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Moral Education and Responsibility for Character in Aristotle

*Certain passages of Nicomachean Ethics (EN) seem to suggest a model of moral education that excludes those who have been misguided by their educators from being responsible for their character. I will argue, however, that this impression may result from misinterpreting the method of Aristotle's moral educators. It is often thought, at least since Myles Burnyeat's classic paper, 'Aristotle on Learning to Be Good'¹, that according to Aristotle, a moral educator should tell to moral students which actions are good so that they could begin to practice performing them. I will show that this interpretation is both exegetically problematic, and the likely cause of the above, uncharitable impression. I will argue that it would be more justifiable to interpret Aristotle to be maintaining that the moral students should discover good actions themselves, though trial and error, and that the moral educator might only be needed to keep them away from acting too badly, as Howard Curzer has proposed². Since in order to discover good actions on his own, a moral student needs to exercise moral discernment, he could be held responsible of the character that he will develop even if his moral educators were misguided him. I will suggest that Aristotle might think that what enables even morally misled people to become morally discerning learners is *synesis*—ability to identify good actions on the basis of other people's opinions.*

1. Introduction

Consider these passages:

EN 2.1 1103a33-b1: ...[B]y building houses, people become house-builders, by playing the cithara, they become cithara-players; so, too, then, by doing just things we become just, by doing temperate things, we become temperate; and by doing courageous things courageous. [...] If this were not the case, there would be no need of an educator, but everyone would come into being already good or bad.

1 In A. Oksenberg Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1980, pp. 69-92.

2 H. Curzer, "Aristotle's Painful Path to Virtue", «Journal of The History of Philosophy», vol. 40, no. 2, 2002, pp. 141-62.

EN 6.11 1143b11-14: One ought to pay attention to the undemonstrated assertions and opinions of the experienced, older and morally wise people [i.e. the moral educators]...for they see correctly.

EN 3.5 1114a 12-21: If someone who is not acting in ignorance does those things as a result of which he will be unjust, then he will be voluntarily unjust [...] [I]t was possible in the beginning for both the unjust person and the intemperate one not to become such as they are, and hence they are what they are voluntarily»³.

In EN 2.1 1103a33-b1, Aristotle says that people can become morally virtuous by performing virtuous actions according to their abilities under guidance of an educator (*didaskalos*)⁴. As we can see from EN 6.11 1143b11-14, Aristotle does, not however, encourage the students to be critical to their educators, who supposedly need to show the virtuous actions to them, just as master builders or cithara-players should show their apprentices the standards of house building or cithara-playing. Although it might not matter for one's responsibility for his craft skills whether he has practiced them under a bad guidance or not, the same cannot certainly be said about a moral student. Without a possibility to be critical to their moral educators, the moral students, who may not yet know what virtuous people actually do, could *not* be held responsible of becoming bad in the light of EN 3.5 1114a 12-21. For in that passage, Aristotle explicitly states that responsibility for character presupposes an informed choice of which habits to adopt.

If the moral students are uncritical, their moral educators can easily pass bad habits to them as without the students recognising that they have been misled. It is easy to unsuspectingly acquire, for example, a habit of consuming excessive amounts of money before certain festivals, eating too much or voting certain political party regardless of the moral quality of their policies. Therefore, for example Susan Sauvé Meyer has concluded that «Aristotle is not attempting to argue that, no matter what the circumstances in which we are raised [...] we are responsible for becoming good persons rather than bad persons».⁵ If this were

³ Quotations are from the translation by Robin C. Bartlett & Susan D. Collins, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2011, unless otherwise indicated. My occasional clarifications are in [brackets].

⁴ Since Aristotle says in EN 1.3 1095a9 that 'it does not matter (for the applicability of his arguments) whether the student is young in age or immature in character', I avoid using age-related language, which Aristotle sometimes uses to describe moral students, because in the light of this passage it can be metaphorical. A moral student does not have to be a child (see Curzer 2002, p. 156) – although the majority of them presumably are – but a person of any age whose character has not yet been trained. Likewise, although most moral educators are presumably parents, it seems that Aristotle could allow also for example, a relative, a friend, tutor or even a helpful philosopher to be a moral educator.

⁵ S. Sauvé Meyer, *Aristotle on Moral Responsibility: Character and Cause*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1993/2011, p. 141. Meyer attempts, however, to be charitable to Aristotle by arguing that responsibility of actions does not presuppose responsibility for character—unlike, for example, Bernard Williams (*Ethics and Limits of Philosophy*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1986, p. 38) assumes. However, since her maneuver is very problematic, I think

the case, Aristotle's model of moral development would, however, exclude a great proportion of people, all those who live under the guidance of bad moral educators, from having a possibility to choose not to develop bad characters. I attempt to show, however, that even if we take *EN* 2.1 1103a33-b1 and 6.11 1143b11-14 at face value, these conclusions do not have to follow. Depending upon the method of the moral educator, of what kind of guidance Aristotle supposes him to give and how, it might be possible that the claim of 1143b11-14 does not even refer to moral education. Aristotelian moral education could even implicitly presuppose that moral students could assess the moral quality of their educators' guidance and be thus responsible of following it.

I will begin my argument from Myles Burnyeat's interpretation on the role of a moral educator, which has influenced subsequent interpreters ever since its publication. According to Burnyeat, the educator should tell a student which kinds of actions are good and which not. I shall show that this interpretation has, however, a certain problem with Aristotle's text, and that listening moral advise would not necessarily help the child to become responsible of his actions. Fortunately, it is, I will argue, more exegetically justified to think that the educator could only prevent the student from acting badly, and let him to learn good actions on his own, as Howard Curzer has proposed. Thus Aristotle's advise for students to be uncritical in *EN* 6.11 1143b11-14 would not apply to moral education, because that advise is concerned only about assertions, not preventive actions. Neither Curzer's interpretation does, however, present how Aristotle could have a more plausible conception of character responsibility than he may now seem to have. It seems, however, that he could. For independent discovery—unlike mere obedience to an educator—is possible only if the student is able to assess the moral quality of other people's acting. I will argue that Aristotle could have considered verbal teaching unnecessary for moral development on account of his view that any moral student eventually develops the cognitive ability of *synesis*, which Aristotle describes in *EN* 6.10, with which he can discern good actions from bad ones without the educator's help. I will conclude by suggesting that Aristotle's little-studied discussion about *synesis* may show that badly educated people are responsible of their character.

2. The Method of Aristotle's Moral Educator

In his paper, *Aristotle on Learning to be Good*, Myles Burnyeat argues that according to Aristotle, 'you', provided that you are a child about to begin to develop your character, need 'someone around to tell you what is good and just'⁶. The need for such advise may explain why Aristotle requires in *EN* 2.1 1103a33-b1 moral development to involve an educator. Burnyeat's argument seems to be based

that it would be more charitable to Aristotle if he could be shown to admit people's responsibility for their character.

6 Burnyeat 1980 p. 74.

on the assumption that Aristotle has explained the educator's task already in 1.4 1095b4-8:

For while one must begin from what is familiar, this may be taken in two ways: some things are familiar to us, others without qualification. Presumably, then, we should begin from things familiar to us. This is the reason why one should have been well brought up in good habits if ones are going to listen adequately to lectures about things good and just, and in general about political (social) affairs. For the beginning (starting-point) is 'the that' and if this is sufficiently apparent to a man, he will not in addition have a need for 'the because. (Burnyeat's translation)

Burnyeat interprets the meaning of 'the that' and the point of above passage to be this:

'What is 'the that'? The ancient commentators agreed that Aristotle has in mind knowledge about actions in accordance with virtues; these actions are the things familiar to us from which we must start and what we know about them is that they are good and just⁷ [...] It takes educated perception ['that because'], a capacity going beyond application of general rules, to tell [the moral student] what is required for the practice of virtues in specific circumstances⁸ [...] That being so, if the student is to have 'the that' for which the doctrines of Aristotle's lectures provide the explanatory 'because' [...] the emphasis had better be on his knowing of specific actions that they are good and just in specific circumstances [...] moral advice will come to him in fairly general terms⁹.

According to Aristotle, attraction to good (natural virtue) belongs to our essence: everyone has it 'immediately from birth'¹⁰. No one can, however, know the normative content of 'good' or correctly identify good actions, that is, what he should do in order to satisfy this attraction, without having received appropriate teaching. Thus, Burnyeat thinks that the task of the educator is to tell a moral student that certain actions are good and just 'in fairly general terms'. Once he knows this, has 'the that' (*to hoti*), he is able to direct his natural attraction rightly: to correctly perceive how he should act in order be a well acting (adj. *spoudaios*) person. Becoming a moral educator requires, however, also 'that because' (*to dioti*), the reasons for why certain actions are virtuous, which comes from learning the intellectual virtue of moral wisdom (*phronesis*) by listening, among other things,¹¹ 'the lectures about things noble and just'. Since Aristotle states in the beginning of *EN* 2, a few lines before

7 'So Aspasius, Eustratius, Heliodorus ad loc.' (Burnyeat 1980, p. 88 n. 3)

8 *EN* 2.9 1109b23 and 4.5 1126b2-4 support this claim.

9 Burnyeat 1980, pp. 71-72.

10 In *EN* 6.13 1444b6ff, Aristotle says that everyone has virtue 'immediately from birth', but that this natural virtue cannot identify correct actions. Since full virtue consists of knowledge, ability to choose virtuous actions for their own sakes, and firm character (*EN* 2.4 1105a31-33), and since people have none of these by nature, natural virtue must only mean desire towards good, potential virtue.

11 Aristotle says that intellectual virtue comes *mostly*, i.e. not entirely from teaching (see quotation on this page). He adds in *EN* 6.11 1143b14-17 that *phronesis* requires also considerable experience in life.

1103a33-b1 that ‘intellectual virtue results mostly from teaching [...] whereas moral virtue is the result of habit’¹², Burnyeat has to be committed to think that one can become a *spoudaios* without receiving teaching for *phronesis*.

Since Aristotle says, however, in *EN* 6 also that ‘one cannot be properly (*kyrios*) virtuous (*agathos*) without *phronesis*’¹³, Burnyeat adds to this conclusion that only by acquiring *phronesis*, a well acting person can ‘achieve the final correcting and perfecting of the that’¹⁴ – a proper moral virtue, which makes him able to guide the new generations of students towards moral goodness. So, on this interpretation, Aristotle thinks that people become morally virtuous by education in the sense that education makes them *spoudaioi* and those people will be properly morally virtuous at once they have acquired *phronesis* to complement their good character. *Politics* 3.4 seems to confirm that something like this must be Aristotle’s view, for also there he differentiates a mere *spoudaios* from a morally virtuous *agathos*: ‘when we speak of an *agathos*, we mean that he has the perfect (*teleia*) virtue. Thus, it is clearly possible to be a good (*spoudaion*) citizen without having the virtue that constitutes the virtuous person’¹⁵, which, thinks Aristotle, is *phronesis*¹⁶.

Burnyeat’s interpretation may seem now plausible. There is, however, an exegetical problem in it. Namely, Burnyeat interprets Aristotle to be thinking that the stable habit of acting well (on the basis of which listening lectures on ethics can help in acquiring *phronesis*) results from being educated to act in accordance with right moral generalizations. However, the problem is that what is telling moral generalizations if not ‘listening lectures on things noble and just’ of which moral learners can profit only *after* they have ‘the that’ as Aristotle says in *EN* 1.4? Burnyeat might reply to this by saying that telling moral generalizations is quite different, far more basic teaching than the presumably specialized instruction provided in Aristotle’s lectures. Although Aristotle might agree with this view, in *EN* 10.9 1179a26-31 he clearly maintains, however, that ‘moral speech (*logos*) and teaching does never prevail with all, but [in order for them to prevail] the soul of the listener must be already habituated...’ That is, not only specialized teaching for *phronesis*, but also *any* moral speech—such as telling moral generalizations, presupposes that the student is already acting well (which, as we have seen above, presupposes the knowledge of good actions, ‘the that’).

These passages have encouraged Howard Curzer to remark in his paper *Aristotle’s Painful Path to Virtue*, that Burnyeat’s interpretation might be ‘misleading’¹⁷

12 *EN* 2.1 1103a14-17.

13 *EN* 6.13 1144b.

14 Burnyeat 1980 p. 74.

15 *Pol.* 3.4 1276b35. Translation by Benjamin Jowett, in *In The Complete Works of Aristotle, Revised Oxford Translation*, vol. II. Edited by Jonathan Barnes, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1995.

16 *Ibid.* 1277a15.

17 Curzer 2002, p. 6.

Of course, if there were no other way to guide learners, then Burnyeat's interpretation might be charitable despite Aristotle's protestations that ethics teaching presupposes that the learner already knows the that. However, there are various ways to keep learners on track without either giving them the that (i.e., teaching learners "this is the right thing to do in this situation") or reducing education to mere mindless repetition (e.g., making learners stand fast in battle again and again no matter what the risk and likelihood of success). For example, one might merely prevent learners from acting wrongly, allowing them to discover the right acts for themselves¹⁸.

According to Curzer, Aristotle's moral educator might not need to provide the students with any moral generalizations, but let them to identify 'the that' on their own, though trial and error, and only 'prevent them from acting wrongly'. This is an intriguing possibility. For by urging the moral students to be uncritical to the assertions of virtuous people in *EN* 6.11 1143b11-14, Aristotle does not ask them to be uncritical to the moral quality of the preventive acting of their moral educators—which may reveal whether someone is a good moral educator or not.

The possibility becomes useful when we recall *EN* 3.5 1114a12-21. It seems mysterious how one could become responsible of his bad habits as a result of an informed choice, if moral education proceeds as Burnyeat interprets it to proceed. Provided that you are told to perform bad actions as good, and you unsuspectingly perform those actions until you are incorrigibly bad (*phaulos*), as opposed to *spoudaios*, when you were able to voluntarily choose whether to be a *phaulos* and become responsible of your character? Can we only uncharitably admit that Aristotle would not regard you as responsible for your character, as we have seen Sauvé Meyer to conclude? Burnyeat does not present any exegetically justified answer to this question, and it seems that he could not, for his interpretation allows the moral students to only listen their educators, and mere listening may have no connection with moral discernment. However, neither Curzer tries to answer it, although his interpretation faces the same problem: what if the educator prevents the student from acting well since beginning? But as opposed to Burnyeat's, Curzer's interpretation has space for the answer. It seems to have a gap that is in need of being filled.

3. Responsibility for Character

In order to come to know which actions are good on his own, to get 'the that', a moral student must be able to independently discern which actions are good. Only such ability can ensure that he can become *spoudaios*, who can then acquire experience in morally good life and attend to philosophical lectures on ethics in order to become *phronimos*. For his educator's preventive measures against wrong actions may, only prevent him from making fatal mistakes, but not necessarily help in discerning good actions. Curzer does not explain how the moral student can discern the good actions, if no one advises him about them. We have just seen

18 Ibid.

that having an ability to discern the good actions is crucial to not only to moral development, but also to responsibility for character: consider the unlucky people whose characters bad education is in the process of corrupting. Only acquiring the ability to discern good actions can enable them try to change the course of their moral development by performing better actions, and make them culpable provided that they knowingly choose to not to perform them. Therefore, in order for Curzer's interpretation to avoid the gap and allowing Aristotle an uncharitable conception of character responsibility, it would need to be shown that Aristotle thinks that *all* people, even those who are not prevented from acting badly, can nevertheless have an ability to discern good actions.

I would like to direct our attention to *EN* 6.10. For seems that in this chapter, Aristotle might describe ability to reliably discern good actions from bad ones, which he calls *synesis* (usually translated as 'comprehension'¹⁹ or 'understanding'²⁰) and does not preclude even badly educated people from having it. Let me quote the entire chapter:

(1) There is also *synesis* and good *synesis* (*eusynesis*), with reference to which we speak of those who comprehend or comprehend well. *Synesis* is in general neither the same things as science, nor the same thing as opinion (in which case everyone would have *synesis*); nor it is any one of the particular sciences—for example, medicine, which is concerned with the matters of health, and geometry, with magnitudes. *Synesis* is concerned neither with beings that are eternal and unmoved nor with just any one or every one of the things that come into being, but rather with the things about which someone might be perplexed and deliberate. Hence it is concerned with the same things as *phronesis*. (2) *Synesis* and *phronesis* is not the same thing, however, for *phronesis* is characterized by the giving of commands (*epitaktikei estin*): its end is what one ought or ought not to do. But *synesis* is characterized by discernment (*krisis*) alone. For *synesis* and good *synesis*, as well as those who use *synesis* and those who do so well, is the same thing. (3) And *synesis* is neither the possession of *phronesis* nor the gaining of it. (4) Rather, just as learning is said to be using *synesis* (*synienai*), whenever it makes use of science, so *synesis* is said to consist of making use of opinion to render a discernment about what someone else says (*legoites*), regarding the matters *phronesis* is concerned with—and rendering such a discernment nobly. For doing something well is the same as doing it nobly. (5) And from this name '*synesis*' – in reference to which we speak of those who are of good *synesis* – has arisen, namely, from the *synesis* involved in learning (*manthanein*). For we often say learning when we mean using *synesis*.

It is descriptive of the present lack of attention towards this passage that the most thorough reading of it is in Norman Dahl's book, *Practical Reason, Aristotle*

19 See e.g. *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by C. Rowe. Commentary and Introductory Essay by S. Broadie, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2002, and Collins & Bartlett 2011.

20 See e.g. *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by D. Ross, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle, Revised Oxford Translation*, vol. II. Edited by Jonathan Barnes, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1995.

and *The Weakness of Will*, in which he dedicates (only) a paragraph for it. According to Dahl, 'Synesis is like a purely intellectual or speculative grasp of moral ends, for it is primarily exercised when one passes judgment on the advice or moral pronouncements of someone else'²¹ This conclusion seems to be based only on the passage (2), in which Aristotle distinguishes *phronesis* and *synesis* by stating the latter does not 'give commands'. Dahl thinks that this phrase introduces a distinction between '[moral] knowledge that is motivationally grounded thus has an effect on what a person does and [moral] knowledge that may function only on a speculative level'²². This might be true only in some extent, for if badly educated people can use *synesis* to knowingly choose to *either* begin to act well with a view of becoming *spoudaioi* or continue to act badly until they become incorrigible *phauloi* (and be therefore be responsible for their character), their moral knowledge seems to be able to function only speculatively. However, with regard to the moral students who have good educators, or people who are already *spoudaioi* or *phronimoi*, the operation of *synesis* should be 'motivationally grounded': they would use *synesis* only in order to satisfy their attraction to good. Therefore the motivational difference between *synesis* and *phronesis* can be more blurred than Dahl assumes.

Let us thus start from the beginning, from (1), in order to see more clearly what might be at stake 6.10. In that passage, Aristotle begins his description of *synesis* by dismissing the possibilities that it is science (*episteme*), opinion (*doxa*) or a particular science. Science is about universal principles and *synesis* is not (this shows that 'comprehension' or 'understanding' are misleading translations, because one could be said to comprehend or understand, for example, mathematical axioms). *Synesis* cannot be opinion, because everyone—that is, even small children who have only a very little experience in life—can have opinions, but not *synesis*²³. *Synesis* can neither be a 'particular science', such as medicine or geometry. Those sciences are skills, which are based on the application universal principles in particular circumstances. After making clear with what *synesis* is not concerned with, Aristotle goes to conclude that it 'is concerned with the same things as *phronesis*', that is, particular good actions that are not discovered by the application of universal principles²⁴.

In (2), Aristotle continues by stating that the task of *phronesis* is to command what 'one ought or ought not to do'. Therefore *phronesis* directs one to perform good actions. *Synesis* enables only the discernment (*krisis*) of good actions. *Phronesis*

21 D.O. Dahl, *Practical Reason, Aristotle, and The Weakness of The Will*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1984, p. 46.

22 Ibid.

23 Cf. *EN* 3.1 111b31, in which Aristotle says that opinion can be about anything, even about impossible things. Thus, having opinions seems to require no experience of social life whatsoever.

24 For the difference between the operation of *phronesis* and the application of universal principles to particular circumstances, see e.g. J. McDowell, (1980) "The Role of *Eudaimonia* in Aristotle's Ethics" in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*.

can require the possession of ‘that because’, because having a justification, the reasons why such and such action is good, may provide one with more motivating reasons for performing the good action as opposed to mere perception of *synesis*. Since a good moral educator should act well, this may explain why moral educators should be *phronimoi*, although they may not be required to advise moral students. Provided that everyone who has experienced some social life, met other people apart from his moral educators, and come to observe their opinions on his actions, has *synesis* – as I assume – it would why Aristotle stresses in (3) that *synesis* has no connection with acquiring or having *phronesis*, which belongs only to the virtuous.

Passage (4) sheds light to the way in which one’s *synesis* discerns good actions. Firstly, Aristotle seems to emphasize that not all ways of speaking about *synesis* refer to *synesis* proper: for example, a learner of science is said to use *synesis*, but he of course not really use *synesis*, because, as (1) has made clear, *synesis* is not concerned with science. This remark suggests that diversity in folk discourse about *synesis* may explain why (1) was so long compared to the rest of the chapter: Aristotle had to make clear that he here discusses *synesis* in a special sense (we see again that ‘comprehension’ or ‘understanding’ are ambiguous translations, because replace a special term with a broad one). Secondly, in (4), Aristotle characterizes *synesis* as the ability that uses the opinions of the others in order to discern which actions are good from someone else’s speech about the matters with which *phronesis* is concerned (that is, about how one ought to act) which reaches the discernment nobly. Since Aristotle emphasized that *synesis* and good *synesis* are the same in (2), his opinion seems to be that one does not have *synesis* at all provided that he does not discern good actions nobly. Reaching the discernment nobly is reaching it well, namely, since truth is the end of discerning, reaching a true discernment. Therefore the function of *synesis* seems to be to extract a true opinion of whether such and such acting is good from other people’s moral speech concerning that acting. There might be no need to criticise a moral educator’s words (cf. *EN* 6.11 1143b11-14), to think that he might be a bad person, unless his acting to prevent the student from acting badly proves to be bad.

Although my interpretation of *synesis* fits with Aristotle’s text and could thus complement Curzer in a justifiable way, one could, however, point to at least two possible problems in it. First, he could wonder how *synesis* can function as I have interpreted it to function: namely, how Aristotle could think that anyone can discern good actions without having yet acquired *phronesis* and knowledge of why such and such acting is good (‘that because’), merely as a result of having received some basic moral education? In spite of Aristotle does not seem to give any answer to this question, we can, however, speculate about how he could deal with it. Perhaps he thought that the answer is so obvious that he does not have to present it. Consider, for example, how people can distinguish that such and such material is mud. There is no definition for mud: it is soft, smelly and brown, but so is much other stuff. People do not need to know why such and such material is mud in order to call it mud. They can simply point to a pile of a certain material and say that it is mud; they have only learned that people tend to agree that suchlike material is mud. Analogously with *synesis*: a moral student can discern that this acting is good, because it resembles

acting that is generally recognised as good. *Synesis* can be the ability to execute this identification by reflecting the acting of one's moral educators to the opinions of the other people, of which he has inevitably come to know as a result of his moral education, regardless of whether it has been good or bad. For no one develops his character in a cage. Thus, one does not need 'that because' in order to have *synesis*.

The second problem might be that if my interpretation were valid, then *synesis* may seem to be an excellence in reaching true opinion. Since intellectual virtues are excellences that aim at truth, as opposed to moral virtues that aim at good, my interpretation may seem to explain why Aristotle remarks in the end of *EN* 1 (13 1103a5) 'that we speak (*legomen*) that some of the virtues are intellectual [...] scientific wisdom (*sophia*), *phronesis* and *synesis*' when preparing ground for *EN* 2. But if this were the case, then it may seem to follow that Burnyeat's interpretation of the method of a moral educator could be nevertheless in right in spite of its uncharitable implications to understanding Aristotle's conception of responsibility for character. Although Aristotle thinks that moral education does not require verbal teaching, it requires *synesis*, and *synesis*, insofar it is intellectual virtue, has to be taught as intellectual virtues in general according to the first lines of *EN* 2, for example, by telling students that such and such kinds of acting are generally good or bad. Since verbal teaching is what Burnyeat suggested to be the starting point of moral education, his basic interpretative tenet may now seem correct.

However, the passage (5), which we have not yet taken into account, seems to suggest that *synesis* of *EN* 1.13, an intellectual virtue, may not be the same as the *synesis* of *EN* 6.10. In (5), Aristotle concludes his account of *synesis* by arguing that the folk notion of *synesis* – of which we speak (*legomen*) as *synesis*, the *synesis* of *EN* 1.13 – has arisen from the (special) conception of *synesis* that he discusses here in 6.10 – which is Aristotle's way of trying to show that his conception of *synesis* is *synesis* proper. He claims that people often speak of 'learning' when they mean in fact using *synesis*. Since, however, Aristotle claimed earlier that the learners of science are *not* using *synesis* even though in folk speech they are regarded as doing so, and since *synesis* is not relevant in learning skills, the 'learning' in (5) must refer exclusively to a moral learning. *Synesis* is indeed essential for moral learning. Therefore there is a difference between the folk and proper notions of *synesis*. The former *synesis*, insofar as the learners of science are said to use it, is regarded as capable of assessing truthfulness of scientific speech among people. No doubt, such an excellence must be verbally taught. This does not, however, mean that *synesis* proper must be verbally taught, that it is an intellectual virtue, which people call it on the basis of their folk conception. Proper *synesis* can be only a cognitive ability acquired through social interaction.

4. Conclusions

The outcome of *EN* 2.1 1103a33-b1 and 6.11 1143b11-14 seemed to be a model of moral education, in which people learn virtuous acting by performing virtuous actions under the guidance of an educator whose advise they should not

criticize. The apparent problem in this model is that provided that responsibility for character presupposes an informed choice of whether to act well or not (*EN* 3.5 1114a 12-21), it may seem that those people who have been morally misguided might not be responsible of their bad character. For obviously, only those people who have been following good teaching (*spoudaioi*) can know which actions are good and which not. Therefore only they can make an informed choice about which actions to perform. In order to avoid this conclusion, I attempted to argue that all moral students, even those who are educated badly, could be critical to their educators before they become incurably bad (*phauloi*).

I began my argument from Myles Burnyeat's interpretation, according to which the task of an educator seems to be to advise the student about which kinds of actions are good and which bad, 'the that'. It became clear, however, that this interpretation does not fit together with what Aristotle says in *EN* 1.4 1095b1-14 and 10.7 1179a26-31, that one cannot properly listen any moral advise unless he already has 'the that'. Moreover, in any case, merely listening moral advice would not necessarily make the student responsible for his character. Therefore I argued that Howard Curzer's interpretation, which suggests that the educator might not advise the student, but only prevent him from doing bad actions, and let him to get to know the good actions by himself, is more plausible. It is more faithful to Aristotle's text, and it does not preclude the student's from being critical to their educators. For although *EN* 6.11 1143b11-14 urges the students to be uncritical to virtuous people's advise, Aristotle does not prevent them from being critical to their educator's preventive acting. Curzer did not, however, make use of this possibility for showing that Aristotle might have a more plausible account of responsibility for character that he may initially seem to have. Therefore I attempted to complement Curzer's interpretation by pointing out that Aristotle could think in *EN* 6.10 that all people with experience in social life have an ability to discern good actions from bad ones, *synesis*. Aristotle, as Norman Dahl has noticed, seems to think that having *synesis* does not presuppose being a good person. By studying 6.10 in a greater detail, I found out that *synesis* could well be the ability what makes even badly morally educated people able to be critical to their current educators' preventive actions, and to voluntarily choose to perform better actions. Everyone acquires *synesis* by coming into contact with wider public apart from one's educators, and having *synesis* makes anyone. Therefore, unlike it seemed in the beginning, *EN* 2.1 1103a33-b1 and 6.11 1143b11-14 seem to pose no problem for Aristotle's conception of responsibility for character (3.5 1114a12-21).

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