The Virtue of Gentleness in Aristotle's *Ethics*

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Studies on gentleness (πραότης[1]) are less common than papers devoted to other moral virtues like courage or magnanimity. Gentleness, however, is not to be considered a minor virtue; Aristotle discusses this mean in both the *Eudemian* and *Nicomachean Ethics*, saying in the latter that it deals with an "easy" affective matter, but adding at once that doing well "to whom and how much and when and for the sake of what and how, that is no longer a matter for anyone, nor easy" (1109a26–29). In absolute terms, the length of the arguments dedicated to gentleness is unequal: nearly a Bekker page for the *Nicomachean Ethics* (*NE* 1125b26–1126b10), half a page for the *Eudemian Ethics* (*EE* 1231b5–26). Compared to the whole discussion of particular moral virtues, the proportion is nevertheless the same: in each treatise, about 8% bear upon gentleness. This shortness is not related to the status of gentleness. It is due, it seems, to the rank occupied by this virtue, at least in the *NE*. Seventh on the list of eleven virtues (in the outlook of book II (1107a27–1108a30), and in the catalog of books III–IV), gentleness does not require as lengthy explanations as preceding virtues considering Aristotle's method in books III and IV: applying the formal definition of moral virtue given in book II (1106b36 ff.) to particular cases.[2] As the

1. According to Paula Gottlieb, *The Virtue of Aristotle's Ethics.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 40, πραότης counts as one of the five nameless virtues on the basis of 1125b26–29 (see also 1108a3–4, and Susan D. Collins, "The Moral Virtues in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*," *Action and Contemplation: Studies in the Moral and Political Thought of Aristotle*, ed. R. C. Bartlett and S. D. Collins.Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999, 131–58, at 143). She claims that "the terms available for modern commentators to use to translate [it], do not capture exactly what Aristotle has in mind." She chooses the term "mildness;" Ross uses "good temper" (Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. William David Ross. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, 72–4) and so does Taylor (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics Books II–IV*. trans. Christopher C. W. Taylor. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006, 50–52). This namelessness is not evoked in the *Eudemian Ethics*; πραότης is used without any comment, and translated as "gentleness" by Solomon (Aristotle, *Ethica Eudemia*, IX, trans. Solomon. *The Works of Aristotle*. ed. W.D. Ross.London: Oxford University Press, 1924–1925) and Kenny (Aristotle, *The Eudemian Ethics*. trans. Anthony Kenny. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, 44–6). This wise choice carries the relevant idea of nobility.

2. Carlo Natali, "Particular Virtues in the *Nicomachean Ethics*," *Particulars in Greek*

author goes through the application, he needs less and less detail to demonstrate how each particular virtue embodies the definition. Maybe the *EE* better stresses the importance of gentleness by naming it first in the chart of means and extremes in chapter 3 of book II (1220b38 ff.), and by treating this virtue at the third rank in book III, immediately after the cardinal virtues of courage and temperance. This difference between the two *Ethics* displays a fact that matters: each treatise brings its own view on shared moral subjects. This paper rests upon the relatively new hypothesis of the complementariness of the Aristotelian *Ethics* according to which each of them expresses in peculiar way similar ideas;[3] in this context, any attempt of reading must rely on both treatises. In order to give a complete general account of the virtue of gentleness, the *NE* and the *EE* are referred to in addressing first the problem of the field of gentleness; this will bring us to explore how gentleness fits the doctrine of the mean—including details about extremes opposed to the virtue—the motive of gentleness being finally described.

I. Anger, Thumos, and Slight

Most papers on gentleness explain this virtue mainly in relation with anger (ὀργή). This is perfectly right, of course—if we have the Nicomachean treatment of this virtue in mind.[4] The Eudemian version indeed does not use this word once in the discussion of gentleness; instead of anger, Aristotle speaks of *thumos* (θυμός).[5] The verb also varies: in the *NE*, agents are said to get angry (ὀργίζομαι), while in the *EE*, they are in addition said to be carried away (πάσχω).[6] Such a difference should not be ignored, contrary to what Fillion–Lahille does in her contribution.[7] Frère's comment

Philosophy, ed. R. W. Sharples. The seventh S.V. Keeling Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2010, 73–96 at 87.

3. Allan was the first to support this understanding of the relationship between the *NE* and the *EE* (Donald J. Allan. "Quasi–mathematical Method in the *Eudemian Ethics*." *Aristote et les problèmes de méthode.* Paris: Nauwelaerts, 1961, 303–318); he is now followed by many commentators, among whom is Bodéüs (Aristote, *Éthique à Nicomaque*. trans. Richard Bodéüs. Paris: GF–Flammarion, 2004, 14–24.) This view allows readers to leave the highly controversial chronological problem aside, and thus to focus on ethical matters.

4. 1108a4, 1125b26, b30, 1126b19.

5. 1231b5–6, b11, b15.

6. 1231b18; κινουμένους τὸν θυμόν, 1231b12.

7. Taking *orgè* and *thumos* as interchangeable words, she even translates *thumos* by "colère" (anger); Janine Fillion–Lahille, "La colère chez Aristote." *Revue des études anciennes.* LXXII 1970: 46–79, at 61–4, 76–8. See also Solomon's rendering of *thumos* as "anger" in the *EE* (1231b5–6, b11, b15). The last English translation by

is more convincing, since he suggests an explanation of the relationship between these two affections. According to him, *orgè* and *thumos* are both forms of anger[8] that differ one from another by the following three characteristics: *thumos* counts first as *orexis* and then as *pathos*, unlike *orgè,* which counts first as *pathos* and then as *orexis*; *thumos* belongs to human beings as well as animals, while *orgè* only belongs to humans; *thumos* is not a matter of excess nor defect, whereas *orgè* is.[9] But the argument could have been driven a step further, and the conclusion applied to the relationship between the *Ethics*. These three characteristics in fact lead to hold that *thumos* has a larger extension than *orgè*; *thumos* therefore should be conceived globally, subsuming many particular affections, anger being one of them (amongst the other affections). If it is doubtful that Aristotle actually defines *thumos* as a faculty of the soul that commands emotions,[10] at least he does characterize *thumos* as the genus of courageous agents at 1116b25–26 (οἱ ἀνδρεῖοι θυμοειδεῖς). Not properly a form of anger, neither a soul faculty, *thumos* is rather a kind of affection; and insofar as anger is a particular one, it follows that the *EE*, by speaking of *thumos*, adopts a more general perspective on gentleness than the *NE*. It is the same virtue, except that the *EE* considers the genus of the affection at stake (*thumos*) and the *NE*, the affection at a particular level (*orgè*).

An account of gentleness would be incomplete without specifying the particular affection at stake, although interpreters have to cope with the absence of a definition of anger in the *Ethics*. This strange omission—considering discussions of courage or temperance, which include precisions on fear and pleasure—is often palliated by using the definition of anger given in the *Rhetoric* II, 2.[11] The strategy must be tested, though, for material found in

Kenny (2011) is also arguable: *thumos* is translated as "rage," a word that fits the excess for it denotes a (too) strong anger (or at least an extreme feeling), so that the virtuous person can hardly feel it. Moreover, this choice raises a problem of consistency regarding other occurrences of this substantive in the *EE* (e.g. 1223a27).

8. Jean Frère, "Emportement et colère: « thumos » et « orgè » selon Aristote." *Ontologie et dialogue: mélanges en hommage à Pierre Aubenque*. ed. N.L. Cordero Paris: Vrin, 2000, 171–87, at 175.

9. *Ibid,* 186.

10. As Viano claims (Cristina Viano, "Passions de rivalité chez Aristote." *L'excellence de la vie. Sur* l'Éthique à Nicomaque *et* l'Éthique à Eudème *d'Aristote*. ed. G. Romeyer–Dherbey. Paris: Vrin, 2002: 237–52, at 248), resting upon *Politics* 1327b40 ff.

11. Curzer (Howard J. Curzer, *Aristotle & the Virtues.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, 145) and Frère (2000: 179) take for granted the *Rhetoric* definition. Leighton associates it to the *NE* account of gentleness (Stephen R. Leighton, "Aristotle's Account of Anger: Narcissism and Illusions of Self–Sufficiency." *Ratio.* 15,

this treatise could not always be transferred into the field of ethics; for instance, the *Rhetoric*'s definition of confidence, the affection at stake in courage, does not suit totally what is said about this virtue in the *NE* and the *EE.*[12] Without any hint about definition of anger in the *Ethics*, prudence is needed if we are to take that of the *Rhetoric*, all the more as it is hypothetical. Here it is: "Anger may be defined as an impulse, accompanied by pain, to a conspicuous revenge for a conspicuous slight directed without justification towards what concerns oneself or towards what concerns one's friends" (1378a30–32). Most elements of this definition are found in the *Ethics*. Anger is said to be accompanied with pain (μετὰ λύπης), and the Eudemian discussion of gentleness includes this information. Aristotle notices that *thumos*—and hence anger, insofar as it is a form of *thumos*—produces pain (1231b6), and that it is called pain (b15). The *NE* does not clearly stress this aspect of anger, except when it is mentioned that revenge ends anger by replacing pain with pleasure (1126a22–23). The association of anger/*thumos* and pain makes this affection unpleasant to feel, and some other virtues do imply such affections—fear in the case of courage (1115a5–9, 1229b12–15), or pain in the case of temperance (1117b25–26, 1230b10). The element of revenge also takes place in the *NE*; in addition to stop anger, revenge counts as the main trait of the bad–tempered person, who "cannot be appeased until she inflicts vengeance or punishment" (1126a28–29 trans. Ross), a trait explained by a remark about human nature saying that revenge is the more human (a30). For its part, disdain or slight, the cause of *thumos* (and thus of anger[13]), only appears in the *EE*. Aristotle points out that the *thumos* of a slavish person (the defect vice) is not moved by disdain, and even that she self–humiliates in face of it (1231b11–13). Recognizing the unpleasant aspect of disdain[14]

2002: 23–45, at 25–9). Gauthier and Jolif refer to the *Rhetoric* in their commentary (Aristote, *L'Éthique à Nicomaque*, trans. René–Antoine Gauthier, Jean–Yves Jolif. Paris/Louvain: Nauwelaerts, 1970, 301).

12. The virtue of courage implies both fear and confidence (1107a33–b4, 1115a5–6; 1228a36–37), but confidence (θάρρος) is said in the *Rhetoric* to exclude fear (1383a17–19).

13. David Konstan, "Aristotle on Anger and the Emotions: the Strategies of Status," *Yale Classical Studies.* 32, 2003, 99–120, at 113 & 119; Leighton (2002: 27); Troy W. Martin, "Sorting the Syntax of Aristotle's Anger," *Hermes.* 129, 2001, 474–8, at 477; Pierre Aubenque, "Sur la définition aristotélicienne de la colère," *Revue philosophique.* 147, 1957, 300–17, at 306.

14. So does Konstan (2003: 102, 111) and Pearson, according to whom slight is an offensive thing because it disregards the value of one's own person; (Giles Pearson, "Non–rational Desire and Aristotle's Moral Psychology," *Aristotle's Nicomachean*

helps explain the pain that comes with anger; indeed, to be slighted is a personal matter, the slight being directed against the agent, who feels it as an injustice against oneself (or her dearest). At the moment, let's remark that the main elements of the *Rhetoric*'s definition of anger appear in the *Ethics*' discussion of gentleness. This compatibility allows considering the definition, but with care, for the *Rhetoric* opposes anger to gentleness (1380a6–9, where they appear mutually exclusive), while the *NE* links gentleness with anger (1125b27), leading to hold that the gentleness referred to may not be quite the same in the *Rhetoric* and the *NE*.

Disdain plays an important role in the account of gentleness, for it defines the field of this virtue; disdain is to gentleness what danger is to courage, pleasure to temperance, money to generosity, namely, the context of achievement of the virtue. Let's describe this context by identifying peculiar characteristics of slight that produce anger at stake in gentleness. The slight is first directed towards the agent herself or towards her close relatives, this being confirmed by 1126a7–8, where Aristotle mentions the slavish attitude. Furthermore, the slight is uncalled for;[15] these two qualities explain the painful aspect of being the victim of disdain (something is undeservedly happening to the agent). The third characteristic denotes the very nature of disdain: it does not depend on the agent, therefore it places her (and the virtue of gentleness) in connection with others—the agent feels the disdain of another person[16] onto herself (or on her relatives). Maybe this last trait contributes to clarify the presentation order of moral virtues in the *NE*; unlike courage or temperance, which are self–directed[17] and thus appear at the beginning of the catalog (in book III), gentleness implies a relation to others, and comes later. Courage and temperance are followed by virtues of generosity, magnificence, magnanimity, and ambition in book IV. Generosity

Ethics: *A Critical Guide*. ed. J. Miller. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, 144–69, at 149).

15. K. Kalimtzis, "Ancient Philosophy's Contribution to the Understanding of Anger," *Skepsis* (Papers in Honor of J.P. Anton). XVI, 2005, 93–105, at 101; Aubenque (1957: 307).

16. Aubenque (1957: 306).

17. Acts of temperance do not need someone else's participation to perform; the pleasure at stake, provided by the sense of touch (1118a23–26, a30–31; 1231a17–18), is a personal one, when eating and drinking, and even when having sex, insofar as the partner's pleasure is not concerned (the partner plays the same role as food and drink). *Stricto sensu*, the courageous agent fights *against* the enemy, and true courage, displayed at war (1115a30), issues in the enemy's destruction or harm.

and magnificence, the means in relation to money (1107b8–10, b16–17), need a recipient, someone else who benefits from the agent's giving—in this respect, magnificence surpasses generosity, for the endowment does not regard a single person, but the whole community (1122b19–24, 1123a1–5). Greatness of soul and ambition are obviously in relation to honor (1107b22–26); now honor is paid by others; by the few in the case of magnanimity (1124a4–6); and by the many in the case of ambition since it regards middling and unimportant objects (1125b5). As Aristotle goes through the list, it seems that the virtues depend more and more on others to exercise, ending up with the three virtues of social intercourses (1108a9–12; friendliness, truthfulness, ready wit). In this view, gentleness is treated just before these means because the affection at stake, anger, arises from someone else's disdain, and is in turn directed against the slighter. If this is right, the order must not be considered haphazard;[18] the criterion of growing refinement has been suggested to explain the Nicomachean order. Due to Joachim, this hypothesis states that materials of virtues treated first (courage and temperance), bodily pleasures and pains, are the rudest; then generosity and magnificence bear on more specifically human, more refined matter (pain of loss, pleasure of acquisition); the material of magnanimity and ambition, honor, is attached to the "civic person;" highly refined and spiritualized pleasures and pains determine virtues of gentleness, friendliness, truthfulness and ready wit, which happen in a civilized and intellectual society.[19] Such an explanation is expressed by Garver, who argues that the presentation order follows some ethical progress: "The other virtues [*viz.* besides courage and temperance] confront situations that are ethically richer, more complex and challenging."[20] But this statement has to be softened, given the importance of each virtue; a lack of courage and temperance would indeed impoverish ethical life, unlike the author says. Instead of progress — which supposes the non–Nicomachean claim of a growing worth of virtues — we could conceive the order in the light of the criterion suggested above. At the beginning, the self–directed virtues of courage and

18. William David Ross holds this conception, saying that "virtues are taken up just as they occur to Aristotle's mind, one no doubt suggesting another as he proceeds"(*Aristotle*, 5 London: Methuen, 1962, 202-3).

19. Harold H. Joachim, *Aristotle. The Nicomachean Ethics: A Commentary by the late H.H. Joachim.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951, 114–5.

20. Eugene Garver, *Confronting Aristotle's Ethics: Ancient and Modern Morality.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006, 105.

temperance; then, the virtue directed towards a single patient (a passive recipient), generosity, and the virtue directed towards the community, magnificence, thereafter, virtues whose matter is received from others, magnanimity and ambition. All these six virtues exercise without reciprocity, for the patient's behavior does not count in the agent's virtuous state. Here comes a breakthrough: gentleness demands the participation of both: agent *a* slights *b*, who gets angry at *a*, and in turn replies to *a*. At last, the three virtues of social intercourses would not exist without interaction—the main difference between them and gentleness being that the latter deals with only one person[21] while the formers can involve a group of people. Instead of a refinement or a moral progress, such an order rather supposes a growing care for others, together with complexity. This does not mean that courage, treated first, is an easier virtue to exercise than ready wit (for courage is unpleasant, difficult and distressful, 1117a33–35). Actually, the complexity mentioned by Garver could flow from the so–called "parameters" of virtue, the last virtues of the catalog implying more modalities than the first. For instance, the gentle person must succeed in five modalities (she gets angry with the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right motive, and in the right way, 1109ba26–28 trans. Ross), whereas the courageous one has to cope with four parameters (she faces the right thing and from the right motive, in the right way and at the right time, 1115b17).

II. Gentleness as a Mean in Affection, in Actions and between Extremes

Thus gentleness takes place in circumstances where disdain occurs; this situation provokes the affection at stake in gentleness, anger or *thumos*. Insofar as gentleness requires right anger, the definition given in part I is not enough to characterize this virtue; we need to specify exactly how the virtuous agent reaches the mean within anger. Avoiding excess and defect, it depends on the above five modalities, which determine the right "quantity" of affection to feel and display; should these modalities be defined, the perfect anger would then be described with sufficient accuracy. By combination of places where Aristotle enumerates these modalities in the *EE* (1221a15–16, 1231b13, b22–24), we obtain the same five as in the *NE* (1125b31–32, 1126a33–34, 1126b5–6): cause, recipient

21. Leighton (2002: 26). Konstan (2003: 110) underlines that anger is a personal matter: one can be angry only at an individual, and not at a class of people (whereas some affection like hatred may be directed against a group; cf. *Rhetoric*, 1378a33–35, 1382a4–7).

(or person), manner (or degree), time (or frequency), and duration. Gathering the few hints found in both treatises will allow giving a concrete characterization of each modality. The virtuous person gets angry for the right cause; according to the *EE*, this cause is slight or disdain (1231b12–12)—the *NE* is about "being dragged through the mud" (προπηλακίζω, 1126a6–7). The gentle agent gets angry with whom she ought to, that is to say, with the individual who gave offense. This may seem too trivial a remark; nonetheless, it matters, because anger is easily devious, since it often happens that someone is slighted by a person and gets angry with another one. Moreover, the gentle agent gets angry at the right degree; having in mind the nearness of gentleness to deficiency (1126a1–2), we could state that anger does express with some restraint (but not pent up), in addition to 1129b22, where Aristotle specifies that the gentle person does not strike another, nor speaks evil. We could assume on this basis the proportionality of the anger to the offense that generated the affection[22]—and so, that the revenge provoked by the anger should be analogous to the slight.[23] Furthermore, the gentle person gets angry when she ought to, neither too slowly not too quickly. Contrary to the irascible, who gets angry excessively quickly (1126a14; presumably before understanding if there really is a slight), the good–tempered agent, once the offense is identified, gets angry immediately[24] (not automatically, since right anger does not coincide with a pure reflex[25]). Finally, the anger felt by the gentle agent lasts for the right duration, precisely a short time, given a trait in *NE* which assures that the best thing about irascible people is that they calm down quickly (1126a15). It is worth noting that the portrait of virtuous anger is provided mostly by the *NE*; this particularity results from a higher concern for the concrete situation by the *NE*, the *EE* considering the affection at stake in a more general view—by speaking of *thumos*, and by the absence

22. And not a medial anger, as Curzer (2012: 156) argues. Recall that the doctrine of the mean is not a doctrine of moderation; see Urmson who even picks anger to illustrate the fact that the mean does not correspond to moderation (James O. Urmson, "Aristotle's Doctrine of the Mean," *American Philosophical Quarterly.* 10,1973, 223–30, at 225).

23. Charles D. C. Reeve, *Actions, Contemplation, and Happiness.* Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 2012, 114; Konstan (2003: 111). Curzer (2012: 158) seems to endorse this view ("retaliation should be equal in severity to the wrong"), but he oddly adds that gentleness "is a disposition to retaliate moderately" (Curzer: 163).

24. Leighton (2002: 26).

25. Konstan (2003: 104).

of concrete description. Finding the mean within anger demands that the agent gets the five modalities right; the *NE* only notices the difficulty of the task and, consequently, emphasizes the laudative nature of gentleness. The Eudemian silence on this aspect of the virtue makes it clear that the treatise does not promote virtue, and thus adopts a theoretical approach of ethics, unlike the *NE*, whose approach is more practical,[26] since Aristotle gives detailed descriptions, is concerned about the exercise of virtue, and seems eager to convince his readers of the great value of moral virtues. At the end of book II, in the general account of moral virtue, Aristotle gives gentleness as an example: "To get angry is easy, and anyone can do this; but to whom and how and when and for the sake of what is no longer a matter for anyone, nor easy—that is why doing well is something rare and praiseworthy and fine" (1109a25–29 trans. Taylor). The treatment of gentleness in book IV calls these ideas back: the difficulty of the mean of gentleness (1126a32–34), and its praiseworthiness (1125b32, 1126b4–5). Nothing similar in the Eudemian treatment, which focuses on demonstration (that gentleness is a mean between extremes) without any concern about the work needed to exercise virtue, neither about its laudative nature (although modalities are twice mentioned).

In itself neither good nor bad, neither praiseworthy nor blameworthy, the affection of anger requires so many conditions as a mean that it might well happen rarely.[27] According to some commentators,[28] compliance to reason figures among these conditions; the affection at stake in gentleness, they assert, must obey reason in order to reach the mean. But the fragility of such a hypothesis appears from the texts themselves: nowhere in both account of gentleness does Aristotle ascribe to reason any control function—even if he points out that the gentle person gets angry as reason (would) dictates (ὡς ἂν ὁ λόγος τάξῃ, 1125b35). This conditional could be understood this (softened) way: as reason might happen to dictate. Instead of a superiority relationship between reason and the mean (in the affection), Aristotle refers to a harmony between them (in virtuous agent) so that modalities of right anger are not directly determined by reason; one passage from the common books, quoted by many authors,[29] leads us to think so:

26. Natali (2010: 84) draws the same conclusion (resting upon different passages).

27. Fillion–Lahille (1970: 72).

28. Frère (2000: 171, 179, 181); Fillion–Lahille (1970: 55, 57, 72).

29. Curzer (2012: 151); Viano (2002: 249); Leighton (2002: 26); Frère (2000: 185); Fillion–Lahille (1970:, 57).

> Anger (θυμός) seems to listen to reason to some extent, but to mishear it, as do hasty servants who run out before they have heard the whole of what one says, and then muddle the order, or as dogs bark if there is but a knock at the door, before looking to see if it is a friend; so anger by reason of the warmth and hastiness of its nature, though it hears, does not hear an order, and springs to take revenge. For reason or appearance informs us that we have been insulted or slighted, and anger (θυμός), reasoning as it were that anything like this must be fought against, boils up straightway. (1149a26–34 trans. Ross)

While commentators who rely on these lines endorse that anger or *thumos* listens to reason, we would like to underline the poor quality of this listening: Aristotle indeed says that *thumos* (anger's genus) hears reason *to some extent*, thus *mishears* it, and *wrongly* carries out what is ordered. One cannot express in a clearer way that reason on its own does not master anger or *thumos*—or that *thumos* does not comply to reason in a strong sense.[30] The only function that this passage assigns to reason consists in notifying the agent being the target of a slight—impossible to be aware of the slight without understanding speech and deeds of the others.[31] Reason's role in gentleness is preliminary to the beginning of the anger; once the affection has started, reason does not have to control it. Aristotle specifies at 1126b3–4 that correspondence to particular circumstances belongs to perception, not to reason—modalities of anger lies in particulars, and their determination depends on perception (cf. 1109b20–25). There is no anger without reason for anger,[32] certainly, and the cognitive element connected to anger within gentleness is precisely found in discerning these causes. Having rightly understood the slight, the gentle agent gets angry, and this virtuous anger, though not under the domination of the reason, harmonizes with it, since well–balanced affection goes in the same direction as rationality.[33] Besides, control of the

30. It does in a weaker sense; according to Pearson (2011: 156), *thumos* obeys reason 'in a sense insofar as it involves a quasi–reasoning process that implicitly makes reference to part of a fully rational response.'

31. In this respect, the non–rational element (the affection) implied in gentleness could only be formed by rational creatures; Pearson (2011: 162).

32. Frère (2000: 187).

33. Bodéüs (2004: 479n2). Pearson (2011: 164 ff.) emphasizes the fact that the virtuous agent's non–rational part motivates her in the same direction as her rational side. See also Garver (2006: 102).

affections by reason better suits an inferior moral disposition, *enkrateia*, than moral virtue (1151a26–27; 1223b12–14). Actually, the virtuous agent does not control anything, even strong affections such as anger; she displays such a perfection[34] that she cannot get angry wrongly, because moral excellence does not consist in mastering inadequate tendencies, but in not having them.

The description of gentleness includes another element proper to this virtue. The general scheme of moral virtue supposes a "matter," affections together with actions (1106b16–17, b24–25; 1220a30–32); in the particular case of gentleness, the affection at stake, anger (or generally speaking, *thumos*), could provoke the action of taking revenge. Much less obvious than the latter, forgiveness is nonetheless attested by both of Aristotle's books on ethics as a constituent of gentleness: the *NE* notes that the gentle person "is not vengeful, but rather forgiving" (συγγνωμονικός, 1126a1–2), and the *EE* speaks of "being accommodating and conciliatory" (ἵλεων, καταλλακτικόν, 1222b1–3). Following the pattern of other moral virtues, gentleness presents a double matter, hence composes a double mean;[35] recall, for instance, that mean within fear and confidence together forms courage (1115a6–7; 1228a36–37), pleasure and pain, temperance (1117b24–26; 1230b9–10), giving and acquiring, generosity (1120b27–28; 1231b28–29). Concerning gentleness, forgiveness, in the same way as revenge, counts as a possible action to perform, and must be conceived in a positive way (not in a negative one, as absence of anger and revenge), given the fact that the relationship between constitutive elements of each virtue falls under complementariness instead of opposition. If both constituents are to be contributive to the mean and coexisting, therefore they cannot be mutually exclusive; to be more specific, the opposition does not take place between fear and confidence, revenge and forgiveness, and so on, but between excess of fear and defect of fear, excess of anger and defect of anger, etc. Furthermore, the importance of constituents with regards to the mean is unequal: one element gains the priority over the other—confidence in the case of courage (1117a29–33), giving in generosity (1120a9–10), and forgiveness in gentleness (1126a1–2). Admitting this framework[36]

34. The *NE* stresses the perfection of moral virtue: essentially a mean, virtue is also an extreme with regard to what is best and right (1107a5–7; see 1106b22–23, b26–27).

35. Or a synthesis, according to Nicolai Hartmann, *Ethics*, trans. S. Coit, London: Macmillan, 1951, 415 and Harald Schilling, *Das Ethos der Mesotes*.Tübingen: Mohr, 1930, 26.

36. Likewise do (in part) Leighton (2002: 28, 37); Collins (1999: 143); Jacqueline

justifies the naming of the virtue, "gentleness," insofar as the gentle person answers to disdain more eagerly with forgiveness than revenge. Despite the fact that the *Ethics* do not really define this component of gentleness, a few remarks are indirectly made about it, one of them pointing out that "being good–tempered means being untroubled (ἀτάραχος) and not being carried away by the feeling" (1125b33–34 trans. Taylor). It turns out from this passage that the gentle agent, without eliminating the affection at stake, anger (this strategy belongs to the vice of defect), avoids being the victim of her anger by managed it the right way. On the one hand, finding the mean within anger helps the agent not to be overwhelmed by the affection, and thus not to exceed in revenge, leaving on the other hand the possibility for forgiveness to happen.

In order to characterize forgiveness, a trait of gentleness directly related to this action[37] could be useful; the *EE* mentions that the mean between the extremes is "good" or "correct," ἐπιεικής (1231b22). The word ἐπιεικής appears 92 times in the corpus[38] (most of the time in the *Ethics*) and it is closely tied with forgiveness in the second of the common books, where it is stated that:

> What is called judgement, in virtue of which men are said to 'be sympathetic judges' and to 'have judgement,' is the right discrimination of the equitable. This is shown by the fact that we say the equitable man is above all others a man of sympathetic judgement, and identify equity with sympathetic judgement about certain facts. And sympathetic judgement is judgement which discriminates what is equitable and does so correctly. (ἡ δὲ συγγνώμη γνώμη ἐστὶ κριτικὴ τοῦ ἐπιεικοῦς ὀρθή) (1143a19–24 trans. Ross)

Discriminating correctly what is "equitable" or "honest" defines forgiveness; it lies in the capacity of the agent to identify *epieikês*. The first common book sheds light on this notion by drawing a parallel with justice: while justice concerns laws as universal, *epieikeia* concerns decree, for in certain cases it is impossible to lay down a law. In this respect, *epieikeia* is characterized by Aristotle as a correction of the law, insofar as the decree is adapted to the facts (1137b24–33). The equitable agent's task consists in considering a

de Romilly, *La douceur dans la pensée grecque.* Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1979: 194.

37. De Romilly (1979: 192).

38. *Ibid*.

particular situation (while justice bears on the universal), so that the outcome changes from a situation to another (whereas laws applies without variation to all situations).[39] Should the explanation be transferred into the field of gentleness, then forgiveness could partly be understood as the ability to discriminate the particulars, and to adapt the facts, enabling the agent to judge others' deeds and to be comprehensive in face of them. It is worth noting that the periphrasis used by Ross to translate συγγνώμη emphasizes the cognitive nature of the main constituent of gentleness; acts of leniency—forgiving, accommodating, conciliating—fall under intellectual ability, and need *bon sens* to exercise. In addition, the adjective *sympathetic* clarifies the state of mind that the agent must display to forgive a slight directed towards her. Yet the importance of leniency or "sympathetic judgment" specifies the role of the reason in gentleness: notifying the offence to the agent, it also contributes, the anger being felt to the mean, towards forgiving the offence since forgiving arises from a (lenient) judgment (about particulars)—in other words, the agent's intellectual judgment on others is made correct by moral virtue itself, whose synonymous is "equitable" or "honest" (1137a34–1137b2).

Let's sum up the structure of the virtue of gentleness, and show how it fits the doctrine of the mean expressed in the *Ethics*. The affection at stake, anger or *thumos*, happening in a situation where the agent is being undeservedly slighted, is felt and displayed according to the mean within five modalities, Aristotle underlying the difficulty of virtuous anger in the *NE*. The mean being closer to the deficiency than to the excess (1125b27–28, 1126a1–3), right anger gives rise to revenge that stays within correct limits, allowing forgiveness to happen. These complementary actions, both subject to variation, contribute to gentleness according to their importance, in a well–balanced proportion. As a double mean, gentleness supposes the coexistence of the actions at stake: leniency, the main component, delimits the extent of the revenge by its tendency to forgive the offence. A mean within affection and actions, gentleness illustrates the other aspect of virtue by taking place between two extremes—at least in principle, as Aristotle suggests in both outlooks of the moral virtues (1108a4–8; 1220b38), the triadic view illustrating the formula that follows the definition of moral virtue at 1107a2–3 (1222a10). A careful examination of the vices, however, indicates that the formula should be construed as a "shortcut;"

39. Bodéüs (2004: 282n2).

the multiplicity of extremes opposed to a single virtue has to be emphasized, gentleness being one of the most paradigmatic cases in this respect. The many vices of excess face a single vice of defect treated differently by each treatise, at any rate with regard to the naming. In the Eudemian chart (II, 3), the term ἀναλγησία is used to refer to the deficiency, and the term ἀνάλγητος to denote the agent. In the Nicomachean outlook of particular states (II, 7), we found nouns derived from the substantive meaning "anger," the affective component of gentleness, ἀοργησία and ἀόργητος. The Eudemian terminology turns out to be more general than the Nicomachean, since the word *analgesia* denotes insensibility at a general level,[40] while *aorgesia* more specifically refers to lack of anger. The *EE* accordingly describes the agent employing a generic adjective that fits other vices,[41] ἀνδραποδώδης (1231b10, 20, 26; see also 1126a8), whose name is (among others) opposed to virtue (in general) and ἐπιεικής. Despite this global approach, both *Ethics* identify this extreme as a vice of defect, namely the defect of anger (or *thumos*) in every aspect: the agent does not get angry with whom, when and how she ought to (1221a16–17), the *NE* adding the cause (1126a4–6). Such a lack of anger leads to an excess of forgiveness at the expense of revenge, the *EE* pointing out that slavish agents "are not moved to anger even when they ought, but take insults easily and are humble towards contempt" (1231b11–13,trans. Solomon). A vice of defect in regard to anger and revenge, *analgesia/aorgesia* also characterizes as a vice of excess in regard to forgiveness, and therefore conforms to the structure of the extremes: a combination of two simultaneous aspects, hence a double nature.

While the *NE* makes a sharp distinction between vices, establishing that excess is worse than defect and thus more opposed to gentleness (1126a29–32), the *EE* does not come to a normative judgment, treating excess and defect the same way, as two faulty states (1231b20–21; ἡμαρτημέναι ἀμφότεραι αἱ ἕξεις)—the Eudemian content in this respect is rather objective, not mentioning that these states are to be blamed (neither that virtue is to be praised). Another particularity of the *EE* consists in its general view of the vice of excess; all five wrong modalities

40. Y. Nolet de Brauwere, "Les tableaux aristotéliciens des vertus et des vices," in *Mélanges Henri–Grégoire IV*, Annuaire de l'Institut de philologie et d'histoire orientales et slaves.1952, 345–60 at 350.

41. Intemperance is said to be slavish (1118a25), as well as excess opposed to ready wit (1128a21–22).

are ascribed to the same agent: "the irascible[42] is one that feels anger more quickly, to a greater degree, and for a longer time, and when he ought not, and at what he ought not, and frequently" (1231b17–19 trans. Solomon). In addition to lack of forgiveness, the irascible person is misled in regard to anger: she exceeds the time, degree, duration, object (cause) and frequency of this affection. This state of disequilibrium, however, belongs to different agents according to the *NE*, which displays a higher concern about the concrete state of the angry person. In the Nicomachean treatment of gentleness, Aristotle draws up a true typology of the vices of excess depending on which one of the modalities of anger is transgressed the most, so that he ends up with four vices. The description of these excesses follows an important note saying that all these vices are not found in the same person, because evil has a destructive effect, and becomes unbearable if it is complete (1126a11–13). Instead of noticing this difficulty, Aristotle in the *EE* ascribes the integral vice to one agent, disregarding the effect it may produce on the excessive person (1231b17–19). Such an approach shows that the Eudemian perspective aims at displaying the doctrine of the mean rather than applies it to concrete situations, hence showing a theoretical interest in moral virtue, while the *NE* has a more practical concern. In its effort to explain excessive anger, the *NE* counts irascible people first, whose principal trait is to get angry quickly (ὀργίλοι, 1126a13–15; even if their anger ceases quickly); then choleric agents, who commit excess in the degree of anger (ἀκράχολοι, 1126a18–19), sulky ones, in duration (πικροὶ, 1126a19–25), and bad–tempered in object or cause (χαλεποὺς, 1126a26–28; Ross' terminology). The real state of the person experiencing anger is thus taken into account, and although the *EE* includes a similar list, this treatise put the emphasis on the modalities. At II, 3, Aristotle picks up the excess vice opposed to gentleness as an example of the many ways of going wrong in respect to the modalities: the quick–tempered person (ὀξύθυμος) reacts (πάσχειν) sooner than one ought to, the bad tempered and choleric (χαλεπός, θυμώδης), more than she should, the bitter one (πικρός) tends to retain one's anger,

42. The general name of the excessive person (χαλεπὸς) is translated as "cruel" by Kenny (2011: 44–5). This term, however, disadvantageously conveys the idea that the agent enjoys doing evil to others and seeing them suffering without any reason, whereas even in excess, there should be an offense made against the agent that raises the anger. Actually, cruelty would better name a negative or inappropriate passion, like envy (1107a8–15, 1221b18–26), base in itself, and not open to the mean, defect nor excess.

the violent and truculent one (πλήκτης, λοιδορητικὸς) inflicts punishments from anger (1221b12–15; Kenny's terminology). In the *EE*, this enumeration appears in the general account of moral virtue because its purpose lies in the importance of the different modalities in which affections may be felt, not in detailing the account of the excessive vice opposed to gentleness; in other words, the enumeration is used as an example of a general principle according to which the excess takes different forms depending on the modality at stake, intemperance being another multiple excess within the desire for pleasure (the excessive agent could be either gourmand, gourmet, or a drunkard, 1221b15). Moreover, the Eudemian terminology must be underlined: rather than using "get angry," Aristotle picks a general verb (πάσχειν), and twice chooses names derived from *thumos* to mean excessive attitudes, seemingly due to the global perspective he adopts in this treatise. These differences, however, take place within the same structure for the vices: each of them associates two main aspects (is a conjunction of defect and excess), and some in addition are divisible; for instance, there are nine distinct varieties of meanness[43] (excess in taking wealth together with defect in giving, 1121a10–15), depending on which modality of taking or giving the agent does wrong.

III. The Motive of Gentleness

Gentleness, we are told in the *NE*, is difficult and praiseworthy (1109a24–30, 1109b14–16, 1126a32–34, 1126b5); the structural analysis of this particular mean (and its opposed vices) has made this statement more significant. Such complexity and praiseworthiness are actually linked to the general status of moral virtue: besides being a mean (within affections and actions, and between extremes), virtue constitutes in itself an extreme (1107a8), that is to say, a height of perfection, partly due to its delicate achievement, but also to its nobility (or beauty or fineness). The motive of the moral virtues, insofar as it remains the same for each of them, does not count as a modality (like degree, time, duration, etc., whose modalities change in each case), but as a criterion of excellence. Now the treatment of courage includes many references to the nobility of this mean, in both treatises:[44] treatment of temperance, few (1119a18, 1119b16), and treatment of gentleness, none—and

43. If the *EN* and the *EE* are combined, and if these varieties are not simply different kinds of comedy character; see 1121b16 ff. and 1231b10–15.

44. 1115b13, 1115b23, 1116a11–12, 1116b3, 1116b30, 1117a17, 1117b9; 1229a4, 1230a33.

this silence is reflected in literature about this virtue, a gap that we shall now try to fill. We must first consider that fineness of moral virtue belongs to action rather than affection; it is clear from the treatment of courage, where Aristotle repeatedly ascribes beauty to the action of facing the danger (see note 44). In this view, acting for the sake of nobility in the case of gentleness has to do with both revenge and forgiveness. If the nobility and the greatness of courage appear rather clearly—for the agent sacrifices her life in order to act virtuously (1117b10–15)— in circumstances where gentleness is called for, however, beauty is much less obvious to define, for we have to find out what is noble and great in revenge. We should bear in mind that we are looking for a non–instrumental good, which the agent aims at for its own sake,[45] and for an action that displays greatness,[46] making virtue an extreme. Now vengeance flows from anger or *thumos* (1149a30–32); in this respect, taking revenge is not a premeditated act, and even though it harms someone else, it does not constitute an evil deed, because the responsibility of the act of retaliation does not fall onto the vengeful person, but onto who has raised the anger or *thumos* through undeserved slight (1135b26 ff., 1138a21–22). Since anger or *thumos* makes the (virtuous) agent react against an injustice, revenge could be characterized as a just act—an act done out of just anger. Given this, gentleness partly compares to justice[47] (the corrective one): the action at stake, revenge, implies a certain nobility due to a kind of restoration or repair of the harm suffered—to a capacity to defend oneself and the dearest (1126a7–8). Such a way of conceiving revenge appears close enough to the Greek popular morality, which indeed conveys the opinion that harming our enemies is valuable, and pertains to the same moral state that leads us to do good to the friends.[48]

Nevertheless, *thumos* or anger by itself, in quite the same way as *epithumia*, may generate impulsive, akratic and vicious

45. It counts as one of the four conditions of virtuous act; 1105b30 ff.

46. Irwin quoting passages cited by Ross (*Politics* 1326a33, *Topics* 116b21, among others); Terence H. Irwin, "Beauty and Morality in Aristotle," in *Aristotle's* Nicomachean Ethics. *A Critical Guide*, ed. J. Miller. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, 239–53, at 242.

47. Gentleness rather than *thumos* as such; see Pearson (2011: 164n27). But obviously justice in itself does not liken to anger, nor punishment to revenge. See also Curzer (2012: 158–9).

48. Maybe Aristotle himself supports this view; see Gauthier and Jolif (1970: 302), quoting the *Topics* 113a2–5, and Fillion–Lahille (1970: 59) referring to the *Rhetoric* 1367a20. At any rate, Aristotle seems committed to this view when he states that retaliation is a more natural human characteristic (1126a30).

reactions, and these must be avoided by the gentle agent, who is said to be unperturbed and not to be led by passion (1125b34–35), and who is not vengeful, but rather forgiving (1126a2–3). It has been explained that leniency and revenge balance out: hitting the mean within the five parameters of anger prevents the agent from being overwhelmed by her affection (and thus from acting one–sidedly out of anger), and leniency strengthens this attitude by its comprehensive judgment. As a complement to revenge out of just anger and as the main component of gentleness, leniency also displays moral perfection. We might get a clue from the Nicomachean treatment of greatness of soul that would help to ascertain the beauty of forgiveness. Aristotle states, amongst the traits he ascribes to the great–souled person, that "nor he his mindful of wrongs; for it is not the part of a proud man to have a long memory, especially for wrongs, but rather to overlook them" (1125a3–4 trans. Ross). Since the great–souled person's traits actually consist in moral virtues—recall that greatness of soul is the "crown of the virtue, for it makes them greater, and it is not found without them" (1124a1–3 trans. Ross)—the forgiveness she has could be associated with gentleness (as other traits could be matched with courage, generosity or truthfulness). If this parallel is correct, then acts of forgiveness are great because they express indifference towards wrongs, an attitude similar to contempt or despise in the face of slight, as though the gentle person was above such a thing. Should the comparison be pushed to its utmost, it could be held that the beauty of forgiveness is akin to the Socratic paradox, according to which we ought to not render evil for evil to anyone. Aristotle shares with his predecessor a view on injustice: both say that acting unjustly is worse than being unjustly treated[49], chiefly because the former involves vice and is blameworthy. Aristotle mentions this fact about injustice in the closing section of the (common) book devoted to the virtue of justice, without going any further, apparently more moderate in this than Socrates in the *Crito*. At 49c–d, given his principle (that neither injury, nor retaliation, nor warding off evil by evil is ever right), Socrates claims that we ought not to retaliate or render evil for evil to anyone, whatever evil we may have suffered from this person. The leniency of the gentle person could similarly be construed as an Aristotelian version of this paradox, as a warrant that the revenge will not turn into evil—indifference towards slight

49. See 1138a32 (in the first common book), and *Gorgias*, 469 b–c.

preventing the agent from overreacting in her retaliation, and thus from falling into wrongdoing. For sure the gentle person answers (proportionally) to the slight, but to an extent that does not make her a slighter in turn, that avoids acting unjustly—all the more as leniency implies *epieikeia*. Beauty, therefore, lies in the capacity of the gentle agent to keep her distance from the morality of the many. Such a difference may contribute to explain the rarity of gentleness: the ability not to behave like most people do, by achieving a complex equilibrium between common and philosophical morality. But this account of gentleness should not surprise readers of the Aristotelian *Ethics*: to reconcile common view with the philosophical one is the method used throughout ethical matters.

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