the state of fully cooperating emotions following a moral decision compromises its moral worth. On that account it is the Aristotelian continent agent who is the true paragon of morality whereas the *phronimos* is simply a morally lightweight conformist. For utilitarians, the extreme demand of maximising the overall happiness of all sentient beings keeps the moral agent constantly on her toes and prohibits any comforting psychological equilibrium. Each decision reached is, in a way, dissatisfying because one could always have done better; and this realisation then becomes a spur to continued moral progress.[17]

In comparison with these theories, the Aristotelian assumption of the nature of apt ethical decision-making sounds distinctively *therapeutic*,[18] tying in nicely (or suspiciously, depending on one's philosophical allegiances) with Aristotle's teleological view of psycho-social homeostasis. According to that view, the parts of the soul are arranged such that it may adjust successfully to the various situations in which individuals will find themselves, *inter alia,* by

[13] *EN* 1099a15-23.

[14] Nevertheless, in the third section I canvass various bits and pieces of Aristotle's own texts, and none of them happens to contain an explicit accommodation of PPP or indicate that the standard picture of Aristotle should be retired.

[15] S. Stark, *Virtue and Emotion*, «Noûs», 35/3 (2001), pp. 440-455.

[16] It might also be referred to as a "thesis" or an "implication" of the more explicit thesis of the psychological unity of the (fully) virtuous. However, the somewhat loose term "assumption" serves my present purposes best here.

[17] There are obviously huge literatures on these particular aspects of Kantianism and utilitarianism, and not all authors will agree with the interpretation on offer here.

[18] D. Carr, *Feelings in Moral Conflict and the Hazards of Emotional Intelligence*, «Ethical Theory and Moral Practice», 5/1 (2002), pp. 3-21.

adopting medial emotional states of character.[19] It is no wonder, perhaps, that one of the most powerful paradigms of emotional cultivation as therapeutic in modernity, that of "emotional intelligence", cites Aristotle as its progenitor and claims to be doing little more than repackaging his theory for contemporary consumption.[20] While emotion-intelligence theorists ignore the moral dimension of Aristotle's emotional homeostasis theory (with EQ being an amoral construct), thus undermining their own claims about an Aristotelian heritage,[21] they do seem to have a point about a psychological-harmony thesis uniting them.

Whatever the true relationship between Aristotle's theory and the paradigm of emotional intelligence, there is a serious difficulty with the former's non-PPP assumption. It simply seems to fall afoul of the principle of "minimal psychological realism", which asserts that moral theories must ensure that the character, decision processing and behaviour they prescribe are "possible, or are perceived to be possible, for creatures like us".[22] This is, indeed, a serious problem for any naturalistic theory, like Aristotelian virtue ethics, which is meant to be answerable to empirical evidence. It is an uncontested assumption of everyday psychology that people frequently agonise retrospectively over even the best of decisions they have made. Consider Sophie's choice of her son over her daughter in the concentration-camp scenario: the pain (eventually leading to her suicide) from which Sophie suffered was not caused by regret about having made the wrong decision. Her premise, that the boy would stand a better chance of survival in the camp than the daughter, was unfalteringly sound as such; yet she was prey to conflicting emotions – about her very choice – of such intensity and fecundity that they gradually destroyed her life.[23]

[19] K. Kristjánsson, *Aristotle, Emotions, and Education*, Ashgate-Routledge, Aldershot 2007, chap. 4.

[20] D. Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*, Bantam Books, New York 1995.

[21] K. Kristjánsson, *Aristotle, Emotions, and Education*, cit., chap. 6.

[22] O. Flanagan, *Varieties of Moral Personality: Ethics and Psychological Realism,* Harvard University Press, Cambridge (ma) 1991, p. 32.

[23] I make use of various moral quandaries in what follows, such as Sophie's choice. It should be noted that, whereas psychologists tend to use "quandary" and "dilemma" interchangeably, within philosophical virtues ethics the term "dilemma" is usually reserved for quandaries of a certain specific sort: namely, intractable quandaries, often involving incommensurable values, such as (arguably) in the case of Sophie's choice. I am not making the case in what follows that all the quandaries I discuss are "dilemmas" in this narrow sense. What I am arguing is rather that even when the quandary is amenable to a reasonable *phronetic* decision, and not intractable, pain may remain. There is obviously a long tradition of discussing moral quandaries and dilemmas within virtue ethics, by authors such as Foot and Hursthouse. However, to the best of my knowledge, none of it has been couched in the language of "post-*phronetic* pain".

The point does not depend on extreme scenarios; consider a *phronetic* decision after a deliberative trade-off between honesty and kindness to tell one's friend that the dress she intends to wear to the party looks awful – because the friend is strong enough to hear the truth and there are not sufficient grounds for a white lie. After the decision has been enacted, one can easily – or so it seems – experience PPP in which conflicting emotions run amok in one's mind, for example when faced with the friend's weeping and wailing (although anticipated and taken into account in the decision-making). What is more, it is not only evidently a common occurrence that both budding and seasoned *phronimoi* can experience such PPP; it would even seem to be a plausible assumption that the more intellectually nuanced the *phronimos* is, the more likely she would be to experience ambivalent emotions about the relevant decision.

I have previously addressed this problem in the context of trying to make sense (psychologically and morally) of the construct of "ambivalent emotions".[24] There, I explored Stark's[25] solution to this problem from within the perspective of virtue theory, and Carr's[26] criticisms of this solution. I argued that although Carr's criticisms miss the mark, Stark's solution fails to hold water for a different reason. I ended up in broad agreement with Carr's conclusion that Aristotle's strict psychological unity thesis had to be abandoned. This, however, was coupled with reservations about the fetishisation of a constructed disunity of mind that I sensed in Carr's attempts to identify a silver lining in the remaining cloud.[27] In the present article, I want to probe deeper. I begin with a brief rehearsal of the structure of the argument from my previous foray, following which I examine four different attempts to defang the non-PPP assumption from within Aristotle's own virtue theory. The fourth section delineates the nature of the PPP by arguing that it comprises a number of distinguishable emotions of moral sadness. The final section probes a number of resources within neo-Aristotelian theory that would allow us to reconceptualise PPP as beneficial to a certain extent – without fetishising it as a pure blessing in disguise.

2. The Mystery of the Missing Motivation

One way to conceptualise the problem of non-PPP in Aristotelian virtue theory is to couch it in terms of "the mystery of the missing motiva-

[24] K. Kristjánsson, *The Trouble with Ambivalent Emotions*, «Philosophy», 85/334 (2010), pp. 485-510; K. Kristjánsson, *Virtues and Vices in Positive Psychology: A Philosophical Critique*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2013, chap. 7.

[25] S. Stark, *Virtue and Emotion*, cit.

[26] D. Carr, *Virtue, Mixed Emotions and Moral Ambivalence*, cit.

[27] I recommend Carr's two articles about ambivalent, conflicting emotions (2002; 2009) as the ideal starting point for anyone who wants to get an initial hold on the problem under discussion.

tion".[28] Consider a case slightly more intense than that of the friend's ugly dress, while less dramatic than Sophie's fatal choice, and in fact one based on a real incident. You work in a UK police response unit. A new female student officer of South Asian heritage joins your team. While alone with an experienced white, male colleague, who happens to be a close personal friend, he refers to the new officer in blatantly racist terms and makes offensive comments about her origin, appearance and character. You consider it a moral quandary whether to report this case to your supervisor (sergeant), as required by your formal Ethical Code, or to have a quiet word with your colleague/friend and try to talk some sense into him. After a period of intense deliberation, applying effectively your metacognitive capacity of *phronesis*, you decide to report the case to the sergeant. However, you continue to feel compassion towards your friend and painful unease about your decision, although you firmly believe it was the right one.

Aristotle invokes various assumptions that seem relevant to a case like this one. Consider the following:

(1) We cannot control the experience of occurrent emotions once the relevant emotional disposition to experience them is established. (This is the point of Aristotle's observation that we blame or praise persons not for their emotions *qua* occurrent episodes – say, for simply being angry – but for their *qua* settled character states (*hexeis*) that constitute virtues or vices, see *EN* 1105b20-1106a7).

(2) Occurrent emotions are at least weakly motivating. (This assumption seems to follow from Aristotle's definition of emotion as always "being accompanied by pain and pleasure",[29] and his view of all emotions involving a goal-directed activity that can either be frustrated or satisfied, see Kristjánsson).[30]

(3) There is an optimal way to feel in each given situation, and the morally virtuous person is motivated to feel in that way. (This is when an emotion hits the golden mean of being felt at the right time, about the right thing, toward the right person(s), for the right end and in the right way).[31]

(4) Virtuous persons – as distinct from the merely self-controlled (continent) ones – are motivationally unified. (This follows from Aristotle's well-known distinction between virtue and continence).

(5) Virtuous persons – as distinct from the continent ones – do not need to suppress their non-optimal emotions. (Again, this follows from Aristotle's distinction between virtue and continence).

[28] K. KRISTJÁNSSON, *The Trouble with Ambivalent Emotions*, cit.; K. KRISTJÁNSSON, *Virtues and Vices in Positive Psychology*, cit., chap. 7.

[29] ARISTOTLE, *On Rhetoric*, trans. G. A. Kennedy, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007, 1378a20-21; from now on I will refer to it as *Rhet.*

[30] K. KRISTJÁNSSON, *Virtuous Emotions*, cit., chap. 1.

[31] *EN* 1106b17-35.

Assumptions *(1)-(5)* are not strictly incompatible, but give rise to a puzzle: "the mystery of the missing motivation". Recall that the police officer's *phronetic* balancing act yielded the conclusion to report the colleague. Although both happiness (over doing one's duty; following the Code; creating a good precedent; etc.) and compassion towards the friend are rationally warranted here, when viewed in isolation, the optimal way to feel (given the assumed aptness of the *phronetic* decision) is to be happy. *Ex hypothesi*, according to *(3)* above, the fully virtuous person is motivated to feel in that way. Yet, this person also presumably has a virtuous disposition to feel compassion when a friend gets into serious trouble. According to *(1)*, the person cannot help feeling that emotion, and that emotion is at least weakly motivating (see *(2)*). Nevertheless, being motivationally unified *(4)*, the virtuous person does not need to suppress the non-optimal weak motivation *(5)*.

The remaining mystery, then, is: what happens to that non-optimal motivation? To reiterate an earlier point, there is nothing mysterious from an Aristotelian perspective about the police officer feeling compassion towards the colleague with respect to the punishment that he is likely to receive, as well as further painful feelings about various other aspects of his life and their friendship that may be affected by the case. What should not happen, however, is enduring pain about the *content of the decision itself* (recall Footnote 12 above), given that it was fully *phronetic*.[32] How does *phronesis* silence the relevant motivation?

In my earlier stab at this problem – where I approached it from a different angle – I allocated considerable space to a debate between Stark[33] and Carr[34] on whether it is possible so defuse the apparent mystery (which Stark believes can be done but Carr does not). For present purposes, I simply rehearse briefly Stark's argument. Stark suggests that we drop assumption *(2)*: that all occurrent emotions are at least weakly motivating. When two conflicting but virtue-based reactions to a situation are potentially appropriate (as I assume to be the case in the police story), we do not simply want the considerations inherent in the overall less virtuous option to be silenced or unrecognised or pushed out of view. Such a manoeuvre would make the psychology of the virtuous person seem singularly one-dimensional and immune from the sense of the tragic that permeates any mature human self. Nevertheless, we want

[32] The orthodox Aristotelian might argue that the reason for the remaining pain in this story is most likely that the decision was not fully *phronetic*. Indeed, it is true that Aristotle would ascribe full *phronesis* only to a very small group of people. However, if we are not allowed to assume in a story like this that a fully *phronetic* decision has been reached, then it seems that *phronesis* is just a rarefied ideal that has no traction in the real world – which means that its naturalistic appeal for virtue ethics is lost. I revisit this consideration in the following section.

[33] S. Stark, *Virtue and Emotion*, cit.

[34] D. Carr, *Virtue, Mixed Emotions and Moral Ambivalence*, cit.

that person to experience the morally proper emotion in the end and to be motivationally unified, and therefore distinguishable from the continent person. How can these claims be made compatible? Stark's suggestion is to reject motivational internalism and maintain instead that, in the case of virtuous agents, they can experience emotions (*qua* moral evaluations) as yielding normative reasons but without having intrinsic motivational force. The quest for overall virtue silences not the non-optimal normative reason – its very non-optimality continues to be experienced as a reason for a sense of loss – but rather that reason *qua* motivational reason.

There are widely differing views on whether Aristotle's virtue theory is to be understood as motivationally internalist across the board[35] or as mixing motivational internalism and externalism depending on the developmental level of the person passing the relevant moral judgement.[36] Motivational externalists believe that persons can sincerely pass moral judgements without being intrinsically moved by them. The trouble with Stark's externalism, however, is that it is not an externalism about moral judgements of this kind (as mere detached evaluations, say: "It is morally wrong to report a close friend and colleague to a superior for a fairly minor offence") but about moral *emotions*. But emotions already contain within them a conative as well as a cognitive component. Emotions are thus intrinsically motivating (at least weakly) in the way that some other types of moral evaluations are not.[37] If that is so, one simply cannot be a moral externalist about emotions. The only way to deflect this concern would be to reject the consensus that emotions have a conative element and understand them as mere cognitions. Some emotion theorists do hold such a pure cognitive view (see e.g. Nussbaum[38] and the Stoics); but for Aristotle emotions are affective and conative as well as cognitive.

There is a further problem here. If the police officer in story is a *phronimos*, then even on a mixed externalist-internalist reading of Aristotle, all of that particular person's moral judgements should be intrinsically motivating. He is, *ex hypothesi*, fully motivationally unified, meaning that all his moral beliefs are fully in line with his emotions and he does not feel emotions that are not backed up by moral judgements and emotions are intrinsically motivating, be it weakly or strongly. However, even if we allow that the police officer is not

[35] C. Strandberg, *Aristotle's Internalism in the* Nicomachean Ethics, «Journal of Value Inquiry», 34/1 (2000), pp. 71-87.

[36] K. Kristjánsson, *Virtues and Vices in Positive Psychology*, cit., chap. 5.

[37] See e.g. Greenspan's observation, albeit in a different context, that we "cannot simply decide to treat emotions, like judgements, as merely prima facie", in P. S. Greenspan, *A Case of Mixed Feelings: Ambivalence and the Logic of Emotion*, in A. O. Rorty (ed.), *Explaining Emotions*, University of California Press, Berkeley (ca) 1980, pp. 223-250, p. 233.

[38] M. C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001.

a full *phronimos*, though was able to take a *phronetic* decision in this particular case, then it is possible that he will continue to harbour detached moral beliefs that do not motivate him intrinsically, because of their lack of attachment to the corresponding emotional repertoire. In that case, then, it is indeed possible, for instance, that he continues to harbour (*prima facie*) beliefs about the wrongness of his particular decision. However, those beliefs would not explain the pain that he feels about the content of the *phronetic* decision. That pain is an emotional PPP, as understood here. So unless one refuses to accept the very possibility of a fully *phronetic* decision accompanied by residual PPP, it does not matter whether the police officer is a fully fledged *phronimos* or not; the mystery of the missing motivation remains.

3. Some Possible Aristotelian Rejoinders

There are at least four potential rejoinders to save the face of Aristotelian virtue theory about *phronesis*.

Rejoinder (1): What Aristotle actually says about the psychological unity of the *phronimos* is heavily dependent on his thesis of the (ideal) unity of moral virtue. However, what that thesis means and implies is controversial; and ascribing the non-PPP assumption to Aristotle may be an over-interpretation of the unity thesis, thus creating a kind of pseudo-problem for Aristotelian virtue ethics.

Response: During the recent surge of interest in practical wisdom in philosophy and psychology, there has gradually evolved what Miller[39] calls a neo-Aristotelian "standard model of *phronesis*", and most of the discussion has taken place within that model (see e.g. Darnell *et al.*;[40] Kristjánsson *et al.*[41]).[42] Within the standard model there are many interpretative avenues, however, and it is not always clear whether scepticism levelled at the *phronesis* construct is scepticism at the standard model, at Aristotle's theory more generally, or at the very idea of an independent intellectual virtue synthesising the moral virtues (see e.g. De Caro, Vaccarezza, Niccoli;[43] Miller).[44]

[39] C. B. Miller, *Flirting with Skepticism about Practical Wisdom*, in M. S. Vaccarezza, M. de Caro (eds.), *Practical Wisdom: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, Routledge, London 2021, pp. 52-69.

[40] C. Darnell *et al.*, Phronesis *and the Knowledge-Action Gap in Moral Psychology and Moral Education*, cit.

[41] K. Kristjánsson *et al.*, Phronesis *(Practical Wisdom) as a Type of Contextual Integrative Thinking*, cit.

[42] However, for an exception, see e.g. I. Grossmann *et al.*, *The Science of Wisdom in a Polarized World*, cit.

[43] M. De Caro, M. S. Vaccarezza, A. Niccoli, Phronesis *as Ethical Expertise: Naturalism of Second Nature and the Unity of Virtue*, «Journal of Value Inquiry», 52/3 (2018), pp. 287-305.

[44] C. B. Miller, *Flirting with Skepticism about Practical Wisdom*, cit.

While it is impossible to disentangle all this criticism and assess to what extent it threatens Aristotelian *phronesis* or the idea of practical wisdom more generally, it is apt to concede that much of what Aristotle says about the unity of the virtues, and the role of *phronesis* in securing that unity, is anything but clear. Many commentators have been puzzled by his claim that the virtues are essentially unified. Does that mean that a virtuous person never faces moral quandaries? Of course not; in fact, Aristotle discusses such quandaries in detail. A more reasonable understanding will be based on the role *phronesis* plays in overseeing the virtues and adjudicating the relative weight of each in apparent conflicts. Aristotle simply says of the unity of the virtues that when one has *phronesis*, which is a single state, one has "all the [moral] virtues as well".[45] It thus lies in the very nature of Aristotelian *phronesis* that it develops over one's character in a holistic way (see Annas).[46] As Annas explains, life itself it not compartmentalised, descriptively or evaluatively, and the unity of the virtues is "no odder or more mysterious than the fact that a pianist does not develop one skill for fingering and another, quite separate skill for tempo, only subsequently wondering how to integrate the results".[47] However, Annas's analogy is set in the context of her skills-account of virtue which again is highly controversial because of the strict distinction that Aristotle himself makes between *phronesis* (and virtue more generally) and *techné*.[48]

Without getting embroiled in Aristotelian exegesis, I would say that in order to preserve anything that can count as an orthodox Aristotelian account of *phronesis,* we need the assumption that although the virtues are not essentially unified, they can be brought into a state of unification in the act of ethical deliberation and decision-making, just like a conductor imposes harmony on a disharmonious orchestra. This is precisely what distinguishes a *phronetic* decision from both the decision-making of the continent, who imposes integrity on her moral make-up through the suppression of a motivation,[49] and that of the agent with merely habituated but not-*phronetic*-infused virtue, who knows how to comply with the demands of the most immediate virtue relevant to the given situation but without recourse to a meta-perspective (see Müller).[50] Given what Aristotle says about phenomenological valence at the

[45] *EN* 1145a1-3.

[46] J. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2011, p. 68.

[47] *Ibidem*, p. 87.

[48] J. Hacker-Wright, *Skill, Practical Wisdom, and Ethical Naturalism*, «Ethical Theory and Moral Practice», 18/5 (2015), pp. 983-993.

[49] K. Kristjánsson, *Is the Virtue of Integrity Redundant in Aristotelian Virtue Ethics?*, «Apeiron», 53/1 (2019), pp. 93-115.

[50] A. W. Müller, *Aristotle's Conception of Ethical and Natural Virtue*, in J. Szaif, M. Lutz-Bachmann (eds.), *Was ist das für den Menschen Gute?/What is Good for a Human Being?*, de Gruyter, Berlin 2004, pp. 18-53.

successful completion of virtue, opposed to mere self-control (see further below), it seems hard to avoid the assumption of non-PPP in Aristotelian theory.

Rejoinder (2): *Phronesis* is an ideal, which real people can only approximate. *Phronesis* is, in fact, a threshold concept; and even for those who have crossed that threshold, they will still fall short of perfect *phronesis*. Hence, as they are not completely unified, they may still experience PPP.

Response: I agree that *phronesis*, for Aristotle, is a threshold concept (just like flourishing and many of his key naturalistic concepts are) or, more specifically, what Russell calls a "satis concept".[51] Satis concepts form a subset of threshold concepts: those with vague, rather than sharp, boundaries. "Satis concepts" are such that, for the concept C, something can satisfy it simply by being "C enough" rather than being "absolutely C" or "as C as can be". I also accept that Aristotle often retains Plato's habit of defining concepts with respect to their most fully realised instances.

Nevertheless, there are two problems with this rejoinder. The first is that the assumption of the psychological unity of the *phronimos* is such a vital part of the characterisation of *phronesis* that if we confine that aspect to a never-fully-realised approximation, we run the risk of turning *phronesis* into a rarefied ideal – some sort of philosophical plaything – without any real-world relevance. The second and more significant problem is that it is so far from being the case that we would expect nonchalance and immunity to pain to increase with greater psycho-moral maturity that most people would consider the opposite true: namely, that the more discriminate and nuanced the moral make-up of a person becomes, the greater her scope will be for residual post-operative pain at foreclosed alternatives.

Rejoinder (3): When Aristotle talks about the pleasure that completes fully virtuous activity, he makes the pleasure conditional upon the end of virtue being successfully completed. However, *ex hypothesi*, because in a typical *phronetic* adjudication one moral virtue takes priority over another, the outweighed virtue is not brought to completion. Hence, residual PPP originates from the non-completed virtue – even if psychological harmony has been achieved through that virtue being trumped in the particular instance.

Response: This rejoinder refers to Aristotle's comments about the specific type of pleasure signalling the completion of virtuous activity. Such activity is true "*en-ergeia*", the actualisation of our true "*ergon*" or functional essence as human beings: a sign of development, progress and fulfilment. Indeed, Aristotle does not seriously consider the possibility that anyone except the virtuous can experience this type of supervening pleasure, which is not pleasure *simpliciter*, but the feeling of complete non-frustration and lack of inner conflict. As it dif-

[51] D. C. Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2009, chap. 4.

fers in species and value from all other pleasures (*EN* 1175a21-b24), we could call it the specific experience of *phronetic* virtue and *eudaimonia* in action. Hence, Aristotle cleverly "weaves pleasure" into virtue (*EN* 1153b14-15); pleasure "completes" the activities of the virtuous "like the bloom on youths" (*EN* 1095b19-20; 1174b30-35) – a feature akin to the idea of "flow" in contemporary psychology.[52]

However, what *Rejoinder (3)* fastens on is an important caveat. It is not the case "that the active exercise of every virtue is pleasant; it is pleasant only in so far as we attain the end [of the virtue]" (*EN* 1117b15-16). This caveat may seem to place an extreme limitation on Aristotelian "flow". After all, there are arguably a number of virtuous flourishing-constituting activities that can never be "completed" in a strict sense. However, that observation aside, *Rejoinder (3)* focuses specifically on the motivational aspect of *phronesis*. At least on one plausible interpretation of this, *phronesis* incorporates both an extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. The extrinsic motivation derives from each of the specific virtues that are perceived to be relevant to the given situation upon which *phronesis* is called to adjudicate: say honesty versus kindness. The intrinsic motivation, on the other hand, derives from the blueprint component of *phronesis* itself: the drive to enhance flourishing through a *phronetic* decision (Kristjánsson *et al.*[53]).[54] While a successful *phronetic* decision, *ex hypothesi*, completes the end of *phronesis*, it will typically leave one of the adjudicated-upon moral virtues (or even both, in case some sort a middle-ground reaction is identified) uncompleted.[55] This would then explain the PPP.

I agree with the terms in which this rejoinder is couched but disagree with the conclusion. The focus in this article is not on various kinds of pain that may remain after a *phronetic* decision relating to unresolved contextual features of the situation and how it continues to unfold, but is specifically, and exclusively, about PPP directed at the *phronetic* decision itself. However, as that decision is by definition successful and complete there is no obvious reason, in the Aristotelian picture, why it should give rise to pain.

Rejoinder (4): Aristotle did not share contemporary psychology's simplistic dichotomy of phenomenological valence as either "positive" (pleasant) or "negative" (painful). Indeed, he considered all emotions to be of mixed valence. Hence, although a *phronetic* decision creates an emotion that is overall

[52] M. Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, Harper, New York 1990.

[53] K. Kristjánsson *et al.*, Phronesis *(Practical Wisdom) as a Type of Contextual Integrative Thinking*, cit.

[54] I rely here on Irwin's view of *phronesis* as not being about means only (T. H. Irwin, *Aristotle on Reason, Desire, and Virtue*, «Journal of Philosophy», 72/17 (1975), pp. 567-578).

[55] The idea of perfectly harmonious 'honest kindness' or 'kind honesty' is idyllic but unrealistic. In most conflict situations, a trade-off takes place in which the demands of one or both of the virtues need to be mitigated.

pleasant, it will inevitably also be mixed with some painful elements; hence the possibility of PPP and the accompanying emotional ambivalence.

Response: This rejoinder makes an important and valid point: namely, that whereas Aristotle does characterise each emotion he describes (in the *Rhetoric*) as *overall* "painful" or "pleasant", he seems to have understood most, if not all, emotions to be of *mixed* valence: namely, to incorporate a mixture of pains/disturbance/frustration and pleasure/restoration/gratification (see Frede,[56] 1996; cf. Konstan[57]).[58] This feature is conspicuously elicited in a discussion of two emotions to which Aristotle devotes considerable space in the *Rhetoric*: anger and emulation. While both are overall of negative valence, the pain in anger is partly offset by the pleasant anticipation of possible retaliation; the pain in emulation, at one's inferiority *vis-à-vis* an admired exemplar, is partly offset by one's pleasure in cherishing the admired qualities of the exemplar.

There are two things to note about this observation, however. The first is that although Aristotle makes this comment about emotions related to specific virtues (such as justified anger as part of the virtue of mildness [of temper]), he does not say anything similar about the feelings associated with *phronetic* activity. Second, even if he did mean that the phenomenology of *phronesis* is also of mixed valence, he would still, *ex hypothesi*, have to say that it is overall pleasant. However, the salient issue about PPP is not that it may just mar slightly an overall pleasant emotion completing a sound decision; more seriously – at least in dramatic cases such as that of *Sophie's Choice* – the overall valence may actually be negative. Or, more precisely, the fact that Sophie associates her decision more with pain than pleasure would not, for most people, undermine the claim that her decision could still have been fully *phronetic*.

Here we seem to have run out of interpretative acrobatics that would enable PPP to be conveniently accommodated within an Aristotelian standard model of *phronesis*.

4. Types of Moral Sadness

If PPP is indeed real, how can we best account for it within a revised neo-Aristotelian model of *phronesis*? I am taking it for granted here that a broad

[56] D. Frede, *Mixed Feelings in Aristotle's* Rhetoric, in A. E. Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's* Rhetoric, University of California Press, Berkeley (ca) 1996, pp. 258-285.

[57] D. Konstan, *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks: Studies in Aristotle and Classical Literature*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 2006, pp. 33-34.

[58] It would be very Aristotelian to assume that the nature of the exact valence mixture in each instance will be heavily dependent on context (both cultural and individual). Indeed, this is exactly what the current empirical evidence indicates (see e.g. B. Morgan, L. Gulliford, K. Kristjánsson, *Gratitude in the uk: A New Prototype Analysis and a Cross-Cultural Comparison*, «Journal of Positive Psychology», 9/4 (2014), pp. 281-294).

Aristotelian model offers so many theoretical and practical advantages over other models of wise decision-making (such as Grossmann *et al.*[59]) that we had better try to modify it rather than discarding it and starting afresh just because of one serious anomaly (Kristjánsson *et al.*[60]).

The best approach is to examine what Aristotle says about post-decision pain at characterological levels lower than that of the *phronimoi*. Consider the vicious first. Some would argue that those may stay clear of emotional ambivalences as long as they remain coherent in their evil-doing. However, Aristotle dismisses this possibility. He thinks that consistently vicious decision-making instantiating a state of mental homeostasis is a chimera, both because the vicious are constantly pulled in different directions by impulsive desires and that, deep down, they will always have some vague sense of, and wish for, goodness that upsets their balance. As their "soul is in conflict", between appetite for the bad and wish for the good, "each part pulls in a different direction", gradually tearing them apart (*EN* 1166b11-26). The emotions of the vicious, be they painful or pleasant, are thus in a constant state of ambivalence, cross-crossing each other like mistimed fireworks.

What Aristotle says about the incontinent and continent is more predictable. The incontinent, who know the good but fall to temptations, suffer from remorse and guilt. The continent, who force themselves to do the good and succeed in doing so, suffer from emotional ambivalence after each continent decision because the contra-continent motivation is still active in their souls. Aristotle is particularly interested in actions that are 'mixed', such as when a tyrant forces you to do something shameful to save your wife and children (*EN* 1110a5-18). After such a decision, under duress, one experiences a mixture of pleasure and pain; we could call it regret (at having been put in such a terrible position) rather than remorse.

I have spoken so far as if the various incarnations of pain at a moral decision by different character types constitute qualitatively different uncomfortable *feelings*. That is slightly misleading from within Aristotelian emotion theory, however, for two reason. First, we are concerned with different cognitively based *emotions* rather than mere non-cognitive feelings. Second, Aristotle does not distinguish between emotions on grounds of their qualitatively differently experienced pain or pleasure (contra e.g. Nussbaum).[61] Aristotle regards pleasure and pain as mere sensations, not as intentional states with cognitive content. To be sure, different overall painful emotions, such as anger and grief, are experienced differently, but that is because of their different

[59] I. Grossmann *et al.*, *The Science of Wisdom in a Polarized World*, cit.

[60] K. Kristjánsson *et al.*, Phronesis *(Practical Wisdom) as a Type of Contextual Integrative Thinking*, cit.

[61] M. C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, cit, p. 64.

cognitive consorts (judgements or thoughts) and goal-directed activities, not because the painful sensations accompanying them vary in kind (see further in Fortenbaugh).[62] This means that if we want to create space for PPP, we must give an account of that pain as a different emotional pain, post-moral-decision, than for the character types delineated above, where the word "different" refers to the emotion(s) in question rather than the pain being phenomenologically different *qua* pain.

Here we are obviously entering an uncharted territory, given Aristotle's (apparent) non-PPP assumption. I do not propose to offer an exhaustive taxonomy of emotions that can represent PPP, but I will just quickly enumerate a few candidates that come to mind.[63] What unites them is that they are all types of *moral sadness* accompanying the *phronetic* decision: sadness about that decision *qua* decision rather than just about its context or subsequent ramifications.

The first overall painful emotion is what we could call *tragic sadness*. Consider a case where I am on a sinking ship and there is space in a remaining lifeboat only for one of my two children: twins of the same gender and indistinguishable in terms of health or other personal features. A *phronetic* decision in this case seems limited to just tossing a coin to pick the twin to survive. An alternative way of looking at this case would be to say that its conditions rule out the very possibility of a *phronetic* decision. However, that seems to be too defeatist; a *phronetic* person would surely opt for saving one of her children rather than neither. At the same time, it seems absurd to claim that such a decision could be taken from anything that could be called a "unified mind". The choice is inherently tragic, however well-grounded it may be. This choice may seem to resemble the duress choice mentioned earlier. However, the agent is not strictly speaking operating under duress. This case is more similar to that of Sophie's choice, but her case included a number of other conditions that render it philosophically controversial what a *phronetic* choice amounts to for Sophie; the issue there is not about a choice that is fairly uncontroversially *phronetic* but nevertheless tragic.

In some cases the very fact of how marginal the decision was, even if it is deemed to be *phronetic*, can be a source of pain. Let us say that the police officer who decided to report his colleague is convinced that he took the right decision. However, the fact of how tight and tenuous the reflection leading up to that decision was can issue in what we could call *marginality sadness*: sad-

[62] W. W. Fortenbaugh, *Aristotle on Emotion*, Duckworth, London 2002, p. 111.

[63] The question of the individuation of emotions is a tricky one (K. Kristjánsson, *Aristotle, Emotions, and Education*, cit., chap. 4). If readers worry that specifying the emotional states described below as discrete emotions elicits the problem of an uncontrollable proliferation of emotions, I am quite happy to redescribe them simply as variants of the same emotion, moral sadness.

ness attached to the fact that the decision was not more clear-cut. The problem here is not so much that of a consideration that continues to bother him retrospectively but rather that the awareness of the marginal nature of the decision-making forecloses a complete unity of mind.

Consider next cases where the *phronetic* decision is more clear-cut but where the *phronimos* knows that the counter-weighing consideration can never be fully silenced because of its deep-seatedness in her psyche. This sort of *non-silenceable sadness* is very common in cases of separation after a long marriage. A woman may decide to leave her husband after realising that their marriage is hopeless. Yet she knows that her abiding love for her husband will always remain as a backseat emotion in her mind. An orthodox Aristotelian might want to say that the existence of a non-silenceable contra-consideration simply rules out the categorisation of the woman's decision as *phronetic*. However, that sounds again like a theoretical overkill. Fully silencing a consideration such as the woman's abiding love would more plausibly be explained as suppression rather than reason-infusion, which would turn the decision into a continent rather than a *phronetic* one.

Another common set of cases revolve around what we could call *bystander sadness*. This is the sadness felt, for example, by the army officer who decides to bomb a terrorist compound, knowing that some innocent bystanders may be hurt by the blast. Once again, the alternative and more orthodox Aristotelian option would be to consider this an encumbered, tragic situation where no truly *phronetic* decision can be reached – reminiscent of Aristotle's anti-Socratic thesis (directed at Socrates's the-good-person-cannot-be-harmed mantra) that those who maintain that we can flourish "when we are broken on the wheel, or fall into terrible misfortunes, provided that we are good […] are talking nonsense" (*EN* 1153b19-21). However, what proves too much proves nothing. If we rule out any decision accompanied by "bystander sadness" as potentially *phronetic*, we seem to be saying that almost no significant decisions taken in war can be *phronetic* – which is excessively restrictive.

The final emotion on this non-exhaustive list of PPP is *no-brainer sadness*: sadness accompanying a decision that is so obviously sound that a *phronetic* deliberation will yield an almost instantaneous and indubitable result. Consider a doctor who has to choose between five badly injured survivors of an air crash (whose lives could all be saved in a hour) and one more badly injured one (whose rescue would also take an hour). Other things being equal (e.g. the most badly injured one is not the doctor's spouse or child), there is not much doubt that the correct *phronetic* decision is to save the five. To claim, however, that this decision cannot be deemed fully *phronetic* unless the doctor has managed to defuse (albeit not suppress) the haunting image of the single survivor "sacrificed" to die seems to betray an unreasonably one-dimensional and unrealistic picture of human psychology.

5. Does PPP Have Any Redeeming Features?

The cases explored in the preceding section all involved decisions that can arguably be deemed *phronetic* but were characterised by PPP rather than any idyllic unity of mind – and indeed pain that is not only felt retrospectively (post-*phronesis*) but can be felt before and during the actual decision-making also. The cases suggested are so common that it seems possible to generalise them by claiming that almost all significant *phronetic* decisions are likely to be accompanied by some kind of pain; in some cases pain that outweighs any positively felt emotions at having made a good decision.

Recognising this, it may still be possible to make the distinctions between the different levels of virtue (and/or pre-virtue) that Aristotle makes between incontinence, continence and virtue. Thus, while the residual pain of the incontinent agent would be that of failure to do what she knows is right, and that of the continent agent over unsatisfied desire to which she is still attached, that of the virtuous agent would be on grounds of inability to act on virtues she still finds morally compelling. But it would no longer seem plausible to construe the difference between continence and virtue in terms of the presence or absence of PPP. The maturely virtuous could hardly avoid PPP in some if not all morally serious (especially conflicted) circumstances. So, if one is still disposed to persist with a broadly Aristotelian virtue theory, some serious revision of Aristotle's (apparent) account would seem inescapable at this point.

It is tempting, therefore, to simply expunge the non-PPP assumption from neo-Aristotelian virtue theory and rest content with the moral benefits only that a *phronetic* decision will elicit, rather than expecting any pleasure- (or freedom-from-pain) benefits also. Such an expungement would tally with a more general rejection of a flourishing–happiness concordance thesis: a thesis that is often ascribed to Aristotle (see Kristjánsson).[64] It is tempting also, however, to take a different tack and ask whether the expungement of the non-PPP assumption could confer some benefits on Aristotelian virtue theory (and indeed on the *phronetic* agent) other than just making the theory more psychologically realistic. Is PPP some sort of a blessing in disguise for the *phronetic* agent? May enduring emotional ambivalence actually, as Greenspan suggests, "improve the agent's overall situation"?[65]

These questions bring us back to the two papers by David Carr that I cited at the outset. Carr emphatically rejects "therapeutic accounts" of emotional

[64] K. Kristjánsson, *Flourishing as the Aim of Education: A Neo-Aristotelian View*, Routledge, London 2020, chap. 3.

[65] P. S. Greenspan, *Emotions and Reason: An Inquiry into Emotional Justification*, Routledge, London 1988, p. 127.

regulation, such as "emotional intelligence", for their insistence on "complete emotional harmony" and unproblematic resolution of "unease and conflict". He considers such endeavours both psychologically disabling and morally untoward. In contrast, he argues, "emotional ambivalence, conflict and disquiet, even at the price of some practical dysfunctionality, cannot but be part and parcel of any recognisable human condition". On his alternative model of conflictual unity, the virtuous are "precisely those equipped with the richly complex – albeit conflicted – psychological life through which alternative possibilities of (virtuous) action remain available".[66]

I argued previously that in wanting to avoid fetishising psychological unity, Carr comes perilously close to fetishising its disunity (similar to what some critics have seen as Nussbaum's fetishisation of the fragility of goodness in her famous 1986 work). However, on closer inspection, Carr escapes this criticism. His two papers[67] offer a measured view of the pros and cons of what he calls "the slings and arrows of emotional ambivalence and moral uncertainty".[68] He tries to draw a distinction between an unhealthy (pathological, neurotic) state of ambivalence and a healthy appreciation of conflict that may enhance possibilities of virtuous character. While warning against therapeutic conceptions of emotional virtue, be those motivated by Aristotle, EQ or misguided understandings of psychoanalysis, he remains acutely aware of the Aristotelian challenge that it is difficult to envisage true virtue, or indeed any effective agency, in a person torn by conflict.

Carr mentions in passing some benefits that the virtuous agent may derive from a constructive dividedness of mind. If we try to offer a more systematic account of those, it may be helpful to divide them into four categories. First are the *epistemic* benefits. Emotional ambivalence can possibly be intellectually character-building through the exploration of alternative possibilities that conflicting emotions are likely to evoke. Very much like the famous Millian argument about the need to have truth constantly challenged in order for it to retain its heartfelt vitality, one could argue that optimal emotions would lose their epistemic urgency and immediacy – and ultimately their motivational bite – if they did not regularly come into conflict with other (non-optimal) emotions. Second are the *existential* benefits of understanding one's own existence better in the light of a deeper understanding of the human condition (as inevitably riven by conflict). Third are the *developmental/educational* benefits. What ensures our psychological

[66] D. Carr, *Feelings in Moral Conflict and the Hazards of Emotional Intelligence*, cit., pp. 18-20; Id., *Virtue, Mixed Emotions and Moral Ambivalence*, cit., p. 37.

[67] D. Carr, *Feelings in Moral Conflict and the Hazards of Emotional Intelligence*, cit.; D. Carr, *Virtue, Mixed Emotions and Moral Ambivalence*, cit.

[68] D. Carr, *Virtue, Mixed Emotions and Moral Ambivalence*, cit., p. 46.

equilibrium by insulating us from ambivalent and/or painful experiences may be the very enemy of what promotes developmentally needed psychological change.[69] Fourth are the *moral* benefits (and here Carr[70] has much to say) of reminding us of moral diversity and the reality of pluralistic approaches to moral truths in the world – as the ambivalent emotions may often be seen to represent a healthy plurality of moral options.

It is moot to what extent Aristotle would be willing to accept these potential "benefits" as benefits, and to what extent neo-Aristotelians should take them on board. *Epistemically*, one could argue that the acquisition of truth may be impeded rather than enhanced by the baptism of fire that comes from being constantly challenged by non-optimal viewpoints. This is not how Aristotle describes the typical trajectory of character development, at any rate. *Existentially*, there a thin line between constructive existential awareness and debilitating existential anxiety. *Developmentally*, it is well-known that what does not kill you does not always make you stronger. And *educationally*, too much appreciation of moral diversity can easily lead to unhelpful moral scepticism, if not cynicism, rather than progress.

I have simply presented those potential benefits as possible stepping-stones on the next part of the journey for neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists – *after* the acknowledgement that *phronesis* is not always accompanied by psychological unity and a lack of emotional ambivalence. The philosophical task is getting the moral psychology of the *phronetic* agent right. What lies beyond that task is perhaps better left to the educationists than the philosophers.

Acknowledgements

I dedicate this article to my friend and former colleague David Carr in appreciation of his brilliant work in moral psychology and educational philosophy. I am grateful to Professor John Haldane for helpful comments on an earlier version.

Abstract · The aim of this article is to refute the standard assumption in Aristotelian virtue theory that a fully *phronetic* decision is characterised by psychological unity and freedom from ambivalent emotions eliciting post-*phronetic* pain (PPP). After introducing the topic, the second section rehearses the structure of an argument showing that the absence of non-optimal emotions after a *phronetic* decision creates a mystery for Aristotelian virtue theory. The third section examines four different (but ultimately unsuccessful) attempts to save Aristotle's face, by defanging the non-PPP assumption from within his virtue theory. The fourth section delineates the nature of the PPP by arguing that it comprises a number of distinguishable emotions of

[69] C. D. C. Reeve, *Love's Confusions*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (ma) 2005, p. 34.

[70] D. Carr, *Feelings in Moral Conflict and the Hazards of Emotional Intelligence*, cit.

moral sadness. The final section probes a number of resources within neo-Aristotelian theory that would allow us to reconceptualise PPP as beneficial to a certain extent, without fetishising it as a pure blessing in disguise.

KEYWORDS · *Phronesis*, Aristotle, Ambivalent Emotions, (Dis)unity of Character, Moral Sadness.