On Virtue and Skill

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ABSTRACT

What does it mean to be a good person? According to virtue ethics, being a good person is to possess the moral character traits we call virtues, such as justice, honesty and generosity. These character traits are often compared to practical skills, in the sense that they are acquired competencies that require training and result in an ability to make good judgments. This thesis explores the relationship between virtuous dispositions and practical skills in the works of Aristotle, Annas and Stichter.

The first three chapters present how each philosopher conceives of this relationship. In the first chapter, I will explore Aristotle’s notion of virtue and skill. We will see that while they share some features, they are treated as two different kinds of dispositions. I identify six arguments against virtue being a skill and argue that any contemporary philosopher attempting to model virtue on skill today should pay attention to these arguments. I move on to present how Annas and Stichter conceive of the relationship between virtue and skill, and consider how they respond to the Aristotelian arguments presented in the first chapter. We will see that Annas views the relationship between virtue and skill as analogical, claiming that certain aspects of skill can illuminate certain aspects of virtue. I call this the ‘illumination-thesis’. Stichter, on the other hand, argues that virtues are skills. I call this the ‘identification-thesis’. Analyzing Annas and Stichter in light of Aristotle allows us to identify the analogous and disanalogous features of virtue and skill in each philosopher.

In the fourth and final chapter, I identify three major disagreements between Annas and Stichter and consider which theory we should prefer concerning each disagreement. This leads me to defend the following three claims. I argue that we have good empirical reasons to doubt the articulacy requirement for skill in general, but that at the same time we have good philosophical reasons to require at least some degree of articulacy in virtue. I move on to argue that the relationship between virtues and skills should be conceived as analogical, due to the number of issues I identify with the identification-thesis. And finally, I argue that self-control should not be conceived as a virtue, as Stichter’s view entails, since the need to exercise self-control reflects a conflict of desire and reason.
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Introduction and Outline

Analogy is our best guide in all philosophical investigations; and all discoveries, which were not made by mere accident, have been made by the help of it.

Joseph Priestly (1769/1966, p. 14)

1. Background

This thesis aims to explore the relationship between practical skills and virtuous dispositions in the works of Aristotle, Annas and Stichter. The philosophical literature on virtue has flourished since people like Anscombe, Foot and Hursthouse reintroduced character-based ethics as an alternative to deontology and consequentialism. Contemporary theories of virtue tend to look to Aristotle for guidance, and concepts such as practical wisdom, flourishing and the golden mean are frequently incorporated into the general framework. One of the Aristotelian\(^1\) notions that have given rise to a particularly fruitful exchange of ideas is the idea that a virtue is like a skill (\textit{technē})\(^2\). If you want to learn how to play an instrument, you have to continuously engage with it over a long period of time. You need experience and to develop an understanding of what works and what does not in order to develop a facility in the skill. Similarly, if you want to become a brave person, you have to engage in activities that require bravery until you develop a disposition to act bravely.

This analogy (often referred to as ‘the skill analogy of virtue’) has received more and more attention in recent years, and has led two contemporary philosophers – Julia Annas and Matt Stichter – to use it as a framework for exploring virtue more generally. While Aristotle primarily uses skill in order to explain virtue acquisition, Annas extends the function of the skill analogy in

\(^1\)This is not to state that this is an idea was first introduced by Aristotle. In fact, Plato explores the similarities between virtue and skill in many of his dialogues (See for example Georgias, Protagoras and the Republic). Aristotle’s use of analogies to explore virtue is thus a continuation of a well-established platonic idea. However, most Scholars working on the relationship between virtues and skills today tend to focus on Aristotle.

\(^2\)The Greek word \textit{technē} is often translated as ‘craft’, ‘skill’ or ‘art’. I prefer just using \textit{technē} when treating Aristotle, but will sometimes employ skill when discussing the thesis as a whole, as that is the termed used by Annas and Stichter.
order to explain virtue acquisition, virtue exercise and the agreement between reason and feelings in the virtuous agent. Stichter sees even further, and argues that the reason why we see so many similarities between the two is that virtues simply are skills. That is, the moral character traits we call virtues fall under the same class of dispositions as the other morally neutral capacities we call skills. Tracing the relationship between virtue and skill in the works of Aristotle, Annas and Stichter thus forms an almost teleological narrative; a narrative where virtues and skill are seen as more and more similar, until they eventually fall under the same class of dispositions.

Annas and Aristotle share the same methodology; virtues can be difficult to understand but can be illuminated through the analogous features they share with skills. As Aristotle claims: “...we must use evident cases to testify on behalf of obscure ones” (NE, 1105b11). Annas is essentially saying the same thing: “In seeing how skill differs from mere routine we can come to see how virtue differs from mere routine” (Annas, 2014, p. 282). I call this the ‘illumination-thesis’. When Stichter comes along, we see a shift from making an analogy (i.e. comparing the two concepts and highlighting their similarities), to claiming that virtues fall under the class of skills. I call this the ‘identification-thesis’. The illumination-thesis can come in degrees, and one of Annas’ aims in Intelligent Virtue (2011) is to identify more analogous features between virtues and skills than Aristotle found. For Aristotle, skills and virtues are two very distinct kinds of dispositions, and he gives six arguments to demonstrate this. Each of these arguments identifies a disanalogous feature between virtue and skill. Moreover, as Aristotle demonstrates the limits of modeling virtue on skill through his counter-arguments, a large part of understanding this narrative will involve understanding how Annas and Stichter might respond to these arguments.

2. Principal Aims and Outline

This thesis has two aims. The first aim is primarily historical: I want to present the narrative described above in three chapters, each dedicated to one philosopher. In chapter 1 I present Aristotle’s theory of moral virtue and skill (technē). This will (i) give us an understanding of the origin of the skill analogy, (ii) function as an introduction to some of the central components of Aristotelian virtue ethics and finally, (iii) introduce his arguments against conceiving of virtue as a technē. I argue that any contemporary philosopher attempting to model virtue on skill today should consider these arguments carefully. In chapter 2 I present Julia Annas’ account of skill and virtue in her book Intelligent Virtue (2011), before analyzing this account in light of Aristotle. This will allow us to see in what specific ways she wants to strengthen the analogy between skill and virtue. Skill and virtue are united in the sense that they both involve what she calls the ‘need to learn’ and the ‘drive to aspire’. Annas also believes that the enjoyment in virtue is analogous to
the enjoyment of skill, which is something we do not find in Aristotle. She reinforces this claim by appealing to the psychological research of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. In chapter 3 I move on to consider Matt Stichter’s skill model of virtue. At this point, we see the shift from making analogies to the idea that virtues are skills. This chapter will start by analyzing how Stichter synthesizes psychological research on self-regulation and skill/expertise, before applying this research to virtue. At the end of the chapter, we will see how he responds to the Aristotelian arguments from chapter 1. Tracing this narrative will provide us with an overview of the different ways it is possible to conceive of the relationship between virtue and skill, touching upon the various analogous and disanalogous features that shape the contemporary debate.

The second aim is to identify the most important disagreements between Annas and Stichter and evaluate which account we should prefer. This will make up the fourth and final chapter of the thesis. After briefly going through the many similarities in their accounts, I will identify three major points of divergence between Annas and Stichter. While I will draw independent conclusions regarding each disagreement, I end up favoring Annas’ view on everything but her account of skill.

1. The first disagreement is concerned with whether or not we should require experts in skill and experts in virtue to be able to articulate reasons for their actions. While Annas argues that articulacy is a requirement in both skill and virtue, Stichter rejects the articulacy requirement altogether. I will argue that we have good empirical reasons to doubt the articulacy requirement for skill in general, but that at the same time we have good philosophical reasons to require at least some degree of articulacy in virtue.

2. The second refers to whether or not we ought to conceive of the relationship between virtues and skill as analogous (the illumination-thesis) or as falling under the same class (the identification-thesis). I will argue in favor of the illumination-thesis, as the identification-thesis leads to a theory of virtue that relies too heavily on the notion of skill.

3. The third disagreement is about the notion of self-control. While Annas distinguishes between the self-controlled person and the fully virtuous person, Stichter regards self-control as a virtue. I will argue that Stichters’ tendency to view self-control as a virtue leads to some issues concerning our intuitions regarding virtuous people.

Hopefully, this discussion will allow me to identify some strengths and weaknesses in both theories that can be useful for further research. In order to continue the project of explaining virtue through skill, we need to be aware of the various disanalogous features such as articulacy.
and the need for self-control. We also need to be aware of the various difficulties of explaining one phenomenon through another phenomenon. I believe the best approach is to continue exploring skill and virtue while maintaining this awareness.

3. Why this Thesis matters

Lastly, I want to explain why I think this thesis raises an important question. Why, exactly, should we care about the relationship between moral virtues and practical skills? I believe there are several good reasons for this. Firstly, virtue is a notoriously difficult concept to grasp. Showing how virtues are similar to skills can help us further our understanding of virtue. Furthermore, expanding our understanding of virtue will help us become better people. This thesis discusses topics such as moral development, moral judgment and the structuring of values, in a manner that people can relate to. Theory alone will not make people virtuous, but it can guide them in their quest for a better life. Secondly, as I do believe that there are structural similarities between virtues and skills, I think virtue ethicists can benefit from the large amounts of psychological research on skill and expertise. Studies on how to best develop a specific ability in a skill domain can be applied to virtue, at least to some extent.
Chapter 1: Virtue and Technē in Aristotle

1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will thoroughly examine the relation between virtue and technē as presented in Aristotle. This will serve three purposes. Firstly, it will give us a better understanding of the origins of the skill model of virtue. Secondly, as both Annas and Stichter work within an Aristotelian framework of virtue ethics, the chapter will function as an introduction to some of the main features of virtue. The final, and perhaps the most important function of the chapter, is to present Aristotle’s arguments against virtue being a technē. Although most philosophers defending the skill model today base their theory of virtue on an Aristotelian framework, Aristotle himself denies that virtues are skills, providing several arguments still debated today. Thus, in order to create an Aristotelian theory of virtue modeled on skills, we have to either (i) form a view of skills that differ from Aristotle’s notion of technē, or (ii) alter his conception of virtue. This will become clear by the end of the chapter.

I will begin with an account of what I believe are the most common features of virtue in Aristotle’s theory. I will go on to give an account of technē, before analyzing the similarities and dissimilarities between the two concepts. In the end, I will consider six arguments, all present in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* (NE), against virtue being a technē. These arguments continue to influence the contemporary debate, and we will see how Annas and Stichter respond to them in chapter 2 and 3.

2. What is Virtue?

There are many ways of approaching this question, as it is an extraordinary complex notion dealing with everything ranging from character, happiness and practical rationality to motivations and emotions. The word itself comes from the Greek word *aretē*, which means “excellence or goodness of any kind” (Urmson, 2001, pp. 20). Aristotle claims that “every virtue, regardless of what thing it is the virtue of, both completes the good state of that thing and makes it perform its function well” (1106b). For example, an excellent knife performs its function well, namely cutting. In NE, however, Aristotle is not so much concerned with excellence as such, but rather with excellence for human beings. But as every virtue is concerned with performing a function well,

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3 All translations of Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* in this paper will be from C.D.C Reeve (2014 edition)
“the virtue of a human being will also be the state by dint of which he becomes a good human being and will perform his own function well” (1106b). But what, according to Aristotle, is the function of a human being? In order to answer that question, we must grasp what distinguishes humans from other beings, such as animals or plants. Aristotle’s answer is our capacity to reason, so that our function becomes “some sort of practical living of the part that has reason” (1098a). This argument is often referred to as ‘the function argument’ and is used to demonstrate that eudaimonia, or human happiness, consists in “activity of the soul in accord with virtue” (1098b16). Thus, virtue is a key concept in Aristotle’s theory of the human good.

Aristotle distinguishes between two types of virtues: virtues of thought and virtues of character. This distinction, and the relation between these two kinds of virtues, allows us to better grasp some of the most important aspects of virtue. Virtues of thought and virtues of character are both virtues of the human soul. However, while the virtues of thought belong to the reasoning part of the soul, the virtues of character belong to the part of the soul that is non-rational. The virtues of the rational part of the soul are the different types of knowledge we find in Aristotle’s theory: scientific knowledge (episteme), understanding or intuition (nous), wisdom (sophia), skill or craft (technē) and practical intelligence (phronesis). The last two will be more central to this chapter: practical intelligence because it is the knowledge that governs the virtues of character, and technē because this chapter aims to investigate the relation between technē and virtue. However, before we consider these virtues more closely, we need to understand what a virtue of character is. In her book The Morality of Happiness, Julia Annas argues that there are three main aspects of virtue, present in most ancient theories: (i) a dispositional aspect, (ii) an affective aspect and (iii) an intellectual aspect (Annas, p. 48-49). I believe this is a good approach to making a concise introduction to virtue, and I will use it here.

2.1 Habituation and the Dispositional Aspect of Virtue

The virtues of character manifest moral excellence and are understood as states, or stable dispositions (hexeis). The word hexis, in this context, is a noun based on the verb ekhein, meaning to have. Having this state involves being disposed towards acting reliably in a certain way. Examples of virtues of character are courage, temperance, justice, and so on. When people speak of virtues today, they usually refer to the virtues of character. According to Aristotle, while virtues of thought are acquired through teaching, we develop virtues and vices of character through habituation (NE, 1103b 14-18). In other words, through the repetition of certain kinds of actions (praxeis) over a longer period of time, that kind of behavior becomes a part of our
dispositions (*hexeis*). In order to illustrate that habituation leads to virtue, Aristotle compares it to the acquisition of technē:

The virtues, by contrast, we acquire by first engaging in the activities, as is also true in the case of the various crafts [technai]. For the things we cannot produce without learning to do so are the very ones we learn to produce by producing them – for example, we become builders by building houses and lyre players by playing the lyre. Similarly then, we become just people by doing just actions, temperate people by doing temperate actions, and courageous people by doing courageous ones. (NE, 1103a32-b3)

This is the most important analogy between virtue and technē in Aristotle, and is the basis for both Annas’ and Stichter’s attempts to model virtues on skills. As we can see, Aristotle believes that in order to acquire a certain technē like playing an instrument, we need to practice it. In addition to practice, the excellent craftsman (*techniēs*) also needs to possess some truth about the technē in question, so Aristotle’s definition of technē becomes “a productive state involving true reason” (NE, 11401). Aristotle’s conception of technē will, as stated in the introduction, be analyzed further in the next section. For the moment, this definition will suffice. Aristotle holds that the same is true for virtues of character; we attain them through engaging in virtuous activity, forming habits over time. We become virtuous by acting as the virtuous person does, just as we learn a technē by practicing it. However, at the surface level, this model of virtue acquisition seems circular. It seems as if a person acts virtuously, he must already possess virtue. Aristotle recognizes this, claiming that acting as the virtuous person is not sufficient for being virtuous, strange as it might sound.

Virtuous actions, understood by Aristotle, requires the agent to be in a certain state: “First, if he does them knowingly; second, if he deliberately chooses them and deliberately chooses them because of themselves; and third, if he does them from a stable and unchangeable state” (NE, 1105a30). This forms what Martha Jimenez calls the ‘disanalogy of virtue’, as it points to an area of virtue that differs from technē (Jimenez, 2016, p. 15). In this passage, Aristotle gives us three necessary conditions for virtuous action—concerning knowledge, motivation and stability—in order to demonstrate his idea that a virtue cannot be reduced to action alone. The three conditions are the following:

(i) The agent acts knowingly
(ii) The agent acts deliberately and chooses the action for the sake of itself
(iii) The agent acts from a stable disposition

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4 For the sake of convenience, I will use the English word craftsman in this chapter.
If accepted, it will be apparent that it is entirely possible to conceive of someone acting like the virtuous person does, without possessing virtuous character. Imagine a person who finds a phone lying on the street, and we assume the virtuous thing to do would be to give it back to its rightful owner. Let us examine the possible ways this person can to the right thing, without possessing the three necessary conditions for acting virtuously. An example of failing to live up to the first condition would be if the person gives it to his friend, and it turns out his friend is the rightful owner, without his knowledge. If the person finds out that the phone belongs to a rich person and gives it back for the sake of the reward, he would fail to live up to the second condition. Failing to live up to the third condition would entail doing the right thing without it being a part of your character to do such things.

These requirements give us insight into some of the core aspects of virtue and the virtuous agent and illustrate what separates virtue ethics from other ethical theories. For example, none of the requirements above play any role in a standard consequentialist theory of right action, as the state of the agent (for example, his or her intention) is not determinate of the consequences of a given action. It also sheds some light on the fact that virtue ethics is often characterized as agent-oriented rather than action-oriented. Even though this model of virtue acquisition starts by considering action, as it is one of the key elements of virtue, it moves on and attempts to describe the sort of person acting in the right way.

2.2 The Golden Mean and the Affective Aspect of Virtue

So far, we have only spoken about the positive character traits of human beings, namely virtues. Aristotle claims that “states like these [virtues of character] are naturally ruined by deficiency and excess” (1104b), meaning that they exist in a medial condition between two extremes. At both ends of the spectrum of excess and deficiency, there is a corresponding vice. Concerning temperance, Aristotle claims that “someone who indulges in every pleasure and abstains from none becomes intemperate, whereas someone who avoids all of them as boorish people do, becomes insensible in a way” (1104b). This relates to actions, as there is a right way to act, understood as a medial condition between two extremes. It also relates to emotions. Aristotle writes that it is “possible to feel fear and confidence, appetite, anger, pity and pleasure and pain generally, both too much and too little and in both ways not well” (1107a). He goes on to claim that “To feel such thing when we should, though, about the things we should, in relation to the people we should, for the sake of what we should, and as we should is a mean and best and precisely what is characteristic of virtue” (11071). Emotions are central throughout NE, not only because the virtuous person feels as he should, but because many of the central virtues
themselves are understood through a corresponding emotion. Concerning anger, the medial condition is identified as ‘mild-manneredness’ (1108a), and “where pleasure and pains are concerned … the medial condition is temperance and the excess intemperance” (1108a). Courage, on the other hand, consists of the right measure of fear and confidence.

In order to fully appreciate the affective aspect of virtue in Aristotle’s theory, we need to make some remarks about his notions of self-control, lack of self-control, and temperance. According to Aristotle, the virtue of temperance is “a medial condition concerned with [bodily] pleasures” (1118a). The temperate person feels the right amount of pleasure and is driven by the proper pleasures. On the other hand, the self-controlled, or enfratic, person does the right thing but undergoes a conflict of desires in the process. His desires are base, but he is capable of acting against them “because of his reason” (1145b). He is the sort of person that aims to be virtuous, but is distracted by temptation to do otherwise. Externally, these two characters (the temperate and the self-controlled) might do the exact same thing, but their internal psychological make-ups differ. Virtuous people will, according to Aristotle, enjoy acting virtuously. The self-controlled person, on the other hand, does not enjoy virtue in this sense. Lastly, lack of self-control is a disposition towards acting against reason due to some emotion or feeling (pathos): “A person who lacks self-control, knowing that the actions he is doing are base, does them because of feeling” (1145b). These distinctions will be discussed in further detail in chapter 4.

2.3 Phronesis and the Intellectual Aspect of Virtue

As I briefly mentioned earlier, the virtues of character are governed by the intellectual virtue of practical intelligence (phronesis), defined by Aristotle as “a true state involving reason, concerned with human goods, and practical” (1140b). Practical intelligence is characterized by the person having it being able to “deliberate correctly about what is good and advantageous … not partially (for example, about what sorts of things further health or strength) but about what sorts of things further living as a whole” (1140a). As a virtue of thought, practical intelligence governs all of the virtues of character. It is what allows you to choose the right course of action in particular circumstances, and involves knowledge of what is valuable in life as a whole. At this point, another distinction should be introduced: According to Aristotle, the virtues we acquire through habituation are necessary, but not sufficient, for what he calls full virtue. It is possible to, at one stage in your life, have some good dispositions, and lack others. Only by possessing practical intelligence can we achieve full virtue (NE, 1140a25-29, 1145a30-40). For Aristotle, this excellence of deliberation and knowledge of what is valuable in life as a whole is necessary for being ‘unconditionally good’. Through practical intelligence, the virtues of character form a sort
of unity, where one cannot exist without the other. In other words, you cannot possess the virtues of character (in the complete sense) without practical intelligence, and you cannot possess practical intelligence without also possessing the virtues of character.

In sum, we have seen that virtues of character are stable dispositions acquired through a process of habituation over time. Acting virtuously requires the agent to act knowingly, deliberately and for the sake of the action itself, and act from a stable disposition. Virtues are characterized as being a mean between excess and deficiency, both in relation to action and emotion. In order to be virtuous, one also needs the intellectual virtue of practical intelligence, understood as the excellence of deliberation and the knowledge of what is valuable in life as a whole. While this is far from an exhaustive account of Aristotle’s theory of virtue, it should be sufficient to understand his definition of virtue in book II of the *Nicomachean Ethics*: “Virtue, then, is a deliberately choosing state, which is in a medial condition in relation to us, one defined by reason and the one by which a practically-wise person would define it” (1107a). Let us move on to his theory of technē.

3. Technē in Aristotle

As we have already seen, technē is one of the five intellectual virtues presented in Aristotle. Three of these five virtues of thought are theoretical (episteme, nous, and sofia). This means they are concerned with what is necessarily the case (1139b19). The last two (prônesis and technē) lack any generic term to cover both, but they both concern “what admits of being otherwise” (1140a). When discussing the technē analogy of virtue in the previous section, we glanced at some of the key aspects of technē, but I will now attempt to further analyze this term in order to prepare us for the Aristotelian arguments against virtue as a technē. As with virtue, summing up Aristotle’s view of technē is a rather difficult task. We have two main sources, NE 6.4 and Metaphysics A.1, and I will use both in an attempt to present the full picture as concisely as possible.

Technē is usually translated as ‘craft’, ‘skill’ or ‘art’. Among the examples of technē most present in Aristotle are medicine, music, and house building. Each technē has a specific end (telos) towards which it strives, that exists independent of the craftsman: “In medicine this is health, in generalship victory, in building a house, and in other crafts [technai] something else” (NE, 1097a 16-20). In book 6 in NE, Aristotle defines technē as “a productive state involving true reason [hexis meta logou alèthous poïetikê]” (NE, 11401). This definition gives three main aspects of technē. First of all, it is a state (hexis), similar to the virtues of character. Secondly, it is linked to making (poiesis), which Aristotle understands as the generation of things “whose starting point (arche) is in the producer and not in the product” (NE, 1140a). In other words, it is concerned with the
coming to be of things that do not exist naturally. Thirdly, it also involves true reason, so the craftsman will need to know the principles (logoi) of that which he creates, in addition to being able to trace the product of his technē back to the causes (aitiai). Aristotle demonstrates this with an example:

We think that architects are more honorable and more knowledgeable than the manual workers, and wiser, because they know the cause of the things that are being made … we think they are wiser not because they are practical but because they themselves possess the account and know the causes (Met, A1).

This part of Aristotle’s conception of technē seems to make him an intellectualist about skills, although this claim is subject to dispute. The ‘logos’ of technē separates it from mere experience (empireia), as the knowledge of the craftsman makes him more reliable than someone without a grasp of the why. It also allows the craftsman to teach, which is another important aspect of technē: “An indication of the one who knows, as opposed to the one who does not know, is his capacity to teach. That is why we think of craft knowledge to be more like scientific knowledge than experience is, since craftsmen can teach, while experienced people cannot” (I 981b7-10). Technē thus has a stronger connection to scientific knowledge (episteme) than practical intelligence. Aristotle defines teaching as “argument (logoi) in accord with scientific knowledge” (Rh. I 1 1355a26). These intellectual aspects of technē reinforce the link between the two modes of knowing.

Just how exact is this knowledge? Does, to give an example, the carpenter need to understand the four causes of the chair he is producing in order for it to be called a technē? It seems that for Aristotle, different technai display different degrees of precision (akribeia), and he states that “It is the mark of an educated man to look for precision in each class of things just as far as the nature of the subject admits; it is obviously equally foolish to accept probable truths from a mathematician as to demand demonstrative proofs from an orator” (NE, 1094b23-7). It might be an anachronism to label Aristotle either as an intellectualist or an anti-intellectualist, but the terms will be crucial in the discussion of Annas and Stichter, and so some remarks are needed. There is a difference here, between the strong intellectualist examples we find the Metaphysics, and examples such as navigation and medicine, of which Aristotle says that

5 In his earlier years, Stichter argued that Aristotle’s conception of craft was anti-intellectualist (Stichter, 2007). For an in-depth critique of this interpretation, see Tom Angier (2010, p. 128)
6 There is a forthcoming paper by Carlotta Pavese and Simona Aimar which argues that technē is in fact a science, or a demonstrative body of knowledge. While I disagree with this interpretation, it is unfortunately beyond the scope of this chapter to go further into this debate.
these [particular circumstances of action which navigators and doctors face] do not fall under any art or any set of rules whatsoever, and the agents themselves always have to inquire to find out what it is opportune to do (NE, 1104a5).

It seems to be a matter of degree, and the closer a technē is to precise scientific knowledge, the more honorable it is. The manual worker possesses technē, but the architect is more honorable due to his knowledge of the causes of what is produced.

According to Joseph Dunne (2009), the original definition of technē is somewhat limited, as it only includes making, whereas some technai don’t seem to be concerned with making as such, but rather with performing. He argues that Aristotle lacks a distinction between “activities such as gymnastics, which we might want to describe performative rather than productive, since they do not leave behind them a product” on the one hand, and the productive crafts such as housebuilding where the product is more easily recognizable on the other hand (Dunne, 2009, p 254). The distinction between production and performance might seem trivial. Although gymnastics doesn’t leave behind a product, the performance itself can be conceived of as a sort of product. But as we shall see in the next section (and in chapters 2 and 3), the distinction between productive and performative skills is a key element in the contemporary debate, and both Annas and Stichter want to maintain it.

To sum up, technē is a virtue of thought concerned with producing, where the end is external to the producer. Each technē has a specific end that corresponds to the technē. It also requires some form of true reason, consisting of knowledge of the causes and the form of that which it produces. All of these requirements will be important for the next section, where we will take a close look at the distinction between technē and virtue.

4. Aristotle’s Six Arguments against Virtue as a Technē

We have seen that Aristotle distinguishes between the kind of knowledge that governs our practical lives (phronesis), and the knowledge concerned with production (technē). They do, however, have much in common. First of all, both craft and virtue are acquired through engaging in the relevant activity. Second of all, they are both concerned with bringing forth a certain good. In the case of justice, the good at which the action aims is “a proportionate distribution of benefits and harms by which the stability of the polis is maintained” (Whiting, 2002, p. 278). And as we have seen in the various technai, they aim at some end corresponding to the function of the craft.
There is a link here, which seems to be why Aristotle constantly alludes to technē in order to illuminate aspects of virtue. Ultimately though, they are to separate forms of knowledge. In his book *Technē in Aristotle’s Ethics* (2010), Tom Angier identifies four arguments, provided by Aristotle in NE, against thinking of virtue as a technē. These arguments have all had a significant influence on the current debate on the skill model of virtue. As we shall see throughout this thesis, this is where we find the most important differences between virtue and skill, differences that we cannot ignore if our aim is to investigate the relation between these two phenomena. In addition, I will also include the “disanalogy of virtue” that we saw in section 2.1, as this shows that virtue has a motivational aspect that is not present in skills. Finally, while this is never presented as an argument by Aristotle himself, it is possible to extract a sixth argument from NE: Virtue requires the right emotional responses in a given situation, while there doesn’t seem to be an emotional component at all in his conception of technē. This argument could potentially reinforce the distinction between virtue and technē.

Interestingly, most of the proponents of a model of virtue based on skill use the standard Aristotelian framework, from which they derive their theory of virtue. It is thus essential to grasp the critique presented by Aristotle, in order to see in what way the contemporary view of skills differs from Aristotle’s view of technē. I believe the best way to do this is to begin by going through these arguments in turn, before analyzing them in light of the contemporary debate.

### 4.1. The Argument from General and Particular Goods

The first argument we will consider is concerned with the distinction between general and particular goods. According to Aristotle, it is possible to seek particular goods such as health and strength, and in order to discover the necessary means to further these ends, we must deliberate well. Technai, such as medicine and exercise, correspond with these particular ends, as the internal end of medicine is health, and the internal end of exercise is strength. In Aristotle’s words “the things that come about by means of technē have their goodness internal to them, and thus it is enough if they come about in such a way as to be in a certain state” (NE, 1105b 26-7). However, being practically wise requires one to “deliberate correctly about what is good and advantageous for himself, not partially (for example, about what sorts of things further health of further strength) but about what sorts of things further living well as a whole” (1140a). Virtue, in other words, is not only directed at particular goods, but at what is good in life more generally, whereas being an expert at shipbuilding only requires the knowledge and ability to produce ships. This marks, at least for Aristotle, a genuine distinction between virtue and technē.
Angier argues that this argument is in some ways unsuccessful, as it is possible to conceive of a “highly general, all-inclusive technē” wherein the internal aim is the good of life as a whole. With such a technē, the craftsman will need to identify and know what’s good in life overall, and this would be the telos towards which the technē strives. Aristotle assumes here that every technē must have a restricted end, which needn’t be the case (Angier, 2010, p. 49). In fact, you could imagine an all-inclusive technē where the overall aim is to technē yourself into a virtuous agent, slowly habituating your character and increasing your knowledge of life. The product, in this case, would be yourself. Despite this, both Annas and Stichter acknowledges that this is an aspect of virtue that makes it unique as opposed to other morally neutral skills.

4.2. The Argument from Production and Action

We have seen that phronesis is concerned with action, whereas technē is concerned with production. Aristotle argues that phronesis and technē cannot be the same, as “action and production differ in kind” (NE, 1140b1). The reason they differ is because they have different ends. In the beginning of NE, Aristotle distinguishes between different ends: “some are activities while others are works of some sort beyond the activities themselves” (NE, 1095b4). This distinction can be understood in terms of intrinsic vs. extrinsic value. Some things are valuable in themselves, whereas other things have instrumental value, i.e. their value lies in something beyond themselves. Aristotle claims that the end in action is the activity itself: “Suppose that the end of someone’s action is to do well in action, and that doing well in action consists in actualizing or using his virtuous state of character, then the end of his action will be the activity consisting in the actualization of that state” (VI 2 1139b). This is essentially to say that virtuous activity has intrinsic value. He goes on to state that “Because the sciences mentioned have ends beyond their actualization or use, they are not like this” (VI 2 1139b).

The end of technē is, as we have seen, the product. In other words, a chair made by a carpenter has a standard of goodness in itself, as there are good and bad chairs according to Aristotle. The chair itself is what determines if the process of creating the chair was good, as each technē has an end (telos) towards which it aims: “In medicine this is health, an generalship victory, in building a house, and in other technēai something else” (NE, 1097a 16-20). This end corresponds to the internal good in each technē, giving the various technai instrumental, but not intrinsic, value.

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7 In fact, some of the Stoic philosophers talk about the ‘art of life’, or βίον τέχνης. For example, Epictetus presents the idea of an ‘all-inclusive’ technē in the following passage: “Now what is it that ensures, when someone is writing, that he won’t be subject to hindrance or obstruction?—‘Knowledge of how to write.’—And when one is playing the lyre?—‘Knowledge of how to play the lyre.’—It thus follows that in life, too, it must be knowledge of the art of living.” (Discourses Book 4.1.62-63).
This distinction between doing and producing is essential for understanding the difference between virtue and technē. In fact, Tom Angier argues that this is the most convincing argument Aristotle creates against what he calls a ‘virtue-craft’, i.e. a conception of virtue as a technē (Angier, 2009, pp 44). However, we will later see how this argument is to some extent rejected by both Annas and Stichter, who both argue that skills are a source of intrinsic value.

4.3. The Argument from Redundancy

The third argument is very short and concise: “Well, of craft knowledge there is certainly a virtue, whereas of practical wisdom there is not one” (1140b21-22). Again, this argument is meant to identify another distinction between practical wisdom and technē. It seems like Aristotle is trying to argue that, while it makes sense to speak of good and bad navigators and generals, it makes no sense to speak of a bad phronimos, as the practically wise person is by definition good. In other words, the virtue, or excellence, of generalship is to excel in this technē. Whereas practical wisdom is, in and of itself, an excellence. This reading is supported by another passage in the Magna Moralia, where Aristotle writes that “whereas every kind of science or knowledge has its own peculiar excellence, there is no excellence of prudence [phronesis]; which appears on the contrary to be itself a kind of excellence or virtue” (1197a18-20). This argument is not addressed by Annas and Stichter and is treated by Angier as more of a linguistic distinction than a proper disanalogous feature (Angier, 2009, p. 46).

4.4. The Argument from Voluntary Error

The fourth argument is concerned with voluntary error. Aristotle argues that “in the case of technē, someone who makes errors voluntarily is preferable but with practical wisdom he is less so, as is also the case with the virtues” (1149b23-24). For example, if world champion chess player Magnus Carlsen decides to lose a game against a young relative in order to inspire her to keep playing, his loss would not undermine his claim to be a world-class chess player. However, if a moral exemplar with the knowledge that theft is unjust, decides to steal something anyway, this would undermine his claim to be a just person. This argument strikes at the core of our intuitions of what a virtuous person should be. Being a paradigmatic character of moral excellence, you should always strive towards doing the right thing. Simply knowing what is right, without acting on this knowledge, seems to be very problematic for the virtuous agent. With morally neutral skills such as chess, however, it seems perfectly conceivable for grandmaster to lose a game on purpose without it influencing our assessment of their ability to play chess in any sense. In fact, as Broadie has argued, it takes technē knowledge to properly misuse a skill.
(Broadie, 1991, 205). Annas does not address this argument directly, but we can infer from other parts of her theory that she probably agrees with Aristotle on this point. Stichter, on the other hand, ends up criticizing it.

4.5 The Argument from Motivation

As we saw in section 2.1, Aristotle claims that acting virtuously requires the agent to be in a certain state: “First, if he does them knowingly; second, if he deliberately chooses them and deliberately chooses them because of themselves; and third, if he does them from a stable and unchangeable state” (NE, 1105a30). He goes on to claim that “where the various crafts [technai] are concerned, these factors do not count, except for the knowing itself” (1105a). We have seen that, while a craftsman needs knowledge from which he exercises his technē, the virtuous agent also needs to act for the sake of the virtuous action itself. This makes sense, as it would be strange to suggest that a man who builds excellent ships is a bad shipbuilder because he is motivated by money.

The good man, at least according to Aristotle, also needs the right motivation. This is a central part of Aristotle’s ethics and needs to be explained further. When Aristotle writes about the specific virtues of character, he no longer uses the term of acting for the sake of the action itself, but claims instead that the virtuous person will act for the sake of the fine, or the noble (to kalon). Gabriel Richardson Lear argues that these two formulations are interchangeable, as “the reason for a virtuous action’s fineness is the same as that which explains it’s being choiceworthy for its own sake as the intermediate action it is” (Lear, 2009, pp. 125). Aristotle says surprisingly little about the noble itself, so I will rely on Lear’s interpretation in this chapter. According to Lear, Aristotle believed actions are “fine when their determination by the human good makes the agent’s commitment with the good visible. Since Aristotle thinks that the human good is the perfect use of reason, this means that morally virtuous actions are fine because, in being just as they are, they express the agent’s devotion to most excellent truthfulness” (Lear, 2009, pp. 125). In other words, a beautiful action will express human excellence and is thus worthy of being chosen for the sake of itself. This is, of course, an oversimplification of a very complex notion, but I believe it will suffice for the purpose of this chapter.

A virtuous man, then, is motivated to choose the good action because of its internally good standard. And as mentioned, it seems strange to require the same of the craftsman. This is another point I believe should be taken seriously, and is treated by both Annas and Stichter.
4.6. *The Argument from Emotional Harmony*

The final argument I will consider in this chapter is, as mentioned above, not explicitly incorporated in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. However, I hope to convince you that it is a point of difference worthy of attention. As we have seen, Aristotle believes that the truly virtuous person acts without inner conflict, and with pleasure. And although it is never explicitly mentioned by him, it seems likely that this is not the case in technē. I would argue, at least, that it is perfectly conceivable that experts sometimes realize the internal goal relevant to their technē, without feeling pleasure.

Imagine a gay surgeon successfully operating a man he knows is a homophobe. During the process, he feels anger towards the patient but manages to pull through and successfully finishes the operation. He is still a good surgeon, despite his internal emotional conflict. Now, let’s imagine that after the surgery, the patient wants to thank the surgeon. Beforehand, he learns about the surgeon’s sexuality, but decides to thank him anyway, despite a feeling of disgust dominating his inner emotional life. If you accept that gay people deserve recognition for their good deeds just as much as any other human, in addition to Aristotle’s claim that the virtuous person does the right thing with pleasure, it follows that the latter example undermines the patient’s virtue.

However, Aristotle *does* claim that people are more likely to become experts in a technē if they enjoy it, thus placing a value on feeling pleasure when acquiring new abilities:

> The proper pleasure intensifies its activity, since each class of things is better judged, and with better accuracy, by those who engage in the activity with pleasure that makes progress in [performing] their proper function *because they enjoy it*. For example, it is those who enjoy geometrical thinking that become proficient in it and grasp its various problems better, and similarly those who take pleasure in music or building, and so on (1175, Emphasis added).

This makes sense. People who love playing guitar are much more likely to excel at it than someone who is forced by his parents to do so, against his will. The same holds for virtue. You are much more likely to do the virtuous thing if you love virtuous activity. Still, it does not change the argument. What I wanted to illustrate was that the psychological and motivational make-up of the agent *in the moment of action* is much more important in virtue than in technē. The reason why I believe this argument is Aristotelian is that it originates from his distinction between the temperate and the self-controlled person. The argument is reconstructed by Annas in *Intelligent Virtue*, and will be revisited in all chapters.
5. Concluding Remarks

Through this chapter, I hope to have demonstrated that, although Aristotle identifies several similarities between technē and virtue, and often uses technē as an analogical tool to illuminate aspects of virtue, they are, ultimately, two distinct concepts. As we have seen, Aristotle created six strong arguments against virtue being a technē. These arguments continue to influence the branch of contemporary virtue ethics that attempt to model virtue on skill today. In the next two chapters, I will present the theories of two particularly influential proponents of this project, namely Julia Annas and Matt Stichter. At the end of each chapter, I will consider to what extent they both depart from Aristotle by overcoming some of the six arguments this chapter has presented. Annas’ position is as we shall see closest to Aristotle, and she maintains the idea that virtues and skills are distinct, while at the same time extending the Aristotelian analogy in some instances. I call this view the ‘illumination-thesis’, as the prime motive to investigating virtue through skill is to illuminate aspects of virtue. Stichter, on the other hand, claims that virtues are skills, but distinguish them from morally neutral ones. I call this the ‘identification-thesis’. This leads him to engage very directly with all six arguments from this chapter. In the final chapter, I will discuss what theory virtue ethics should prefer.
Chapter 2: Virtue and Skill in Julia Annas

1. Introduction

Julia Annas first published an article on the relation between virtues and skills in 1995, and has since written many papers on the subject. In 2011 she published the book *Intelligent Virtue*, a monograph aiming to present an account of virtue. The skill analogy of virtue is a central part of this picture, and I believe one of the most well-founded modern attempts at reintroducing this idea. It is a mix of Aristotelian, Platonic, Stoic and modern theories of virtue, along with a fresh outlook on the importance of skills. As we shall see, Annas identifies more similarities between virtues and skills than Aristotle does. The main functions of the skill analogy in her book can roughly be divided into two claims:

1. Firstly, Annas claims that “the acquisition and exercise of virtue can be seen to be in many ways like the acquisition and exercise of more mundane activities, such as farming, building, or playing the piano” (Annas, 2011, p. 1).

2. Secondly, she argues, “the skill analogy can help us get on the right track for understanding the way in which virtue requires agreement of reason and feelings” (Annas, 2011, p. 5).

The first claim is essentially twofold: On the one hand, the process of acquiring skills is analogous to the process of acquiring virtues. We recognize this point from the previous chapter, as it is more or less found in Aristotle, and is not so controversial. However, we will go through how Annas conceives of virtue development and skill acquisition in order to see how it relates to and how it differs from Aristotle. In addition to this, the exercise of skill and virtue are similar, as they both involve a form of intelligent automaticity that expresses an informed competence. They thus share the same kind of practical reasoning: “exercising a virtue involves practical reasoning of a kind that can illuminatingly be compared to the kind of reasoning we find in someone exercising a practical skill” (Annas, 2011, p 1). Moreover, the skill analogy helps us understand the relation between virtue and enjoyment. This is not at all present in Aristotle and seems to conflict with some of our intuitions about practical skills. In order to support this claim, she

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8 It should be noted that this is my division, and that Annas is generally skeptical of listing of similarities and dissimilarities between virtues and skills (Annas, 2011, p. 100).
draws on the works and research of psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and his concept of *flow*. This research turns out to support other aspects of Annas’ account as well.

Annas’ project is not to defend the view that virtues and skills are identical, but rather to “bring out the shared features and their importance” (Annas, 2011, p. 2). In other words, her account does not need to connect every aspect of virtue to skill. Annas thus identifies both analogous features and disanalogous features. In her account, particularly two aspects of virtue are independent of the skill analogy. Her first claim is that “a virtue is admirable for itself” and secondly, virtues “require a commitment to value” (Annas, 2011, p. 6). In addition to these two aspects, virtues also constitute a good life overall, whereas skills are concerned with realizing particular goods in a more local manner.

At this point, it should be noted that Annas’ attempts to produce an account of virtue that is ‘holistic’, meaning that it does not start with some basic assumptions from which the rest of the theory is deduced. Rather, it is an account where the different ideas fit together in a whole, without necessarily relying on each other. The holistic aspect of her account leads to the fact that her theory, as a whole, cannot “be refuted by a single counterexample” (Annas, 2011, p. 4). This creates some issue with, and some advantages for my project. This chapter aims to focus on the usage of skill analogies in her account, and in the process, I have to ignore other crucial aspects of her account. And as her account is holistic, it might be problematic to “extract” the points I find interesting, while ignoring other notions central to her theory. However, the holistic aspect of her account also implies according to Annas that “disagreement with some aspects of the account does not cut off the possibility of agreement over others” (Annas, 2011, p. 4). It thus allows commentators to narrow down their focus to specific parts of the book, without losing their connection to other assumptions. But the reader should be aware that in doing so, I am not addressing her theory as a whole, as I focus for the most part on the analogies between virtues and skills.

The aim of this chapter is to go through the two main functions of the skill analogy in turn and investigate to what extent Annas’ theory differs from Aristotle by exploring how Annas responds to the Aristotelian arguments identified in chapter 1. This analysis will show that Annas, while accepting some of the crucial distinctions between virtue and skill, attempts to overcome three of the arguments (the argument from production and action, the argument from emotion, and the argument from motivation). In doing so, she wants to create a stronger link between virtues and skills than we find in Aristotle. I will start by presenting Annas’ theory of skills, and what skills she believes are relevant when building an account of virtue. I will move on to explore the three
main functions of the skill analogy in her account. In the end, we will see how her account is similar to and differs from Aristotle.

2. Annas’ Theory of Skills and the Articulacy Requirement

An important aspect of Annas’ version of the skill model of virtue is that there are only some types of skills that are relevant when exploring virtue. She thus narrows down her focus to a specific subset of skills that share some aspects with virtues. Annas distinguishes between skills that consist of mere routine (such as driving to work or tying your shoelaces) and skills that require active engagement and intelligent mastery, where the latter have similarity to virtue and the former don’t. Also, skills that come from natural talent are not similar to virtues, as virtues need to be developed consciously over time. Most importantly, however, is when the following two aspects are united: “the need to learn and the drive to aspire” (Annas, 2011, p. 16). These two aspects will only appear in some areas of expertise, and it is precisely when they do that the skill in question will be useful to understand features of virtue, as these two aspects exist both in virtue and in (some) skills.

Let us look closer at these two aspects and see how they can be united in certain areas of expertise. The need to learn reflects the fact that skills are practical. In order to learn something new, you have to practice. You won’t learn how to build a house by reading a book on carpentry. You need to actually engage in various tasks, experience the different difficulties that might arise, and ideally have a teacher present that can provide feedback. In order to show how virtues and skills are both learned by practice, Annas returns to Aristotle, citing a passage we saw in chapter 1:

The virtues, by contrast, we acquire by first engaging in the activities, as is also true in the case of the various crafts. For the things we cannot produce without learning to do so are the very ones we learn to produce by producing them – for example, we become builders by building houses and lyre players by playing the lyre. Similarly then, we become just people by doing just actions, temperate people by doing temperate actions, and courageous people by doing courageous ones. (NE, 1103a32-b3)

This forms the basis of the first aspect, the ‘need to learn’. According to Annas, building is a skill you cannot acquire through mindless repetition and copying a role model, but requires that you develop your own understanding of the field. We have to learn from a teacher, but we will never become masters unless we understand the reasons for doing something one way rather than another. That is why building also involves the ‘drive to aspire’, which includes “coming to understand what you are doing, doing it in a self-directed way, and trying to improve” (Annas, 2011, p. 37). We thus find three main components to the drive to aspire. The first involves
understanding what you do, as you will not become a master builder unless you understand what you have learned, and why what you have learned is correct. For Annas, this involves being able to give reasons for what you are doing, being able to explain to others not only that something is correct, but also why it is so: “The ability both to teach and to learn a skill thus depends on the ability to convey an explanation by giving and receiving reasons. It thus requires some degree of articulacy” (Annas, 2011, p. 19). It is only through such an understanding that you can attain the second feature of the drive to aspire, namely self-directedness. Simply copying what others do won’t lead to skill level. The third component of the drive to aspire is the constant strive to improve, which will be present even when skill level is attained. Thus, the subset of skills Annas is interested in involve developing an articulate understanding that is self-directed and involves a constant effort to improve.

The fact that expertise, according to Annas, involves an articulate understanding is often referred to as “the articulacy requirement”, and is one of the key elements of Annas’ theory of virtue and skill. As we discussed in chapter 1, Aristotle seemed to be an intellectualist about skills, as he distinguished between manual workers with mere experience and architects, who have an account, or a logos. Annas also believes that we should distinguish between articulate and inarticulate abilities, as the “drive to aspire” leads to the ability to convey reasons and explanations. This part of Annas’ theory of skills is often called intellectualist, and has been met by many with resistance. Stichter, in his earlier years, used to attack the articulacy requirement through counterexamples, pointing towards experts that are inarticulate, but experts nonetheless. Expert gardeners, football players and chefs are often unable to articulate reasons for what they are doing. But as Cheng-hung Tsai (2016) has pointed at, such counterexamples are not a problem for Annas. She is not claiming that inarticulate expertise does not exist. Rather, she argues that those abilities are better captured by the word ‘knack’, while abilities that require articulacy are the only proper ‘skills’. While someone might have a knack for cooking, they don’t possess the skill unless they also have the ability to articulate reasons. Knacks are according to Annas “mastery of technical matters needed for the exercise of a skill”, without requiring articulacy (Annas, 2011, p. 19). She writes that:

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9 See for example Stichter (2007): “Annas should be more concerned with the fact that she is advancing an account of skills that does not fit numerous examples of actual skills … Annas owes an argument for the claim that there are such skills” (pp. 187-188). See also Kurth (2018) and Tsai (2015) for more recent critiques of the articulacy requirement as an analogous feature of skill and virtue.

10 Even though Tsai (2016) argues that such counterarguments are unsuccessful, he doesn’t agree with Annas’ account in general.

11 This distinction is made by Socrates in Plato’s Gorgias. For example, he says of pastry baking that it “seems to be a craft, but in my account of it isn’t a craft but a knack and a routine” (463a). This is because it “has no account of the nature of whatever things it applies by which it applies them, so that it is able to state the cause of each thing” (465a).
In any case, we have already seen that the contemporary usage of the notion of skill or expertise is quite broad, and it is no surprise that it does not cover all and only the kinds of expertise that we have been looking at so far; these are the cases that I am interested in, where we can see a sharp distinction between practical expertise and mere routine, despite some apparent shared characteristics (Annas, 2011, p.109).

These counterexamples are thus not damaging to her account, as she accepts that inarticulate expertise exists. What is important to Annas is that *articulate skills exist*, and these skills are the ones that are relevant to her account of virtue. Annas argues that Aristotle holds a similar view of virtue, found in his distinction between natural and full virtue in Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Being naturally brave can be a good thing, but “the person lacks the ability to demand, and give, reasons for what he does” (Annas, 2011, p. 26). As we saw in chapter 1, Aristotle thinks full virtue is reserved for the person with practical intelligence (*phronesis*). And with practical intelligence, Annas believes you will also attain the ability to articulate reasons.

We might understand Annas’ distinction between knack and skill better by introducing another important philosophical distinction, between ‘knowledge-how’ and ‘knowledge-that’. Knowledge-how refers to the kind of knowledge you have when you are able to do something, e.g. riding a bicycle, climb a tree, etc. By contrast, knowledge-that refers to knowing that some proposition is true, e.g. “the capital of Norway is Oslo”. This distinction can be traced back to the distinction between *technē* and *episteme*, but as we saw in chapter 1, this is somewhat problematic.\(^\text{12}\) In contemporary literature though, the distinction between knowledge-how and knowledge-that is widely acknowledged.\(^\text{13}\) Annas claims that some skills involve an element of propositional knowledge. In the article “Moral Knowledge as Practical Knowledge”, Annas provides an argument for this claim:

> Either “knowing how” involves “knowing that” or it does not. If it does not, then what we think of as practical knowledge is being construed as a kind of inarticulate practical knack, an ability to manipulate the world which is not at a sufficiently rational level to be judged epistemically. This, however, would amount to saying that there is no such thing as practical expertise, only knacks – that there is no significant difference between the inarticulate practitioner and the expert in the field. This is ridiculous” (Annas, 2001, p. 248).

Annas is only claiming that there is a distinction between these two kinds of abilities, and that the skills where articulacy is present are the ones we can compare to virtue. A frequently used example of a proper skill is mastering a language. Surely, Annas would claim, there is a distinction

\(^{12}\) For example, Parry claims that “The ancient Greek philosophers had one word, *epistêmê*, that is usually translated as knowledge and another, *technê*, often translated as craft or art. This distinction, it might be thought, maps roughly onto the distinction between knowledge-that and knowledge-how, respectively. The relationship between *epistêmê* and *technê* is rather fraught, though, so whether to classify, say, Plato and Aristotle as intellectualists or anti-intellectualists is not easy” (Parry, 2014, Sec. 1.1).

\(^{13}\) See for example Fantl (2007)
between one who is merely capable of speaking Italian, without any knowledge of the grammar, and a university-level teacher of Italian, who is capable of explaining why something is correct and why something else is not. Mastering a language is thus the type of skill Annas believes has the potential for articulate knowledge. She contrasts practical abilities that involve knowledge—that with abilities that don’t. If you accept that some skills can involve both knowledge-how and knowledge-that, her distinction is valid.

At this point, I believe it is important to note that Annas gives few examples of what constitutes a knack. While she claims that it is possible to have knack-knowledge in a domain that also has the potential for skill-knowledge (such as speaking Italian), she also seems to imply that some domains are governed by knack-knowledge only. Examples of such domains are gardening and certain physical abilities such as playing soccer (Annas, 2011 p. 19). It might be argued that gardening, for example, also has the potential for articulacy. It is easy to imagine a gardener with articulate knowledge of why one specific soil works for this specific plant. She might even have a Ph.D. in botany, having in-depth knowledge of each individual plant in her garden and how they operate. It is thus difficult to conceive of a pure knack, i.e. a domain where articulacy is not possible. How are we then to understand the knack - skill distinction? I believe that Annas is trying to argue that it is possible to become an expert gardener (and soccer player) without articulacy, whereas this is not possible for mastering a language, and that this is what constitutes the distinction. In other words, some areas of expertise require articulacy, and others do not.

So far, we have seen that Annas is interested in the forms of expertise where the need to learn and the drive to aspire are united, and thus require articulate understanding. It might seem like this model overemphasizes the role of reason-giving. However, Annas wants to argue that once expertise is achieved, the expert won’t always be aware of the reasons in the moment of performance. Rather, she wants to make room for automatic responses that reflect the expert’s intelligent engagement. Once you have attained the deep understanding that develops from the drive to aspire, you can internalize your reasons for acting so that you no longer have to engage with them consciously. Consider the expert concert pianist. When truly mastering the piano, you no longer have to engage consciously with the instrument to the same extent as a beginner, and you might “lose” yourself in a piece. For Annas, this does not mean that playing piano is routine: “The experienced pianist plays in a way not dependent on conscious input, but the result is not mindless routine rather playing infused with and expressing the pianist’s thoughts about the piece” (Annas, 2011, pp. 13-14). Thus, the automaticity of an expert piano player is not mindless, but rather intelligent. This, as we shall see later, is also true of the virtuous person.
In sum, Annas is primarily interested in skills that involve the need to learn and the drive to aspire. The need to learn reflects the necessity of engaging actively in an activity in order to improve, while the drive to aspire reflects the sort of intellectual attitude that leads to an articulate understanding of why something works, and a constant drive to improve this understanding. The result is the ability to engage with an intelligently informed automaticity where the thoughts efface themselves in the moment of performance. She goes on to claim that “Virtue can most illuminatingly be seen as like this kind of skill; it shares the intellectual structure of a skill where we find not only the need to learn but the drive to aspire, and hence the need to ‘give an account’, the need for articulate conveying of reasons for why what is done is done” (Annas, 2011, p. 21). This point is widely disputed in contemporary literature, concerning both virtue and skill. And as we shall see later on, it is a central point of disagreement between Annas and Stichter. Now that we have a basic understanding of how Annas conceives of skills, and what skills are relevant when discussing virtue, we can take a closer look at how she applies this in her theory of virtue acquisition.

3. Virtue, Habituation and Skill Acquisition

In the second and third chapters of *Intelligent Virtue*, Annas presents her account of how people become virtuous. As with skills, Annas believes that virtues are acquired through teaching and learning from others, so understanding them requires an understanding of the process of ethical education. In addition, learning to be virtuous involves the drive to aspire, and so once again, we will see these two elements unified. This entails that the articulacy requirement will be equally important for virtue. In this section, I will consider Annas’ view of the dispositional aspect of virtue and how virtuous dispositions are acquired, in addition to how the drive to aspire shapes virtue development. Since Annas believes this process is similar to acquiring a new skill, these similarities will be considered.

In order to better understand the process of virtue development, we have to have some notion of what the virtuous agent is like. Having a virtue means having a disposition, which Annas understands as being “persisting, reliable and characteristic” (Annas, 2011, p. 8): persisting in the sense that it lasts through challenges and is reinforced through virtuous activity; reliable because we expect virtuous people to act according to their values consistently; and characteristic as virtuous people act from a deeply embedded character. She defines virtue as:

…a disposition to reason, feel and act in certain ways, a disposition which is reliable in similar circumstances and persistent offer differing circumstances, which is dynamic, always adjusting to new conditions.
A virtue is an active state that you have to continuously work on and not a “passive product of a string of impacts from outside” (Annas, 2011, p. 10). This means that becoming virtuous is not something that happens overnight; it takes time and commitment and requires habituation and experience. Annas wants to create an account of virtue that singles it out from mere routine, just as she did with skill. Virtue will thus involve both the need to learn and the drive to aspire.

The need to learn is present in virtue, but the context in which you learn it is different from learning a skill. First of all, Annas reminds us throughout the book that “by the time we think about virtues, we all have some” (Annas, 2011, p. 21). In other words, by the time we are mature enough to reflect around our own character strengths and weaknesses, we are already habituated into a certain way of being. According to Annas, this habituating process starts in our upbringing. Throughout our childhood, parents, teachers and other people in our community teach us “many things: mathematics, manners, how to read and write, how to interact with animals” (Annas, 2011, p. 21). Annas argues that in this process, through demonstration, these people also teach us about virtues such as honesty, loyalty, and generosity. Thus, learning virtue is not something that happens in an isolated context, separated from our daily lives. Rather, it is always developed in an embedded context. This means that learning virtue is different from learning a skill:

When we learn to be virtuous, then, the need to learn is less obvious than it is with skill, since our surroundings are overflowing with teachers, and often it is not obvious at the time that we are learning to be generous or brave in learning how to do things; most people discern this only much later (Annas, 2011, pp. 21-22).

This aspect of virtue – that it is learned in an embedded context throughout our general education – is crucial in Annas’ account of virtue. But equally important is the fact that virtue acquisition involves the drive to aspire. Becoming virtuous, similar to learning an articulate skill, requires that you (i) come to understand what you are doing, (ii) that you act in a self-directed way and (iii) that you continuously try to improve. Developing virtues is consequently a matter of both engaging in virtuous activity, combined with an active and reflective attitude towards understanding what you are doing and why you are doing it. This results in a form of automaticity that is intelligently informed, similar to that of the expert pianist (this form of automaticity, and how it relates to the articulacy requirement, will be explored further in section 4). Virtuous habituation will, therefore, involve a constant drive to understand and develop your ability to articulate reasons for how you behave. We have already seen how Annas understands the role of reason-giving in learning activities such as building and piano playing. Let us now consider the
role of articulacy in virtue and virtue development. Consider the following example: A young boy learns about bravery by witnessing his parents chase away a stray dog threatening the family, registering that this is brave. However, this does not happen passively. The boy has to reflect actively on what he sees. As Annas notes:

He needs to come to understand why, not just that, the parents chased off the dog, and the factors involved, such as the dog being a threat. He needs to come to be able to act bravely himself in similar situations, and we can see how much understanding this will require: he has to learn the difference between bravery and recklessness, the importance of realizing what merits a defensive response and what does not. And he needs to come to appreciate that his own attempts may be blunders, and that he has far to go before getting it right in the way adults do. All three aspects of the drive to aspire that we saw in practical skill turn out to be crucial for the acquiring of virtue (Annas, 2011, p. 23).

This is the heart of Annas’ theory of virtue acquisition and how it relates to acquiring a skill. Both learning virtue and learning a skill requires an active reflection on what it is you are learning. The student has to want to become better in order to achieve expertise in a domain, and you won’t become better unless you strive to understand. It also reflects her theory of moral habituation; through experiencing the value of bravery, children gain some intellectual understanding of both what it means to be brave and why it matters. These two points reflect the need to learn and the drive to aspire, which we saw in Annas’ theory of skills in section 2. First of all, virtue is something you need to learn, as we do not start ethical reflection as “blank sheets” (Annas, 2011, p. 25). Rather, ethical reflection starts in our childhood, and is developed through copying and learning from role models. Secondly, acquiring and maintaining virtue requires the drive to aspire, as it is an active way of engaging intelligently with the world, and is accompanied by the ability to articulate reasons that justify your actions. We can therefore see a close link between acquiring virtue and acquiring skill, as they both involve the need to learn and the drive to aspire. This leads us to the next section, where we will take a closer look at the practical reasoning required both in skill and in virtue.

4. Exercising Virtue: Practical Reasoning in Virtue and Skill

Annas wants to argue that exercising virtue and exercising skill share some features, particularly the practical reasoning involved in virtue. As we saw in section 2 and 3, Annas believes that exercising virtue is similar to exercising skills that involve intellectual ability to give reasons. This means that for Annas, the practical reasoning involved in virtue must be intellectual and reason-giving. This, as I have already pointed out, singles virtue out from mere habit or routine, where an agent acts unengaged. In the section on skill, we briefly saw that Annas believes learning an articulate skill results in a form of automaticity that is intelligent and well-informed, as opposed
to mere habit or routine. It might seem difficult to unite automatic responses with the intellectual conception of skill we get from the articulacy requirement. This has been a general problem in virtue theory as well; we often conceive of the virtuous person as someone who automatically does the right thing, while at the same time expecting their actions to be rational. In order to solve this potential problem, Annas applies the skill analogy. According to Annas, skill is a domain wherein you can internalize reasons for acting to such a degree that you no longer have to access them consciously; you simply apply them when needed. It is only in the learning phase that you have to constantly strive to understand and figure out what works. Once you have reached expert level, your performance will be infused with all the knowledge you attained as a learner. The same, Annas claims, is true of virtue:

For one important lesson we learn from the analogy with skill is that reasons for acting can efface themselves without evaporating entirely. Moreover, it is the fact that these reasons cease to take up psychological room at the time of action which enables the virtuous person to become someone who is disposed to act generously or sympathetically without hesitation or the need to work out the options. The reasons have left their effect in the person’s disposition, so that the virtuous response is an intelligent one while also being immediate and not one which the person had to consciously figure out (Annas, 2001, pp. 29-30).

As we can see, Annas points out that skill is a domain wherein reasons can efface themselves during the performance, as they cease to take up psychological room. Acting virtuously and exercising a skill does not require actively thinking of reasons in the moment of action. But the agent needs the ability to justify his or her behavior in hindsight of acting, just as a professional pianist has the ability to explain why he or she played in a certain way. This kind of practical reasoning – being able to act intelligently and successfully when the situation requires it – is for Annas crucial in both skill and virtue. It reflects a person’s ability to act on his feet and to articulate a justification for the action later on. She thus wants an account of skills (and virtues) that involves both automaticity and articulacy, bridging the gap between mindless routine and intelligent engagement.

Let’s illustrate this last point with an example. Suppose a virtuous man is at a dinner party, and he notices that one of his friends is uncomfortable due to the topic of discussion. This is a situation that calls for virtue. Instead of pointing out that his friend is not comfortable discussing this topic, bringing it to everyone’s attention, he subtly manages to change the discussion into something else. He does so automatically without having to discern the right course of action consciously, as he has experienced similar situations many times. But if asked later on why he

\[^{14}\text{See for example Snow (2016) for a paper that discusses three different solutions to this problem. Here, she discusses Annas' skill analogy as a viable option to unite habit with virtue.}\]
responded as he did, he would be perfectly able to explain why this was the right thing to do. This is what I take Annas’ integration of articulacy with automaticity to be; the ability to do the right thing spontaneously due to experiences with similar situations, combined with the ability to justify the action if confronted.

It should be noted that Annas focuses mostly on the practical reasoning we find in automatic virtuous behavior. There are, of course, instances of virtuous people having to deliberate actively on what to do. Annas claims that virtuous people will sometimes face a situation where past reflection and experience won’t be sufficient do handle it in an effortless manner, and will thus have to struggle. She identifies two ways this can happen and argue that both are perfectly consistent with virtue. The first kind of struggle that a virtuous person can encounter is when facing a challenge that she cannot control. For example: “A compassionate person might find himself forced to choose, among family members all of whom need full-time care, which can remain at home and which must go into institutional care” (Annas, 2011, p. 78). Annas notes that the struggle experienced here will not come from this person’s internal conflict in desire and values, but rather from the difficult external circumstances in which she finds herself (Annas, 2011, p. 78). The second kind of struggle mentioned is when a virtuous agent encounters a complicated situation with many diverse outcomes, which will require active deliberation. This is consistent with her picture of virtue as the “activity is harmonious in the sense that there is no disrupt of intent” (Annas, 2011, p. 77). These examples render a more nuanced picture of what the virtuous agent is like. Although they will often act intelligently without active reflection, sometimes situations will arise that require them to step back and deliberate.  

5. Virtue, Skill and Enjoyment

Among the key similarities between virtue and skill found in Annas, we find that both involve enjoyment. The skill analogy can thus help us understand the way feelings and reasons are in agreement in virtuous people. Annas adopts the Aristotelian distinction between the merely enocratic agent who does the right thing, but with a conflict of desire, and the fully virtuous agent, who does the right thing “wholeheartedly, readily, and without internal conflict on the matter” (Annas, 2015, pp. 283-4). And she wants to explain this phenomenon through the use of analogy to skill, arguing that “practical skills give us examples of enjoyment coming as a disposition develops” (Annas, 2011, p. 69). In order to support this claim, she draws on the works and research of psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and his concept of flow. In this section, I will

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15 Still, some philosophers suggest that Annas is too focused on the automatic actions of the virtuous agent (See for example Kurth, 2018).
present Csíkszentmihályi’s research on ‘flow experience’ and see how Annas uses this research to reinforce three central ideas. The first is that both general flow experience and virtuous activity are valued for their own sakes. The second idea is that flow is strikingly similar to the intelligent automaticity Annas believes governs skill and virtue. The third is that we can further understand the enjoyment found in virtue through the skill analogy, as exercising a skill as something people generally enjoy. Annas thus gets an empirical grounding for her account of virtue that, as we shall see, goes beyond Aristotle in the use of the skill analogy.

Csíkszentmihályi has spent many decades studying what he calls ‘optimal experience’, i.e. the types of activity humans enjoy the most. What he found out is that many of the experiences we enjoy are found in goal-directed skillful activity:

> By far the overwhelming proportion of optimal experiences is reported to occur within sequences of activities that are goal-directed and bounded by rule – activities that require the investment of psychic energy, and that could not be done without the appropriate skills. Why this should be so will become clearer as we go along; at this point it is sufficient to note that this seems to be universally the case (Csíkszentmihályi, 1991, pp. 49, emphasis added).

This optimal experience, when one is deeply engaged in goal-directed activity, is what Csikszentmihalyi calls ‘flow’. It has two central features. First of all, it is ‘autotelic’, meaning that the activity is “experienced as being its own end, and thus experienced as being enjoyable in itself” (Annas, 2011, p. 72). Thus, even though an activity (such as chess) is goal-oriented (checkmating your opponent), the experienced chess player can enjoy the game itself, regardless of whether or not he succeeds. We remember from chapter 1 that Aristotle claims the technai are valued for their end, while a virtuous action is valued for the sake of itself. I will discuss this in detail in section 7. For now, it will suffice to say that Annas is open to the possibility that exercising skill can, at least phenomenologically, be experienced as its own end.

The second crucial feature is that when a person is engaged in an activity that produces flow experience, she is “not conscious of the self” (Annas, 2011, p. 72). Annas takes this aspect of flow to support her idea of intelligent automaticity. In the section on practical reasoning, we saw that engaging in activities intelligently does not necessarily require awareness of what one is doing while one is doing it, as the expert has internalized their reasons for acting. And Csikszentmihalyi’s research supports this claim. Focusing too much on the reasons behind your actions in the moment of acting will most likely distract you from succeeding. Thus, the flow one experiences when engaged in skillful coping often involves losing consciousness of the self. It is somewhat difficult to grasp just what this loss of self-consciousness entails. You might get connotations to the sort of loss of ego we find in certain eastern traditions that can be attained
through deep meditation. But this is not how I understand it. It is rather a state where you no longer have to consciously work out your decisions, where they instead flow effortlessly out of you in a deeply engaging manner. Annas conceives of virtuous activity in the same manner: “Virtuous activity, at least in those past the stage of the learner, exhibits the same combination of direct engagement and loss of self-consciousness that we find with skill” (Annas, 2011, p. 74).

Now that we have a basic understanding of flow experience, we can see how Annas uses the affective component of skill in order to understand the affective component of virtue better. Essentially, she wants to point out that the argument from emotion reconstructed in chapter 1 is not as forceful as we might think. She starts by presenting what seems to be the challenge:

> A skill can be exercised in independence of affective commitment; a skilled potter can produce pots, and a skilled plumber can fix leaks, in an unconcerned way. A virtuous person, by contrast, does not perform virtuous actions impassively and with lack of concern. The virtuous person not only does the right thing for the right reasons, she has the right feelings about it (Annas, 2011, p. 66).

Her response to the challenge is twofold. First, she says that this argument is more persuasive when it comes to productive skills, i.e. skills that leave behind a finished product by which we evaluate the craftsman. As the producer himself is not what is being evaluated, it “matters less what the expert’s feelings were in producing it” (Annas, 2011, p. 66). She goes on to argue that the argument is less forceful in cases of skills concerned with performing, such as sports, dance, etc. In such activities, the expert is both the producer and the product, so separating the two is more difficult when evaluating the result. However, there are still cases of skills Annas refers to (such as building) where the product is the main source of evaluation. She needs something more forceful than these particular cases in order to convince the reader.

Distinguishing between producing and performing is thus not Annas’ main solution to the problem stated above. As we have seen, Csíkszentmihályi’s research has shown that people generally enjoy engaging in a skillful activity and enjoy it for the sake of itself. For Annas, this means that “practical skills give us examples of enjoyment coming as a disposition develops” (Annas, 2011, p. 69). Learning a new skill can be frustrating in the beginning. You continuously make mistakes, have to focus hard on what you are doing, and you will generally receive negative feedback. But as you develop your abilities and start mastering new areas, you get a sense of accomplishment. A good example of this is learning a new language. In the beginning, you constantly have to struggle to find the right word, to conjugate the verbs correctly etc. But as you start to master the grammar and develop your vocabulary, it becomes very rewarding. In Annas’ words “I come to enjoy the exercise of language mastery as it no longer requires conscious
working-out but enables me to express my thought unimpededly” (Annas, 2011, p. 70). The same, Annas argues, is true of learning to enjoy virtue. She illustrates this with another example. Imagine someone who realizes that eating meat is unjust, as it contributes to the unnecessary suffering of animals. She used to really enjoy meat, and abstaining from eating it difficult in the beginning. But, “as they [vegetarians] develop the relevant disposition to be a vegetarian they cease to find it tempting (Annas, 2011, p. 69). As this disposition develops, Annas believes that she will take more pleasure in not eating meat than she got from eating it in the first place. And the vegetarian will also no longer have to consciously engage with the reasons for why she stopped eating meat in the first place. We can now see how the skill analogy will be helpful to understand the joy involved in virtue as well. People generally enjoy mastering new areas, as it allows you to experience an effortless flow. The virtuous person will also enjoy “…the ready and unselfconscious way the activity is performed, “flowing” effortlessly from the person’s overall harmoniously arranged goals unchecked by effortful self-questioning or conscious figuring-out” (Annas, 2011, p. 76). It is important to note that what we enjoy in virtue is also the fact that our actions and feelings are in harmony with respect to our life as a whole. It is thus a global matter. Whereas in skill it is a local matter, as “someone might be a skillful skater while having all kinds of unresolved issues in other areas of her life” (Annas, 2011, p. 75).

6. Some Points of Divergence between Virtue and Skill

We have now considered what I argue are the three main functions of the skill analogy in Annas’ Intelligent Virtue. Towards the end of the book (In chapters 7, 8 and 9) Annas discusses some of the aspects of virtue that are unique to virtue. In the introduction, I briefly mentioned that Annas does not want to identify virtues with practical skills. First of all, she argues that “a virtue is admirable for itself” and secondly, that virtues “require a commitment to value” (Annas, 2011, p. 101). These two aspects of virtue separate it from the domain of practical skill. Thus, we need to get a grasp of these differences in order to understand the limits of the skill analogy in Annas.

The first diverging point is that virtues are admired in a way different from the way we admire other traits, e.g. the ability to ski, speak Italian or play an instrument. Annas recognizes that we generally tend to admire people with skills, but she claims that the type of admiration is different: “In the case of the virtues our admiration is for the person’s character: possession of virtues indicates something about what the person is like, whereas possession of traits such as tidiness or wittiness indicates only traits that the person has” (Annas, 2011, p. 101). Second, virtue expresses a commitment to goodness, or positive value. According to Annas, “the brave person’s action reveals that he is committed to something valuable that is centrally important to him”. Thus “a
virtue expresses a positive aim at some overall good way of developing” (Annas, 2011, p. 102). This is not the case in skill, nor vice, for that matter.

These are both points of divergence between virtue and skill, and manifest some of the limits of the skill analogy of virtue. While Annas believes that investigating skill can shed light on some aspects of virtue, she does not argue that virtues are skills. Matt Stichter, on the other hand, as we shall see in the next chapter, argues that they are. However, the skill analogy shapes Annas’ account more strongly than what we saw in Aristotle. And, as we have seen, she identifies more similarities between the two concepts than Aristotle did. In order to demonstrate this clearly, we shall revisit the six arguments against virtue being a skill that we saw in the first chapter.

7. Annas in Light of Aristotle: The Six Aristotelian Arguments Revisited

In this chapter, we have analyzed Annas’ account of virtue, focusing specifically on how she applies the skill analogy in order to illuminate how virtues are acquired, exercised and how they are enjoyed. Although this has not given us a complete picture of how Annas conceives of virtue, we can easily see that she adheres to many Aristotelian ideas; virtues are dispositions that involve acting, feeling and reasoning in a certain way, and are unified through practical intelligence. What I have not considered in this chapter is the way Annas also defends the idea that virtue is part of an agent’s happiness or flourishing, another Aristotelian notion. Even though the framework is highly Aristotelian, Annas is expanding many of his ideas, in addition to developing new ones. Among the many examples of this is the way she applies the skill analogy. While Aristotle primarily uses skill in order to demonstrate how virtues are acquired through experience (NE, 1103a32-b3), Annas also focuses on the fact that, in exercising skill and virtue, there is a point where reasons efface themselves and we are left with an intelligent and educated automaticity. This mode of engaging efficiently and skillfully with the world is a cause of enjoyment, which allows Annas to also explore the affective aspect of virtue through analogies to skill. The explanatory value of the skill analogy is thus greater than it was for Aristotle. It is time to return to the arguments identified in chapter 1, to better see how Annas to some extent aims to identify more similarities than Aristotle. We will see that Annas maintains the Aristotelian notion that virtues and skills are distinct, but that she extends the analogy.

In the introduction to this thesis, I argued that any Aristotelian virtue theorist modeling virtue on skill today should consider Aristotle’s arguments against virtue being a skill. Annas ends up addressing most of these arguments, either explicitly or implicitly. She does not address the argument from redundancy or the argument from voluntary error, and I want to argue that given the divergences between skill and virtue considered in section 6, this is justified. The redundancy
argument states that, while it does make sense to speak of good and bad navigators and doctors, it does not make sense to speak of good and bad virtuous people, as these people are, by definition, good. Annas can simply agree with this claim. The argument from voluntary error claims that if a virtuous person errs on purpose, it undermines the person’s virtue. Whereas in skill, an expert can err as much as she likes, without it affecting her actual ability to generally perform well. Is this a problem for Annas? I would argue that it’s not, as Annas ties virtue with a commitment to goodness. Erring on purpose displays a failure to commit to the good, a requirement of virtue that, as we saw in the previous chapter, is not present in practical skills such as playing tennis or building houses.

The argument from general and particular goods distinguishes between skills and virtues due to the scope of their aims: “the things that come about by means of technē have their goodness internal to them, and thus it is enough if they come about in such a way as to be in a certain state” (NE, 1105b 26-7). On the other hand, being practically wise requires one to “deliberate correctly about what is good and advantageous for himself, not partially (for example, about what sorts of things further health of further strength) but about what sorts of things further living well as a whole”. Annas, in her discussion of the virtue and happiness, acknowledges this distinction: “This [virtue] is a global way of thinking about my life: I come to see that I have various goals that I aim at, and that in the one life I have, and which I am already living, these goals need to be structured in a unifying way in order for me to achieve them” (Annas, 2011, p. 123). As virtue is a state that is concerned with how you live your life as a whole, it cannot be aimed solely at particular goods, but must also be aimed at the general good of your life. This idea is recognized at several points throughout the book. Thus, we find another similarity between Annas and Aristotle. Let us now consider the remaining arguments, where Annas goes beyond Aristotle.

7.1 The Argument from Motivation: Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Value

In the first chapter, we saw that Aristotle believes a virtuous action is chosen for its own sake, whereas technē can be exercised based on other motivations such as honor or wealth. This is often taken to mean that virtuous actions have intrinsic, rather than extrinsic value (Whiting, 2002, p. 270). Although Annas does not explicitly engage with this distinction as an argument that serves to undermine the skill analogy, she does so implicitly. When she draws on Csikszentmihályi’s research, she adopts his claim that flow experience is valued for its own sake. In Csikszentmihályi’s words, “The key element of an optimal experience is that it is an end in itself. Even if initially undertaken for some other reasons, the activity that consumes us becomes
intrinsically rewarding” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991, p. 67). By embracing the idea that skillful activity is autotelic in the same sense that virtuous activity is done for the sake of itself, Annas can go beyond Aristotle and find new places to apply the skill analogy. And indeed, other contemporary psychological researchers operate with the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, where intrinsic motivation can be tied to feelings of competence more generally (Ryan and Deci, 2002, p. 58). We thus have good reasons to consider skill a domain where intrinsic value and motivation is found.

7.2. The Argument from Production and Action

According to Aristotle, (virtuous) action (praxis) has its end in itself, whereas production (poiesis) has an external end, i.e. the product. And as virtue is concerned with action and technē is concerned with production, they differ in kind. This argument is, in many ways, an extension of the previous one, and we are again faced with the distinction between intrinsic value and extrinsic value. As flow experience (and by extension exercising a skill) has intrinsic value, the gap between virtue and skill becomes less forceful. We also saw that Annas believes that, while we usually value productive skill through their results, this is not the case for performative skills: “a sporting performance may be valued and admired in itself, even though it does not for some reason succeed in winning the price” (Annas, 2011, p. 75). Joseph Dunne had a similar critique of Aristotle’s distinction between praxis and poiesis, as we remember from chapter 1. The idea is that just as with virtue, the end of a skill can be exercising the skill itself. By endorsing this claim, Annas can extend the explanatory value of the skill analogy.

7.3. The Argument from Emotional Harmony

The argument from emotional harmony claimed that it is conceivable for someone with a skill to perform well without harmony between reason and feelings, whereas this is not possible for the virtuous person. Annas does not see this as limiting for the skill analogy. On the contrary, Annas wants to argue that there is a strong link between engaging in skillful activity and enjoying oneself, drawing on the research of Csikszentmihalyi and his concept of flow. Indeed, loving and enjoying an activity appears to be a crucial part of mastering it. Thus, the enjoyment found in mastering a skill can illuminate the enjoyment found in virtuous activity.

Concluding Remarks

In sum, we have seen that Annas wants to maintain a distinction between virtue and skill, while at the same time identifying new points of similarity between the two concepts. In her account,
investigating skill can illuminate how virtues are acquired, exercised and enjoyed. As briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, I call this the ‘illumination-thesis’. The idea is that we can gain a new understanding of one thing (virtue) through investigating a similar phenomenon (skill), that we are more disposed towards understanding. Skills and virtues are united in the sense that they both involve the ‘need to learn’ and the ‘drive to aspire’ in addition to the fact that “practical skills give us examples of enjoyment coming as a disposition develops” (Annas, 2011, p. 69). This gives the skill analogy more explanatory value in Annas than in Aristotle.

In the next chapter, we will go through another attempt to model virtue on skill; the account of Matt Stichter. He argues that as we now can see so many similarities between virtues and skill, it is time to realize that virtues are skills.
Chapter 3: Matt Stichter’s Skill Model of Virtue

1. Introduction

We have seen how Aristotle and Annas both think that certain aspects of virtue can be illuminated through skill analogies. Matt Stichter, on the other hand, argues that “the reason why people find so many similarities is simply because virtues are skills” (Stichter, 2018, p. 3). In his doctoral dissertation entitled The Skill of Virtue: Moral Virtues as Practical Skills (2007), Stichter argues that virtues are skills. Since then, he has spent much of his career exploring the benefits of modeling virtues on skills, the result of which was the monograph The Skillfulness of Virtue: Improving our Moral and Epistemic Lives, published in October 2018. The aim of his book is to present an empirically informed skill model of virtue, drawing on psychological literature on self-regulation and skill acquisition. This literature is synthesized and presented in the first chapter, before Stichter builds an account of virtue as skill based on this framework in chapter 2. The result is an empirically informed view of skills, which he uses to critique Annas’ intellectualist theory of skills, especially the articulacy requirement, a requirement he ultimately rejects. And while this leads him to rethink some of the traditional virtue categories, his account of virtue “turns out to have many affinities with a neo-Aristotelian approach to virtue” (Stichter, 2018, p. 5). Interestingly for this thesis, Stichter devoted the entire chapter 3 to what he believes is the strongest objection to the skill model of virtue: the argument from motivation. He concludes that these objections aren’t as strong as people usually assume, as there is a deeply rooted motivational component to skills as well.

This chapter aims to present the main ideas developed in Stichter’s The Skillfulness of Virtue and analyze how he responds to the Aristotelian arguments from chapter 1. I begin with a summary of his attempt to synthesize the psychological literature on self-regulation, skill acquisition and dual-process theories in cognitive science. In section 3, I present how Stichter applies the insight from his study of self-regulation and skill acquisition to an account of virtue and virtue acquisition. In the end, I will consider how he deals with Aristotle’s six arguments. As Stichter aims to defend a skill model of virtue where virtues are skills, I will also present his argument for why this is the case, despite the fact that practical wisdom governs reasoning about the good life as a whole, whereas other skills do not.
2. Stichter on self-regulation, skill acquisition and dual-process theories in cognitive science

Any skill model of virtue needs a theory of skill. Stichter believes the best approach will be to take advantage of the vast amount of psychological literature produced on the acquisition and exercise of expertise. Theories of virtue, he argues, should be founded on the “psychological mechanisms for improving our behavior” (Stichter, 2018, p. 8). These mechanisms have been studied for decades by psychologists, and Stichter aims at “synthesizing numerous psychological theories that are usually discussed in isolation from each other, in order to provide a broader psychological framework” (Stichter, 2018, p. 8). Attempting to recapitulate Stichter’s synthesis of all this research is a difficult task, so I will focus on what I believe are the three main theories he draws on: (i) social cognitive theories of self-regulation, (ii) deliberate practice and skill acquisition and (iii) dual-process theories of cognition. Self-regulation helps us understand how people set goals and how to best strive towards them, theories of deliberate practice gives us insight into how we improve our skillfulness, and dual-process theories of cognition explain the automaticity aspect of exercising a skill. Thus, we get an empirical foundation for how people set goals, how they go about reaching those goals, and the mental processes involved in learning and exercising a skill.

2.1 Self-regulation and the Rubicon Model of Action Phases

Stichter starts his account of how people improve their behavior with social cognitive theories of human agency, which “understands the exercise of agency primarily in terms of self-regulation” (Stichter, 2018, p. 8). Self-regulating behavior consists of setting a goal or standard that one wants to pursue and implementing actions in order to pursue that goal. The goal itself can be anything from eating healthier or learning a new ability to becoming more honest or just. Thus, Stichter argues that skill acquisition (and moral improvement) is just a complex form of self-regulation, which is why we should understand self-regulation when creating a skill model of virtue. As this sort of goal setting behavior is where social cognitive theory locates our agency, it is from consciously pursuing goals we truly actualize our agency.

One important aspect of human self-regulation is that it requires an understanding of how we come up with goals and how best to pursue them. In order to understand human self-regulating behavior, Stichter believes it can be helpful to distinguish between “the related activities of setting a goal” and “striving to reach them” (Stichter, 2018, p. 11). The process of self-regulation is thus twofold: on the one hand we have deciding on a goal we want to achieve, which involves deliberating on what goals are worth pursuing, deciding on which goals are realistic etc. On the
other hand we have the actual striving to attain the goals we set for ourselves. Self-regulation is represented by the Rubicon model of action phases, which categorizes goal setting and goal striving into four distinct phases: (1) choosing a goal to commit to; (2) planning how to achieve the goal; (3) taking action to implement the plan; and (4) evaluating the action in light of the goal commitment.\textsuperscript{16} The distinction between motivation (goal setting) and volition (goal striving) is central to the Rubicon model. The former (goal setting) is located in the first and fourth phase and the latter (goal striving) in the second and third. The reason why we should distinguish between these activities is that committing to a goal requires a different mindset than actually striving to achieve it (Stichter, 2018, p. 15). I will go through each of these phases in turn and present some of the different strategies for succeeding in the different phases.

The first phase of human self-regulation consists of deciding on what goal you want to achieve. Psychologists such as Carver and Scheier (2003) have shown that people tend to structure their goals hierarchically, where one highly valued goal (the superordinate goal) leads to a set of more specific subordinate goals. Stichter demonstrates this process through the use of the traditional example of a New Year’s resolution; getting in shape. In order to achieve this subordinate goal, it’s helpful to “break that abstract goal into more concrete goals – like “eat less” and “exercise more” – each of which could contribute to better health and fitness” (Stichter, 2018, p. 13). To illustrate, Stichter creates an example of how this goal hierarchy might look like:

\begin{itemize}
  \item Superordinate goal (be fit)
  \item Subgoal 1 (exercice more)
  \item Subgoal 2 (take fitness classes)
  \item Subgoal 3 (join gym)\textsuperscript{17}
\end{itemize}

Structuring your goals in such a hierarchical manner helps you plan the specific strategies you want to apply in order to reach the superordinate goal you set yourself. The superordinate goals are more valued and can be tied up to our sense of self, whereas the subgoals are less valuable and can in some instances be given up without a loss of commitment to the superordinate goal. Psychologist Angela Duckworth has noted that “Lower-order goals are more numerous, context-specific, short-term, and substitutable, whereas higher-order goals are typically fewer in number, more abstract, more enduring, and more important to the individual” (Duckworth, 2014, p. 321).

In sum, the first phase involves commitment to a superordinate goal, in addition to mapping out the various subgoals that will allow you to realize it. Drawing on the work of Duckworth (2010),

\textsuperscript{16} Stichter, 2018, p. 16
\textsuperscript{17} Sticher, 2018, p. 13
Stichter presents some of the strategies one should implement in this phase, the most important one being ‘mental contrasting’. Mental contrasting consists of focusing mentally on the positive aspects of the goal you want to achieve, while framing the present negative reality as something that stands in the way of realizing this goal. This will provide you with the motivation needed for implementing action. Stichter writes that “Ultimately, phase 1 culminates in a commitment to realize a goal” (Stichter, 2018, p. 17).

In the second phase of self-regulation, striving to achieve the goal begins. According to Stichter, this phase “takes us from the vertical hierarchy of goal organization into a horizontal (or temporal) perspective on action” (Stichter, 2018, p. 14). Thus, in the second phase, you have to plan how to achieve your goal, which will involve “trying to figure out what needs to be done, how you are going to do it, when and where you will take action, etc.” (Stichter, 2018, p. 18). This phase is crucial for actually maintaining your commitment to the superordinate goal, and one of the key strategies of succeeding in this phase is through the use of ‘implementation intentions’. An implementation intention is a strategy in self-regulation that has an “if-then” structure, i.e. “if this situation arises, then I will respond in this particular way (in order to achieve the goal I have committed myself to)” (Stichter, 2018, p. 18). For example, if your goal is to regulate your anger in everyday situations, an implementation intention might be structured like this: “If someone provokes me, I will calmly count to 10”. This allows you to prepare for any obstacle that might prevent you from reaching the goal of manifesting less anger. According to Stichter, numerous studies have shown that using implementation intentions “significantly increase goal attainment” (Stichter, 2018, p. 19).

Once you have chosen a superordinate goal, divided it into several subgoals and planned out how to best attain it/them, you can move on to the third phase. Now it’s time to put your plan into practice with action. According to Heckhausen (2007), the crucial part of this phase is that “information processing should be narrowly focused on the action required to reach the goal and situational cues to prompt such action while blocking out any distractions or conflicts with other goal commitments (Heckhausen, 2007, p. 167). Dealing with the conflicts between different goal commitments – between highly valued goals and less values goals – will require self-control. If your goal is to pursue a career in academia, and your friends invite you to a party the night before an exam, some degree of self-control will need to be exercised in order to stay at home to study.

Now, once you have started acting in accordance with your superordinate goal, you have to start reflecting back on how well you were able to commit to the goal you aimed to achieve in the first place. In this phase (4), one should ask if this goal is worth committing to, whether or not you
have succeeded in reaching your goal, etc. If you did not succeed, you should think about how to alter your strategies in order to accomplish what you set out to do. And, if you find out that the goal you were pursuing might be wrong for you, you have to decide on whether or not to keep pursuing it. In sum, Stichter writes that:

In evaluating your action (phase 4), if you did not meet your subgoal, you may (1) decide that there is another means for achieving it and renew your commitment to that subgoal (and by extension to the superordinate goal it serves); (2) decide that one should drop commitment to this subgoal, but replace it with another subgoal that supports the superordinate goal; or (3) drop your commitment to the superordinate goal altogether, and find some alternative superordinate goal to pursue (Sticher, 2018, p. 22)

Deciding to keep pursuing the superordinate goal requires a strong commitment. The stronger your commitment is, the more likely you are to find new ways to pursue your goals, thus going for option (1) or (2). According to Duckworth (2014), this long-term determination is best understood in terms of the character trait grit. Grit is similar to self-control but is more concerned with long term commitment than moment to moment impulse control. Possessing grit is thus crucial for long-term self-regulating commitments such as improving one’s character.

We have seen how the Rubicon model of action phases provides a good framework for self-regulating behavior. It provides us not only with the structure of how human beings improve themselves, but also some of the strategies that can make these endeavors more successful. Through organizing your superordinate goal into various subgoals, carefully planning how to achieve each individual goal (with the help of implementation intentions), actually acting in accordance with the plan (by exercising self-control) and finally, through evaluating yourself and your commitments, you can increase your chances of efficiently improving in some area of your life.

2.2 Skill Acquisition and Deliberate Practice

According to Stichter, skill acquisition is “a sophisticated form of self-regulation, which we engage in so as to achieve a desired goal in a domain of high complexity” (Stichter, 2018, p. 23). Thus, the overall framework of self-regulation will be helpful when trying to understand how we acquire skills. Just as in self-regulation, learning a new skill involves a “progression from tackling simple tasks to more challenging tasks, no matter what level of skill you are aiming at, and of course as one advances in skill development which tasks count as simple or challenging will change” (Stichter, 2018, p. 24). For example, if you want to learn ancient Greek, you will most likely start by learning the alphabet, accentuation, pronunciation etc. Eventually, you will progress into more difficult tasks, such as morphology and verb conjugation. Once you have mastered
some of the basic aspects of ancient Greek grammar, you might start translating short phrases constructed by textbook authors, before you eventually, after hours and hours of hard work, may get to the point where you are able to read and translate original works. You thus have a structure of subgoals (Learning the alphabet, the different declensions, verb conjugations etc.) that become more and more difficult as you progress, which requires a lot of practice. These subgoals are all oriented towards the superordinate goal of mastering ancient Greek.

It is often estimated that in order to achieve expertise in any field, you need at least 10,000 hours or 10 years of practice (Horn, Masunaga, 2006, p. 601). However, Stichter reminds us that simply practicing is not sufficient. Repeating the same task over and over again will most likely lead you to develop your abilities within that field, but achieving expertise requires “continually striving to do things that you currently cannot do” (Stichter, 2018, p. 24). Here, we see a point similar to one Annas was making in the previous chapter. Mindless routine will not result in skill acquisition; you also need what Annas calls the drive to aspire. The form of practice needed to become an expert is what Stichter (drawing on Horn and Masunaga) calls ‘deliberate practice’. Deliberate practice involves, similar to self-regulating behavior, laying out a strategy with specific subgoals in order to improve, in addition to the meta-reflection we saw in phase 4 of the Rubicon model. It also involves constantly seeking out feedback from your performance, in order to figure out what works and what doesn’t work. And due to the unpredictability in most skill domains, the expert will have to develop “some flexible hierarchical structures to guide action in a dynamic context” (Stichter, 2018, p. 26).

Stichter also points out that once you have achieved expertise in a field, you still have to continuously engage in deliberate practice in order to maintain expertise-level performance. Krampe and Carness (2006) have shown that “maintaining skills is as effortful as acquiring them in the first place” (Krampe, Carness, 2006, p. 693). As achieving expertise requires so much practice and commitment, Stichter writes that “one of the most important factors for determining whether someone can attain that level of performance is motivation” (Stichter, 2018, p. 26). This is true both of acquiring expertise and maintaining expert performance.

2.3 Dual-processes Theories of Cognition

When you learn a new skill, the most basic tasks require a lot of effort and attention. In order to improve, those basic tasks need to become effortless, so that we can focus our attention on more complicated tasks. For example, when you first learn how to drive a car, changing gears will be effortful, and you will have to invest a lot of attention in doing it. But driving in traffic also requires you to be aware of multiple things at once. Thus, before you can face driving on a
heavily trafficked road, the process of changing gears should be somewhat automatic, so that you can shift your focus on to the already quite complicated task of driving in traffic. This is a crucial part of skill acquisition. This phenomenon – where an action becomes effortless – is called automaticity, understood as “features of an action … requiring little effort or attention, occurring without much (or any) conscious awareness or intention, and happening spontaneously” (Stichter, 2018, p. 28).

This contrast between effortful and effortless actions was also present in Annas’ theory of skill. But Stichter draws a more explicit distinction between the two mental processes involved, based on ‘dual-processes theory of cognition’. According to this model, there are two main forms of cognitive processes that guide our actions; the first is characterized by being intuitive, automatic and effortless (System 1/automatic); the second one (System 2/deliberate) is characterized by being deliberate, effortful and analytic. Stichter believes this distinction is very useful for understanding skill knowledge and argues that deliberate practice “involves a transition from deliberate to automatic processing” (Stichter, 2018, p. 29). Thus, exercising system 2 will be crucial in the learning phase, whereas system 1 will play a larger role once you have acquired expertise. This does not mean, however, that skillful performance consists only of automatic processing. On the contrary, automaticity allows you to shift your attention onto more complicated tasks that often require using deliberate processing. Stichter argues that we have to understand skillful performance as the interplay between system 1 and system 2. Again, this is illustrated by the driver; while some of the basic tasks of driving (such as changing gears and activating the turn signal) can be governed by system 1, the more complex tasks of passing a trailer on a highway full of traffic might be governed by system 2. Stichter’s account of skill leads to a critique of other attempts at modeling virtue on skill based on other theories of skill. He focuses on the two accounts presented by Dreyfus and Annas and positions himself somewhere in the middle. On the one hand, you have Dreyfus, who Stichter believes “overemphasizes the role of automatic processes and mostly neglects the deliberative processes” (Stichter, 2018, p. 48). I won’t get too much into the details of Stichter’s critique of Dreyfus and will instead focus more on his critique of Annas. According to Stichter, Annas is guilty of going to the other extreme, focusing too much on the intellectual aspects of skill. We will look closer at how this model of the cognitive makeup of the expert relates to Annas in chapter 4.

In sum, Stichter’s synthesis of these various psychological theories gives him a good framework for understanding how people set goals, how they go about to reach those goals, and the mental processes involved in learning and exercising a skill. The aim of Stichter’s synthesis was to understand how humans improve their behavior, in order to apply this insight to virtue
acquisition and virtue exercise. It is now time to look closer at how Stichter applies this framework to virtue and see what implications this has for a theory of virtue.

3. Applying the Psychological Insights: A Theory of Virtue and Virtue Acquisition

Now that Stichter has provided us with a psychologically plausible account of how people acquire and exercise new abilities, he wants to apply this framework to virtue. He argues that moral agency is “a specialized form of human agency in general”, and thus “insofar as agency is exercised through self-regulation, the same will be true of moral agency” (Stichter, 2018, p. 59).

In this section I will consider how improving moral character can be understood in terms of self-regulation and skill acquisition. First, we will see that the Rubicon model of action phases can be applied to virtue if the superordinate goal is living according to some moral value. Furthermore, skill acquisition mirrors virtue acquisition in the sense that it involves a transition from tackling simpler tasks to more difficult tasks, requires deliberate practice and is something you have to work on continuously. I will move on to see how this framework shapes the picture a virtuous agent, focusing on moral intuition and articulacy in moral judgments.

3.1 Moral Self-Regulation

Improving one’s moral character is according to Stichter a matter of setting certain moral standards and attempt to live accordingly. This will involve self-regulating behavior. Stichter points out that he uses the term ‘moral standard’ in a neutral way. People can engage in self-regulation with regards to their moral standards, without necessarily knowing what the right standards are. For Stichter, moral standards are simply “those standards by which we make evaluating judgments with respect to moral actions” (Stichter, 2018, p. 60). Moral self-regulation is thus a value-neutral framework that explains how people attempt to live according to some moral value, whether it is correct or not. Moral self-regulation follows the same structure as any form of human self-regulation, and will involve the same 4 phases and the same strategies as we saw in section 2.

Let us therefore return to the four stages in Rubicon model of action phases (choosing, planning, implementing and evaluating), and consider it in terms of moral self-regulation. The first phase will here consist in choosing some moral standard that you wish to pursue and breaking it down to sub goals. Figuring out what values are worth conforming to is, of course, one of the main goals of normative ethics in general. This will also involve creating a hierarchy of values, and their importance in relation to other values and commitments. However, Stichter points out that people will often stop at this level, without going through phase 2 (planning how to achieve the
goal). It seems to be important to plan what you should do and how you should do it when attempting to conform to some moral value. Successfully committing to a moral standard can involve some of the strategies we saw in section 2, such as setting implementation intentions and self-control. Phase 3 in moral self-regulation will simply involve attempting to live according to the standard you set for yourself in phase 1. And phase 4 will, just as in general self-regulation, consist in evaluating your behavior and deliberating on how to improve, what strategies to implement and what sub goals contribute to the superordinate goal of living in accordance with some moral standard.

Stichter writes surprisingly little about how to structure moral self-regulation with regards to virtue and its connection to happiness or flourishing. He focuses mainly on moral values as the thing at which we should aim. But in his discussion of how to individuate the virtues in the virtue as skill thesis, he returns to the question of how we should conceive the relationship between the virtues and flourishing with respect to moral self-regulation. He claims that we ought to conceive of the virtues as aiming at the overall goal of living well, while simultaneously “thinking in terms of constitutive ends that make up living well (eudaimonia)” (Stichter, 2018, p. 84). This means that we can think of eudaimona as the superordinate goal, and the virtues as the subgoals that together constitute living a good life:

So we can start out with a commitment to an abstract conception of a flourishing life, and then flesh it out with subgoals that are constitutive of living well, such as being honest, just, kind etc. These specific virtues are essentially our more proximal subgoals for the superordinate goal of living well. These virtues would give us more concrete ends to aim at relative to just aiming at living well overall, and thus would help us with knowing what counts as success, how to structure deliberate practice, providing better feedback, etc. Even the initial constitutive ends could be broken down into further constitutive ends, if needed for better practice and feedback (Stichter, 2018, p. 84).

This passage gives us a proper understanding of how to conceive of self-regulation in terms of developing virtues and aiming at a flourishing life. Grounding virtue development in self-regulation gives Stichter an empirically informed framework for exploring virtue. In sum, Stichter writes that “competent self-regulation with regards to moral standards enables the acquisition of specific moral skills, like honesty or kindness, which are sensitive to different features of moral relevance and will also require different problem-solving approaches” (Stichter, 2018, p. 62). The fact that moral self-regulation allows you to acquire specific moral skills leads us to the next section, where I we will consider how Stichter understands moral development in terms of skill acquisition.
3.2 Moral Skill Acquisition

One of the central claims of Stichter’s book is that virtues are skills. We should, therefore, expect that his virtue acquisition would overlap with his account of skill acquisition and deliberate practice. As we saw in section 2, learning a skill involves a “progression from tackling simple tasks to more challenging tasks”, which will also be the case in virtue acquisition. Moreover, as with learning a new skill, the most important factor for acquiring virtue is experience (Stichter, 2018, p. 64). The third point I would like to address is Stichter’s claim that virtue, just as in any area of expertise, is just as effortful to maintain as to acquire. Finally, I will consider how Stichter conceives of the automaticity of a virtuous agent, and how this relates to articulacy of moral knowledge.

Learning virtue might begin with what Stichter calls ‘context-free’ rules, such as ‘always tell the truth’. But the virtue of honesty is of course much more complex than simply telling what is true, and requires an understanding of what “honesty demands in a variety of situations” (Stichter, 2018, p. 65). A classic example of how honesty doesn’t always require telling the truth is a person who is visited by a Nazi officer asking for information about the location of Jews during the Second World War. Most people will agree that this person should lie. But as with skill, learning virtue will most likely start by following some context-free rules, before a more nuanced sensitivity develops. In order to develop this idea, Stichter draws on Hursthouse’s concept of v-rules. A v-rule is a normative rule that that involves an appeal to a specific virtue, e.g. “Do what is honest/charitable; do not do what is dishonest/uncharitable”. These rules are complex and require some understanding of what honesty is, and so context-free rules such as ‘don’t lie’ can be a large part of developing this understanding. Again, such rules will be helpful for the novice, and moving beyond this stage requires experience.

Just as with skill, mere experience is not sufficient to become an expert, you also need to engage in deliberate practice, continuously striving to do things you currently cannot do. This will involve seeking feedback, both in others and in the environment in which you act. You thus have to strive to move beyond context-free rules, and discover new relevant features of the situation that allows the novice to “follow guidelines, given to them by more experienced practitioners, based on these newly discovered features” (Stichter, 2018, p. 66).

One of Stichter’s claims about expertise is that it is as effortful to maintain it as it is effortful to acquire it. Stichter wants to argue that the same is true of virtue, contrary to the intuition that “virtues are more firmly entrenched and are in no danger of being forgotten if a person does not exercise virtue over time” (Stichter, 2018, p. 69). This line of thought is suggested by Gilbert
Ryle, who argues that “we do not keep up honesty by giving ourselves regular exercise in it. Nor do we excuse a malicious action by saying that we have recently been short in fair-mindedness and generosity” (Ryle, 1984). In other words, we expect virtuous people to do the right thing without regularly having to practice virtue. Stichter believes this is false and claims that this argument overlooks the subtleties involved in the knowledge possessed by the virtuous agent. Sure, Stichter would say, once you have learned that $2 + 2$ equals $4$ you no longer have to regularly exercise this calculation in order to hold on to this knowledge. But virtue cannot be reduced to simple rules such as ‘don’t lie’.

Stichter illustrates this point with an example: Consider someone who, after a shipwreck, has been stranded on a desert island for a longer period of time. And let us suppose that this man was virtuous before the accident. If virtue is the sort of set of dispositions that do not require regular exercise, this man’s stay at the desert island should not affect his character. After all, he has already acquired virtue. Stichter argues that this is most likely a false assumption, as “someone shipwrecked on an island for five years is likely to be quite awkward for a time in anything other than simple social situations” (Stichter, 2018, p. 70). He would of course not start from scratch upon his return, but he would need time to adjust and reform his old habits and commitments. Similarly, an expert mountain biker facing the same scenario would still be able to ride a bike after returning, but he would have trouble facing the same trails that he used to ride before.

3.3 Automaticity and Articulacy in the Virtuous Agent

We saw in section 3 that Stichter defends a theory of skill where the learner slowly progresses from having to actively deliberate to attaining automatic responses. This allows him to shift his attention to more complex aspects of the situation. Stichter argues that this process mirrors that of virtue development. The result is an agent who has internalized their moral values to the extent that acting accordingly becomes effortless. This model can “make sense of the common view that virtues are habits” (Stichter, 2018, p. 72). Stichter points out that developing this effortless way of dealing with situations that require virtue cannot be a product of blind repetition but is rather the result of moral self-regulation and deliberate practice (Stichter, 2018, p. 73). We remember from the previous chapter that one of the benefits of modeling virtue on skill is that it gives us a reasonable explanation for why virtuous people can act out of habit while still manifesting rationality. This is explained by Stichter in the following passage:

The idea is that our goals have mental representations, and while we often think consciously about our goals (which can then lead to behavior to accomplish those goals), these goals (and their corresponding
goal-directed behavior) can be triggered nonconsciously. Stimuli in one’s environment can activate the mental representations of our goals and corresponding behavior without our awareness (Stichter, 2018, p. 73).

This picture is supposed to represent how someone can act according to some virtue (e.g. justice) automatically due to his or her overall commitment to acting justly, experiences with situations that call for justice and years of deliberate practice and self-regulation concerning just behavior. The just act is the result of years of self-regulating activity and deliberate practice, and thus manifests all the deliberate mental processes this person has invested in improving his or her character. This view differs from the sort of intuitionism about moral judgment proposed by Haidt (2001), where moral judgments are understood as being “caused by quick moral intuitions … followed (when needed) by slow, ex post facto moral reasoning” (Haidt, 2001, p. 817). According to this model, people usually make moral judgments intuitively without reference to some moral principle. And when asked to support their judgments, people will most likely construct a ‘post-hoc confabulation’ that is not really casually linked with their original intuition-based response. The sort of moral intuition that results from years of deliberate practice and self-regulation is, according to Stichter, closer to Horgan and Timmons’ (2007) view of moral judgment, called ‘morphological rationalism’. According to this view, the content of moral principles is internalized, and “as a result can lead to moral judgments being arrived at intuitively (at least in the sense of spontaneous, and not preceded by conscious reasoning)” (Stichter, 2018, p. 75). Moral knowledge is understood by Horgan and Timmons as a kind of ‘procedural knowledge’ – a knowledge-how where “an individual is disposed to form moral judgments that non-accidentally conform to the principle” (Horgan, Timmons, 2007, p. 286). However, Horgan and Timmons argue that the procedural knowledge involved in moral judgment is articulate, as it allows you to “present reasons for one’s moral judgment if one is prompted to do so”, in addition to experiencing “one’s reason-giving as fitting smoothly with the moral judgment for which one is giving reasons” (Horgan, Timmons, 2007, p. 290). This stands in direct opposition to Stichter’s denial of the articulacy requirement, due to experts often lacking access to one’s own automatic processes. This leads to a question; to what extent does virtue require articulacy for Stichter? We already saw that this is fundamental for Annas, and that she believes that in spite of the automatic flow that governs decision making for virtuous people, they are still able to provide reasons if asked. Stichter, on the other hand, denies the articulacy requirement.

18 This picture is very similar to the one proposed by Snow and the concept of ‘goal-oriented automaticity’ (2006).

19 Horgan and Timmons even make an analogy to skill, claiming that possessing a principle morphologically is similar to Tiger Woods being able to hit a tee shot without the need to “currently represent any principle of such golf shots that he knows (head down, even balance between both feet, etc.) and that he has thoroughly internalized. Rather. The principles are part of Tiger’s know-how as a golfer and operate procedurally” (Horgan, Timmons, 2007, p. 286).

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requirement in virtue as well as in skill, but with some nuance concerning virtue. That is, Stichter
does not believe that articulacy is necessary for virtue, but views it as a good. We will return to
this question in the next chapter, where I will look closer at Stichter’s critique of the articulacy
requirement.


We have seen that Stichter provides a new framework for building an account of virtue, where
self-regulation and skill acquisition are central elements. There are many similarities between
virtues and skills, and he argues that “the reason why people find so many similarities is simply
because virtues are skills” (Stichter, 2018, p. 3). This is what I refer to as the ‘identification-thesis’.
Defending this claim leads him to engage more directly with Aristotle’s counterarguments and
distinctions. Stichter goes through the various arguments he sees as potential challenges, and
systematically argues that they fail to undermine the identification of virtues and skills. One of the
major steps in this process is to argue that skills have intrinsic value, which leads him to engage
with the argument from production and action. He concludes that “skills can have more than
mere instrumental value, and thus can be significant sources of a motivation to perform well”
(Stichter, 2018, p. 93). After he establishes - through three separate arguments - that skills do
have intrinsic value, he goes on to claim that skill also involves intrinsic motivation. He then
engages with the argument from motivation, the argument from voluntary error and another,
non-Aristotelian argument concerning less than wholeheartedly performance. After responding
to these arguments, he concludes: “The motivations of a skilled performer can be evaluated as to
whether they express a commitment to achieving the ends of their practice, and in a way that
mirrors the motivational commitment we expect from virtue” (Stichter, 2018, p. 93). At the end
of this section, I will also consider how Stichter deals with the argument from particular and
general goods. While Stichter believes that this argument brings forth a genuine distinction
between virtue and skill, he still maintains that it is conceptually consistent to view virtues as
skills. But first, I will go through Stichter’s arguments for the intrinsic value of skill, before
considering his response to the motivational arguments he engages in.

4.1 The Argument from Production and Action: Defending the Intrinsic Value of Skills

The argument from production and action is grounded in the different ends with which virtue
and skill are concerned. Whereas skills have ends beyond the actual activity, virtuous activity is an
end in itself. Stichter wants to eliminate this distinction, and believes that exercising skill can have
intrinsic value. Here is Stichter’s initial formulation of the argument:
If skills in general are limited to instrumental value, then they will be limited in their value relative to intrinsic goals such as virtue. Aristotle at one point argues along these lines, claiming that there is a distinction between skill and virtue because skills have a separate end that they aim at, like a carpenter building a house, unlike virtue. In his view skills only concern ‘making’ things with a value that is independent of its production (i.e. instrumental value), while virtues are concerned with ‘doing’, as in activities where the value is the activity itself (i.e. intrinsic value) (Stichter, 2018, pp. 94-95).

Stichter does not see this as a particularly challenging argument, and provides three counter-arguments. The first one is familiar to us from chapter 2, and consists in distinguishing between productive and performative skills. Like Annas, Stichter believes this distinction is less forceful when it comes to performance skills, as “there is no separate end or product apart from the performance itself” (Stichter, 2018, p. 95). He concludes from this that the virtue should be understood as an ‘acquired performance’, instead of a productive skill. Exercising virtue is thus not productive with an external end, but rather performative. However, this does not explain the intrinsic value of skills - which is a central part of the distinction - and so Stichter goes on to provide two arguments that support the claim that skills are valuable, not only instrumentally, but also intrinsically.

The second argument is inspired by virtue epistemologist Ernest Sosa’s influential work *A Virtue Epistemology: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge* (2007). In this work, Sosa argues for the intrinsic value of both epistemic virtues and skills more generally. It might seem like epistemic skills are only valuable instrumentally. That is, they are valued in so far as they are able to produce truth, whereas the truth itself is what has intrinsic value. Ernest Sosa argues that this is not the case. His response can be found in his general account of ‘performance normativity’, where he claims that we can distinguish between three different assessments we can make about practices that have a characteristic aim it strives to achieve:

> Performance with an aim, in any case, admit assessment in respect of our three attainments: accuracy: reaching the aim; adroitness: manifesting skill or competence; and aptness: reaching the aim through the adroitness manifest (Sosa, 2007, p. 23).

He calls this the ‘AAA’ account of performance normativity (Accuracy, Adroitness and APTness). Here, we see a distinction between reaching the aim and manifesting skill. This is important because in any goal-oriented practice, it is possible to reach the aim through luck. It is also possible to manifest skill without reaching the target, at least in domains where there is an element of luck involved. For a performance to be apt, Sosa argues, the performer has to reach the aim *because of or through* his skill. His primary example is archery, where the principal aim is to hit the target with the arrow. In archery you can hit the bullseye by luck and you can miss the
bullseye while manifesting skill (if the wind intervenes). Aptness occurs only when the target is hit and skill is manifested. In Stichter’s words: “The success an archer has in hitting a target through skill represents an achievement for which the archer deserves credit, which would not be the case if she hit the target merely by luck” (Stichter, 2018, p. 95). The idea is that the skill from which the goal was reached is something intrinsically valuable. Sosa extends this idea to epistemology, so that the dispositions from which truth arise can be said to have intrinsic value. Thus, contrary to what Aristotle argues, we do not only place value on the product of a skill, but value the skill itself.

If we read the passage where we find Aristotle’s main skill analogy carefully, we seem to find the same line of reasoning. Aristotle also argues that we can distinguish between someone realizing the aim of a technē accidentally, and someone who does it through knowledge. Consider the following passage:

For it is possible to produce something grammatical either by luck or on someone else’s instruction. Someone would be a grammarian, then, if he produced something grammatical and produced it in the way a grammarian would. And to do this is to do it in accord with the technē knowledge of grammar that is internal to himself (NE, 1105a21-6)

As this passage seems to indicate, Aristotle is perfectly aware of the value we place on producing something grammatical with the knowledge of grammar, contrary to producing something grammatical without manifesting skill or competence. However, for Aristotle this does not imply that the technē is intrinsically valuable.

The third argument appeals to Csikszentmihalyi’s research and how it shows that skills are important “sources of intrinsically valuable experiences” (Stichter, 2018, p. 96). This, Stichter argues, is the most forceful indication that skills are in fact intrinsically valuable. We have already seen how Annas does the same, and Stichter’s approach is similar.

To sum up, we have seen that Stichter provides three arguments for the intrinsic value of engaging in skillful activity. By (i) distinguishing between productive and performative skills, (ii) showing that we value skill not only for achieving its end (as this can be done through luck), but also for its own sake, and (iii) drawing on Csikszentmihalyi’s research on the ‘autotelic’ aspect of skills, Stichter believes he has made a strong case for his claim.
4.2 The Argument from Motivation, the Argument from Voluntary Error and Less than Wholehearted Performances

Now that Stichter has demonstrated the intrinsic value of skills, he is ready to move on to argue that skills can be a source of intrinsic motivation. In the introduction, I briefly stated that he devotes an entire chapter to the motivational objections to the skill model of virtue. He categorizes both the argument from motivation and the argument from voluntary error in the same class and deals with them together. He also introduces a new counter-argument, based on less than wholehearted performance. The arguments are all concerned with motivation, as we want virtue to involve a form of intrinsic motivation that is persistent and reliable. Stichter ends up concluding that these three arguments are misplaced, and do not affect the identification-thesis. I will start by presenting the arguments in turn, before presenting Stichter’s responses.

The first argument I will consider is familiar to us from the first chapter: the argument from motivation. Here is Stichter’s formulation of the argument:

… it does not appear to count against the surgeon’s level of expertise if we found out that she is motivated ultimately by wealth, where improving the welfare of the patient is a means to an end rather than the end itself. However, it would count against someone’s possession of kindness if we found out that all the putative kind acts were motivated out of some selfish desire, even if the person was reliable in doing kind acts (Stichter, 2018, p. 103).

The reason why we would not count this person as kind, even though she performs kind acts, is precisely because her motivation is some end beyond the goodness of the acts themselves. On the Aristotelian account of virtuous action, the agent needs to act for the sake of itself, not for some further end. Again, what is central to the argument is the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic qualities.

Stichter connects this problem to the argument from voluntary error, as they are both concerned with motivation. In skill, you can lose on purpose without undermining your abilities to win. Whereas “if someone acts cruelly, we tend to regard it as worse if it was intentionally done than if it was done accidentally” (Stichter, 2018, p. 104). This is because we expect the virtuous agent’s motivation to do the right thing to be reliable and consistent. In other words, their general commitment to virtuous values should stop a virtuous person from intentionally doing the wrong thing. We can therefore see the connection between this argument and motivation more generally.
In addition, he raises another motivational argument against the virtue as skill thesis, based on less than wholeheartedly performances. This is not something we saw in Aristotle, but is rather an objection that was raised by Gary Watson (2004):

Indifference in a performance doesn’t count against one’s skill, whereas a less than wholehearted effort to save someone’s life does impugn my moral character. Talent and skill are fully displayed only in wholehearted performances, whereas aretai perspective is also concerned with the “will,” that is, with one’s purpose, ends, choices, concerns, cares, attachments, and commitments. Not trying can be a failure of virtue but not of skill (Watson, 2004).

What we see here is an apparent distinction between virtuous activity and skill performance. We expect virtuous people to always do their best, and to actually care about the actions they make. In skill, on the other hand, we can more easily forgive a less than wholeheartedly performance, as it does not count against her or his ability to perform well. Together, these three arguments build a strong case against the identification-thesis. All arguments are essentially concerned with motivation, as virtue requires a form of intrinsic motivation that is persistent and reliable that doesn’t seem to be required in other forms of expertise such as playing chess, building houses or speaking a language.

4.3 Responding to the three Cases: Moving from the Performance to the Performer

Now that we are familiar with the three motivational objections Stichter raises in his book, we can consider how he responds. As mentioned, he sees these arguments as essentially saying something similar; the motivational aspect of virtue is fundamentally different than in skill. While learning a skill requires a high degree of motivation, virtue requires being intrinsically motivated to do the right thing consistently throughout your life. Stichter argues that there is a way to analyze these cases in a way that undermines the seemingly present differences: “If we switch our evaluations from the performance to the performer, then it looks like we can evaluate the performer in a way that brings in concerns about motivational commitments” (Stichter, 2018, p. 105). Drawing on Gary Watson (2004), Stichter distinguished between a good tennis performance on the one hand, and being a good tennis player, on the other hand. A good tennis performance is simply one that wins the game, whereas a good tennis player also displays ‘commitment to the game’. Evaluating a tennis player will therefore involve an evaluation of their character, and to what extent they display virtues such as “boldness, devotion to the discipline, originality, sensibility, etc.” (Watson, 2004, p. 244). According to Stichter, this strategy can be applied to all the three motivational arguments.
If a doctor who is perfectly capable of performing a surgery wholeheartedly gives someone a half-hearted surgery, we will be in a position to criticize her as a doctor. According to Stichter, she would not be “responsive to the distinctive demands of medicine, and so we can criticize them for their lack of commitment like we would if someone acted half-heartedly with respect to a virtue like kindness” (Stichter, 2018, p. 105). This would also be the same for acting based on external motivation. If a doctor practices medicine solely for the purpose of acquiring wealth, and this leads her to “recommend expensive but unnecessary medical procedures”, Stichter argues that we “would likely think that this person is not a good doctor, even though we would not deny her expertise at performing those procedures” (Stichter, 2018, p. 106). The same holds for acting wrong intentionally. Stichter admits that Aristotle is right in that the chess player who tries hard but fails unintentionally is less skilled than one who could win but fails intentionally. However, the former is better “in the sense of displaying a commitment to the game” (Stichter, 2018, p. 106). Thus, if we bring in evaluations of the performer and their commitments to the distinctive demands of their skill domain, we can evaluate them in a similar manner that we evaluate the commitments and motivations of a virtuous agent. According to Stichter, good effects (or goal attainment) and good motivations are independent sources of value and can therefore be “evaluated separately in both the cases of virtue and skill” (Stichter, 2019, p. 107).

This conclusion leads Stichter to suggest that we add another A to Sosa’s account of performance normativity (assurance), dealing with the evaluation of the performer's commitment to the distinctive demands of the practice. This gives us another element of value to consider when we evaluate someone who exercises any goal-oriented skill. And by introducing this element of evaluation, we get a motivational component to skill that mirrors the motivational component of virtue.

4.4 The argument from Particular and Universal Goods

We have seen that Stichter wants to eliminate the various distinctions between skills and virtues made by Aristotle. In doing so, he strengthens the possibility of creating a theory of virtue as skills. But there is one argument he believes marks a clear distinction between virtues and other, morally neutral skillsets; the argument from particular and universal goods. He presents the argument in familiar terms: “Moral virtues require being practically wise about what is good and bad for people, and how various practices fit into an overall conception of the good life. In contrast, skills do not require making these kinds of value judgments” (Stichter, 2018, p. 120). We should be very familiar with this argument at this point, so there is no need to give examples of why this seems to be the case. Stichter agrees with Aristotle on this point and incorporates the
notion of practical wisdom *(phronesis)* into his account of virtue. As virtue is concerned with what is valuable in life as a whole, it requires practical wisdom to make value judgments, to deliberate about what aims are worth pursuing and to form some unity of the virtues.

At first glance, this crucial distinction seems to undermine the identification-thesis. Skills are concerned with realizing particular and fixed ends, whereas virtue is concerned with realizing general aims such as what is valuable in life as a whole. This entails that virtue is deeply bound to value judgments. James Wallace has argued that this implies that virtues cannot be skills, drawing on the fact that all virtues are valuable, but not all skills are valuable. Stichter does not believe that this counterargument holds, and wants to maintain the initial claim that virtues are skills while at the same time acknowledging that virtues have these distinctive features. He initially draws on a response to this challenge formulated by Zagzebski:

This argument does not support the conclusion that virtues are not skills, however, but only that the class of virtues is not coextensive with the class of skills. On Wallace’s reasoning it might be the case that every virtue is a skill, although not every skill is a virtue (Zagzebski).

According to Stichter, you cannot separate virtue from skill by claiming that virtue has some unique features. Of course, virtue has some features that are unique; otherwise, we wouldn’t be able to distinguish it from other things (Stichter, 2015, p. 3). Every skill has some unique features, and one of the major features of virtue is its connection to morality. Thus, we can maintain that not all skills are virtues, while still claiming that virtues are skills. We might say that while virtues and other morally-neutral skills belong to the same class (skills), they differ in kind, just as playing tennis and playing chess do. Every skill has something that makes it unique, and the moral skills we call virtues, such as honesty and courage are unique in the sense that they are concerned with morality. The distinction between moral skills (i.e. virtues) and morally-neutral skills will be revisited in the last chapter.

**Concluding Remarks**

We have seen that Stichter wants to go beyond the illumination-thesis and claims that virtues fall under the class of skills, i.e. the identification-thesis. This starting point allows him to draw heavily on psychological research. His strategy is essentially to synthesize the leading research on self-regulation, skill acquisition and the cognitive processes involved in expert performance, in order to form an empirical foundation for how people set goals, how they go about to reach those goals, and the mental processes involved in learning and exercising a skill. This synthesis is then applied to create a theory of virtue, understood as a set of moral skills such as honesty, courage and justice. Defending the identification-thesis motivates Stichter to demonstrate that
this is conceptually coherent, in spite of the Aristotelian arguments identified in chapter 1. This leads him to argue that skills are intrinsically valuable, and that the motivational component of skills mirrors that of virtue. In the following chapter, I will identify the major disagreements between Annas and Stichter and evaluate which theory we should prefer.
Chapter 4: Annas and Stichter: A Song of Skills and Virtues

1. Introduction

So far, I have presented an analysis of Aristotle, Annas and Stichter and their views on the relationship between virtues and skills. We have seen how this forms a kind of narrative where more and more similarities are identified, until they eventually fall under the same class of dispositions. Both Annas and Stichter draw on psychological literature to strengthen their theories, and believe that the way forward for virtue ethics is to foster interdisciplinary research.\(^{20}\)

More specifically, they both believe theories of virtue will gain from appealing to research on skill and expertise, a field that is rapidly expanding in our time. In addition to this shared outlook on the future of virtue ethics, their accounts do have a lot in common. They both believe that virtues require conscious development through training over a longer period of time. Annas explains this as the 'need to aspire' whereas Stichter applies the concept of 'deliberate practice', but they are more or less representing the same idea. In addition, they both believe that the virtuous agent (one that has achieved moral expertise) will (most of the time, but of course with exceptions) be able to do the right thing effortlessly and automatically without conscious deliberation about the reasons, while still manifesting rationality. In Annas this is justified by drawing on the concept of ‘flow’, and in Stichter it is understood in terms of ‘goal-directed automaticity’ and ‘morphological rationalism’. As mentioned, this part of the skill-approach to virtue is a potential solution to what has been a problem for virtue ethicists for a long time, namely to bridge the gap between habitual action and rational choice. They also argue that skillful activity, just as virtuous activity, is a source of intrinsic value.

On the other hand, their accounts differ in some of their fundamental aspects. I have identified three major points of disagreement between Annas and Stichter:

\(^{20}\) In the final chapter of Intelligent Virtue, Annas claims that “If we are concerned with the empirical applicability of virtue, the way ahead would seem to be to promote empirical study of practical skills and the ways in which virtue can be taken to be similar” (Annas, 2011, p. 175). She also claims that “Empirical study of this would put us in a better position to study the acquisition and exercise of virtue” (Annas, 2011, p. 175).
1. **The Articulacy Requirement**: While Annas defends an account of both virtue and skill where articulacy of reasons is required, Stichter rejects the articulacy requirement.

2. **Identity vs. Similarity**: Stichter argues that virtues are skills (the identification-thesis), whereas Annas only claims that certain aspects of skill can illuminate certain aspects of virtue (the illumination-thesis).

3. **Self-Control vs. Virtue**: Annas believes that skill development can illuminate the affective component of virtue i.e. that exercising virtue should be effortless and enjoyable, but Stichter is not that invested in the distinction between the virtuous and the enkratic, or self-controlled, agent, and argues that self-control is a virtue (and not something we should aim to improve upon, as Aristotle argued).

In this final chapter, I aim to present these disagreements in turn, and evaluate which theory has a stronger case. The chapter will form a dialectical structure where I present arguments from both Annas and Stichter, aiming to identify the different strengths and weaknesses in their theories. I will draw an independent conclusion concerning each of the disagreements.

Concerning the articulacy requirement, I will argue that we have good empirical reasons to doubt the articulacy requirement for skill in general, but that at the same time we have good philosophical reasons to require at least some degree of articulacy in virtue. Articulacy can thus be seen as a point of divergence between virtue and skill. When it comes to the issue of whether or not we ought to conceptualize virtues as skills (the identification-thesis), as opposed to being structurally similar to skills (the illumination-thesis), I argue that we should prefer the latter. With regards to self-control as opposed to virtue in the Aristotelian sense, I argue that Stichter’s tendency to view self-control as a virtue leads to some issues concerning our intuitions of virtuous people.

2. **The Articulacy Requirement: Intellectualism vs. Anti-intellectualism in Skill and Virtue**

Intellectualism concerning skill and virtue is the idea that experts are able to articulate reasons for their actions. If you ask expert chess players why they made a particular move in a particular position, an intellectualist expects him or her to possess the ability to explain it. Similarly, if you ask a virtuous agent why he or she stood up for a victim of verbal harassment, the intellectualist expects this person to have an articulate justification ready at hand. Annas’ notion of the ‘articulacy requirement’ comes close to this position; although her notion of ‘knack’ opens up the possibility for a form of inarticulate expertise (gardening and soccer are among the examples provided). Virtue, on the other hand, only shares the intellectual structure of articulate skills. This means that Annas believes the articulacy is a requirement for being virtuous. Stichter on the other hand argues that, since research on expertise shows that experts are often unable to articulate
reasons, we should expect the same to hold for virtuous people. This debate has been central in virtue ethics since Anscombe, but the focus on skill has introduced a new approach to answering it: as we now have access to psychological literature on expertise, we can gain new insights into actual experts’ ability to convey reasons. If it turns out that they are not able to do this, the skill model of virtue should either adapt and discard the articulacy requirement in virtue, or alternatively, view this as a point of divergence between skill and virtue. I will argue that the best way forward is to acknowledge that articulacy in skill is rare, and thus we should reject the articulacy requirement in skill. On the other hand, there are good arguments for requiring articulacy in virtue. My conclusion is therefore that articulation of reasons is a point of divergence between virtues and skills, and that Annas’ account is best equipped to deal with this discrepancy.

In this section, I will go through Stichter’s critique of Annas and the articulacy requirement in skill and virtue, and argue that we have good empirical grounds to be skeptical of theories of skill that places too much focus on articulacy. However, as Annas’ main reason for focusing on articulate skills is to illuminate this particular aspect of virtue, this is not a large issue for Annas’ account as a whole. I will move on to look closer at the articulacy requirement in virtue, and present three arguments from Annas that demonstrate the importance of being able to convey reasons in ethical situations. After that, I will attempt to understand how Stichter can respond to these arguments. We will see that while Stichter explicitly denies the articulacy requirement in skill, he acknowledges that articulating reasons for virtuous actions is something we might want to strive towards. In the end, I will argue that while Stichter is right that the articulacy requirement should not be a key factor in our theories of skill, Annas is right that our demands for reason-giving should be present in our theories of virtue.

2.1 Stichter on Articulacy in Skills: Identifying the Middle Ground

As we saw in the previous chapter, Stichter positions his account of skill somewhere in between Annas and Dreyfus. While Dreyfus is said to be guilty of overemphasizing the role of automatic processes in skillful coping, Stichter argues that Annas is guilty of overemphasizing the intellectual aspect of skill. When reconstructing her view of skill, Stichter relies on Annas’ paper “The Structure of Virtue” from 2003. In this paper, Annas gives three necessary features of any genuine skill: (i) the skill is teachable, (ii) the skill has underlying principles that are graspable and (iii) the expert is able to give an account of skilled action.21 The second requirement is not explicit in Intelligent Virtue, and so it is not certain if Annas still endorses this part today. The last one will

21 For example, “we do in fact deny that someone is an expert if she is inarticulate about her subject, unable to teach it or unable to express more than isolated tips about its practice” (Annas, 2003, p. 33).
of course be the center of focus in this section, but something needs to be said of the teaching requirement and of grasping the underlying principles as well.

Annas believes that skills require teaching, and that experts are able to teach. Stichter agrees with the first claim, but rejects the second. According to him, being able to perform well in a domain does not translate into being able to teach others how to do it, and he provides three arguments to support this claim. His first point is that “Expertise is not primarily an intellectual grasp of theory, but the development of a number of cognitive adaptations (many of which are automatic processes) that result from experience and practice” (Stichter, 2018, p. 54). Since this form of knowledge is so heavily governed by automatic processes that result from years of deliberate practice and experience, it cannot be codified and passed down to others. The only way to attain expertise knowledge is “by going through the same kind of process” (Stichter, 2018, p. 54). This argument is supported by psychological research on expertise.22

Stichter’s second point is connected with the first: experts “have trouble predicting novice performances, perhaps because they cannot easily take on the perspective of a novice attempting a task” (Stichter, 2018, p. 54). This is again connected with the fact that experts have a unique way of analyzing problems in their field. This unique knowledge makes it difficult for them to understand novices and their way of solving problems. According to Stichter, this is a disadvantage for experts attempting to teach their technē to others, as “a good teacher needs to be able to appreciate the perspective of a novice, in order to provide helpful guidance at that stage of skill development” (Stichter, 2018, p. 54). This does not necessarily imply that no experts are good teachers, but simply that it might be difficult for experts to relate to novices.

The third, and perhaps most forceful point is that teaching “requires an additional skill set beyond being able to perform well yourself” (Stichter, 2018, p. 54). According to Stichter, knowing how to give good feedback, constructive critique and tips that are appropriate at the learner’s stage is not something that accompanies expertise. It is rather a unique skill. Again, he does not deny that some experts might have this additional teaching skill, or that experts with this skill are worse than other teachers. Stichter is simply pointing out that it does not seem to be the case that all experts are also expert teachers. To borrow one of his examples, most college students have encountered professors who are excellent at research, but not the best teachers. Their inability to communicate and connect with their students does not seem to undermine their ability to research, as teaching and researching – as Stichter argues – are two different skill domains.

Annas’ second requirement – that experts need to have a unified grasp of the principles of their skill – is also something Stichter denies. But as mentioned, it is not certain that Annas still holds this as a requirement for expertise, as it is not explicitly mentioned in *Intelligent Virtue*. However, she does use this phrase when speaking of someone mastering Italian. When you no longer have to struggle to find the right word, gender and case “speaking Italian becomes more fluent – the expression of a unified understanding of the language” (Annas, 2011, p. 69). In any case, a unified grasp of the principles of a field will, according to Annas, allow the expert to understand their own success and also to deal with unfamiliar situations (Annas, 2003, p. 18). Her main example of such a genuine skill is medicine. And again, Stichter draws on the psychological studies of expertise to show that this is not the case. As Feltovich et al. (2006) write, “Studies showed that the same physician can demonstrate widely different profiles of competence, depending on his or her particular experiential history with different types of cases”. The importance of individual experience means, according to Stichter, that each individual expert will have a unique set of competences.

The third requirement that Annas presented in the 2003 paper, which she still holds firmly onto today, is the articulacy requirement. It is not enough to grasp the unifying principles of a skill domain; you also need the ability to articulate and apply these principles. As we saw in the previous chapter, Stichter raises some issues with this claim. Drawing on psychological research, he makes the case that experts – due to the number of automatic processes involved in exercising a skill at expert level – cannot fully articulate their knowledge. Kahneman (2011), for example, claims that the intuitions that accompany expertise “are due to highly valid cues that the expert’s System 1 has learned to use, even if System 2 has not learned to name them” (Kahneman, 2011, p. 240). We have already seen how skill acquisition is a matter of making deliberate and effortful tasks automatic and effortless (consider again the example of someone learning how to drive). Due to this fact, experts will most likely have much of their performance automatized. And according to Kahneman, System 2 does not have ‘access’ to these automatic processes, and so we are not able to articulate them. There have been experiments that test this, where experts are asked to perform a task within their expertise before explaining verbally what they were doing and why. In a study where experts were asked to explain themselves by answering ‘why-questions’ after a performance, it was found that “Participants’ responses to ‘why-questions’ after responding in a task were in many circumstances as inaccurate as those given by other participants who merely observed these individuals’ performance and tried to explain it without any memory or first-hand experience of the processes involved” (Ericsson, 2006, p. 230). According to Ericsson, such experiments show that this method of studying expertise (observing
a performance, before asking the expert about it afterwards) is faulty, and suggests that we learn more from having the experts verbally explaining what they are doing as they are doing it. In any case, it does not seem like expert performance necessarily translates into the ability to give an account.

In sum, the empirical literature on expertise shows that we should be skeptical of the three requirements in Annas’ theory of skill. It seems like being able to perform well doesn’t necessarily translate into being able to teach. In addition, experts don’t always have a unifying grasp of their field, as their individual experience will shape their knowledge, methods, reasoning etc. Finally, Stichter is able to cast doubt on the ancient Aristotelian view that expertise is articulate. Due to the number of automatic processes involved in skill performance, experts don’t always have access to the reasons that underlie their decision-making. The structure of this argument is similar to the situationist critique of virtue\(^\text{23}\); studies in social psychology show that people are influenced by situational factors to such a degree that it seems psychologically implausible to base an ethical theory on stable character traits that are immune to such situational distractions. Similarly, studies on expertise show that experts are more often than not unable to give good explanations after a performance, and we should therefore not hold onto the idea that expertise and articulacy go hand in hand.

However, the fact that some experts are unable to articulate themselves is not necessarily a problem for Annas. She clearly states that she is interested in one particular subset of skills that are articulate, as these will be the skills that share the intellectual structure of virtue. The fact that most experts are unable to convey reasons does not prove that none can. In addition, just because experts cannot articulate all their knowledge, they are most often able to articulate some of it. Annas clearly states that “it does not matter for this account if there are such cases [where experts are unable to convey reasons], since the claim is simply that virtue has a structure which can be found in cases of skill which do exhibit the features of need for learning and drive to aspire” (Annas, 2011, p. 19). What Annas needs to prove in order to keep the notion that the articulacy in virtue is analogous to the articulacy in skill is at least one skill domain where almost all recognized experts possess an articulate ability. According to Stichter (and the numerous studies he cites), she has failed to provide us with this. What she might be able to do is to claim that across the different skill domains, there exist articulate individuals. If such individuals exist, they would possess an ability that is analogous to virtue. Thus, she could claim that simply being an expert in chess is not sufficient for having a type of knowledge analogous to virtue (as some

\(^{23}\) The two major proponents of the situationist critique of virtue are John Doris (2002) and Gilbert Harman (1999).
chess experts are inarticulate), but rather that the individuals who are experts in chess and possess articulacy are the relevant cases. However, this move would reduce the strength of her analogy. I will now move on to consider the role of articulacy in virtue and look at some of the arguments against the anti-intellectualist position.

2.2 Articulacy in Virtue

We have seen that Stichter successfully shows that there are some empirical issues with postulating an articulacy requirement in skill. Does this mean that we should also drop the articulacy requirement in virtue? Many virtue ethicists seem to defend what we might call an anti-intellectualist theory of virtue. A good example of such a view is presented by John McDowell, who writes that:

Of course a kind person need not himself classify the behavior he sees to be called for, on one of the relevant occasions, as kind. He need not be articulate enough to possess concepts of the particular virtues; and even if he does, the concepts need not enter his reasons for the actions that manifest those particular virtues. It is enough if he thinks of what he does when – as we put it – he shows himself to be kind, under some such description as “the thing to do”. The description need not differ from that under which he thinks of other actions of his, which we regard as manifesting different virtues; the division into actions that manifest kindness and actions that manifest other virtues can be imposed, not by the agent himself but by a possible more articulate, and more theoretically oriented observer. (McDowell, 1979, p. 332)

It seems plausible to assume that Annas would not accept “the thing to do” as sufficient justification for a virtuous person. Her view thus differs from the more intuition-oriented accounts of virtue we find in McDowell and Dreyfus. Let us look at some of the arguments Annas makes in favor of articulate virtue as opposed to what she calls the ‘subrational picture’ of virtue. Annas notes that much of the learning and teaching process of virtue is not articulate:

At all ages we are guided not just by what the teacher or role model says but by what he does and the specific way he does it. Still, virtue is like a practical skill in being more than a subrational knack, and account of virtue make a bad mistake if they downplay the role of reason-giving, and demands for reasons, as we are educated to have the virtues. (Annas, 2011, p. 25)

So why exactly demand that the virtuous person must be able to give reasons? Why is it not enough for him or her to simply do the right thing? Annas provides three main arguments to defend this claim.

The first argument is based on Aristotle’s distinction between natural and full virtue (See chapter 1). A person with natural virtue has a tendency to act as the virtuous person but lacks the experience and intellectual understanding of the *phronimos* (and thus lacks complete or full virtue).
According to Annas, natural virtue is much like the subrational virtue we find in accounts that lack a demand for articulacy. But due to the lack of articulacy and understanding, the naturally virtuous person is unable to “deal with new and unforeseen circumstances” (Annas, 2011, p. 26). As an example of this, Annas writes that “Never having learned not to take people at face value … the ‘naturally brave’ person may get into a serious fight over a slight intended as a joke, while the ‘naturally sympathetic’ person may find herself victim of scams” (Annas, 2011, p. 26). Even though natural tendencies towards virtue are admirable, they are not yet virtuous. And if Annas is right that the subrational picture of virtue is closer to her understanding of natural virtue, then it seems like the virtuous person needs the “ability to demand, and give, reasons for what he does” (Annas, 2011, p. 26).

The second argument is concerned with ethical advice and disagreements. According to Annas, virtuous people should be able to both give good advice to friends and family members seeking counsel, in addition to being able to defend their advice if the discussion turns into a disagreement. But if all you have is a subrational disposition to ‘see’ the right thing to do, without the ability to convey it to others, then you would not be in a position to give others advice. As Annas puts it, “It would obviously be absurd if they replied that there was no way they could explain; the questioner should just watch some loyal people and pick up what they do” (Annas, 2011, p. 26). And in a complex domain such as ethics, disagreements are bound to occur, even between virtuous people. Annas points out that if two indisputably loyal people are asked for advice at the same time, they might “pick on different features of the case and give diverging advice” (Annas, 2011, p. 26). What happens in such situations is that these people pick out diverging reasons, but both recognize that the best thing to do is to debate the subject and see which course of action is best, given the situation. Again, Annas notes that “if the subrational view of virtue were true, there would seem to be nothing they could no other than accuse each other of being badly brought up” (Annas, 2011, p. 26).

Annas also presents a third argument, having to do with individuating the virtues. This is one of the central debates in virtue ethics that this thesis unfortunately doesn’t have the space to explore fully, but the argument is easily understood, nonetheless. Consider two people who are about to become parents, with a desire to do so well. Do they, in order to become good parents, need a specific virtue of parenting? Or can they simply apply the virtues they already possess (such as sympathy and patience)? According to Annas, figuring out an proper answer to such questions (having to do with individuating the virtues) is “something that we discuss and give reasons for; that is, even on the way to getting clear on this issue, and thus well before having a clear idea of the answer, we reject the idea that the virtues, whatever they are, are nothing more than
subrational knacks that can just be picked up independently of reason-giving” (Annas, 2011, p. 27). The idea is that we need to be able to discuss and figure out such issues, and that this can’t be done without some degree of articulacy.

In sum, we have seen that Annas believes the subrational picture of the virtuous agents turns out to be of someone who is (i) unable to deal with new and unforeseen circumstances, (ii) unable to give ethical advice and deal with potential disagreements between other virtuous agents, and finally (iii) is unable to understand what virtues they need to cultivate in different aspects of life. All these cases seem to be important for a moral expert. Let us now see to what extent Stichter believes that articulacy is required for virtue, and how he deals with these cases.

As Stichter defends the identification-thesis, and his account of skill rejects the articulacy requirement, we should expect his theory of virtue to do the same. However, when Stichter discusses articulacy in virtue, he seems more inclined towards accepting that some degree of articulacy should be expected in the virtuous agent. His account of virtue is more focused on acting well, and he argues that “the skill model [in this case, the one presented by Stichter] rejects the idea that these intellectual requirements are necessary or sufficient for acting virtuously” (Stichter, 2018, p. 81).24 He also says that “In sum, we should be wary of any approach that would imply that if you cannot fully articulate your reasons for action, then you are not really skilled (or virtuous)” (Stichter, 2018, p. 82). Thus, his theory explicitly rejects articulacy as a requirement for both practical and ethical expertise. But in some of his footnotes25, a more nuanced view emerges. Here, he argues that while articulacy is not a formal requirement for being virtuous, being able to articulate reasons is a good that we should aspire to.

First of all, he admits that “the intellectual requirements that Annas defends do have a place in our overall view about ethics” (Stichter, 2018, p. 81, Footnote 49). However, he does not understand it in terms of the virtuous person being able to justify their actions, but rather “in terms of what a coach or teacher would need to be able to articulate to help someone perform better, or for use in deciding which moral standard to internalize in the first place” (Stichter, 2018, p. 81). Supposedly, the amount of articulacy teachers and coaches need to help someone perform better is not the same as what Annas requires from the fully virtuous person. Stichter does not develop this argument in length, but it seems connected to Annas’ argument about

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24 This can be seen as a response to Zagzebski’s main reason for denying that virtues are skills. Stichter believes that acting well is the main function of virtue, whereas Zagzebski claims that “the motivational component of virtue defines it more than external effectiveness does, whereas it is the reverse in the case of skills” (Zagzebski, 1996, p. 115).

25 The particular footnotes I have in mind here are footnote 49 (Stichter, 2018, p. 81) and footnote 56 (Stichter, 2018, pp.82-3).
ethical advice. It does seem important that virtuous people have the ability to guide others and to use their knowledge to help others deal with difficult situations. If there is a disagreement here, it seems to be about the degree to which the virtuous person is able to articulate himself.

In another footnote (Stichter, 2018, p. 83, Footnote 56), Stichter again argues that articulation and awareness principles are more important in ethics than in other, morally neutral skill domains. The demand for ‘giving an account’ is thus more important for virtuous people than for chess masters. He states three main reasons for this. The first is the seriousness of the subject matter in ethics. Being a good chess player might be important for some individuals, but it is not important for our society as a whole. There is a lot less at stake in a chess match than in an ethical situation that calls for virtue. The second reason is that in virtue “there are usually less concrete success conditions for acting well” (Stichter, 2018, p. 83). This claim latches on to Annas’ claim that virtuous people will also disagree about particular strategies in particular situations, and thus need the ability to debate each other over what the best course of action might be. This brings us to the final reason, namely that “there is less agreement as to who are the ethical experts” (Stichter, 2018, p. 83). In chess, there is a fixed goal, in addition to a rating system that allows us to rank each player based on their success in winning matches. The person with the best rating is the best player, whether or not he or she is able to articulate his or her expertise. Whereas the moral domain is so complex that “it seems that we have very important needs in being able to give an account of what morality requires of us, such as in drafting laws and making social policy, which need to be formulated in explicit rules and principles” (Stichter, 2018, p. 83). Here, Stichter wants to show that while particular individuals might not need articulacy in their everyday activity, articulacy is important at the collective level. In order to promote goods in a society as a whole, we need to articulate rules and principles. Ethical articulacy thus seems to have a role in Stichter’s theory, but to a lesser degree than in Annas’. While Annas views articulacy as a formal requirement for full virtue, Stichter believes that one can be virtuous without articulacy. But at the same time, he maintains that it is a positive feature to possess.

2.3 Conclusion

We have seen that there are some empirical issues with Annas’ notion of the articulacy requirement concerning skill. According to psychological research on actual experts, being able to perform well does not necessarily also involve being able to convey reasons well. This is not a major problem for Annas’ arguments in Intelligent Virtue, as her only claim is that some experts are articulate, and that their form of expertise is the relevant one when attempting to understand
virtue in terms of skill. As long as some people have this capability, we understand virtue in terms of these people. But if this turns out to be extremely rare, then the skill analogy might lose some of its force. I believe Stichter is able to successfully cast doubt on the idea that experts in skill are able to articulate themselves. Concerning articulacy in virtue, we saw that Annas presented three arguments against a theory virtue that downplay the role of reason-giving. And when looking closer at Stichter’s view of articulacy in virtue, it was shown that he is not as anti-intellectualist as it seems. He does believe that virtuous people can sometime take to role as a coach, and that it is valuable to articulate ethical rules and principles in the context of law drafting and social policymaking. The difference is that Annas believes it is necessary, while Stichter merely argues that it is positive.

In sum, it seems as we have good empirical reasons to doubt the articulacy requirement in skill, but at the same time, we have good philosophical reasons to require at least some degree of articulacy in virtue. Articulacy can thus be seen as a point of divergence between virtue and skill. I believe Annas’ framework is better equipped to deal with this divergence, as she advances a view on which virtue and skill only share some features. However, the large focus she places on articulacy in skill is unfortunate, and we should take Stichter’s critique of her account of skill seriously. An implication of this conclusion is that articulacy in virtue should be understood on grounds that are independent of its similarity to skill. We therefore need to stick to philosophical arguments if we want to keep the articulacy requirement in virtue.

3. The Identification-thesis vs. the Illumination-thesis

The next issue we need to discuss is whether or not we should prefer understanding virtues as a subset of dispositions that fall under the broader class of ‘skills’ (the identification-thesis), or if we should simply claim that some aspects of skills can illuminate some aspects of virtue (the illumination-thesis). As a development from the previous section, I want to argue that the latter is preferable.

In *Intelligent Virtue*, Annas argues that virtues are structurally similar to skills, focusing on the way they are learned, exercised and enjoyed. Her project is to “bring out the shared features and their importance” (Annas, 2011, p. 2). Annas does not identify virtues with skills and believes that virtues have many unique features that need to be considered in isolation from the skill analogy. Some examples of these features are that a virtue requires a commitment to goodness, is admirable for itself, is tied up to an agent’s happiness and is concerned with one’s life as a whole. Stichter on the other hand, simply argues that virtues are skills. Virtues are a particular set of skills.
that are unique in the sense that they are concerned with moral issues, but they still fall under the same class of dispositions.

This section will have three parts. In the first part of this section, I want to highlight some of the methodological differences between Annas and Stichter that follow from how they conceive of the relationship between virtues and skills. I will argue that Annas is creating an analogy between the two phenomena in order to make virtue more understandable and relatable. Stichter, on the other hand, is making analogical arguments between moral skills and morally neutral skills. This methodological difference is born out of the difference between the identification-thesis and the illumination-thesis.

In the second part, I will move on to consider how Annas and Stichter differ in the way they use psychological research to strengthen their theories, and look at the different advantages and disadvantages of the illumination-thesis and the identification-thesis in relation to this. The advantage of the identification-thesis is that it allows you to draw on psychological research on skill through analogical arguments. However, I will argue that this is problematic in two ways. Firstly, analogical arguments are ampliative, so the premises do not guarantee the truth of the conclusion. Secondly, this way of building a theory of virtue might lead to an unhealthy reliance on the psychological literature on skill, which as any other field, is subject to paradigmatic changes. Concerning the illumination-thesis, I will argue that the application of psychological research becomes slightly weaker, or more indirect. Annas does not gain any new aspects of her theory of virtue by drawing on Csíkszentmihályi; she simply gets some support for her already present assumption that virtue results in a form of intelligent automaticity that is enjoyed. I will argue that the downside of this way of using empirical literature is that it might seem ad hoc.

Lastly, in the third section, I will revisit the importance of the Aristotelian arguments from chapter 1 and their influence on the illumination-thesis and the identification-thesis. Each argument attempts to identify a disanalogous feature of virtue and skill. As Annas adheres to the identification-thesis, she can reject some while accepting others without any contradictions. Stichter, on the other hand, is much more committed to arguing that none of these arguments actually undermine the claim that virtues are skills, as he adheres to the identification-thesis. I will argue that his wish to overcome Aristotle’s arguments leads him to create a theory of virtue where successful performance is valued more than good motivation. Linda Zagzebski (1996) has argued that the opposite is the case (namely that in virtue, good motivation is more important than external success), and I believe her argument demonstrates a problem in Stichter’s theory.
In this section, I will argue that while Annas is simply making an analogy between virtues and skills (i.e. comparing the two concepts and highlighting their similarities), Stichter’s identification-thesis leads him to employ analogical reasoning, i.e. citing “accepted similarities between two systems to support the conclusion that some further similarity exists” (Bartha, 2019, sec. 1). This difference originates in their respective views on the relationship between virtues and skills. In order to make this case, some remarks need to be made on the structure of analogies and analogical arguments.

Annas is essentially investigating one phenomenon (virtue) through another phenomenon (skill), claiming that they are two separate things that share the same intellectual structure. This is essentially creating an analogy. An analogy is a “comparison between two objects, or systems of objects, that highlights respects in which they are thought to be similar” (Bartha, 2019, sec.1). Aristotle’s frequently cited passage on the similarity between learning to be virtuous through engaging in virtuous activity and learning a skill through practice is an example of a philosophically interesting analogy. These analogies can be seen as useful philosophical tools, which allow us to grasp something difficult by showing how it is similar to something we already understand. The fact that both skill and virtue involve the need to learn and the drive to aspire is one of the main analogies in Annas’ account.

An analogical argument, on the other hand, is a form of argumentation that “cites accepted similarities between two systems to support the conclusion that some further similarity exists” (Bartha, 2019, sec. 1). For example, Mars and the Earth have a set of known similarities: they are planets that orbit the sun, have a moon/moons, are subject to gravity and revolve on an axis. The fact that earth supports life can support - through an analogical argument - the hypothesis that Mars also can support life. The many known similarities are supposed to support the conclusion, but do not guarantee it. The argument thus has an ampliative form. Another domain in which analogical reasoning is frequent is law. Lawyers often cite previous and similar cases in order to argue that a similar ruling should be made in a present case, which is a form of analogical reasoning. Bartha (2019) formalizes the structure of analogical arguments in the following way:

1. S is similar to T in certain (known) respects.
2. S has some further feature Q
3. Therefore, T also has the feature Q, or some feature Q* similar to Q

Let us see if we can find examples of such arguments in Annas. First of all, Annas argues that virtues and (some) skills have a set of known similarities: They both involve the need to learn and
the drive to aspire. This is not an analogical argument, but simply an analogy. In the introduction to *Intelligent Virtue*, Annas actually notes that ‘analogy’ might not be “the best term for a relation so close that some have come to think of virtue itself being a kind of skill; but what is important is to bring out the shared features and their importance” (Annas, 2011, p. 2). But as she does not advocate that virtue is a skill herself, it seems analogy is a fitting term after all. Her method is essentially to bring out all the areas that overlap between the two concepts, but does she make any analogical arguments? While it seems intuitive – given the analogical nature of her account – to assume this is what she does, I want to argue that this is not the case. When she includes the research of Csikszentmihályi to support her notion of the automatic and intelligent ‘flow’ of virtue, she does not infer from the fact that skill involves flow to support the fact that virtue involves flow, or vice versa. If this was in fact what she was doing, the argument could be presented in the following manner:

1. S (skill) is similar to V (virtue) in certain (known) respects.
2. S has some further feature F (Flow-experience)
3. Therefore, V also has the feature F, or some feature F* similar to F

This does not seem to match her way of integrating flow in her theory of virtue. Rather, she begins with a notion of virtue where exercising virtue is enjoyable, automatic and intelligent before demonstrating that psychological research finds that the same kind of experience is present in exercising a skill. In Annas’ words: “So on this account of virtue the ‘flow’ model of skilled activity dovetails neatly with the relevant features of virtue” (Annas, 2011, p. 76). She simply states that flow is something that occurs both in skill and in virtue, in order to highlight this similarity.

Stichter, on the other hand, seems to be making analogical arguments. Given that Stichter endorses the identification-thesis, he is not making analogical arguments between virtues on the one hand, and skills on the other, as he believes that virtues are skills. Rather, he is making analogical arguments between morally-neutral skills (such as playing chess or speaking a language) and moral skills, or virtues (such as honesty and courage). This distinction can be found in his account of practical wisdom as something that exists uniquely in moral skills, given their connection to what is valuable in life as a whole. Moral skills are unique, but fall under the same class as other skills nonetheless, due to the number of similarities: “…the reason why people find so many similarities is simply because virtues are skills” (Stichter, 2018, p. 3).
Consider the question of articulacy. Stichter makes the argument that, as psychological research on skill shows experts are rarely articulate, we should not expect virtuous people to be articulate either. We can formalize this argument with an analogical structure:

1. MNS (Morally neutral skills) are similar to MS (Moral skills/virtues) in certain (known) respects.
2. MNS has some further feature NA (Not articulate)
3. Therefore, MS also has the feature NA, or some feature NA* similar to NA

I believe this way of presenting the argument captures an essential part of Stichter’s methodology and the way he draws on skill research in order to reach an empirically informed theory of virtue as a skill. Annas, on the other hand, aims simply to identify the respects in which the two phenomena are similar. I believe this difference in methodology (between making analogies and making analogical arguments) is born out of the difference between the identification-thesis and the illumination-thesis. Analogical arguments are tricky and are difficult to make when comparing two things that are very different in nature. But as Stichter advocates a position that aims to bring virtue and skill into the same class, it opens up for the possibility of arguing analogically in order to identify further similarities between morally neutral skills and moral skills. Annas, on the other hand, uses skill as a pedagogical tool in order to teach the reader something about virtue, and does not employ analogical arguments. I believe her method comes closer to the discussed notion found in Aristotle: “…we must use evident cases to testify on behalf of obscure ones” (NE, 1105b11). Skills are something we are all familiar with and they can help illuminate the more obscure notion of virtue, which is more difficult to grasp. For example, Annas claims that “In seeing how skill differs from mere routine we can come to see how virtue differs from mere routine” (Annas, 2014, p. 282). The point of bringing skill into her account of virtue is that it allows us to see aspects of virtue through something we already to some degree understand. If my analysis is correct, we have found a methodological difference between Annas and Stichter. We will move on to see how the distinction between analogies and analogical arguments relates to the application of psychological research.

3.2 Applying Psychological Research: Advantages and Issues

Virtue ethics today is becoming a more and more interdisciplinary field, where psychological research is used both to reinforce and to critique central notions. As virtue is first and foremost something that is exercised through individual people’s psychology, and is concerned with phenomena such as motivations, character and emotions, philosophers have started to incorporate findings from psychology in order to create empirically plausible accounts of the sort
of creatures we are. Owen Flanagan (1993) formulated a principle called the ‘Principle of Minimal Psychological Realism’ (PMPR) as a guide for every philosopher concerned with moral theory:

Make sure when constructing a moral theory or projecting a moral ideal that the character, decision processing, and behavior prescribed are possible, or are perceived to be possible, for creatures like us (Flanagan, 1993, p. 32).

This principle has been influential in the literature on virtue, and is seen as something virtue ethicists should strive to incorporate in their accounts of the psychological nature of virtues. I will now go through Annas’ and Stichter’s use of psychological research, its relation to the way they conceive of the relationship between virtues and skill, and to PMPR more generally.

According to the identification-thesis, virtues are skills. More specifically, they are skills concerned with acting, thinking and feeling the right thing in accordance with the right values with respect to your life as a whole. This makes them unique in some regards, but Stichter still conceives of virtues as falling under the same class of dispositions as other (performative) skills. One of the benefits of this position is that it allows us to apply psychological research on skill acquisition, skill exercise, expertise, and self-regulation etc. to our theories of virtue. In the previous chapter we saw how Stichter attempts to undergo this project; starting off with theories of self-regulation, skill acquisition and dual-process theories of cognition, before building an account of virtue that follows these theories. As we have seen, this involves making analogical arguments based on the similarities between morally neutral skills and moral skills. Stichter is therefore committing himself to the empirical literature on skill. If the empirical literature on skill tells us that expertise is usually non-articulate, the same will probably hold of virtue. If skill is something you have to continuously engage in in order to maintain, the same will be true of virtue. If you argue (as Stichter does) that virtues are skills, and hold that the analogical arguments he makes are sound, this project has much potential.

However, this strategy also leads to some issues. Firstly, analogical arguments are, as mentioned, ampliative (as opposed to deductive), meaning that the premises do not guarantee the truth of the conclusion – they only support it. We should therefore be wary of simply accepting the various analogical arguments Stichter makes. Secondly, this strategy leads to a perhaps unhealthy commitment to psychological research on skill. Psychology, as any other science, is dominated by paradigms in which certain concepts, areas of research, methods, etc. are more valued than others. Ten years from now, the state of the art in expertise research might reveal that expert articulacy actually is the rule, and not the exception. If this happens, Stichter would have to reconstruct his account of virtue for it to fit this new paradigm. Given that his theory of virtue is
strongly committed to the psychological research on self-regulation, skill acquisition and expert knowledge, they ‘stand and fall together’, so to speak. This can be problematic.

On the other hand, if your position is that virtues share some aspects of skills (as Annas argues), then I would argue that the direct application of psychological research can also be problematic, and thus limits the potential for creating an interdisciplinary account. This does not mean that people advocating the illumination-thesis cannot build their account on empirically informed theories of skills. I simply want to make the case that as Annas does not argue that virtues are skills, the applicability of this research is slightly weaker, or more indirect, than for Stichter. Put differently, looking to psychological research on skill will not add any new aspects to Annas’ account of virtue. Annas already starts out with an account of virtue. The concept of ‘flow’ simply confirms that this account overlaps with an empirically informed account of skill. What Annas’ theory gains from drawing on Csíkszentmihályi is a confirmation that it is possible for agents like us to achieve a form of intelligent automaticity that Annas believes mirrors the one found in virtuous people. Skill is a domain in which people are able to act intelligently without having to deliberate in the moment of performance. This is supposed to support the possibility of reasons ceasing to take up psychological room without disappearing entirely in the virtuous agent.

Another potential problem for accounts that are based on similarity and not identity is that it might lead to cherry picking: drawing on psychological research on skill to support one aspect of your theory of virtue, while simultaneously ignoring the research that undermines it. If you start out with a theory of virtue, and aim to argue that this is analogous to skill, you can simply pick the theory with the most overlap and ignore theories that contradict the similarities you wish to put forth. For example, Annas draws on Csíkszentmihályi in order to support her theory of intelligent automaticity in virtue. Meanwhile, many experiments on articulacy in expertise contradict other parts of her theory. Thus, Annas might be guilty of ‘ad hoc’ reasoning, i.e. creating a solution that is designed for one specific problem. In this case, the problem is bridging the gap between mindless routine and intelligent engagement in virtuous activity, and the solution is found in Csíkszentmihályi’s concept of flow.

Returning to PPMR, we can see how both Annas and Stichter create accounts of virtue in agreement with this principle. Stichter of course draws on a large amount of different psychological theories, and acknowledges the importance of PPMR in his book (Stichter, 2018, p. 7). Annas draws on the research of Csíkszentmihályi in order to show that it is psychologically plausible for beings like us to achieve ‘flow’, a state wherein thoughts efface themselves in goal-
oriented activity, without disappearing entirely. As this state is analogous to how she conceives of the virtuous agent, it is plausible that this state can be achieved with virtue as well.

We have seen advantages and issues with the way in which both Annas and Stichter draws on psychological research. As Stichter advances a theory where virtues are skills, he can apply psychological research on skill directly to his theory of virtue by using analogical reasoning, which can be a large advantage. It gives him a plausible framework for understanding how people improve their behavior, become more apt to deal with complex situations, and the cognitive processes involved in expert knowledge. However, we have seen that the premises of an analogical argument don’t guarantee the truth of its conclusion, which means that we should be careful with accepting them. In addition to this, his method might lead to an unhealthy reliance on the psychological literature that dominates today, which can subject to radical changes in the future. Annas, on the other hand, draws on psychological research to identify empirically informed analogous features between virtues and skills. But as she does not make analogical arguments, the features of virtue which she wants to illuminate remain theoretical assumptions. This can lead to ad hoc reasoning.

3.3 Overcoming Counter-arguments: Revisiting the Motivational Objection

This thesis has been structured around the counter-arguments to virtues being skills presented by Aristotle. I have argued that any attempt to model skill on virtue today (at least with an Aristotelian framework) should pay attention to these distinctions and arguments in order to create a coherent account. The strength of the skill analogy is dependent on the number of analogous features and can be criticized if enough disanalogous features are revealed. We have seen that Annas adopts some of Aristotle’s distinctions between virtue and skill, while abandoning others. And as she only claims that there is a structural similarity between the two concepts, this does not seem to lead to any problems. Adhering to the illumination-thesis allows you to identify the different aspects of virtue that makes it a unique concept, and to choose which aspects of skill are relevant to virtue. Conceptually, this is a major advantage. Stichter, on the other hand, argues that virtues are skills, which leads him to face the Aristotelian arguments more directly, as there is more at stake for his overall account.

In this section I want to explore one final consequence of Stichter’s identification-thesis. As he argues that virtues are skills, Stichter aims to create a theory of the relationship between virtues and skills where the number of disanalogous features are minimal. In the previous chapter we saw how he responds to the motivational objection, focusing especially on how the motivational component of skill mirrors that of virtue. But one consequence of this project, which remained
unexplored in that chapter, is the fact that it leads him to place external success higher than
motivation, claiming that “being virtuous is centrally a matter of acting well” (Stichter, 2018, p.
81). In both skill and virtue, there is a motivation component and a component of external
success. And in skill, we usually value external results more than we value motivation. This is
evident from how we evaluate performers. The winner of the contest gets the trophy, not the
contestant with the most motivation. Stichter’s commitment to the identification-thesis leads him
to attribute this feature of skill to virtue, which I believe is problematic. I want to argue, drawing
on Zagzebski, that the opposite is the case; the motivational component of virtue is more
defining than external success. I will attempt to demonstrate that there are some cases where
motivation alone is sufficient for virtue, whereas there are no cases where external success is. Motivation is thus necessary, and in some cases also sufficient, for virtue. External success on the
other hand, is sometimes required, but never sufficient for being virtuous. I will start by
presenting Zagzebski’s motivational objection to virtue being a skill, before presenting Stichter’s
response. I will move on to present two cases that demonstrate that motivation is in some
circumstances sufficient for virtue. And as external success is neither necessary nor sufficient, I
conclude that the motivational component of virtue is more defining than external success.

In the book *Virtues of the Mind* (1996), Zagzebski argues that virtues are distinct from skills, as the
number of disanalogous features are “too numerous to permit the collapse of the two concepts”
(Zagzebski, 1996, p. 107). Instead, she argues, moral virtues are associated with moral skills in the
sense that these skills are required for effectiveness in action. For example, she claims that “a fair
person [processing the virtue of fairness] who is a teacher would be motivated to learn
procedures for fair grading [which she conceives as a moral skill]” (Zagzebski, 1996, p. 115).
However, while virtues are often accompanied by certain skills, virtues are “psychically prior to
skills” (Zagzebski, 1996, p. 115). The reason for this, she argues, is that the motivational aspect of
virtue is more central than the skills associated with effectiveness in action. Thus, the efficiency
of a virtuous person is dependent on certain moral skills, but these skills are not as important as
the values and motivations involved in virtue. For Zagzebski, this means that virtues are different
from skills. This is a whole new way of conceiving the relationship between virtues and skills that
we unfortunately do not have time to explore in depth. Let us instead see how Stichter responds
to this objection and the consequences his response has for his theory of virtue.

Stichter rejects the idea that the motivational component defines virtue more than external
effectiveness. He illustrates with an example. Stichter’s case is a well-intentioned inept business
person, described as a “merely ‘kind-hearted’ person [who has] internalized a good moral
standard, but does not display any success in implementing the standard, and so seems to lack
knowledge of how to do so” (Stichter, 2018, p. 100). This person has moral motivation, but lacks two things. Firstly, he lacks a display of success in actually realizing the goods he is motivated to promote. Secondly, this person lacks the knowledge of how to do it, as is evident from the fact that he fails to succeed. He concludes that while the good intentions of this person are praiseworthy, “the lack of good effects should be a reason to deny the virtue attribution” (Stichter, 2018, p. 100). This is because Stichter primarily understands virtue as a term of success. The same was true concerning the articulacy requirement: the ability to articulate reasons is not required for virtue, as it is perfectly possible to do the right thing consistently without this ability.

Both Stichter and Zagzebski agree that good motivation is required for virtue. They also agree that in some instances lack of success can undermine virtue. What they disagree about is which component is most important. An important distinction to keep in mind when thinking of the role of external success in virtue is the distinction between ‘ability’ and ‘opportunity’. As Stichter pointed out, the business person in his case lacked the knowledge of how to actually put his moral standard into practice. This is what I call lacking ability. On the other hand, you can have cases where the person has motivation and ability, but lacks the opportunity. This can, for example, be situations where external circumstances beyond a person’s control stand in the way of him/her exercising virtue. With this distinction in mind, I will present two cases where a virtuous person fails to succeed externally, but is virtuous nonetheless. In the first case the person has motivation but lacks ability. In the second case the person has motivation and ability but lacks opportunity.

Zagzebski argues that in some cases, it seems as if a person can possess a virtue without possessing the ability to realize the good associated with the virtue in question. In order to illustrate this claim, Zagzebski gives us an example from economic and social justice:

A dramatic example of this difference is in the arena of economic and social justice. The possession of such virtues as compassion and justice is independent of the skills needed to produce material goods and such nonmaterial goods as freedom for as many people as possible. It is not uncommon for people to have the virtues just mentioned [compassion and justice] but to support social programs that are opposed to their own ends. Much social and economic controversy is over means and not ends, so when the requisite virtues are possessed, the necessary skills may still be beyond our reach” (Zagzebski, 1996, p. 116).

This case is supposed to demonstrate that it is possible to possess a virtue without possessing the skills necessary to put that virtue into practice. One can be just and be motivated to strive towards a more just society, without knowing what specific policy will lead to the most just outcome. If you accept than one can be virtuous without this ability, it seems that these cases of virtue must be judged by motivation alone.
On the other hand, you have cases where a virtuous person has the ability, but lacks the opportunity. Consider a humanitarian worker who is highly motivated to aid a specific country in need. She is motivated to help, and has developed a competence for helping others in need throughout her years of humanitarian work. In other words, she has the motivation and the ability to actually contribute. Now, there are several countries that are currently more or less inaccessible to humanitarian workers, such as Eritrea, Syria and Venezuela. In such cases, it seems unreasonable to expect anyone to succeed in helping these countries. Nevertheless, this highly motivated and highly trained humanitarian worker is still virtuous.

With these two cases I hope to have demonstrated that there are instances where motivation alone is sufficient for virtue and cases where motivation and ability but lack of opportunity is sufficient for virtue. These are of course just cases, and we should still generally expect virtuous people to succeed in their actions. And as Stichter has demonstrated, there are cases where lack of success undermines virtue. On the other hand, most contemporary virtue ethicists seem to agree that external success alone is not sufficient for virtue. If you consistently do good deeds but have ulterior motives, you are not yet virtuous. This is because a virtue is a multitrack disposition that – in addition to action – covers psychological states such as values, emotions and motivations. The fact that motivation alone can be sufficient for virtue, whereas external success can’t, gives us good reason to hold that motivation is a more defining component of virtue.

3.4 Conclusion: A Defense of the Illumination-thesis

It should be clear by now that I believe the issues related to the identification-thesis outnumber the problems of the illumination-thesis. First of all, the method of analogical reasoning in Stichter’s account is problematic. For example, Stichter claims that as the psychological literature shows that experts are inarticulate, we should hold the same for virtuous people. But I believe this ignores the good philosophical reasons we have for demanding that virtuous people develop an articulate understanding of their values and principles, as explained in section 2.2 of this chapter. We have also seen that there are some more general issues with using psychological research in this manner. Studies on expertise are not always applicable to virtue, and I have argued that this is specifically the case when it comes to articulacy. Lastly, we have seen that Stichter’s commitment to the identification-thesis leads him to create an account of virtue where external results are values more than internal motivation, and I argued that the opposite is preferred. All these issues lead me to conclude that the relationship between virtues and skills

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26 There are of course exceptions, such as Julia Driver (2001), who argues that a virtue is a trait that consistently produces good effects, regardless of the person’s motives. This view falls into the category of consequentialist virtue ethics.
should be regarded as analogical. While the number of similarities is striking, I hold that we should keep the distinction between moral virtues such as honesty and justice on the one hand, and morally-neutral skills such as playing chess and speaking a language on the other. The benefit of this is that we can continue to explore virtue through skill, while simultaneously acknowledging the disanalogous features that make virtue unique.

4. Self-Control vs. Full Virtue

In this final section, I will explore the role of self-control in Annas and Stichter. In chapter 2 we saw that Annas applies the skill analogy in order to better understand the way feelings and reasons are in agreement in virtuous people. She is thus upholding the Aristotelian distinction between the energetic and the virtuous agent in which reason and appetite are in harmony. It does not seem like Stichter is equally invested in this distinction, as he often speaks of self-control as a virtue, as opposed to something that we can improve. I believe the Aristotelian idea that self-control is something we should ultimately aim to improve upon is worth preserving, and will therefore argue in favor of Annas concerning this disagreement. I will begin by summarizing the various statements Stichter makes about self-control, in addition to how he ends up conceiving of temperance. I will move on to a general introduction to the Aristotelian distinction between self-control and full virtue, aiming to present some of the nuances introduced by Foot (1978) and Hursthouse (2001). In the end, I conclude that we should prefer Annas’ Aristotelian picture.

4.1 Stichter on Self-Control

In his discussion of how to individuate the virtues in a skill model of virtue, Stichter distinguishes between domain-general and domain-specific areas of moral agency. The domain-general areas of moral agency carry over across other more specific areas. For example, ‘reading situations correctly’ is something that will be required when exercising both honesty and kindness and can therefore be understood as a domain-general ethical competence. This leads him to discuss how we should understand self-control – understood as “overcoming strong inclinations” (Stichter, 2018, p. 87) – in terms of this distinction. We have already seen how self-control is an important factor for all self-regulating behavior. Is self-control a skill that is domain-general, so that it is useful in exercising several virtues? Or is it a particular domain-specific skill? In order to better understand this, Stichter draws on Angela Duckworth’s research on self-control. According to Duckworth there are “both domain-general and domain-specific aspects to the exercise of self-control on a given occasion” (Stichter, 2018, p. 88). This means that there is an aspect of self-control that is general in nature, and an aspect that is specific to certain domains, such as work,
food, and money. Based on this distinction, Stichter understands the virtue of temperance “on a model of general strategies that apply across domains, along with it having more specific subskills to resist temptations in specific domains in temptation” (Stichter, 2019, p. 88). Temperance is thus understood in terms of self-control, and Stichter also claims that we need to exercise self-control in order to exercise other virtues, such as honesty (Stichter, 2018, p. 89).

The importance placed on self-control in the self-regulation-based framework in Stichter, in addition to his notion of self-control as the ability to overcome strong inclinations, indicates that he believes that self-control is a large part of exercising virtue. In addition, we saw that Stichter argues that virtue is as effortful to maintain as it is to acquire. And while I agree that exercising self-control will be a large part of training for virtue, I want to defend the Aristotelian notion that we should strive to become people who don’t need to exercise self-control in order to do what is right. In this sense, Stichter fails to distinguish between the learner and the expert, and falls short of an ideal account of the virtuous person.

4.2 The Distinction between Self-control and Full Virtue

In the first chapter, I briefly discussed Aristotle’s distinction between the self-controlled person and the fully virtuous. While it might be natural to think of self-control as something inherently admirable and virtuous, Aristotle argues that “the self-controlled, or enkratic, person does the right thing but undergoes a conflict of desires in the process” (1145b). On the other hand, the fully virtuous agent both does the right thing and desires it, experiencing a harmony between desires and reason. As the self-controlled person undergoes a conflict, he is morally inferior to the fully virtuous person. While I agree with Aristotle on this point, contemporary virtue ethicists such as Philippa Foot (1978) and Rosalind Hursthouse (2001) have both argued that this distinction needs to be applied with careful qualification, as we are sometimes inclined towards believing that “the harder a man finds it to act virtuously the more virtue he shows if he does act well” (Foot, 1978, p. 10). This idea can be traced back to Kant, who famously claimed that the self-controlled agent who acts out of duty is morally superior to the ‘happy philanthropist’ who “find[s] an inner pleasure in spreading happiness around them and can take delight in the contentment of others as their own work” (Kant, 1964, p. 66). I will not go too much into the different interpretations of this specific part of Kant’s theory. What is important is to recognize that we often think that it is admirable and virtuous to overcome inclinations in order to do the right thing. According to Foot, this leads to a kind of contradiction in our intuitions about moral character:
For on the one hand great virtue is needed where it is particularly hard to act virtuously; yet on the other it could be argued that difficulty in acting virtuously shows that the agent is imperfect in virtue: according to Aristotle, to take pleasure in virtuous action is the mark of true virtue, with the self-mastery of the one who finds virtue difficult only the second best (Foot, 1978, p. 10).

If we want to accept both of these inclinations, we need to qualify the Aristotelian distinction between self-control and full virtue. The solution proposed by Foot is that both claims from the passage above are true, but they apply to different cases (and different virtues). In some circumstances the need for self-control reflects a lack of character. For example, if a person needs to exercise self-control in order to treat women equally at work, he has not fully internalized the value of gender equality. In other circumstances, the presence of self-control is needed. Take the virtue of courage. According to Hursthouse, it is the case that “someone who wants to risk and endure frightful pain or death, and enjoys doing so, is not thereby courageous but a masochist, or a daredevil maniac” (Hursthouse, 2001, p. 96). What is admirable in battle is to overcome the inclination to flee, but even then, they should not take pleasure in such activities. It is not the individual’s character that makes it so, but the circumstances in which he finds himself. We should thus be careful about applying the distinction between the self-controlled individual and the fully virtuous person to all circumstances, while at the same time maintaining that it is useful in some.

Annas’ theory is better placed to preserve the distinction. In fact, she goes as far as to say that “the encratic is someone who has not yet matured or grown up; there is something still missing in his development” and that “it is hard to think of a theory of virtue making virtue a matter of character and disposition which could fail to note the distinction [between the encratic and the virtuous person] in some form” (Annas, 2011, p. 67). She gives us many examples of such cases; someone who gives money to charity while actually resenting the expenditure, someone helping the homeless while having feelings of repulsion etc. She also creates room for cases where acting virtuous is difficult, but notes that “the sources of struggle and regret lie not in the virtuous way the agent deals with the situation, but in the circumstances in which he finds himself” (Annas, 2011, p. 78).

Why is this distinction so important? The best way to demonstrate its importance is by creating cases where doing the virtuous thing and enjoying it is more admirable than doing the virtuous thing but having to exercise self-control. We have already seen some: the person who shares but resents the expenditure and the person who treats women equally while secretly not wanting to. Let us keep exploring the latter. While he does treat women equally, he has to exercise self-control in order to avoid making sexist remarks, in order to distribute responsibility to his female
colleagues and even in order to actually listen when they speak. As I mentioned, this person does not seem to have truly internalized the value of gender equality. This issue is connected to the motivational component of virtue. While this person seems fine externally, there is something lacking in his internal psychological make-up. And the fact that he has to exercise self-control confirms this.

On behalf of Stichter, one could make a counterargument against this view. For example, you could argue that the harmonious flow between reason and feelings in Annas’ ideal person violates the principle of minimal psychological realism. Reaching a state where virtuous activity becomes so enjoyable that you no longer have to exercise self-control might be psychologically implausible, at least in a global manner. It is easy to illustrate the importance of harmony through examples of particular situations, but it seems more difficult to conceive of someone so harmonious that they would never have to exercise self-control. This counterargument can be met by introducing the qualifications presented in Hursthouse and Foot. The distinction should not be regarded as absolute, but as holding for certain cases only.

4.3 Conclusion

We have seen that Stichter defends a theory of virtue where self-control is both regarded as a domain-general and a domain-specific virtue, and that exercising self-control is a large part of exercising virtue. I believe that this is true for virtue training, but I still maintain that we cannot overlook the importance of cases where the need for self-control seems to undermine virtue. In this sense, Stichter’s theory lacks a description of the fully virtuous agent. As Annas’ theory embraces the distinction, I conclude that her theory is richer in this particular aspect.

5. Concluding Remarks

This chapter aimed to identify and analyze what I believe are the three most important disagreements between Annas and Stichter. Hopefully, this discussion has allowed me to identify some strengths and weaknesses with both theories that can be useful for further research. While I tend to agree more with Annas, I do not endorse all parts of her theory. And while I spent much of this chapter criticizing Stichter, I believe many of his ideas are worth more attention. As mentioned in the introduction, I have drawn independent conclusions concerning each disagreement. I developed a unique view concerning articulacy, argued in favor of the illumination-thesis and defended the distinction between self-control and full virtue.

Concerning the articulacy requirement, we saw that Stichter provides good empirical reasons against articulacy in skill, while Annas provides good arguments for articulacy in virtue. This leads
me to conclude that articulacy can, and should, be seen as a point of divergence between virtue and skill. While a chess player can be an excellent performer without the ability to convey reasons (as winning games is the main measure of his or her skill), virtuous people should be able to explain and communicate their values to others in order to deal with unforeseen situations, moral disagreement and individuating the virtues. I therefore conclude that articulacy is best understood as a disanalogue feature of skill and virtue.

When it comes to whether or not we should prefer understanding virtues as skills or understanding the relationship as analogical, we saw that there are advantages and issues with both claims. The benefits of the identification-thesis are the possibility of analogical reasoning and application of psychological literature. But both of these advantages turned out to have some problems. The main advantage of the illumination-thesis is that you can continue the project of investigating virtue through skill, while maintaining that there are disanalogue features that are too important to ignore. I argued that the motivational aspect of virtue is different from the motivational aspect of skill, and that Stichter’s is unable to account for this. Given the number of difficulties recognized in the identification-thesis, I concluded that we should prefer to conceive of the relationship between virtue and skill as analogical.

The third point of divergence between the two theories was Stichter’s lack of a distinction between having to exercise self-control in order to do the right thing on the one hand, and enjoying doing the right thing on the other. This distinction is central to Annas’ account, and she reinforces it through the research of Csíkszentmihályi. I argued that this is an important distinction that we should aim to preserve.
Conclusion

We have seen how some features of skill can illuminate some feathers of aspects of virtue. On the other hand, a too strong commitment to the skill model of virtue can lead us to infer features of skill to virtue that do not belong, so to speak. We have seen some cases of this in Stichter. I argued that the analogical argument concerning articulacy in virtue and skill overlooks the important philosophical reasons we have for demanding some degree of articulacy in virtuous people. We also saw that while external results are valued more in skill, this is not necessarily the case in virtue. Good motivation is both necessary and in some instances sufficient for virtue, whereas good effects are in some cases necessary but never sufficient. Concerning the notion of self-control, we saw that there are some issues with Stichter’s tendency to view it as a virtue. There are instances where the need to exercise self-control seems to undermine virtue, and we should have a distinction to explain such cases. The Aristotelian distinction between the enkratic and the fully virtuous, with some qualifications, can do that for us. Applying features of skill, such as self-control and external effects, to virtue gives us a conception of virtue that is more fixated on the abilities of the virtuous agent, rather than the values, motivations and inclinations that are a large part of our character. I thus conclude that we should ultimately conceive of the relationship between virtues and skills as analogical, and not identical.

I hope this thesis has been able to shed light on some of the benefits and problems with modeling virtue on skill. We have seen that virtue and skill share many structural features, such as the need for practice and the form of quick deliberation involved in decision-making. Moral knowledge of how to conduct ourselves is not merely something we can attain by reading a book on moral principles and rules; it is rather an acquired ability that you will only attain through a strong commitment to moral values and standards, in addition to years of training. Explaining this by analogy to skill helps us to understand the nature of virtue better, as we all have some experience with learning and exercising skill. It also gives us a psychologically plausible account of how virtuous people are able to do the right thing immediately while simultaneously being rational. While theory cannot help us directly to improve in virtue, it might provide some guidance as to what strategies of improvement might work for creatures like us.
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