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Why is Aristotle's vicious person miserable?.

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is, the absence of mental conflict enables her to realise her nature. But that does not imply that her happiness consists, even in part, in her experiencing that harmonious condition.

However, in his account of the contrary case to the virtuous person, namely, the vicious, or bad person, Aristotle implies that the experiential state matters for happiness.² For the bad person falls short of happiness not only on account of failing to realise her human nature. In addition, the bad person is miserable precisely on account of what it feels like to be in that state. Arguing for the view that we should do our utmost to become good, and to avoid wickedness, Aristotle points out that the bad person is full of remorse, finds nothing lovable about herself, indeed hates herself, and even considers suicide (*NE* 9.4, 1166^b11–13, 24–8).³ By contrast, if the bad person's lack of happiness were merely a matter of not being in the perfect natural state, then arguably, she could even be enjoying herself in the less than perfect state.

The question I want to raise is why the bad person is in such a miserable state. One reason for the bad person's failure to realise her nature is that, in contrast to the virtuous person, she is not harmonious in her motivational states. For the bad person is conflicted between opposing impulses pulling her in different directions (*NE* 9.4, 1166^b19–22). But without further qualifications, appeal to the bad person's conflicted state does not explain why she feels so bad about herself. Going for the fulfilment of one desire at the expense of

² For the view that vice is the contrary (*enantia*) to virtue, see *NE* 7.1, 1145^a15–18.

³ As for attributing self-hatred to the bad person, I go on the manuscript variant in L^b, or Parisiensis 1854, of *NE* 9.4, 1166^b12, reading *misousi te* instead of *misountai*. So Irwin 2001, 90 note 28. Nothing in the context suggests that bad people flee from life because they are hated by other people, but rather because they hate their own life. Admittedly, hatred of one's own life is not equivalent to self-hatred, but the context strongly suggests that the bad person hates not just her life, but herself for her miserable character.

competing desires may cause nuisance, but it does not in an obvious way lead to self-contempt, let alone to a suicidal condition.

The purpose of this paper is to explain what the conflicted mental state of the bad person amounts to, and why she is so exceedingly miserable on account of it. In view of the fact that Aristotle pinpoints the conflicted vicious life as the most miserable one, understanding the condition of the bad person is instrumental in understanding its contrary, the happy condition of the virtuous person. I will argue that the bad person's mental conflict consists in a clash between two different kinds of desire, and that fulfilling one of the desires violates values that she also desires, and holds in esteem. More precisely, the bad person feels miserable not only on account of failing to fulfil her desire for the truly good life, but also on account of doing things that are degrading for her. The virtuous person, by contrast, fulfils her desire for the good life, and is pleased that she is good (*NE* 9.9, 1170^b8–10), and even loves herself.⁴

It should be pointed out that there is no conflict between this understanding of happiness, and the claim that it takes a certain natural state to be happy. For it is precisely by fulfilling the desire for the good life that one comes to realise one's nature. For this reason, the distinction between an objectivist and a subjectivist notion of happiness is inapt to capture Aristotle's position, at least without further qualifications.⁵ In fact, at least three different distinctions should be separated. The first concerns the question whether happiness is, or involves, an experiential state or not. The second concerns the question whether happiness is determined by the individual in the sense that what anyone thinks will make her happy, will do so. The third concerns the question whether happiness amounts to the same thing for all

⁴ A further reason for why the virtuous person enjoys her condition is the pleasure taken in virtuous activity (*NE* I 8, 1099^a7-17; X 7, 1177^a22-7). However, I shall leave the part played by pleasure in the virtuous life for another occasion.

⁵ For discussion, see Kraut 1979, 180–6; Annas 1993, 43–6; Jost 2002, xiii–xxiv.

individuals. I opt for the view that Aristotelian happiness is an enjoyable experiential state brought about by the fulfilment of the specifically human desire, namely wish (*boulesis*). Wish is a desire for what is truly good for a human being, and what is good for a human being is determined by facts about human nature, and not by what the individual happens to think is good for her.⁶

The attempt to explain the miserable state of the bad person faces a tough challenge. As mentioned, the fact that the bad person is conflicted in her motivational state does not suffice to explain her self-hatred. One option is that the bad person acts against what she thinks is good, and in fact does what she thinks is bad, and degrading for her. The problem, then, is that this construal of the mental conflict of the bad person seems to conflate her with the akratic one. But the bad person, in contrast to the akratic one, acts on what she believes to be good. A proper account of the bad person's conflict should still manage to explain why the bad person is remorseful, and even hates herself. Whereas the akratic condition does provide a straightforward explanation of these feelings, the nature of the bad person's conflict makes it harder to explain them.

2. The mental conflict

In order to understand why the bad person feels remorse, and even hates herself, we need to explain what it is about the bad person's mental set-up that prompts these feelings. More particularly, we need to understand what it is about the bad person's conflicted state that prompts them. I will argue that the mental conflict of the bad person consists in a particular kind of value-clash between desires, such that by fulfilling one kind of desire, she violates

⁶ For the purposes here, I set aside the important question whether it is the prospect of obtaining a certain state, or of experiencing that state, which ultimately *motivates* our pursuits. But for a balanced discussion, see Soll 1998, 23–6.

other values, which she esteems. She is remorseful on account of doing things, which she finds degrading for herself.

But as mentioned, it is not obvious that the bad person even is conflicted. For the bad person pursues what she believes to be good, and acts on the reasoned view about how to achieve it (*NE* 7.8, 1151^a5–7). The akratic agent, by contrast, acts against her own conception of what the good thing to do is (*NE* 7.4, 1148^a4–11). Although the bad person may be wrong about what the good really is, no conflict need arise between her reasoned view of what to do, based on that erroneous conception of the good, and her other desires. In so far as the bad person succeeds in her pursuit of what she thinks is good, she should be as content as the virtuous person, leaving no desire frustrated. Think of a bad person, who at the expense of virtues such as temperance and justice, successfully pursues a life of excessive wealth, power, and public praise. Whether or not a virtuous, and hence a morally appropriate, way to live, it does not suggest a conflicted life full of remorse

But in *NE* 9.4 Aristotle indeed seems to portray the bad person as conflicted: “the soul of [bad people] is at odds with itself, and the one part, because if its wickedness, grieves at holding back from some things, whereas the other part is pleased, the one part pulling in this direction, the other in that direction as if tearing it apart” (1166^b19–22).⁷ But if the bad person pursues what she takes to be good, it is not obvious why, and in what way, she is conflicted.⁸

⁷ στασιάζει γὰρ αὐτῶν ἡ ψυχὴ, καὶ τὸ μὲν διὰ μοχθηρίαν ἀλγεῖ ἀπεχόμενόν τινων, τὸ δ’ ἥδεται, καὶ τὸ μὲν δεῦρο τὸ δ’ ἐκείσε ἔλκει ὥσπερ διασπῶντα. The metaphor of tearing the soul apart features in Plato’s soul/city analogy, see, e.g., *Republic* 5, 462a8–b1, 464c7–8, and *Laws* 9, 875a5–b1.

⁸ For discussion, see e.g. Annas 1977, 553–4; Irwin 2001, 89; Brickhouse 2003, 4. Sarah Broadie notices that Aristotle nowhere explicitly claims that the bad person is unconflicted (Broadie 1991, 177, note 41).

In their commentary, Gauthier & Jolif even dispute that this characterisation actually concerns the bad person. They argue that with the exception of lines 1166^b11–14, the account of inferior people (*hoi phauloi*) at 1166^b2–26 is concerned with the akratic person exclusively (Gauthier & Jolif 1970, 733–4). Of course, since lines 1166^b11–14 depict bad people (*hoi mochtheroi*) particularly as shrinking from life, and destroying themselves, these lines are still testimony to the miserable condition of the bad person. But if Gauthier & Jolif are right, then there is no contradiction with the view of the bad person as unconflicted. For the miserable condition of the bad person may be due to other factors. For instance, Aristotle may follow Plato in portraying the bad person as being insatiable, because of her pursuit of bodily pleasures, which provide no lasting contentment (*Gorgias* 493e6–494a3).

However, it is more straightforward to take the short characterisation of the akratic person on lines 8–11, rather than the discussion of the bad person on lines 11–14, to be the exception from the main topic. That is, Aristotle starts the account by referring to inferior people in general as being conflicted. He then, on line 5, specifies bad people as a particular kind of inferior people, namely as those that are entirely inferior (*hoi komidei phauloi*). He only then, on line 8, gives the case of the akratic person as a comparison (*hoion*), and fleshes out this case in the following three lines.⁹ The akratic conflict consists in going against what one believes to be good for oneself, and instead going for what one believes to be harmful (8–10). But after this comparison, from line 11 onwards, he returns to his main concern, which is to elucidate what it is that makes the conflicted *bad* person miserable.

Still, the characterisation of the bad person as conflicted between different desires does not by itself explain why she feels remorse, let alone self-hatred. Nevertheless, at *NE* 9.4, 1166^b23–5 the bad person is portrayed not only as conflicted, but as remorseful as well: “after a short while he grieves that he was pleased, and had wished that these things had not been

⁹ For a parallel account, see *EE* 7.6, 1240^b11–14.

pleasant to him. For bad people are full of remorse.”¹⁰ This portrayal of the bad person as full of remorse is in flat contradiction with Aristotle’s claim in book 7 of the *Nicomachean ethics* that, in contrast to the akratic person, the bad person is not remorseful (*NE* 7.7, 1150^a21–2; 7.8, 1150^b29–36).¹¹ But I shall assume that the book 9 account gives Aristotle’s considered view. The purpose in book 7 is to articulate the akratic person’s condition, the bad person merely providing a contrast in certain respects. Lack of remorse on the part of the bad person is invoked as an explanation of why she cannot change her ways. In book 9, on the other hand, the issue concerns the self-love of the virtuous person, which is more closely related to the question what makes the virtuous person happy. In this context, the bad person’s remorse does not imply that she can be reformed. Moreover, the account of the bad person’s state is considerably more longer, and detailed, than anything to be found in book 7.

But most importantly, in *NE* 9.4 Aristotle articulates what kind of mental conflict both the akratic and the bad person are susceptible to. It consists in having an appetite for one set of things (*heteron men epithumousin*), but wishing for another set of things (*alla de boulontai*) (*NE* 9.4, 1166^b7–8). So the conflict is put forward as a clash between two different kinds of desire, namely appetite (*epithumia*) and wish (*boulesis*), respectively. The distinction between appetite and wish is well established in Aristotle’s psychology, and they are distinguished by reference both to their domicile in the soul, and to their objects. The non-

¹⁰ ...ἀλλὰ μετὰ μικρὸν γε λυπεῖται ὅτι ἦσθη, καὶ οὐκ ἂν ἐβούλετο ἡδέα ταῦτα γενέσθαι αὐτῷ· μεταμελείας γὰρ οἱ φαῦλοι γέμουσιν. (*NE* 9.4, 1166^b23–4)

¹¹ Cf. Annas 1977, 553–4; Irwin 2001, 73–4; Brickhouse 2003, 6. Broadie plays down the contradiction by distinguishing between remorse for particular actions, on the one hand, and remorse for what kind of person one has become, on the other (Broadie 2009, 164, footnote 18). In the end, I do not see how remorse for what kind of person one has become can be independent of the assessment of one’s particular actions.

rational part of the soul harbours appetite, the object of which is pleasure (*DA* 3.9, 432^b6; *EE* 2.7, 1223^a34), whereas the rational, or reason possessing, part harbours wish, the object of which is the good (*DA* 3.9, 432^b6; *EE* 2.10, 1227^a28–9).¹²

In section 4, I shall elaborate on the relation between wish and the good, but for now, let me pinpoint that the object of wish is the ultimate end of specifically human pursuits, namely the good life, or happiness, and what is conducive to it. But in other works, and in the biological works most notably, the notion of the good is a stand-in for anything desired, and pursued (*DA* 7, 431a8–12; 10, 433b8–10; *MA*, 700b25–9), without in any way suggesting that these things appearing good to the agent are conducive to her happiness. So in explaining animal and human pursuits, Aristotle employs the term ‘the good’ (*tagathon*) equivocally.¹³ Hence, nothing implies that whatever appearing good is seen as (or, for that matter, is) pertinent to the ultimate end of human pursuits. A chocolate bar may appear good to a person on account of appearing delicious, without implying that she takes it to be pertinent to

¹² Less directly in *Rhet.* 1.10, 1368^b37–1369^a7. This is not the place to defend the distribution of the different kinds of desire, but for considerations against locating wish in the reason possessing part of the soul, see Price 1995, 111; Moss 2012, 161–2. To keep things manageable, I leave out the third kind of desire, namely spirited desire (*thumos*), which belongs to the non-rational part. But see, e.g., Cooper 1996, 102–114; Richardson Lear 2006, 128–9; Grönroos 2007, 260–4; Pearson 2012, 111–39.

¹³ Cf. Pearson’s distinction between a narrow notion of the good as the object of *boulesis* specifically, and a broad notion of the good as the object of desire (*orexis*) generically (Pearson 2012, 70–2).

happiness. The chocolate bar may appear good even to the virtuous person, without implying that she takes it in any way to be conducive to the good life.¹⁴

But back to the kind of conflict Aristotle has in mind. It arises when the pursuit of pleasure violates values embraced by the rational part of the soul. This is why the bad person wishes that the things pursued had not been appealing to herself in the first place (*NE* 9.4, 1166^b22–4). For instance, if a person values justice as a good, then a conflict of this kind arises when the person does something unjust. She may choose the unjust action under another description, such as being pleasant, or for the sake of some other value. But in either case, the conflict consists in the unjust action's violating a value embraced by the agent, and not just its blocking a just action from being performed. Indeed, in the particular situation, there might not even be room for doing something just, but merely for refraining from doing the unjust thing. So the conflict need not even be a matter of choosing between doing something just or doing something unjust.

To be clear about the kind of mental conflict at issue, let us distinguish between two cases. In the one case, an agent must choose one, and only one, of two options, X and Y say, both of which she wants. The conflict consists in the fact that whichever option she goes for will block the acquisition of the other. However, if it were possible to have both X and Y, no conflict would arise. But in the case, which concerns us here, if the agent chooses X, then the conflict at issue does not consist in the fact that the acquisition of X blocks the acquisition of Y, but in the fact that the very acquisition of X violates Y. So in this case, even if it were possible to have both X and Y, a conflict would still arise.

¹⁴ Cf., also, *EE* 7.2, 1235^b24–1236^a15. Katja Vogt (manuscript) argues that even if all pursuits aim at *some* good, not all particular actions aim at the ultimate good, albeit that the ultimate good, the good life, may *constrain* the particular pursuits.

Of course, the mere presence of wish and appetite need not lead to a conflict. Even the virtuous person has appetites, and satisfying appetites like hunger and thirst, or sexual desires, is perfectly proper from the point of view of the virtuous life. A conflict between the desires of the non-rational part, and those of the rational part of the soul, may arise when the satisfaction of the one is at the expense of the other. But the kind of conflict the bad person suffers from arises when the satisfaction of desires of the non-rational part violates values embraced by the rational part. One case is that of satisfying an appetite in a way, which would be entirely proper unless the situation demanded otherwise. For instance, a person may choose to finish her meal, although the virtues of justice and of courage demand of her to take immediate action to prevent a burglar from entering the neighbour's house. Finishing the meal is not in itself an improper thing to do, but becomes so when other concerns are overriding. Another case is that of satisfying an appetite in a way which in itself, regardless of the circumstances, violates virtue. For instance, finishing the meal in an improper manner, through excessive intake of food and drink, in itself violates the virtue of temperance.

The account of the conflict as arising from the pursuit of a value, which violates another value embraced by the agent, is a good starting point for explaining the bad person's remorse. A person may certainly grieve at having to refrain from something she regards as good, although she deems that what she opted for instead exceeds it in goodness. For she would have preferred to have it all, without having to choose one of them at the expense of the other. Choosing between going to a party or to a concert may not be difficult, but may still cause some nuisance in view of the missed event. But to feel remorse, and self-hatred, something more seems to be involved. The strong feelings of remorse and self-hatred suggest that she regards it as degrading, and as something she should not have chosen under any circumstances. It is not that she grieves at what she missed, but that she feels bad about what she did.

3. Two options dismissed

Understanding the mental conflict as a clash between different values is, I think, what provides the best starting point for explaining the bad person's feelings of remorse, and self-hatred. Nevertheless, there are other options that deserve consideration. One option is that the mental conflict of the bad person is instrumental in nature (Brickhouse 2003, 12–19). On this option, the bad person conceives of pleasure as the good, and acts on the reasoned view of what will maximise pleasure over time. However, even the bad person can be conflicted between the reasoned view of what will give most pleasure over time, and an intermittent urge to do something pleasant at odds with this reasoned view. Although the pleasure from having a doughnut right now in no way measures up to the lost pleasure from the gourmet dinner in half an hour, the bad person, due to her weakness for pleasure, may still irrationally go for the doughnut. On this account, the bad person suffers from diachronic akrasia, and cannot stick to the view of what will benefit her in the long run. But in contrast to the case in which the akrasia consist in a clash between conflicting values, this kind of diachronic case concerns the same value, such as pleasure.

To begin with, it is not obvious that all bad persons are susceptible to diachronic akrasia. On the instrumentalist reading, indulgence in pleasure, which is the goal of the bad person, in the end weakens the bad person's ability to stick to deliberated plans to maximise pleasure over time. But even if this may be the case of some bad people, the instrumentalist reading does not provide an argument that would rule out in principle that a bad person could successfully stick to long term planning with a view to maximising pleasure.

Furthermore, the suggestion fares poorly in explaining the remorse, and the self-hatred, of the bad person. According to the instrumentalist reading, the bad person regrets her akratic action on account of the failure to maximise pleasure. But feelings of remorse, and of self-

hatred to the point of considering suicide, seem unlikely to follow.¹⁵ Perhaps constant failure in achieving even a fair share of pleasure is reason for regret, and even for self-hatred in that regard. But it is more reasonable to think that these strong emotions of feeling contempt for oneself presuppose that the bad person considers the pursued value to be bad, indeed degrading, and not worth pursuing at all.

Another option is that Aristotle follows Plato in pointing out that the conflicted bad person is not only pursuing the wrong things, but that she is not even capable of any consistent, and successful, pursuit at all. Arguing against Thrasymachus's thesis that injustice is of more benefit to the individual than justice, Socrates points out that injustice in fact makes the individual incapable of achieving anything in a consistent way, because of inner conflict (*Republic* 1, 351e10–352a9).

According to this Platonic reading, the source of the miserable condition of the bad person is her inclination to pursue what is appealing at the moment, without forming a reasoned, and stable, conception of the value pursued.¹⁶ For that reason, the bad person cannot even conceive of an overall strategy for her life. There is simply no articulated value, and no conception of what it is to be a human being in the first place, which could bind that strategy together. Although the bad person is able to figure out what to do in the particular situation, and even to plan for the future, the lack of a unifying value deprives her of fully-fledged practical knowledge. So according to this Platonic interpretation, the bad person's problem is not that she cannot stick to what she believes to be good, but that she does not even have a consistent, and lasting, conception of the good in the first place.

¹⁵ For the same point, see Roochnik 2007, 213.

¹⁶ See Irwin 2001, 87–9, 91–4. Irwin's view is more particularly that the bad person lacks not merely a stable conception of the good, but that she does not even have a clear idea of what she is, and that, hence, she has no real concern for herself in the first place.

It is true that Aristotle occasionally portrays the bad person as having no stability, always changing, and not being the same (*NE* 8.8, 1159^b7–9). But on this Platonic reading, it is unclear what the mental conflict on the part of the bad person would come to. The bad person's alleged lack of systematic conception of the value she pursues does not explain the conflict. To the contrary, in fact. For to the extent that the objects of pursuit vary, it is even less clear what the conflict comes to. Perhaps the conflict consists in an impulse action's blocking the acquisition of something else. But in order to generate a conflict it seems that the bad person must cling to the value of the blocked action. If the person is to feel distressed, then she should hold the value of the blocked action in even higher esteem than that of the action actually performed. That suggests the kind of stability in the bad person's evaluative outlook that this Platonic reading denies to her.

But the main objection to the Platonic reading is that there are no compelling reasons for ruling out that Aristotle's bad person could have a thoroughly thought out conception of the value pursued, such as bodily pleasure, which would make successful prudential reasoning possible. That is, to the extent that the bad person conceives of bodily pleasure as the ultimate good, that would seem to suffice in order for her to be able to form an overall plan. In that case, bodily pleasure is chosen for its own sake, and serves as the ultimate end for all actions. Indeed, Aristotle even claims that the self-indulgent person pursues pleasures "because of decision, because of themselves, and because of nothing else resulting from them" (*EN* 7.7, 1150^a19–21).¹⁷

What is more, Aristotle leaves it open that the bad person may successfully pursue whatever she values as good. More precisely, the bad person may deliberate correctly about what to do given a certain end (*NE* 6.9, 1142^b18–20). This capacity to successfully achieve

¹⁷ Irwin, it should be noticed, refers to this passage as evidence against his own view (Irwin 2001, 78).

one's ends is labelled 'cleverness' (*deinotes*), and it is found in the virtuous, as well as in the bad person (*NE* 6.12, 1144^a23–36). Despite the fact that the bad person accomplishes something bad, her effort to achieve her ends need not be hampered by any inner conflict. It is true that excellence in deliberation (*euboulia*) requires that both the end, and the deliberation towards that end, are correct (*NE* 6.9, 1142^b28–33), but that fact does not rule out successful reasoning concerning whatever end. So even if Aristotle attributes mental conflict to the bad person, it does not make her incapable of consistent, and successful, pursuit of a desired end.

It should be noticed that there is a common assumption in both the Platonic, or more precisely, in Irwin's Platonising interpretation, and in the instrumentalist reading, respectively. On both interpretations, wish (*boulesis*) is taken to be a desire for whatever the agent believes to be good. According to Irwin, the bad person's wish is a reasoned desire for whatever the agent figures out as good, although in fact it is not good (Irwin 2001, 87). But Irwin does not take into account the general description of the conflict of bad people, namely, that they wish for some things, but have appetites for other things. On his reading, it is not clear what the clash between wish and appetite comes to. In particular, since the object of the bad person's wish seems to be just as variable as that of her appetites, it is not even clear in what sense there is a clash between the values of wish and appetite, respectively.

On the instrumentalist reading, again, the bad person's wish is a reasoned desire of how to maximise pleasure over time (Brickhouse 2003, 5). The conflict consists in a clash between this desire, and the intermittent urge for immediate gratification of whatever appetite. So on this reading, the conflict is between a reasoned, and an unreasoned, desire for pleasure. On the bad person's evaluative standards, satisfying the intermittent urge is not by itself a bad thing to do, but becomes so in case it blocks the wish to maximise pleasure over time.

But as I have argued, the mental conflict of the bad person consists in a clash of values in the sense that the very value of wish is violated by the bad person's pursuits. For doing what

the bad person chooses in fact violates the good. That is what the clash between appetite and wish comes to. But in order to see this, we need to qualify the assumption that wish is a desire for whatever the agent believes to be good. We need to distinguish between the good as the value which fulfils wish, and the conception of the good upon which a person acts. Since that conception may be erroneous, the action based thereupon may not fulfil what the reason possessing part of the soul desires.

4. Wish and the apparent good

The problem of attributing a conflict between appetite and wish to the bad person, is that in her case, both desires seem to have the same object. For the bad person is typically described as pursuing pleasure as the ultimate good in life (*NE* 3.4, 1113^a33–^b2; *NE* 9.8, 1168^b15–23). The self-indulgent person (*akolastos*) is a particularly clear case (*NE* 7.3, 1146^b19–24; *NE* 7.7, 1150^a19–21; *NE* 7.14, 1154^b9–15), but not all varieties of vice seem equally obviously related to the pursuit of pleasure. What about the coward, the boastful, or the stingy person?¹⁸ Some of these cases may be explained by the pursuit of pleasure and the aversion of pain, but in other cases appeal to pleasure and pain may seem out of place. Be that as it may, for the purposes here, I will take my starting point in the bad person, who acts on the view that pleasure is the ultimate good.¹⁹

¹⁸ Thanks to Hallvard Fossheim for bringing this to my attention. See, also, Irwin 2001, 86–9.

¹⁹ Admittedly, the characterisation of the bad person as acting on the considered view that pleasure is the overall good implies a hedonist. But whether she is a philosophically reflected hedonist or not turns on what demands we put on how articulate that view must be. Perhaps there are bad people pursuing pleasure without a particularly articulated view of pleasure as the good. For discussion, see Pearson 2012, 141–3.

Of course, it is not any kind of pleasure that the bad person conceives of as good. Pleasures related to virtuous activities are not at issue, but a certain range of base pleasures manifested in the cravings of the body, as well as in greed, and hunger for power.²⁰ Nevertheless, on the assumption that the bad person conceives of pleasure as the ultimate good, and that her decisions to act are based on that conception, it seems that what she has an appetite for, and what she wishes for, come to the same thing. So the account of the bad person's conflict between appetite and wish should accommodate this feature.

My suggestion is that although the bad person pursues what she believes to be the ultimate good, and believes it to be what she really wants, nevertheless it is not what she wishes for. Hence, on pursuing pleasure as the good, the bad person does not wish it, despite the fact that she thinks so. In fact, she is oblivious of what she really wants. The strange sounding idea that people may do what they do not want to do, although they think they want it, is anticipated in Plato's *Gorgias* (466c9–468e5). The challenge is to spell out this idea in more detail.

Aristotle makes it clear that the good for a human being is not whatever a person happens to think is good for her. For what really is good for a human being is to live virtuously. In other words, the good for a human being is an objective value in the sense that there is something which really is good regardless of what people happen to think is good for them. In fact, only the virtuous person pursues what by nature is good for human beings (*NE* 3.4, 1113^a15–33). So despite the fact that all people are said to pursue the good (*NE* 1.1, 1094^a1–3; *NE* 10.2, 1172^b35–6), they may go wrong, pursuing what in fact is not good, but merely

²⁰ As far as base pleasures are concerned, Aristotle distinguishes between necessary ones related to bodily functions, such as those had from satisfying hunger, and unnecessary ones, for instance those had from amassing wealth, both of which may be excessive (*NE* 7.7, 1150^a16–21).

appearing to be so. In particular, however skillful in spotting ways to do what she believes to be good, the agent may go wrong in forming her conception of the good.

The reason why people tend to go wrong about what their own good, is that the specifically human good does not belong to the obvious and apparent things, like pleasure and wealth (*NE* 1.4, 1095^a20–6). In fact, the assumption that it is obvious what the human good is, is an obstacle to obtaining it: “While there are many other things about which it is not easy to judge correctly, this is even more the case with what most people think is the easiest, and what they think anyone knows, namely, what of the things in life should be chosen, and what would fulfil one’s desire if obtained” (*EE* 1.5, 1215^b15–18).²¹ So the difficulty in achieving the good is aggravated by oblivion of its demands.

A crucial source of error in forming the conception of the good, is a mistaken conception of what it is to be a human being. For as Aristotle makes clear, the virtuous person pursuing the good, does not choose what she believes to be good for a different kind of nature, but what is good for what she actually is, which is to say a rational being (*NE* 9.4, 1166^a19–23). As far as the bad person is concerned, in pursuing base pleasure, she does not pursue what is good for her true self, which is to say the reason possessing part of her soul. The anonymous paraphrast is even more explicit: “For the reasoning part is what it is to be human, for the sake of which the good person does everything, and pursues everything good, but for the sake of which the bad man does nothing. For the bad person does not have thinking as the end of his own activities, but base pleasure. For this reason, he does not wish what is good for himself

²¹ περὶ πολλῶν μὲν οὖν καὶ ἐτέρων οὐ ῥάδιον τὸ κρίναι καλῶς, μάλιστα δὲ περὶ οὗ
πᾶσι ῥᾶστον εἶναι δοκεῖ, καὶ παντὸς ἀνδρὸς τὸ γινῶναι, τί τῶν ἐν τῷ ζῆν αἰρετόν, καὶ
λαβῶν ἂν τις ἔχοι πλήρη τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν.

for his own sake.”²² So an important reason for the bad person’s erroneous conception of the good is her ignorance of what she really is.

But despite the fact that the bad person pursues what merely appears to be good, Aristotle thinks that even the bad person has a desire for the real good. Evidence for this view can be gathered from *NE* 10.2. He takes on Eudoxus’s argument that pleasure is the good, pointing out that in so far as it is based on the assumption that every creature, rational and non-rational alike, seeks pleasure, there is room for doubt. For it is not obvious that what unintelligent creatures (*ta anoêta*) pursue is good. However, Aristotle is adamant that in so far as practically wise creatures (*ta phronima*) are concerned, what they seek is good (1173^a2–4). But in order to block the objection that bad people pursue what merely appears good, but without being so, Aristotle argues that even bad people have a desire for the real good: “but equally in bad people too there is something by nature good, which is greater than what they are in themselves [i.e. *qua* bad], and which aims at the proper good” (1173^a4–5).²³ So the idea is that human beings, even if they are bad, and pursue what is not good, still have an element within them, which desires the real good.

²² τὸ γὰρ διανοητικόν ἐστι τὸ ἀνθρώπινον εἶναι, οὗ ἕνεκα ὁ μὲν σπουδαῖος πάντα ποιεῖ καὶ τὰ ἀγαθὰ πάντα ζητεῖ, ὁ δὲ φαῦλος οὐδέν. οὐ γὰρ τὴν θεωρίαν ὁ φαῦλος ἔχει τέλος τῶν ἑαυτοῦ πράξεων ἀλλὰ τὴν ἡδονὴν τὴν φαύλην· ὅθεν οὐ βούλεται τὰ ἀγαθὰ ἑαυτῷ ἑαυτοῦ ἕνεκα. [Heliodor.] *In EN paraphr.* 193. 33–7 Heylbut.

²³ ἴσως δὲ καὶ ἐν τοῖς φαύλοις ἔστι τι φυσικὸν ἀγαθὸν κρεῖττον ἢ καθ’ αὐτά, ὃ ἐφίεται τοῦ οἰκείου ἀγαθοῦ. So I here take the *phauloi* to refer only to inferior, or bad, rational animals, excluding non-rational animals. For the opposed view, see Michael of Ephesus, Mich. *In EN* 538, 2–4 Heylbut; Grant 1874, 318; Stewart 1892, 407.

But even if it is the case that the bad person desires the real good, we need to explain how it comes that the bad person nevertheless seems to desire, and to pursue, what merely appears to be good. The crucial discussion is in *NE* 3.4, where Aristotle addresses the question whether the object of wish is something determined by nature, or whether it comes to whatever is regarded as good. He disarms the dilemma whether wish (*boulesis*) is for what in fact is good, or for whatever appears to be good, by distinguishing between two different senses of the expression ‘the object of wish’ (*to bouleton*). On the one hand, it may signify the natural object of wish, namely the truly good, but on the other hand, it may signify whatever appears good to a person, even if it is not.

One way of fleshing out this distinction is that when a person is said to wish for the good, there is an opaque reading, on which the person wishes for whatever she thinks is good. On this reading, the object of wish is what she represents as good. But there is also a transparent reading, on which the object of wish is the real good, or what is good by nature (*phusei*). So on pursuing an object on an erroneous conception of the good, the bad person, on the opaque reading, may be said to wish for what appears good to her, despite the fact that on the transparent reading her wish is not for the merely apparent good, but for the real good, which is the only thing that can fulfil her wish.²⁴

The view, then, is that on the transparent reading, the object of wish is what fulfils this desire, regardless of what the person happens to think is good. So even in the bad person, the merely apparent good does not fulfil her wish, although on the opaque reading, she may be said to wish it. Aristotle points out that the less than virtuous people tend to be deceived about the real good through pleasure, and to believe, erroneously, that pleasure is the good (*NE* 3.4,

²⁴ Cf., also, *EE* 2.10, 1227^a18–31. For a transparent definition of *boulesis*, see *Top.* 7.8, 146^a36–^b9, and discussion in Corcilius 2011, 119–121. I elaborate on the two senses of the object of wish in more detail in Grönroos 2015, 74–81.

1113^a33–^b2). It is for this reason that in the bad person wish and appetite may seem to be for the same thing. But on the transparent notion of the object of wish, there is room for a conflict between the wish for the good and the desire for what the bad person believes to be good, or what appears good to her.²⁵

Admittedly, this suggestion raises the question what it means to have a desire for the real good, although one pursues the merely apparent good based on an erroneous conception of the good. For the implication seems to be that the bad person's wish is an unarticulated, or even unconscious, desire. In other words, the agent would be able to possess a desire without any conception, or any representation, of its object. Indeed, wish would seem to be no intentional state in the first place.

Keeping in mind that wish is a desire for the good as the ultimate end of life, or for happiness, and that a person must form an action guiding conception of the good in order to achieve it, it is conceivable that even though the person goes wrong in forming that conception, she still wishes for the real good. Imagine a person who thinks that wealth is the ultimate good thing, and that becoming rich will make her happy. But on becoming rich, she finds out that she is not content, and even feels that something important is missing in her life. She may then be inclined to revise her view of what the good comes to, and of what kind of life would make her happy. But in order to explain her motivation to probe her conception of what the good life comes to, appeal to a desire for the truly good is called for. For if her wish were for whatever she thinks is good, then she should have no impetus to change her view.

So even though wish cannot prompt the agent to act without an action guiding conception of the good, the object of wish is not determined by that conception.

²⁵ Note that even the truly good is an apparent good in so far as it appears good to the virtuous person. All pursuits of the good are based on a representation of the good. For further discussion, see Moss 2012, 4–8, 159–161; Pearson 2012, 79–83.

In the present interpretation, then, the bad person pursues what is not good despite the fact that she desires the real good. For because of the erroneous conception of the good, the bad person's pursuit is directed towards the merely apparent good. The seeming contradiction that the bad person's wish both is, and is not, for the good, again, is dissolved by pointing out that the object of wish may come either to whatever is conceived of as good, or to what actually fulfils the wish for the good. So the mental conflict of the bad person consists in wishing for the real good, but pursuing the merely apparent good.

5. Pleasure and deception

It should not come as a surprise that a person may be mistaken about what the happy life amounts to, and that she pursues the wrong things on that erroneous conception. What surprises is that the bad person insists on pursuing the wrong things, and that she is not prepared to abandon her erroneous conception of the good despite the fact that she does not manage to fulfil her wish. For although her pursuit of pleasure does not fulfil her wish, she sticks to her conception of pleasure as the good, and pursues more of it.

As mentioned, Aristotle points out that pleasure is a source of deception (*apate*) concerning the good (*NE* 3.4, 1113^a33–^b2). The task now is to spell out what this deception comes to. To begin with, Aristotle repeatedly pinpoints the pleasant (*to hedon*) as the apparent good (*EE* 7.2, 1235^b26–7; *MA* 700^b28–9). Of course, something's appearing to be good to someone may be veridical, and it may not even be related to the good life in the first place. But the kind of deception Aristotle has in mind concerns the conception of the good as the ultimate end of our pursuits. So in some sense we may be deceived by pleasure to believe that we should look for it as the ultimate good.

We may take our lead from Aristotle's distinction between two different kinds of ignorance put forward in his account of voluntary action. He distinguishes between ignorance

about facts, which makes the action non-voluntary, and ignorance about the universal, which does not make it so (*NE* 3.1, 1110^b30–1111^a2). To begin with, a person may be ignorant about whether a particular thing is good. For instance, a glass of wine may seem good to a person, because she thinks it will be a source of gustatory pleasure.²⁶ But on having a sip of it, she realises that it is corked, not pleasant at all, and, hence, no good. There is a whole range of different kinds of ignorance about facts, but what is important, in most cases the mistake is detected by the agent herself. For in the above case, when the desire motivating the action is not fulfilled, to the frustration of the agent, she immediately realises the source of the frustration, and no longer has any desire for the particular glass of wine.²⁷

But the ignorance may even concern the very conception of what the good, or advantageous, is. The bad person typically conceives of bodily pleasure as the ultimate good, although it is not. In this case, the mistake may be noticed, but importantly, it may also go unnoticed. But if bodily pleasure is not the good for a human being, and, hence, does not fulfil wish, then it may seem that the bad person should notice it, and be inclined to revise her conception of the good. However, the bad person's conception of the good as bodily pleasure not only motivates its pursuit, for on obtaining it, she will still think that it is good, and look for more pleasure in the future. Hence, in addition to an erroneous conception of the good, the mistake goes unnoticed even in experience. So in some sense her experience of pleasure as good is deceptive.

²⁶ In this example, the wine's appearing good need not imply that it is seen as pertinent to happiness.

²⁷ A striking example of a factual mistake which goes unnoticed is Oedipus's having sex with his mother on the ignorance about the identity of Jocasta. Explaining this mistake crucially turns on how the action is described. But importantly, on the description Oedipus himself performed it, he presumably even enjoyed it.

It sounds awkward to say that we may be deceived about what we experience as good. What else than the subjective criterion of experience could decide that? In particular, considering the fact that wish is a desire for the real good, even in the bad person wish is fulfilled only by what really is good. But since the bad person acts on what seems to be good without being so, the action will frustrate that desire. So why does she not notice the mistake, and why does she look for more pleasure? The explanation, I conjecture, is that the bad person may not be aware of the source of her frustration. In particular, since pleasure is the object of appetite, a desire of the non-rational part of the soul, it does satisfy a desire. So on successfully pursuing pleasure, the bad person is satisfied as far as appetite goes, regardless of the erroneous assumption that pleasure is good. But since pleasure is not the good, it does not fulfil wish, and the bad person will be left frustrated without being able to spot the source of the frustration.

Compare this case to a thirsty person, who has a craving for a soft drink, and believes it to be the best means to quench her thirst, whereas in fact the increase of blood sugar concentration will make her even thirstier. Hence, on having the soft drink, her desire to quench the thirst will be frustrated. But despite the fact that the thirst is not quenched, there is something enjoyable about the soft drink, which makes the thirsty person stick to the view that soft drink will quench her thirst, and go for more of it. Just as the thirsty person may be at a loss of why the thirst is not quenched, so the bad person, satisfying her appetites, may not be aware of the source of her frustration.

This piece of psychology provides the prerequisites for explaining the kind of deception the bad person suffers from. Since she feels satisfaction from pleasure, that is a sufficient reason both to believe that pleasure is good, and to pursue more of it. But even if satisfying appetite may bring some contentment, there is another desire, namely wish, which is left frustrated. Indeed, the satisfaction of appetite may even violate the values of wish. But in

contrast to the akratic, and the enkratic, person, the bad person need not be aware of the conflict, and may not understand the reason for her frustration. In particular, she may still stick to the view that pleasure is the good, and think that the remedy to the frustration is to have more pleasure.

In this way, sense can be made of the claim that the bad person is conflicted, and that the conflict consists in a clash between appetite and wish, albeit not in the instrumental way suggested by Brickhouse, nor in the same way as the akratic person is conflicted. Being conflicted between the short term and the long term supply of pleasure does not constitute a clash between values in which one value is violated by the pursuit of the other value. The akratic person, again, knows what the good thing to do is, and that yielding to pleasure is not good for her, but nevertheless, she cannot resist the temptation. Since the bad person, by contrast, does not know what the good is, she has no articulated understanding of the clash between values. But her wish for the good is nonetheless frustrated.

6. The miserable condition of the bad person

The above account of how the bad person's mental conflict makes her frustrated and discontent does not on its own explain her feelings of remorse and self-hatred, which make her prone even to consider suicide. Perhaps repeated failure to achieve contentment, and the constant frustration of the person's innermost desire for a good life, is reason in itself for remorse and self-hatred. So maybe these uncomfortable feelings need not presuppose that the person realises that what she has done is in fact bad, and degrading for her.

However, according to Aristotle, the bad person is distressed over the fact that she found the things pursued appealing in the first place (*NE* 9.4, 1166^b22–4), and does not love herself because she has nothing lovable about her (*NE* 9.4, 1166^b25–6). Moreover, the bad person is said to look for company with others in order to forget about her many odious deeds

(*duscheron*) in the past (*NE* 9.4, 1166^b13–17). Taken together, these remarks suggest that the bad person feels remorse because she is aware of the fact that what she has done is intrinsically bad, and degrading. Her distress at the fact that she found these things appealing indicates that her remorse extends beyond the particular bad actions, and that she feels remorse for being such a bad person so as to be pleased by them.

The challenge now is to attribute to the bad person sufficient cognition of her doing bad things in order to explain her remorse, but without putting her on a par with the akratic person. A crucial difference between the bad, and the akratic, person, respectively, is that only the akratic person has a correct conception of the good, and even a sound, reasoned view of what to do in the particular situation. It is just that she cannot resist her desires to the contrary, to simplify it grossly. The bad person lacks at least this knowledge, since she has an erroneous conception of the good. But is there another sense in which the bad person may be said to pursue what she takes to be good, and still be aware of its badness?²⁸

The puzzle at hand may be put as a dilemma. On the assumption that the bad person has some grasp of the fact that what she is doing is bad, the puzzle is why she does not attempt to replace her erroneous conception of the good. On the one hand, if the grasp is insufficient to impel the bad person to replace her conception of the good, then the question is whether it is sufficient to explain the remorse. On the other hand, if the grasp is sufficient to challenge that conception, and hence to explain the remorse, it is difficult to distinguish the bad person from the akratic person. For then it would seem that the bad person acts against her conception of the good.

²⁸ One suggestion is that the bad person has “some residual recognition of what virtue is and what it requires, with enough psychological force, even, to impel him to commit suicide.” (Pakaluk 1998, 177).

As pointed out in section 4, even in bad people there is something by nature good, which longs for its own proper good (*NE* 10.2, 1173^a4–5). But I also argued that the bad person has no grasp of what his own proper good is. My conjecture now is that even the bad person has a sense, albeit an unarticulated one, of virtue, which is insufficient to guide actions, but which is sufficient for remorse.²⁹ I base my conjecture on Aristotle's remarks on the natural virtues in *NE* 6.13. For he claims that we are just, moderate, and courageous, right from birth, but that it takes reason to turn these dispositions for virtue into full (*kuria*) virtues (1144^b1–17). What Aristotle seems to have in mind is that even small children have a sense of justice, say, perhaps in terms of having one's fair share of some good. This sense of justice is unsophisticated, and it would not suffice in the face of more complex cases, in which, for instance, unequal distribution is just. Through experience and reasoning the individual can develop this sense to a full virtue.

But in the bad person, the natural virtues are not developed to full virtues. Developing them to full virtues requires guided, repeated, experience of them, turning them first into habituated virtues, which in turn serves as the basis for an articulated understanding of them, and recognition of virtue as good.³⁰ Lest one is fortunate enough to be easily turned into virtue, developing the natural virtue into a full one is a cumbersome process, giving little gratification in the short term, and requires that the person forms a successful action guiding conception of virtue. Since only fully virtuous actions fulfil the desire for the real good, the exercise of mere natural virtues does not leave the person content. Instead, the more easily accessible value of pleasure takes over, and becomes formative of her conception of the good. One reason for preferring pleasure over virtue is that it is easier to satisfy the desire for

²⁹ My suggestion is somewhat in line with Broadie's in Broadie 1991, 161.

³⁰ Cf. Burnyeat 1980, 73; Mele 1984, 142–3. It takes full virtue to be distinct from both natural (*φυσική*) and habituated (*ἐθιστή*) virtue.

pleasure, and to form a successful action guiding conception of it. The person turning bad may have a sense, but no real understanding, that her pursuit of pleasure is in conflict with the demands of virtue, but she brushes them aside as mere sentimental rubbish at best, or as coercive measures imposed by the community at worse.

On this suggestion, the bad person is attributed some cognition of virtue. But importantly, realising that her pursuits of pleasure are at the expense, and even in violation, of virtue, does not imply a successful action guiding conception of virtue as the good. In the state of frustration, the bad person starts to waver. She realises that her pursuits provide no lasting contentment, and that violating values such as justice and temperance did not give the award she expected. At first, she may not even realise that it is an erroneous conception of goodness that impedes her in the quest for a good life, and that it should be replaced by a conception of goodness as virtue.

But even if the bad person has neither a conception of the real good, nor experience of fully virtuous action, the bad actions may still clash with her sense of the values attached to the natural virtues. For instance, in order to maximise pleasure, the bad person finds herself prudentially justified in violating justice precisely in terms of what she takes to be the ultimate end of her pursuits. But since she has some sense of justice acquired through the exercise of the natural virtue of justice, she may still be aware that she violates an important value, which, however, she has not taken the trouble to articulate and internalise through practice.

Admittedly, my suggestion offers no conclusive explanation of the remorse, and the suicidal condition, of the bad person. Since remorse, and particularly the suicidal condition, seem to presuppose not only that the agent feels uneasy about her present condition, and that she has a vague sense of violating important values, but that she realises in some fuller sense that what she has done is bad, and even degrading, why does she not attempt to revise her

conception of goodness, or at least abandon it? Moreover, if the bad person is aware that she violates an important value, then she seems to be in the same situation as the akratic person, who acts against her knowledge of the good.

The bad person still differs from the akratic one in having no articulated conception of the virtuous life as good, let alone a successful action guiding conception of virtue. The bad person simply does not know what to do instead. She may, both from own experience, and from comparison with the virtuous people's lives, come to realise that her conception of goodness is misguided, even perverted. But since her bad character has become deeply entrenched, which has made her a slave to appetite, she has difficulty forming an alternative conception, which could be conducive to the good life.³¹ In particular, she can find no enjoyment in anything else than base pleasure. But even without a clue as to what to replace her erroneous conception of the good with, she can feel the remorse for being the kind of person doing odious things.³²

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³¹ *NE* 7.7, 1150^a19–22; 8, 1150^b29–36 seems to have it that the bad person is beyond rescue, but for a more upbeat account, see *Cat.* 13^a23–9.

³² I wish to thank audiences in Uppsala and Rome for fruitful discussions, and Hallvard Fossheim and Miira Tuominen for comments on drafts of the paper. I acknowledge a grant from the Swedish Research Council (2010-1399).

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