

Phronêsis and Kalokagathia in Eudemian Ethics VIII.3

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ABSTRACT In *Eudemian Ethics* VIII.3, Aristotle treats a virtue that he calls *kalokagathia*, “nobility-and-goodness.” This virtue appears to be quite important, and he even identifies it with “perfect virtue” (*EE* VIII.3, 1249a17). This makes it puzzling that the *Nicomachean Ethics*, a text that largely parallels the *Eudemian Ethics*, does not discuss *kalokagathia* at all. I argue that the reason for this difference has to do with the role that the intellectual virtue practical wisdom (*phronêsis*) plays in these treatises. The *Nicomachean Ethics*, I argue, makes use of a more expansive conception of *phronêsis* than does the *Eudemian Ethics*. Hence, the work that is done by *kalokagathia* in the *Eudemian Ethics*—crucially, accounting for the unity of the virtues—is done in the *Nicomachean Ethics* by *phronêsis*.

KEYWORDS Aristotle, *kalokagathia*, *phronêsis*, practical wisdom, *Eudemian Ethics*, common books

AT THE VERY END OF THE *EUDEMIAN ETHICS*, Aristotle discusses a virtue that he calls *kalokagathia*, which may be translated literally but clumsily as “nobility-and-goodness,” but which I will leave untranslated throughout, since this term does not correspond neatly to any term in English.¹ On the face of it, *kalokagathia* appears to be quite important. In fact, Aristotle goes so far as to identify *kalokagathia* with complete virtue (*EE* VIII.3, 1249a16–17).² It is puzzling, then, that in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, a work that otherwise quite closely mirrors the *Eudemian Ethics*,

¹Or, for that matter, to any term in any modern language that I am familiar with. ‘Nobility-and-goodness’ is the translation taken by Solomon in the ROT (cf. Dirlmeier’s *Schön-und-Gutheit*). Inwood and Woolf, and Woods prefer the slightly less clumsy ‘nobility,’ just as Bonet translates *nobleza*. This translation might be fine for some contexts, but I do not think that it is well-suited for this particular text, because it obscures the, so to speak, bipartite aspect of the term, which is important not only for understanding the term’s meaning, but also for understanding Aristotle’s procedure in *EE* VIII.3. The same goes for ‘gentleman.’ Presumably it is because of considerations like this that Caiani leaves the term untranslated.

²I follow Susemihl and most commentators in treating the last three chapters of the *EE* as a separate book from *EE* VII (although, as I will explain below, it is clearly not a coherent book but rather a collection of fragments).

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there is no discussion of *kalokagathia* at all.³ Here my aim will be twofold: first, to explain the purpose of the discussion of *kalokagathia* in the *EE*, and, second, to explain why the virtue is not found in the *NE*. I shall argue that the main aim of the chapter is to provide a characterization of the ideally virtuous agent in such a way as to respect the idea that there is a single unified condition characteristic of such a person. In this respect, I argue, the aim of *EE* VIII.3 overlaps with that of *NE* VI.13, and I think that this overlap is key to understanding why *kalokagathia* is absent in the *NE*. The reason Aristotle uses *kalokagathia* in the *EE* where he uses *phronêsis* in the *NE* is because he conceives of the connection between virtue of character and *phronêsis* differently: in the *NE*, Aristotle conceives of these as two parts or aspects of a single unified state, but in the *EE*, he regards them as, at least to some degree, separable.

If this picture is right, then it is quite important for several reasons. First, it suggests that the account of *phronêsis* and its relation to virtue of character that we find in *NE* VI is distinctly *Nicomachean*.⁴ Since *phronêsis* is a crucial concept in Aristotle's ethical system, if the conception of *phronêsis* is different in these two works, it suggests that these works differ more widely than is commonly appreciated. On what appears to be the most common view, the *EE* and the *NE* differ primarily on points of detail, not on the fundamental issues.⁵ And if they differ more significantly than commonly appreciated, the books proper to the *EE* deserve more attention from scholars than they have generally received. Second, the picture that I will defend has implications for the longstanding debate about the origin of the so-called common books—the three central books of the *Nicomachean Ethics* that are also transmitted, in identical form, in the middle of the *Eudemian Ethics*. Scholars have long speculated about where these books at first originated and how they came to be shared by both ethical treatises. This topic, of course, is related to the difficult question of the relationship between the *EE* and the *NE*—why do we have two treatises that are so similar, and which came first? I will not be able to go into all of these issues here, but I do think that my argument provides good reason to believe that at least a substantial part of *NE* VI is distinctively *Nicomachean* and does not belong in the *EE* at all,⁶ where it was placed by a later editor.

I proceed as follows. In section 1, I begin by giving a brief overview of *EE* VIII.3 and some of the available views about what its purpose is. Then, in section 2, I turn my attention to the connection between that chapter and the account of the unity

³In fact, Aristotle only mentions *kalokagathia* two times in the *NE* (1124a4, 1179b10).

⁴Throughout, I shall refer to *NE* VI/*EE* V as “*NE* VI” for simplicity. This should be taken as a rigid designator and not as prejudging the question whether *NE* VI is properly *Nicomachean*.

⁵A nice example of this view is how people typically interpret the account of voluntary action in the *EE*. According to most interpreters (e.g. Cooper, “Aristotelian Responsibility”), the main difference between that account and the account in the *NE* is relatively minor—the *EE* classifies compelled actions as involuntary, while the *NE* does not. I argue in “Aim of Eudemian Ethics” that this is not the case, and that the differences between the two treatments go much deeper than that.

⁶On this point, I agree with Rowe, *Ethics*, 109–10; and Frede, “Common Books.” However, notice that I only claim that a very substantial part of *NE* VI is uniquely *Nicomachean*. A number of scholars (e.g. Lorenz, “Plain and Qualified Akrasia”) have shown, to my mind conclusively, that at the very least *NE* VII contains a mixture of *Eudemian* and *Nicomachean* content. It is possible (even likely) that the same is true of *NE* VI. I only claim that the actual theory of *phronêsis* presented there, especially in *NE* VI.12–13, is distinctively *Nicomachean*.

of the virtues in *NE* VI.13. I argue that these two chapters constitute two different answers to the same question. Both aim to explain the unified condition of the ideally virtuous agent. But where *NE* VI.13 does this by means of *phronêsis*—that is, by arguing that *phronêsis* and the virtues are mutually entailing, and hence that authoritative virtue (*kuria aretê*) is a single state that involves all the virtues of character and practical wisdom—*EE* VIII.3 does this by appealing to *kalokagathia*, concluding that the condition of the *kalos kagathos* is identical to “complete virtue” (*aretê teleios* [*EE* VIII.3, 1249a16–17]). Finally, in section 3, I turn my attention to the question of what explains this difference and argue that Aristotle is operating with an importantly different conception of *phronêsis* and its relationship to virtue of character than in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, a conception of *phronêsis* closer to what was probably the ordinary Greek conception.

I. KALOKAGATHIA

Let me begin by giving a brief overview of the contents of *EE* VIII.3. I will reserve a more detailed discussion of the Greek concept of *kalokagathia* as well as the details of Aristotle’s argument for later.

The chapter opens by stating that the individual virtues have been examined and that it is now time to discuss the virtue that arises out of (*ek*) them (*EE* VIII.3, 1248b10). Aristotle does not give an argument for thinking that the resulting supervirtue is *kalokagathia*, but rather refers back to a previous discussion (*ekaloumen hêdê*⁷) in which he apparently made that identification (*EE* VIII.3, 1248b10). That previous text is not part of the *Eudemian Ethics* as we have it today. Already in the first lines of the passage, then, we have an indication that the account of *kalokagathia* that we get in VIII.3 forms part of a discussion that was present in the original *Eudemian Ethics* but has been lost, probably as a result of the judgment of one of Aristotle’s editors.⁸ The task of understanding *EE* VIII.3, then, consists in part in trying to reconstruct to the best of our abilities given our limited evidence what that original discussion might have looked like. That is the main aim of what follows.

⁷This is the reading of all the manuscripts and is rightly adopted by Susemihl, Walzer, and Mingay in the Oxford Classical Texts edition, as well as the main English translations (Solomon; Inwood and Woolf). Ross emends the imperfect *ekaloumen* to the present-tense *kaloumen*, and this reading is adopted by Jackson, Bonet, Woods, Caiani, and Kenny (Ross also deletes the *êdê*, but this needless intervention has not been accepted even by those who wish to make Aristotle speak in the present tense, since one can just as well interpret *êde* to mean not ‘already’ but ‘now’; see *LSJ*, s.v. ἤδη, 3). There is really nothing to be said in favor of this emendation other than that it would allow us to avoid the uncomfortable possibility that the *EE* as it has been transmitted by the tradition is almost certainly incomplete. And even if one rules out this possibility a priori as many commentators do, there are other ways that one might accommodate this reference (see the next note).

⁸I am not suggesting, of course, that this is decisive evidence. In addition to the question of what text to read, discussed in the last note, Inwood and Woolf, *Eudemian Ethics*, point out that it is possible to take this text as a reference not to some part of the *EE* but to some other work, which has been lost (something not implausible since a great many of Aristotle’s works have been lost). On balance, however, the most likely explanation for this reference is precisely that it refers to some part of the *EE* that has been lost, not only because that is the most plausible explanation from the way in which the reference is made (it sounds very much like Aristotle means to come back to a topic that he commented on earlier, as all the proponents of the emendation discussed in the previous note agree), and also because I think that it is clear that *EE* VIII consists entirely of fragmentary discussions.

After introducing the topic, Aristotle proceeds, apparently, to analyze *kalokagathia* into its components: a *kalos kagathos* is both good (*agathos*) and noble (*kalos*), and Aristotle proceeds to explain briefly what both goodness and nobility consist in. He does so by means of a distinction between good and noble things. His account of what the good person is like relies, in turn, on the familiar Aristotelian distinction between things that are good by nature and things that are good for a particular person.⁹ What is good for a particular person depends in part on that person's character, just as what foods are healthy for a particular person depends in part on the person's physical constitution. A bad person, as Aristotle tells us elsewhere (*Pol.* VII.17, 1336b8–11), might need to be beaten to correct his character. So beating, in this case, would be something good for him, but not, presumably, for someone who already has a good character. Only in the case of the good person do what is good for him and what is good by nature coincide. This, in fact, is how Aristotle defines the good person in *EE* VIII.3: a person is good if and only if the things that are good by nature are good for that person.

After characterizing the good person in this way, Aristotle considers how being *agathos* differs from being *kalos kagathos*. There is a big question, which I will discuss at some length below, about how Aristotle understands the relationship between these characteristics, but he does seem to think that they are separable and that what distinguishes the person who is *kalos kagathos* from the one who is merely *agathos* has to do with the person's evaluative outlook. A person who is *kalos kagathos* values noble things—for example, virtue and virtuous actions—for their own sake. The person who is merely good, on the other hand, need not. Thus, while the merely good person might count as virtuous in a way, the *kalos kagathos* is maximally virtuous—such a person's virtue is perfect or complete.

This constitutes, roughly, the first half of the chapter and will be my main concern here. Most of the relatively scant literature on this chapter, though, deals with the second half, where Aristotle raises the question of what the standard (*horos*) is to which the *kalos kagathos* refers when selecting things that are good by nature but not noble. Aristotle offers a rather obscure account of how the ultimate aim of such a person will be the life of contemplation, and hence that is the standard to which the *kalos kagathos* will look (*EE* VIII.3, 1249a21–b23). Although this passage is not my main focus, I do think it is important for understanding the first half of the chapter, as I discuss in section 3.

This summary should make clear that this text raises several important questions, which I address in the coming sections. For now, though, I wish to pause to consider the explanations given by various commentators for the place of this chapter in the treatise as a whole. There are three main suggestions to consider: (1) It is meant to conclude the treatise as a whole. (2) It is meant to rebut a traditional way of thinking about the good person's relationship with external goods. (3) It is meant to conclude the discussion of virtue of character specifically. Now I think that some version of the third view, suitably qualified, is correct, as I will defend in the next section. For now, I wish to start by saying a little bit about the first two views and why I find them unsatisfactory.

⁹Familiar from e.g. *NE* III.4.

The first view is suggested both by the location of the chapter—at the end of the treatise—and by the obvious parallels between the latter part of the chapter and *NEX*.6–8. The latter passage, of course, is the notorious conclusion to the *NE* in which Aristotle returns to the question of what *eudaimonia* consists in and offers a somewhat surprising answer, identifying the life of theoretical contemplation (*theoria*) as most *eudaimôn* and godlike. In the same way at the end of *EE* VIII.3, Aristotle seems to identify the theoretical life as the most desirable and divine form of life and suggests that it should be our ultimate aim.

There is, however, good reason for doubting that our chapter belongs where the manuscript tradition has placed it. First, unlike *NEX*, which is very clearly a return to the topic of *eudaimonia*, *EE* VIII.3 makes no explicit reference to *eudaimonia* at all, nor does Aristotle make any other remark in that chapter that would indicate that he means to be concluding the treatise. In fact, the way Aristotle introduces the topic suggests, in my view, that it was not intended to be placed there. As Woods points out,¹⁰ the way that Aristotle opens the chapter is more naturally read as a transition from the discussion of the individual virtues. This is inherently a strong reason for rejecting this interpretation. Moreover, there is good reason for doubting the compositional unity of *EE* VIII, which in turn suggests that the mere fact that the chapter occurs at the end of the treatise is perhaps not especially probative. *EE* VIII resembles a mere collection of scraps. Chapter 1 is manifestly a fragment since the first sentence neither introduces a new topic nor picks up where the preceding book left off.¹¹ Chapters 2 and 3 are less obviously fragmentary, but they also do not appear to form a continuous discussion.¹² A variety of possible hypotheses might explain how the book ended up this way. It is possible, of course, that it was left in its current state by Aristotle himself, who, perhaps, never got around to finishing up his fragmentary notes. But that hypothesis seems less likely than that they are simply fragments that were assembled by a later editor, probably from parts of the original *EE* that have been lost.¹³

Thirdly, there is ancient evidence that suggests the discussion of *kalokagathia* at the end of the treatise was not original. The *Magna Moralia*, a work of the Hellenistic period,¹⁴ which closely mirrors the *EE* and was likely written by a Peripatetic with access to a version of the *EE*, places the discussion of *kalokagathia* not at the end of

¹⁰Woods, *Aristotle*, 172.

¹¹As Cooper, *Reason*, 135n44; and Woods, *Aristotle*, 158, point out.

¹²Pace Whiting, "Self-Love," 165, who suggests, somewhat implausibly, that the common thread is that all three discussions are meant to deal with problems raised by Socrates.

¹³While it may be a good default position to assume that the texts we have now are more or less as they originally were, I think that many scholars have an excessive tendency to cling to this assumption in the face of countervailing evidence: the textual oddities of *EE* VIII clearly meet the bar for defeating this assumption. Arguing for this point in detail, though, would require addressing methodological questions beyond the scope of the present essay.

¹⁴Although I believe the evidence that the *MM* is Hellenistic is overwhelming, the view that it is by Aristotle is fairly common (due largely to the influence of Cooper, "*Magna Moralia*"; but see Rowe, "Reply to John Cooper"). I do not need to go into this controversy for the present purposes, though. Even if one thinks that the *MM* is the work of a young Aristotle, the mere fact that the work otherwise quite closely parallels the *EE* in structure gives us some, if not conclusive, reason to believe that divergences were caused by a later editor.

the treatise, but between the discussions of intellectual virtue and of friendship.¹⁵ Regardless of whether that is where the chapter originally belonged, the mere fact that the *MM* disagrees with our version of the *EE* in this regard gives some reason to believe that there was some question, even in antiquity, about where it belongs. Hence, the fact that the chapter finds itself at the end of the treatise is rather weak evidence that it is meant to form some sort of conclusion to the treatise as a whole.

The second view, defended by Friedemann Buddensiek, is worth considering in some detail.¹⁶ Buddensiek emphasizes the second half of the chapter within which the focus, as I said, is on the question of selecting things that are good by nature but not praiseworthy. Pointing to a text in which Aristotle comments on the Spartan ideal of the *kalos kagathos*, Buddensiek suggests that Aristotle's concern is to oppose the traditional conception of the *kalos kagathos* and to offer in its place his own philosophically refined conception. In doing so, according to Buddensiek, Aristotle is especially concerned with the issue of the good person's relationship to external goods.

I do not dispute that one topic that Aristotle hopes to say something about in the chapter is the question of external goods. However, Buddensiek identifies these as Aristotle's *main* concerns by downplaying (mistakenly, in my view) the comprehensive nature of *kalokagathia*. On Buddensiek's reading, Aristotle is not trying to provide a capstone to the account of virtue of character, but is, instead, dealing with something of a side issue—he is treating something that is widely considered to be a virtue in the public imagination, but that he does not think is actually very important.

In defense of this reading, Buddensiek points out that, although Aristotle calls *kalokagathia* a comprehensive excellence, the resulting discussion lacks what we would expect of a discussion of such a thing. Specifically, it lacks any discussion of the mutual relations of the individual excellences and their relations to *kalokagathia*. It is certainly true that the discussion of *kalokagathia* disappoints in this way, but that does not seem a compelling reason to deny that Aristotle means to treat it as a sort of comprehensive excellence. In general, Aristotle is frequently frustratingly vague when it comes to discussing crucial issues. One need only think of *De anima* III.5, or, closer to home, the discussion of *eudaimonia* in *NE* X, which caused many reputable scholars to suggest that the whole project of the *NE* was flawed or that the discussion did not belong to the *NE* at all.¹⁷ It should hardly be surprising, then, that the discussion in *EE* VIII.3 is not as full as we would like. Moreover, if I am right about what I am about to argue, both *EE* VIII.3 and *NE* VI.12–13 are meant to serve as capstones of sorts of the accounts of virtue by showing how virtue

¹⁵This is the view adopted by Dirlmeier, *Eudemische Ethik*. Cooper, *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle*, 135–36n48, objects to this view on the grounds that *EE* VIII.3, 1249a17–18 contains a reference to *EE* VII 2, 1235b30–1236a6. I agree with Cooper that this is a strong consideration (though perhaps not as strong as Cooper thinks) against Dirlmeier's reading, but it is not a problem for my reading. Although I think that *EE* VIII.3 forms a part of the *EE* counterpart of *NE* VI, I am not committed to any particular view about where in particular that discussion fell in the program of the treatise. It is perfectly possible, as far as I can see, that the discussion of the intellectual virtues in the *EE* did not immediately follow the account of virtue of character.

¹⁶Buddensiek, "Contemplation and Service of the God."

¹⁷For example, Nussbaum, *Fragility of Goodness*, 377.

constitutes a single unified condition. But the discussion of how *phronēsis* unites the virtues in *NE VI.13* can hardly be said to be very detailed or satisfying either.

Moreover, while it is indisputable on the basis of the second half of the chapter that part of Aristotle's concern there has to do with external goods, I think Buddensiek places too much emphasis on this in thinking about the general aim of the chapter. After arguing against the view that Aristotle is treating *kalokagathia* as a sort of comprehensive virtue, Buddensiek writes,

Why would Aristotle be concerned with the distinction between noble things and merely good things and with the right attitude towards them when discussing *kalokagathia*? The most likely reason for this concern seems to be that someone—for instance, a Spartan (cf. 248b38)—held a view about *kalokagathia* . . . which entailed a wrong view about the relation between noble things and external goods. A wrong view about this relation would have been the view, for instance, that to be a noble person—a *kalos kagathos*—means to be excellent in such a way that the excellent behavior leads to success in terms of external goods. This was not Aristotle's view.¹⁸

Buddensiek is right to call attention to the fact that Aristotle prominently cites Sparta in his discussion of *kalokagathia*, but I think the historical evidence about the concept of *kalokagathia* in the Spartan context both speaks against Buddensiek's reading and is important for understanding what is going on in *EE VIII.3*. Félix Bourriot has argued, convincingly in my view, that in Sparta *kaloi kagathoi* were not distinguished by their wealth or their inherited social standing, but by their excellence, especially in battle:

The expression *kaloi kagathoi* does not correspond to a social-institutional hierarchy. It is fundamentally an honorific title bestowed upon combatants as well as full citizens. . . . It was neither heredity nor wealth that created the *kaloi kagathoi* in Sparta, but the attitude of the champions of battle that revealed the quality of the man. And on the rivers of the Eurotas, the virtue was primarily military. It did not have to do with a division of the body politic between nobility and commoners, old or recent, but with a promotion of the military order of the best, of the *primi inter pares*.¹⁹

Thus, the *kaloi kagathoi* of Sparta were not distinguished by their relationship to external goods—either inherited or earned—but rather by their character. Sparta being a militaristic society, good character was identified with military excellence and bravery. This is relevant for understanding our passage from Aristotle for two reasons. First, it suggests that Buddensiek is wrong to think that Aristotle somehow identifies *kalokagathia* with excellence in procuring external goods, since *kalokagathia* (in Sparta anyway) had little to do with external goods and much to do with excellence of character. Second, it lends further support to the view that *kalokagathia* is meant, somehow, to be a comprehensive virtue. In Sparta, the *kaloi kagathoi* were meant to be an elite class of citizen, in contrast with the merely “good.”²⁰ Hence, it would make sense for Aristotle to identify *kalokagathia*

¹⁸Buddensiek, “Contemplation and Service of the God,” 121.

¹⁹Bourriot, “*Kaloi kagathoi*,” 135, my translation. Interestingly, the evolution of the term *kalos kagathos* from a term denoting class status to one indicating moral excellence is an example of a fairly common linguistic phenomenon. Confucius, for example, frequently uses the term *junzi* (君子) to refer to a type of morally good person, but it originally meant ‘son of the ruler’ and was later used to denote noblemen before it acquired its moral dimension (see Pines, “Elitism,” 165–69).

²⁰See Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, IV.40.2; and Bourriot, “*Kaloi kagathoi*,” 131.

with maximal excellence, as he explicitly does, as opposed to partial excellence, which he identifies with mere goodness. Moreover, Bourriot has also shown that the Athenian usage of this language has much to do with the Spartan usage. The language of *kalokagathia* was “imported,” so to speak, to Athens from Sparta, with the sophists as the intermediaries. Hence, in the Athenian usage, the language of *kalokagathia* retained its superlative connotations, but lost the connection with excellence in battle in particular, since the culture of Athens was less militaristic than that of Sparta.

This brings us to the third of the aforementioned readings: that the discussion of *kalokagathia* is meant to follow the discussion of the virtues of character and, somehow, serve as its conclusion. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, of course, the discussion of virtue of character is followed by a discussion of intellectual virtue—*NE VI*. Assuming, then, that *EE VIII.3* was meant to follow the discussion of the virtues in *EE III–IV*, there is a question about whether it was meant to come between *EE IV* and *EE V* (this is identical to *NE VI*) or, rather, if it was meant to replace (part of) what we have in *NE VI*. In what follows, I will argue for the latter alternative by highlighting important parallels between *EE VIII.3* and *NE VI.13*. I think on that basis that *EE VIII.3* probably formed a part of a Eudemian predecessor of *NE VI*, most if not all of which is Nicomachean in origin. What the rest of that discussion looked like is not something I will speculate much about.

2. UNITY OF THE VIRTUES IN *NE VI.13* AND *EE VIII.3*

I begin by discussing the aim of *NE VI.12–13*. Among Aristotle’s goals there is to show that the various virtues of the maximally virtuous person belong together in more than an accidental way. That is, he wants to show that there is a single unified condition characteristic of the maximally virtuous person. The way he does this, of course, is by showing that *phronêsis* and virtue of character require each other. I then turn my attention to *EE VIII.3* and argue that the aim of that chapter is best understood along the same lines. The difference is that he makes no appeal to *phronêsis* and instead appeals to *kalokagathia* to characterize the unified state of the ideally virtuous agent.

One way to understand the project of *NE VI.13* is by thinking about the connection between the individual virtues and virtue of character in general. Aristotle agrees with ordinary thought that there are a variety of different virtues of character—justice, generosity, courage, and so on. He also agrees that there is such a thing as virtue of character tout court. But it is not obvious how to conceive of the relationship between these two things. One possibility would be to think of the various virtues of character as simply representing ways of being virtuous tout court. Thus one might hold there are various but not necessarily overlapping types of people, all of whom may be said to have virtue of character—courageous people, generous people, and so on. On this view, one might think of virtue of character as analogous to athletic excellence. While we sometimes talk of athletic excellence simpliciter, there is not one single condition to which it applies: the sprinter Usain Bolt and the strongman Hafþór Björnsson are excellent athletes, but the qualities in virtue of which they are excellent athletes are very different.

Björnsson, for example, would not perform well in a 100-meter dash against Bolt, and Bolt could not deadlift 1,000 pounds. So, too, one might think there are just various ways to be virtuous with respect to character without thinking there is a single state constitutive of virtue of character.

Now, the fact that Aristotle rejects this way of thinking about virtue of character in the *NE*, although only made explicit in *NE VI*, is already clearly enough presupposed in *NE II*. There he characterizes virtue or excellence as “the state that makes a human being good and makes him perform his function well” (1106a22–24). Nowhere does he seriously consider the possibility that there should be a variety of distinct types of conditions that count as virtue of character, although, of course, he recognizes that there are a variety of distinct virtues. This suggests that *NE VI.12–13* should be viewed as a continuation and summation of the discussion of virtue of character. When Aristotle switches from talking about virtue of character in general to talking about the particular virtues, there is an important question about how these are supposed to relate to each other. More precisely, how, given the fact that there are a variety of different virtues of character, can he be entitled to speak simply of virtue of character sans phrase? To answer this, Aristotle needs some kind of unifying principle to show that all the virtues of character cohere. And he only ever provides an account of how this works in *NE VI.12–13*, where the unifying principle is *phronêsis*: *phronêsis* requires all the individual virtues of character, and each individual virtue of character requires *phronêsis*. Thus, while at the beginning of book VI it looks as if Aristotle has moved on to a completely new topic, having finished with virtue of character, by the end of the book we see that this new topic was not as unrelated as it might have seemed, and, in fact, that the account of *phronêsis* allows Aristotle to complete his account of virtue of character.

There he draws a distinction between what he calls natural virtue (*phusikê aretê*) and genuine or authoritative virtue (*kuria aretê*). Aristotle is willing to grant to common sense that some people are naturally less risk averse or naturally less disposed to indulging in sensory pleasures than others. Such people can be thought of as having a kind of courage or temperance, but Aristotle nonetheless insists that this is not genuine virtue, because genuine virtue is always good, whereas these dispositions are sometimes bad. What distinguishes full virtue is that its subject possesses not only the right desiderative dispositions, but also practical wisdom. Moreover, according to Aristotle, one cannot be practically wise without having all the other virtues. In this way, it is clear that if Aristotle is right, we should be able to infer from the fact that an agent has one virtue to the conclusion that the agent has them all (and hence the virtues are unified): if *A* has virtue *v*, for example, courage, then *A* has practical wisdom; if *A* has practical wisdom, *A* has all the other virtues; hence, if *A* has virtue *v*, *A* has all the virtues.

Naturally there is much about this line of argument that is unclear and controversial, but for now, I wish merely to emphasize the fairly modest (perhaps even obvious) point that in *NE VI.13* *phronêsis* is the glue that holds all the virtues together. By virtue of the connection between *phronêsis* and the virtues of character, Aristotle can preserve the idea that there is one unified condition in virtue of which someone is good simpliciter. I turn now to *EE VIII.3*, where I will argue that

there Aristotle is dealing with the same question—there too, he is interested in accounting for what it is to be a maximally virtuous person, but his answer is quite different insofar as it appeals not to *phronêsis* but to *kalokagathia*.

Like authoritative virtue in *NE VI.13*, *kalokagathia* requires the (other²¹) virtues of character. However, it is worth looking closely at the way in which Aristotle introduces the virtue in the first lines of *EE VIII.3*:

We have spoken previously about each particular virtue and since we have separately distinguished their capacities we should also make articulations about the virtue which comes from them, which we already referred to as *kalokagathia*. It is obvious that whoever is going to genuinely earn this appellation must have the particular virtues. Nor can it be otherwise in any other domain; for no one is healthy in the body as a whole but not in any part of it; rather, it is necessary that all parts or most parts, i.e. the most important ones should be in the same condition as the whole. (*EE VIII.3*, 1248b8–16²²)

Aristotle here claims that *kalokagathia* comes from (*ek*) the other virtues. From this it is clear that having the other virtues of character is a necessary condition for having *kalokagathia*. But beyond that, there are several questions we need to ask about the relationship between the virtues of character and *kalokagathia*. For example, is having the virtues of character a sufficient condition for *kalokagathia* in addition to a necessary one? And if it is a sufficient condition, why is that? Is it simply because *kalokagathia* is a name for the condition of the agent who has acquired all the virtues of character? Or is the relationship between the two rather like the relationship between the character virtues and *phronêsis* that we find in *NE VI.13*, where having the character virtues is both necessary and sufficient for having *phronêsis*, but the two are nonetheless different characteristics? So we can distinguish at least between the following three interpretations: (1) virtue of character is necessary but not sufficient for *kalokagathia*;²³ (2) virtue of character is both necessary and sufficient for *kalokagathia* because *kalokagathia* is the name for the totality of the virtues;²⁴ (3) virtue of character is both necessary and sufficient for *kalokagathia*, but *kalokagathia* nonetheless picks out a distinct virtue.²⁵ I will argue for interpretation (3), and in the process of doing so, I will argue against both interpretations (1) and (2).

Let us begin by studying the health analogy we find in the preceding passage. This is important because it is tempting to understand the analogy so that it supports interpretation (2). After all, if one is healthy in every single part of one's body, then one is healthy simpliciter, and there is nothing more to being healthy simpliciter than being healthy in, as Aristotle puts it, "all parts or most parts, i.e. the most important ones." One cannot fail to be healthy if one is healthy in every

²¹It is not exactly clear from the text itself whether or not *kalokagathia* is meant to be one of the virtues of character. I return to this topic below and suggest that it is not.

²²All translations from the *EE* are from Inwood and Woolf, *Eudemian Ethics*, with minor modifications, unless otherwise noted.

²³This is the view of Broadie, "Good, the Noble."

²⁴This is the view of Bonasio, "*Kalokagathia*."

²⁵This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of all the possible interpretations. E.g. if one accepts (1), there is still a question about how more precisely to understand the relationship between the two (e.g. is virtue of character itself a constitutive part of *kalokagathia*, or does it contribute in some other way?).

part of the body. So, too, it might seem, one cannot fail to be *kalos kagathos* if one has all the other virtues, and moreover, much like health in the body as a whole is identical to health in the parts of the body jointly, so it might seem, more strongly, that *kalokagathia* just is the condition of having all the virtues.

However, it is worth noticing the precise way in which that analogy comes up. Aristotle introduces that analogy in the context of an argument for the claim that if one is *kalos kagathos* one has the other virtues. So, the thought is supposed to be that *kalokagathia* is a good condition of the agent as a whole, and insofar as this is true, it implies a good condition of “all or most” of the parts. Aristotle does not say, however, that *kalokagathia* is merely a good condition of the agent as a whole. So, I think the health analogy is neutral as to which interpretation we accept. It is unclear how far Aristotle intends the analogy to go beyond illustrating the claim that *kalokagathia* requires the other virtues.

In order to understand the relationship between *kalokagathia* and the character virtues, we need to read on and look at how Aristotle carves out the distinction between the good person and the *kalos kagathos*. Aristotle starts by distinguishing between things that are merely good and things that are noble:

The good and the noble are distinct not only in name but also in themselves. For of all goods, the ones which are worth choosing for their own sakes are goals, but of these, the fine are all those which are praiseworthy on their own account, since the actions they generate are praiseworthy and so are they themselves: justice, both itself and the actions based on justice, and temperate actions (for temperance too is praiseworthy). But health is not praiseworthy, since neither is its product. Nor is acting strongly praiseworthy, since strength is not. They are good, but not praiseworthy. (*EE* VIII.3, 1248b16–25)

The point Aristotle is making here is an intuitive one. Health, on Aristotle’s view, is something that is good by nature insofar as it is something that human beings naturally desire. But simply being healthy does not make someone praiseworthy. In this respect, health is unlike, say, virtue of character. Virtue of character is a good condition of the agent, but, unlike physical health, virtue of character is by its very nature such as to produce acts that are praiseworthy. And for this reason, virtue of character is noble, but health is merely good.

On the basis of this distinction, Aristotle proceeds to distinguish between being merely good and being *kalos kagathos*:

The good man is the one for whom things that are good by nature are good. For the competitive goods and those which are thought to be greatest (honour, wealth, the bodily excellences, good fortune and power) are good by nature, but they can be harmful to some people because of their dispositions. If one is foolish or unjust or undisciplined one would get no benefit from making use of them, just as a sick man would get no benefit from the diet of a healthy man, nor would a man who is weak and crippled get benefit from the adornments of one who is hale and whole. But one is *kalos kagathos* because goods that are fine are his on their own account and because he is the sort who does fine actions also for their own sake. And the goods that are fine are virtues and virtuous actions. (*EE* VIII.3, 1248b26–37)

Now it is not immediately obvious from this passage whether this is meant merely to be a distinction between two traits or aspects that a person might have, or whether it is meant to be a distinction between two character types that are actually

separable. Nothing that Aristotle says strictly speaking rules out the possibility that *agathoi* and *kaloi kagathoi* both necessarily apply to the same class of people but, nevertheless, pick out different aspects or characteristics of that class. This question is complicated by the fact that it is not perfectly clear whether being *agathos* in this sense is meant to be the same as having virtue of character. If it is, then the proponents of interpretations (1) and (2) must hold that in this passage Aristotle is merely drawing a conceptual distinction, not a distinction between two types that are actually separable. Otherwise, they must insist, somewhat surprisingly, that being *agathos*, in the sense in which Aristotle intends in this passage, is not the same as being virtuous.

I think this latter option is the only viable one, since ostensibly Aristotle intends the *agathos* and the *kalos kagathos* to be actually separable. Consider, for example, the fact that Aristotle does not talk, in this passage, directly about the distinction between being *agathos* and being *kalos kagathos*, as one would expect were these simply necessarily connected characteristics. Rather, he talks about the difference between the person who is *agathos* and the person who is *kalos kagathos*: the clear implication is that there is something about the person who is *kalos kagathos* that is superior to the person who is merely *agathos*. More strongly, what Aristotle goes on to say makes even clearer that he intends these as separable conditions. To illustrate the difference between the *agathos* and the *kalos kagathos*, Aristotle uses the example of a certain “civic disposition” (*hexis politikê*) exhibited by the Spartans:

There is a civic disposition like the one which the Spartans and other such people have. It is a disposition of the following kind. There are people who think that they should possess virtue, but only for the sake of natural goods. Hence they are good men (since the natural goods are good for them), but they do not have *kalokagathia*. For they do not possess fine things on their own account, but all those who do possess them on their own account also decide on noble things. (*EE*VIII.3, 1248b37–1249a2)

There is a question about what text to read for the crucial lines 1248b39–1249a2, but regardless of what text we read, it is clear that Aristotle means to say that the Spartans are *agathoi* but are not *kaloi kagathoi*.²⁶ This seems to be decisive evidence that being *agathos* does not imply straightaway that one is *kalos kagathos*. And if being *agathos* is a way of being virtuous, this would imply that (2) is false: virtue does not imply *kalokagathia* straightaway. Let me turn, then, to the question of whether being *agathos* in the sense in which that term is used here is the same as being virtuous.

There is strong *prima facie* evidence that the *agathos* is virtuous. First, although *spoudaios* is the word most commonly used by Aristotle to refer to the virtuous

²⁶The main issue here is whether Walzer and Mingay’s text at line 21, *dio agathoi men andres eisi*, is right. All the manuscripts read *agrioi* (‘wild’) in place of *agathoi* (‘good’), which is first found in the fifteenth-century Aldine edition. The reason this reading has seemed attractive to so many editors and translators is, presumably, because it makes much more sense in context. Simpson, “Some Passages,” 671–72, defends the manuscript reading by calling attention to some of Aristotle’s criticisms of the Spartans elsewhere (i.e. *Pol.* II 9, 1271b3–6; *Pol.* VII 15, 1334a39–b3, discussed below) where he does seem to suggest that their obsession with war makes them brutish and unable to deal well with leisure. Which of these readings we take, however, makes no big difference for my purposes, since no one disputes whether Aristotle characterizes the Spartans in this passage as *agathoi*.

person, he sometimes uses *agathos* for this purpose too.²⁷ Second, it seems that if the natural goods are good for a given agent, it must be the case that the agent is virtuous. This is a view that goes back at least to Plato and that Aristotle seems to accept as well.²⁸ Consider, for example, the following passage from *NE* III.4, where Aristotle is considering the question of whether the object of wishing is the good or the merely apparent good:

For the excellent [*spoudaios*] person, then, what is wished is what is good in reality, while for the base person what is wished is whatever it turns out to be that appears good to him. Similarly, in the case of bodies, really healthy things are healthy to people in good condition, while other things are healthy to sickly people and the same is true of what is bitter, sweet, hot, heavy, and so on. For the excellent person judges each sort of thing correctly, and in each case what is true appears to him.²⁹ (*NE* III.4, 1113a25–31)

No one, as far as I know, seriously disputes that here when Aristotle is talking about the good person being the standard by which we can determine the true object of wishing, he is talking specifically about the person who is virtuous. The same seems to go for the same analogy in *EE* VIII.3. There seems to be very good reason, then, for thinking that the *agathos* that Aristotle describes is a virtuous person.

However, there is also reason for doubting this. After all, Aristotle says that the *agathoi* like the Spartans do not possess noble things for their own account (*di' auta* [*EE* VIII.3, 1249a2–3]), while the *kaloi kagathoi* do. Moreover, he says that the *agathoi* only perform noble actions *per accidens* (*kata sumbebêkos* [*EE* VIII.3, 1249a14–16]), by which he seems to mean that the *agathoi* do not do virtuous actions because they are noble but because of the positive consequences they might bring (wealth, honor, etc.). But it is widely accepted among scholars that part of what it is to be virtuous, on Aristotle's view, is to be motivated by the *kalon* (noble) itself and to pursue virtuous actions for their own sakes and because they are *kalon*.³⁰ Therefore, if the *agathoi*, as it appears, do not act for the sake of the *kalon*, then they are not virtuous.

Now, Sarah Broadie,³¹ acknowledging that acting for the sake of the *kalon* is a necessary condition for virtue, has argued that this can be squared with the idea that the Spartan *agathoi* of Aristotle's example are nonetheless virtuous: the distinction

²⁷See, for example, *Pol.* 1287b12–13, where Aristotle is clearly using *spoudaios* and *agathos* interchangeably (cf. *NE* 1144b30–32).

²⁸See e.g. *Meno* 87e–88a and *Euthydemus* 280e.

²⁹Translation from Irwin, *Nicomachean Ethics*, with minor modifications.

³⁰In *NE* IV.2, for example, Aristotle says of the magnificent (*megaloprepos*) person, that he “will spend such [great] sums for the sake of the noble [*kalon*], for this is common to the virtues” (1122b6–7). Similarly, in *NE* II.4, in explaining the difference between doing a virtuous action (i.e. an action of the sort that a virtuous person would do) and doing an action virtuously (i.e. doing a virtuous action in the way that a virtuous person would do it), one of the conditions that Aristotle includes among the conditions for an action to be done virtuously is that the agent “must decide on [the virtuous actions], and decide on them for themselves [*di' auta*]” (1105a31–32). This condition is standardly interpreted to mean that the virtuous person performs virtuous actions simply because they are virtuous and not because of, say, concern about maintaining a certain reputation or whatever. In the *EE*, Aristotle is somewhat less emphatic on this point (e.g. he does not mention the *kalon* in the discussion of virtue of character in general in book II), but there is still clear evidence that he holds the same view; see e.g. III.1, 1230a26–33 (cf. 1229a2).

³¹See Broadie, “Virtue and Beyond in Plato and Aristotle.” Cf. Kenny, *Aristotle on the Perfect Life*, 9–13.

between the mere *agathoi* and the *kaloï kagathoi* is not in their motives for action (they both act for the sake of the *kalon*) but in their second-order attitudes about virtue, how they think about the character state. The *kaloï kagathoi* recognize it as valuable for its own sake, while the *agathoi* do not. This is an ingenious attempt to preserve the idea that the *agathoi* of this passage are virtuous, but I do not find it convincing for several reasons.

There are two main reasons in particular. The first is that there is no indication in the text that Aristotle intends this subtle distinction between attitudes about actions and attitudes about character states, and, as I have already mentioned, what Aristotle does say is most naturally read as suggesting that he is talking about both noble actions and noble character states. Thus, when Aristotle says, using the neuter plural, that *kala* (noble things) do not belong to the mere *agathoi* for their own sake, that seems perfectly general, including everything noble, both actions and character states.³² And his claim that they do noble actions *kata sumbebêkos* suggests they precisely do not do them because they are noble.

Second, it is hard to square the idea that Aristotle is claiming that the Spartan *agathoi* are virtuous with things he says elsewhere. Recall that Aristotle calls the condition of the Spartans a “civic disposition.” Elsewhere Aristotle states that he does not take civic dispositions to be genuinely virtuous.³³ We need not even look outside the *EE* for evidence of this. Returning to *EE* III.1, one of the dispositions that Aristotle contrasts with genuine courage is “civic courage” (*politikê andreia* [*EE* III.1, 1229a13]), which differs from genuine courage by being motivated not by the *kalon*, but by a sense of shame. Aristotle is perfectly clear, however, that this is not genuine courage (*EE* III.1, 1229a30–31, 1230a25) and is only called courage by virtue of a certain likeness (*kath’ homoiotêta* [*EE* III.1, 1229a12]).³⁴ This coheres with what Aristotle says about civic virtue elsewhere, most notably in *Politics* III.4, where he makes explicit that civic virtue and ethical virtue are not the same.³⁵

Moreover, in another passage from the *Politics*,³⁶ Aristotle again says that the Spartans value virtue for the sake of external goods and also strongly implies that they are not fully virtuous:

The charge which Plato brings, in the *Laws*, against the intention of the [Spartan] legislator, is likewise justified; the whole constitution has regard to one part of excellence only—the excellence of the soldier, which gives victory in war. So long as they were at war, therefore, their power was preserved, but when they had attained empire they fell, for of the arts of peace they knew nothing, and have never engaged in any employment higher than war. There is another error, equally great, into which they [viz. the Spartans] have fallen. Although they truly think that the goods for which men contend are to be acquired by excellence rather than by vice, they err in

³²As Barney, “Comments,” 121, rightly points out.

³³Another point rightly made by Barney, “Comments,” 120–23.

³⁴The discussion of political courage in *NE* III.8, as far as I can see, completely agrees with the *EE* discussion, although the *NE* discussion contains somewhat more detail (e.g. Aristotle explains why, of the conditions that resemble courage, civic courage is the most like genuine courage). See *NE* 1116a17–b3.

³⁵See especially *Pol.* 1276b34–35.

³⁶The tension between this passage and the idea, held by Broadie and Kenny, that the Spartans are meant to be genuinely virtuous is pointed out by Jennifer Whiting, “Self-Love,” 167–68.

supposing that these goods are to be preferred to the excellence which gains them.
(*Pol.* II.9, 1271a41–b11)³⁷

This passage strongly suggests that when Aristotle says that the Spartans value virtue for the sake of external goods, he means they value virtue *de dicto*, not *de re*. In fact, the passage suggests that they would not recognize true virtue if they saw it, since they narrowly identify virtue with “the excellence of the soldier.”³⁸ This makes sense. After all, the Spartans were notorious in the Greek world for their military excellence, which one might identify with courage, but they were not commonly praised for the other Aristotelian virtues of character—generosity, magnificence, and so on. It is, of course, possible that the Aristotle of the *EE* holds a different and much more optimistic view about the Spartans, but, on balance, that is unlikely.

I take it, then, that Aristotle does not mean to attribute genuine virtue to the Spartans in general. And since Aristotle clearly says that the Spartans are *agathoi* (*agathoi* . . . *andres eisi* [*EE* VIII.3, 1249a1]), we must deny that the *agathos* is fully virtuous.³⁹ However, I think we can accommodate the *prima facie* case for thinking the *agathos* is virtuous by distinguishing between full or complete virtue and an inferior form of virtue or quasi-virtue. The *agathos* does not live up to Aristotle’s demanding ideal of the maximally virtuous agent, but does still have dispositions that are importantly like virtue. Viewed from the outside, so to speak, without taking into account the agent’s motivations, the *agathos* person closely or even completely resembles the fully virtuous person in possessing a stable disposition to do virtuous actions.⁴⁰ I take it that it is precisely this distinction between complete virtue and more common quasi-virtue that Aristotle is alluding to when he concludes that *kalokagathia* is “complete virtue” (*EE* VIII.3, 1249a16–17).

If all of this is right, then it suggests an answer to the question of what the relationship is between *kalokagathia* and virtue of character. *Kalokagathia* is not actually separable from virtue of character—one cannot be *kalos kagathos* without being virtuous, nor can one be fully virtuous without being *kalos kagathos*—but it is conceptually distinct from virtue of character. It picks out something about the completely virtuous person that distinguishes that person from other agents, including agents who are virtuous in the sense of being decent, but it does not

³⁷Translation from Benjamin Jowett, in *Complete Works*, 1986–2129, with minor modifications.

³⁸Notice that Aristotle does not say that the Spartans identify virtue with *courage*. This suggests that Aristotle thinks that the excellence that the Spartans identify with the whole of virtue is not even true courage, but is rather some morally neutral sort of skill in battle (cf. the morally neutral natural courage of *NE* VI.13).

³⁹This is also the route taken by Woods, *Aristotle*, 158; and Barney, “Comments,” 121 (cf. Zena Hitz, “Aristotle on Law and Moral Education,” 285, who nonetheless is unsure how to square this reading with the evidence to the contrary that I cited). See Barney for a more detailed discussion of Broadie’s view.

⁴⁰Compare the way that Aristotle describes shame (*aidōs*) in *NE* IV.9. He makes clear that it is not a virtue strictly speaking since it is not something that the ideal agent would ever have occasion for (1128b22–26), but he clearly thinks that it is similar enough to the virtues to merit inclusion in the discussion. Moreover, on at least one occasion in the *NE*, Aristotle, speaking less cautiously, even calls shame a virtue (III.1, 1116a27–28). This latter passage is especially relevant because it occurs in the discussion of civic courage while Aristotle is explaining that civic courage is the form of quasi-courage most like genuine courage precisely because it is caused by shame and because it is for the sake of honor, which is noble. If Aristotle is willing to accord shame the status of a quasi-virtue, it is not implausible to think that he thinks the same thing about the civic dispositions, at issue in our passage from *EE* VIII.3.

simply consist in the fact of having all the virtues. Rather, it picks out a certain evaluative outlook that both implies and is implied by having all the virtues.

This brings us to the question of why Aristotle includes this discussion at all. Why, that is, does Aristotle think that the topic of complete virtue requires separate discussion? Why are the accounts of the individual virtues not sufficient to understand complete virtue? The reason is that Aristotle wishes to characterize complete virtue as a single unified condition. The perfect agent is not one who just happens to be courageous, happens to be just, happens to be moderate, and so on. Rather, the thought is that this agent has a specific evaluative outlook that explains at least in part why all the virtues coincide in that person. In the case of the person who is merely *agathos*, by contrast, there is no such unifying principle.

The parallels between the aims of *NE* VI.13 and *EE* VIII.3, then, should be clear. Just as *NE* VI.13 attempts to distinguish “authoritative virtue” (*kuria aretê*), which is a single unified state and the ideal condition for human beings, from lesser forms of quasi-virtue, here too Aristotle distinguishes “complete virtue,” which he identifies with the unified condition of the *kalos kagathos*, from the lesser kind of virtue had by people like the Spartans. The reason that Aristotle draws this distinction is the same in both cases: he is trying to distinguish the ideal agent—the agent who is fully virtuous—from lesser forms of virtue or quasi-virtue. This substantial overlap, together with the bits of overlap that I indicated in the preceding section, is very good evidence that these two chapters do not belong together in the same treatise and that *EE* VIII.3 is the Eudemian counterpart to *NE* VI.13. If this is right, it raises a question: Why does Aristotle assign this role to *kalokagathia* rather than to *phronêsis* in the *EE* VIII.3? The aim of the remainder of this paper will be to answer that question. I argue that it is because Aristotle conceives of *phronêsis* in a different, narrower way in the *EE* than in the *NE*. To show this, I attend to the latter half of *EE* VIII.3.

3. PHRONÊSIS IN THE EE

After concluding his principal discussion of *kalokagathia*, Aristotle investigates what limit (*horos*) the *kalos kagathos* looks to in making decisions. The relevant passage reads as follows:

Since even a doctor has a limit to which he refers when determining which body is healthy and which not, and the extent to which he should perform each procedure (if it is done well the body is healthy, and if it is done too little or too much the body is not healthy)—in the same way, when dealing with actions and choices about things which are good by nature but not praiseworthy, an excellent man must have a certain limit for the possession, choice and avoidance of money (how much or how little) and of the fruits of good fortune. Earlier on this was specified as being “as reasoning indicates.” But this is like saying in matters of nutrition that it is “as medicine and its reasoning indicate”: it is true, but not clear. (*EE* VIII.3, 1249a21–b6)

It is impossible to read this passage without hearing an echo of the opening of *NE* VI.1, which reads as follows:

Since we have said previously that we must choose the intermediate condition, not the excess or the deficiency, and that the intermediate condition is as the correct reason says, let us now determine what it says. For in all the states of character we

have mentioned, as well as in the others, there is a target that the person who has reason focuses on and so tightens or relaxes; and there is a definition of the means, which we say are between excess and deficiency because they accord with the correct reason. (*NE* VI.1, 1138b18–25)

Aristotle goes on just as he does in *EE* VIII.3 to point out that simply saying that there is such a standard is “true, but not at all clear” (*NE* VI.1, 1138b26), and he provides precisely the same medical analogy that we get in the VIII.3 passage. A doctor who knows only that he ought to prescribe the mean amount of medication will “be none the wiser about, for instance, the medicines to be applied to the body, if we were told we must apply the ones that the medical science prescribes and in the way that the medical scientist applies them” (*NE* VI.1, 1138b30–32).

The striking similarity between these two passages might suggest that they are parallels, that is, that the *EE* passage is the counterpart in some sense of the *NE* one. Suitably qualified, this may be true, but we need to be careful about the passages’ precise relation. After all, there is at least one very important difference between the two passages that suggests they are dealing with different issues, as Donald Monan observes.⁴¹ The *EE* passage is clearly concerned with the *horos* by which the good man (*spoudaios*) chooses things that are “good by nature but not praiseworthy” (*EE* VIII.3, 1249a24). The *NE* passage, by contrast, is concerned with the question of what the standard is by means of which the virtuous person identifies the intermediate (*meson*) in action.

One might conclude on the basis of these differences that the initial appearance of similarity is simply misleading, that the similarity is merely superficial and disappears upon closer examination.⁴² This would, however, be too hasty. Aristotle makes clear in both passages that he is interested in giving content to the previously introduced idea that the virtuous person acts on the basis of the *orthos logos*. Moreover, in both passages, Aristotle is trying to say something about *phronēsis*. *Phronēsis* is the main focus of *NE* VI, and what Aristotle goes on to say in *EE* VIII suggests that he is concerned with *phronēsis* there too. To see this, we need to scrutinize the remainder of the discussion in *EE* VIII.3.

To solve the problem raised in the last passage from VIII.3, Aristotle begins by asserting that one should live with reference to the commanding part of the soul, and he then specifies that this means living in accordance with the rational part:

Since human beings too are by nature composed of a commander and a commanded, each person would also have to live with reference to his own commanding element. This has two aspects. For the art of medicine and health are commanding elements in different ways (the former is for the sake of the latter). This is how it is with regard to the contemplative. God is not a commander in the sense of giving orders but as that for the sake of which practical wisdom [*phronēsis*] gives orders. (*EE* VIII.3, 1249b9–15)

The word *phronēsis* only occurs once here, but the context is telling. Aristotle is still trying to answer the question he introduced just a bit earlier about what the *horos* is by which the *kalos kagathos* selects external goods. His answer relies

⁴¹Monan, *Moral Knowledge*, 126–29. Cf. Ackrill “Aristotle on *Eudaimonia*,” 30–31; Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle*, 375; Cooper, *Reason*, 138–39; and Rowe, *Ethics*, 110.

⁴²This seems to be Cooper’s view. Broadie, *Ethics*, 375, and others are similarly dismissive.

on an analogy with medicine. The standard to which the doctor looks is health. So health in this sense can be regarded as issuing certain commands insofar as certain measures are hypothetically necessary to achieve health. As we might put it, health *requires* that one quit smoking, lose weight, or whatever the case may be. But the understanding of medicine that doctors have is the thing responsible for issuing orders in a different sense, insofar as it is the doctors' understanding of medicine that enables them to see what health requires in the circumstances. The thought, then, is supposed to be that it is in the former sense that God is the thing that issues commands in the case of selecting external goods, by being the normative standard or goal. But—and this is crucial for our purposes—Aristotle makes explicit in the final line of this passage that the thing responsible for issuing commands in the way that medicine does is *phronêsis*. When Aristotle raises the question of what the *horos* is to which the *kalos kagathos* looks, then, he is clearly discussing whatever standard it is to which *phronêsis* looks.

This suggests that although the immediate focus of the two passages is different—the Eudemian one is concerned with things that are good by nature but not praiseworthy, the Nicomachean with morally good action—their mediate aim is the same: to adumbrate what *phronêsis* consists in. This raises two questions. First, what explains the difference in the immediate aim? Second, why, if this *EE* passage is about the *orthos logos* and *phronêsis*, does it occur within the context of the discussion of *kalokagathia*? I begin with the latter question because it holds the key to the first.

Now the question here really amounts to the question of what the relationship is between *kalokagathia* and *phronêsis*. We know by now that the *kalos kagathos* is *phronimos* insofar as the *kalos kagathos* is the maximally virtuous person. But there is a question about what exactly *phronêsis* accomplishes and what the accomplishments of *phronêsis* have to do with the accomplishments of *kalokagathia*. Here is my proposal: When Aristotle talks about the capacity for choosing things that are good by nature and not praiseworthy, he is talking about *phronêsis*. This is strongly suggested, as I said, by the reference to *phronêsis* in that passage. This also coheres with what I take to be the ordinary Greek conception of *phronêsis*, which involves having good sense.⁴³ The reason Aristotle introduces this topic as a question about things that are good by nature but not praiseworthy is that *kalokagathia* already deals with things that are good by nature and praiseworthy. Given that the *kalos kagathos* is the ideal agent, the interesting remaining question is this: the *kalos kagathos* can choose praiseworthy things, but also needs to select nonpraiseworthy goods; how is that possible? Aristotle answers in part by attributing that task to a separate faculty, *phronêsis*.⁴⁴

If this is right, then clearly it supports the picture that I have been arguing for. If *phronêsis* in the *EE* is merely concerned with choosing goods that are good by

⁴³See, for example, Isocrates, *Plataicus*, 61. I take it that it is because of the close association in the popular mind between *phronêsis* and cleverness (*deinoteta*) that Aristotle is careful to distinguish the two in *NE* VI.12, 1144a23–b1.

⁴⁴It is worth pointing out that this is not a particularly radical suggestion. If one looks, for example, at the corresponding passage in the *MM* (II.10), it is clear that the author of that text also interpreted this passage as taking up a new (albeit related) topic and not merely continuing the discussion of *kalokagathia*.

nature but not praiseworthy, then clearly it is a narrower capacity than *phronêsis* as we find it in *NE VI*. And this suggests a reason why *kalokagathia* in the *EE* seems to play the unifying role that *phronêsis* played in the *NE*. *Phronêsis* in the *EE* cannot play that unifying role because it is a capacity narrowly concerned with choosing things that are good by nature but not praiseworthy.⁴⁵ And it is harder to see how a capacity like this would require all the virtues in the same way in which *phronêsis* in the *NE* requires all the virtues. In the *NE*, for example, *phronêsis* seems to consist partly in a disposition to be sensitive to reasons for acting. It is easy to see, at least roughly, why a disposition like this would coincide with virtue of character.⁴⁶

I want to conclude by calling attention to two passages from elsewhere in the *EE* that strongly support this conclusion. There, Aristotle evidently suggests that the merely enkratic individual—namely, an individual who does not have virtue of character—nonetheless has *phronêsis*.⁴⁷ If this is right, it is important for our purposes for several reasons. First, it supports the idea that these two treatises employ importantly different conceptions of *phronêsis*.⁴⁸ Second, and more specifically, it supports the idea that in the *EE* the conception of *phronêsis* is thinner than in the *NE*. And, third, it supports the idea that in the *EE* *phronêsis* is not a suitable candidate for the thing that is meant to bind the virtues together.

The first passage occurs in *EE VIII.1*. Recall that this chapter is concerned with the puzzle of whether practical wisdom, just as other forms of expertise or *technai*, can be used in two opposing ways. There Aristotle conceives of *phronêsis* as the virtue of the rational part of the soul (by which he apparently means the practically rational part), and he considers the question whether vice in the nonrational part could “use” *phronêsis* for bad purposes (*EE VIII.1*, 1246b4–7). On the basis of *NE VI*, we ought to expect that Aristotle would deny that any such state of affairs is possible, since in *NE VI.12* he writes that one cannot have *phronêsis* without virtue of

⁴⁵One consideration in favor of this view is that it would help somewhat to make sense of the otherwise mysterious characterization of *phronêsis* in *EE II.3*, 1221a12, as a mean between unscrupulousness or knavishness (*panourgia*) and simplicity or unworldliness (*euêtheia*). Later in that chapter, Aristotle explains this by saying, “The unscrupulous person tries to get more in every way and from every situation, the unworldly person does not do so even where one ought” (1221a36–38). If *phronêsis* has to do with selecting external goods, this makes a lot of sense. The idea would be that *phronêsis* involves reasoning well about how and when to obtain external goods. The cunning or unscrupulous person is always looking for a way to gain external goods, even in ways, on occasions, and from sources that one ought not to. The simple or unworldly person (*euêthês*), on the other hand, does not pay enough attention to material goods and ends up getting taken advantage of, wasting resources, or missing opportunities to secure material goods. If, on the other hand, one assumes that the *NE* account of *phronêsis* applies just as well to the *EE*, then it is very hard to interpret this passage. That, presumably, is why Susemihl (followed by Solomon and Woods) excises both 1221a12 and 1221a36–38, when there is no textual reason to do so (cf. Aubenque, *La prudence chez Aristote*, 137).

⁴⁶For a defense of this view of virtue of character in the *NE*, see Lorenz, “Virtue of Character.” Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of the present essay to investigate this highly complex topic.

⁴⁷My understanding of these two passages is heavily indebted to Callard, “Enkratês Phronimos,” which uses them as the main evidence for the claim that Aristotle’s enkratic agent has *phronêsis*. My main point of disagreement with Callard is that she does not take seriously the possibility that Aristotle’s two ethical treatises might disagree on this point; as a result, she fails to see any problem with the fact that her two main pieces of evidence come from the *EE*. (My other main point of disagreement comes from her treatment of *NE VI.13*, which in my view cannot be made consistent with the idea that the enkratic can have *phronêsis*, but this issue is not immediately relevant to my project.)

⁴⁸Callard, “Enkratês Phronimos,” 53–61, thinks that this picture can be made consistent with *NE VI*, but I disagree for reasons I will explain.

character. But, interestingly, Aristotle does not respond in this way. Rather, he insists that if an agent has a vicious nonrational part and *phronêsis* in the rational part, the rational part will win out and the agent will act virtuously. This, Aristotle explains, is precisely the condition of the enkratic agent: “Practical wisdom [*phronêsis*] in the rational element will cause the indiscipline in the irrational element to act temperately—that is what self-control seems to be” (*EE* VIII.1, 1246b23–25). Now, if one wishes to defend the standard view that *phronêsis* is only possible for the virtuous person in the *Eudemian Ethics*, one might lean on the fact that Aristotle here only says that this is what *enkrateia* seems or is thought (*dokei*) to be. This is true, but Aristotle often introduces his own beliefs by means of the verb *dokein*, and, at any rate, the second passage supports the same idea. So, let me turn there.

The passage in question occurs in *EE* II.11, where Aristotle consolidates the discussion in the foregoing chapters of virtue, decision (*prohairesis*), and deliberation. In that discussion, Aristotle has made clear that virtuous action involves both a rational and a nonrational component: the agent has the right nonrational desires, but also grasps the *orthos logos* and reasons well about achieving aims. Aristotle thus raises the question of which of these two components is attributable to virtue of character specifically as opposed to some other feature that the virtuous person has:

Now that we have made these determinations, we may say whether virtue makes decision error-free, and the end correct, such that one decides for the sake of what one ought; or whether, as some believe, it makes one’s reasoning correct. The latter, however, is what self-control does, since on its own it keeps reasoning uncorrupted. But virtue is different from self-control. (*EE* II.11, 1227b12–16)

Aristotle’s point is that virtue cannot be responsible for making the agent’s reasoning correct, because correct reasoning is something that even the enkratic—who is not virtuous—has. Elsewhere, Aristotle is clear that it is *phronêsis* that is responsible for making the agent’s reasoning correct.⁴⁹ Hence, although in this passage Aristotle does not talk about *phronêsis* explicitly, insofar as he attributes correct reasoning to the enkratic, we have again a clear indication that the enkratic agent is meant to have *phronêsis*, and hence that *phronêsis* is not meant to imply virtue of character.

Before proceeding, it is perhaps worthwhile to address a possible objection based on a passage toward the end of *EE* VIII.1, where Aristotle might seem to be endorsing the idea that *phronêsis* implies the other virtues. The passage in question occurs in the final, fragmentary paragraph of the chapter. There is controversy about what text to read, but the manuscript reading would be translated as follows:

Thus, it is clear that those states of the other part [of the soul] are at the same time practically wise and good, and Socrates’s dictum that nothing is more powerful than *phronêsis* is right.⁵⁰ But he said that [*phronêsis*] was scientific understanding [*epistêmê*], which is not right. It is a virtue and not *epistêmê*, but a different kind of cognition [*gnoseos*]. (*EE* VIII.1, 1246b32–36, my translation)

⁴⁹See, for example, the definition of virtue of character at *NE* II.6 1107a1–2, where the claim that the virtuous action is the one “determined by reason” is explained by “namely [*kai*], as the person of practical wisdom would determine it.” Cf. *EE* VIII.1, 1232a35–38.

⁵⁰Reading Bekker’s emendation of *Sokratikon* for the clearly nonsensical manuscript *soma kratetikon*.

One thing is clear about this passage: Aristotle means to underscore, in solution to the chapter's initial puzzle, that the reason that *phronêsis* cannot be used in both of two opposing ways is that it is a kind of virtue and not a kind of scientific understanding (which can be used in both of two opposing ways⁵¹). The question, though, is how to construe the first sentence. Although there are many textual questions about what to read here that I will not go into for reasons of space, it seems to say that someone who has *phronêsis* is also good (*agathos*). If this is right, then it would seem that here, too, just like in *NE* VI.12, Aristotle means to accept the idea that *phronêsis* requires the virtues. But if this is what Aristotle is saying in the preceding passage, then it is in tension with the idea that the enkratic can have *phronêsis*, since the enkratic is someone who falls short of full virtue.

It is important to note here that Aristotle at various places in the *NE* and the *EE* praises the enkratic person, and that he does appear willing to say that the enkratic person is good.⁵² This opens the possibility that in the preceding passage, Aristotle means to attribute to the enkratic agent something less than full virtue. This would fit better with the context as well. At the point in the chapter at which the preceding passage occurs, Aristotle has told us nothing that would justify the claim that *phronêsis* implies all the other virtues of character. He has, however, said much to justify the assertion that vice cannot overpower *phronêsis*. Thus, he is entitled to the claim that if someone is a *phronimos*, any failings in the person's nonrational part will not overpower *phronêsis*. And since Aristotle thinks the enkratic is a good person, this seems sufficient to justify the assertion that the *phronimos* is also *agathos*. But this does not, of course, imply that the *phronimos* is maximally virtuous like the *kalos kagathos* is.

4. CONCLUSION

This brings me back to the main topic I am interested in, *EE* VIII.3. The foregoing considerations suggest that in the *EE* Aristotle does not think that *phronêsis* implies a maximally virtuous condition, as he does in the *NE*. This clarifies why he would need to supply a completely different account of "complete virtue" than the one we get in *NE* VI.13. Aristotle in the *EE* agrees with the *NE* that there is a single unified condition that is characteristic of the maximally virtuous agent, and he wishes to provide an account of that condition. In the *NE*, however, Aristotle has a fairly high-powered conception of *phronêsis* such that *phronêsis* is a superior kind of achievement—something only possible by people who are fully virtuous. Hence, in order to account for the unified state of the maximally virtuous person, Aristotle appeals to *phronêsis*. In the *EE*, however, Aristotle is operating with a conception of *phronêsis* much closer to the ordinary conception according to which it is simply a matter of being competent and decent in dealing with ordinary practical problems. Hence, it is a much less powerful condition, and there is no reason that someone whose nonrational dispositions have some imperfections should not count as

⁵¹Cf. the Platonic saying that Aristotle frequently repeats, that "knowledge of contraries is the same": see *Topics* 105b6, 105b24, 105b33, 109b17; *Metaphysica* 1078b27; and Plato, *Hip. Min.* 366c–369a; *Rep.* 333e–334a.

⁵²As Callard, "Enkratês Phronimos," 36–37, notes. See e.g. *NE* VII.2, 1145b8; VII.7, 1151a27; VII.9, 1151b28; *EE* II.7, 1223b11–12.

practically wise. However, since *phronêsis* can be shared even by somewhat flawed agents, Aristotle needs to look elsewhere in order to formulate his account of the ethical ideal, the perfectly virtuous person. Hence, he looks to *kalokagathia*, a virtue that in ordinary thought was meant to connote something like the ideal person—the person who has it all, not merely someone who is decent. The result is the account of *kalokagathia* that we find in *EE* VIII.3.⁵³

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