

MARIA MARCINKOWSKA-ROSÓŁ

THE CONCEPT OF BRUTISHNESS (*THĒRIOTĒS*)
IN ARISTOTLE'S *NICOMACHEAN ETHICS*

Although Aristotle's ethical theory is focused on the notion of ἀρετή and aims at helping people with already high moral standards in their further development, in Book VII of the *Nicomachean Ethics* we encounter reflections on a mode of existence in which there are no prospects of achieving virtue, and the presence of the elementary capabilities constituting the humanity of an individual is questioned. Aristotle links this state with a special ethical disposition which he refers to as “θηριότης.” The term is created from the noun “θηρίον” (“wild animal,” “beast”) and can be translated as “brutishness,” “bestiality,” “animality,” or “wildness.”¹ In exemplifying this category

Dr Hab. MARIA MARCINKOWSKA-ROSÓŁ—Department of Hellenic Studies, Institute of Classical Philology, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań; address for correspondence: ul. Fredry, 61–701 Poznań; e-mail: marmarro@amu.edu.pl

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¹ In the following, I adopt the translation “brutishness” which was accepted, among others, by ROSS, whose translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* I also use in all quotations from this work below (*Aristotle, Ethica Nicomachea*. In *The Works of Aristotle*, translated into English under the editorship of W.D. Ross (Vol. 9, Oxford: Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1925)). Other translations of the term θηριότης into modern languages are, among others: “brutality” (LSJ, s.v.), “beastliness” (e.g. David C. REEVE, *Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics*, translated with Introduction and notes By David C. Reeve (Indianapolis–Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2014)), “Roheit” (Olof von GIGON, *Aristoteles, Die Nikomachische Ethik: griechisch-deutsch*, übers. von Olof Gigon, neu hrsg. von Robert Nickel, 2. Aufl. (Düsseldorf: Artemis & Winkler, 2007)), “tierisches Wesen” (Franz von DIRLMEIER, *Aristoteles, Nikomachische Ethik*, übersetzt und kommentiert von F. Dirlmeier, 8. Aufl. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1983), “tierische Rohheit” (Eugen ROLFES, *Aristoteles' Nikomachische Ethik*, übersetzt und mit einer Einleitung und erklärenden Anmerkungen versehen von Eugen Rolfes (Leipzig: Verlag von Felix Meiner, 1911)), “bestialité” (e.g. Rene A. GAUTHIER & Jean Y. JOLIF, *L'éthique à Nicomaque*, introd., trad. et commentaire par Rene A. Gauthier et Jean Y. Jolif, t. I, 2^{ème} partie: *Traduction* (Louvain-La-Neuve–Paris–Sterling, Virginia: Éditions Peeters, 2002a)), “bestialstwo” (Daniela GROMSKA, *Arystoteles, Etyka*

(EN VII 5, 1148b20–27), Aristotle invokes a number of pathological, partly drastic behaviours (with the dominant cannibalistic motif—eating human organs or foetuses, sacrificing and consuming the body of one’s own mother etc.), and his statements suggest that these cases are well known to his readers. The theoretical elaboration of the underlying dispositions can be found in three short passages of Book VII: VII 1, 1145a15–33, VII 5, 1148b15–1149a24 and VII 6, 1149b23–1150a8²; the last two, though, are considered to be unclear and relatively difficult to interpret. These texts and the category of brutishness itself—as a problem of marginal importance for the Aristotelian ethics of virtue—have not received much attention in previous studies, therefore both basic and more detailed issues concerning θηριότης have not been convincingly explained.³ The problems raising fundamental doubts or at least requiring significant clarifications are: the very essence of θηριότης understood as a specific ethical disposition, its concrete forms and their possible genesis, the psychological and moral condition of persons affected by the brutish disposition and the problem of moral awareness and responsibility of such persons.

In the following text an attempt will be made to clarify the first three of these questions on the basis of Aristotle’s statements in Chapters VII 5 and 6. In the case of the last question (moral awareness and responsibility), which was not explicitly addressed by Aristotle, a hypothetical solution will be proposed based on the theories and concepts elaborated in other parts of

nikomachejska, translated by Daniela Gromska, in ARYSTOTELES, *Dziela wszystkie*, vol. V (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2000)).

² In addition, this issue is discussed in the *Great Ethics* (and interpreted slightly differently than in EN): II 4, 1200a–b, II 5, 1200b, II 6, 1202a and 1203a. Apart from the Peripatetic School and commentaries on Aristotle’s treatises, the term θηριότης appears very rarely in ancient literature (see Carlo NATALI, *Nicomachean Ethics VII.5–6: Beastliness, Irascibility, akrasia*, in ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics, Book VII, Symposium Aristotelicum*, edited by Carlo Natali (Oxford: University Press, 2010), 105). However, the cultural impact of this imaginative concept is noticeable—it can be found in Dante (*Divine Comedy, Hell*, Song XI, v. 76–90; see John CIARDI, trans., DANTE ALIGHIERI, *The Inferno* (New York: Signet Classics, 1982), ad loc.) and, according to Hankins (John Erskine HANKINS, “Caliban the Bestial Man,” *PMLA* 62 (1947): 797–801), also in Shakespeare.

³ Thorp’s (John THORP, “Aristotle on Brutishness,” *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review* 42 (2003)) article seems to be the only comprehensive study of brutishness; Carlo Natali (*Nicomachean Ethics*) offers a detailed analysis of Chapters VII 5 and 6, while Cooper (John M. COOPER, “Nicomachean Ethics VII.1–2: Introduction, Method, Puzzles,” in ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics, Book VII. Symposium Aristotelicum*, edited by Carlo Natali (Oxford: University Press 2010)) analyses Chapter VII 1; in addition, Curzer (Howard J. CURZER, *Aristotle and the Virtues* (Oxford: University Press), 382–386) presents an important interpretation of θηριότης.

the *Nicomachean Ethics* (EN). These analyses will be preceded by a presentation of preliminary observations on θηριότης made by Aristotle in EN VII 1.

I. PRELIMINARY REMARKS ON θηριότης IN EN VII 1

By introducing the category θηριότης in his deliberations in the first chapter of Book VII of *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle defines it as a negative disposition which is different from both κακία, i.e. moral vice or villainy,⁴ and ἀκρασία, i.e. incontinence, lack of control, consisting in a conflict between a right ethical judgment and passion (EN VII 1, 1145a15–17). However, Aristotle does not explain here which specific features constitute the essence of θηριότης; instead, he tries to explain the category of brutishness by contrasting it with its opposite. While the positive correlate of ethical vice is virtue (ἀρετή), and for akrasia it is continence (ἐγκράτεια), the opposite of brutishness is, as he states, “a superhuman, heroic and divine virtue” (“τὴν ὑπὲρ ἡμᾶς ἀρετὴν, ἥρωικὴν τινα καὶ θεϊαν,” 1145a19–20). We thus have the following preliminary classification:

Positive dispositions	Negative dispositions
ἡ ὑπὲρ ἡμᾶς ἀρετή	θηριότης
ἀρετή	κακία
ἐγκράτεια	ἀκρασία

However, the concept of superhuman virtue⁵ is not explained here, thus the reader has to rely exclusively on single remarks which juxtapose these two barely sketched dispositions. First of all, Aristotle justifies the postulated correlation between brutishness and superhuman virtue by postulating the thesis that both are dispositions that transcend ordinary human vice and virtue, respectively. People seem to become gods (θεοί) by the “excess” of virtue (“δι’ ἀρετῆς ὑπερβολήν,” 1145a23–24), but since gods do not have ἀρετή, this disposition must be a higher or more valuable state than virtue

⁴ This term is used here in the general sense of moral evil.

⁵ For the discussion of this concept and its reception see Rudolf HOFMANN, *Die heroische Tugend: Geschichte und Inhalt eines theologischen Begriffes* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1976), esp. 3–13. Cf. also Rene A. GAUTHIER & Jean Y. JOLIF, *L'éthique*, 2002b, 583f., Howard J. CURZER, *Aristotle*, 115, 127f., William F.R. HARDIE, “‘Magnanimity’ in Aristotle’s Ethics,” *Phronesis* 23 (1978): 72 and the remarks by John M. COOPER (“Nicomachean Ethics”) 18f.

(“τιμιώτερον ἀρετῆς,” 1145a26). Similarly, brutishness is something else than a moral vice (“ἕτερόν τι γένος κακίας,” 1145a27), since also animals (θηρία) —into which, as it follows from this analogy, people having θηριότης might turn—do not have moral virtues and vices.

Secondly, Aristotle compares brutishness to divine virtue due to their frequency in the human population:

ἐπεὶ δὲ σπάνιον καὶ τὸ θεῖον ἄνδρα εἶναι, καθάπερ οἱ Λάκωνες εἰώθασι προσαγορεύειν, <οἷ> ὅταν ἀγασθῶσι σφόδρα του, σεῖος ἀνὴρ φασιν, οὕτω καὶ ὁ θηριώδης ἐν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις σπάνιος· μάλιστα δ’ ἐν τοῖς βαρβάροις ἐστίν, γίνεται δ’ ἔνια καὶ διὰ νόσους καὶ πηρώσεις· καὶ τοὺς διὰ κακίαν δὲ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὑπερβάλλοντας οὕτως ἐπιδυσφημοῦμεν (1145a27–33).

Now, since it is rarely that a godlike man is found—to use the epithet of the Spartans, who when they admire any one highly call him a ‘godlike man’—so too the brutish type is rarely found among men; it is found chiefly among barbarians, but some brutish qualities⁶ are also produced by disease or deformity; and we also call by this evil name those men who go beyond all ordinary standards by reason of vice.

Elaborating on the correspondence between divine virtue and brutishness, Aristotle points in the quoted text to the rarity of both dispositions as another similarity between them; the remark on barbarians⁷ and the etiology of brutishness sheds additional light on this issue, preparing for more detailed arguments on the genesis of θηριότης in Chapter 5.⁸ However, the last sentence from this passage is puzzling and ambiguous: “καὶ τοὺς διὰ κακίαν δὲ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὑπερβάλλοντας οὕτως ἐπιδυσφημοῦμεν” (1145a32–33), as it allows for at least three different interpretations.

⁶ The word “ἔνια” can be understood as an adverb (“niekiedy” [“sometimes”], Daniela GROMSKA, *Aristoteles*) or as an adjective with an implicit noun, e.g. “some brutish qualities” (W. David Ross in the quoted translation), “some cases” (Robert C. BARLETT & Susan D. COLLINS, *Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics*, A new translation by Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins, with an Interpretive Essay, Notes, and Glossary (Chicago–London: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 135), “manche Erscheinungsformen eines tierischen Wesens” (Franz von DIRLMEIER, *Aristoteles*, 141).

⁷ The ethnographic thesis that places the majority of cases of bestiality among barbarians is of course consistent with the typical Greek perception of many non-Hellenic, especially Asian, peoples as primitive, uncivilized, lawless, without social order and morality, i.e. living in a manner similar to animals (Aristotle attributes the inclination to murder and cannibalism (ἀνθρωποφασία) to the tribes inhabiting the Black Sea area also in *Politics* VIII 4, 1338b19–24).

⁸ For the genesis of brutish dispositions given in EN VII 5 and for the relation of this theory to the etiological remarks in EN VII 1, see Section III below.

(1) At first we are inclined to regard it as belonging to the earlier ethnologico-etiological remark—having pointed to barbarian brutishness and brutishness acquired through physiological disorders, Aristotle would mention here another, third type of brutishness, i.e. the disposition consisting in the extreme intensity of a moral vice.⁹ However, distinguishing here between these three types would be very chaotic (as the text discusses first the area of occurrence, then the cause, and only then the nature of brutishness), and an attempt to smooth out this classification would be possible only on the basis of a fairly far-reaching interpretation, i.e. assuming that there is an implicit criterion of this division, for instance the criterion of genesis¹⁰ (e.g. 1. innate brutishness, 2. brutishness acquired due to illness, 3. brutishness acquired due to habituation¹¹) or the criterion of the intensity and scope of brutish dispositions¹² (e.g. 1. full brutishness, 2. brutishness limited to certain spheres deformed by an illness, 3. “lighter” brutishness in the form of an amplified moral vice).

(2) In view of these difficulties, the solution may be to dispense with the thesis that the sentence “καὶ τοὺς διὰ κακίαν δὲ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὑπερβάλλοντας οὕτως ἐπιδυσφημοῦμεν” refers to another type of brutishness. The expression “οὕτως ἐπιδυσφημοῦμεν” seems to suggest that we are talking here only about an additional, non-terminological use of the “θηριώδης”, a linguistic convention to refer to morally very bad people in somewhat exaggerated way as a beast.¹³

⁹ Thus, among others, Gottfried RAMSAUER, *Aristotelis Ethica Nicomachea*, edidit et commentario continuo instruxit Gottfried Ramsauer (Leipzig: Teubner, 1878), 426; Frank H. PETERS, *The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, translated by Frank H. Peters (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1886), 209, Anm.; John A. STEWART, *Notes on the Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, vol. II (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), 118; cf. also William F.R. HARDIE, “‘Magnanimity’ in Aristotle’s Ethics,” *Phronesis* 23 (1978): 72.

¹⁰ Thus Anne BÄUMER, *Die Bestie Mensch: Senecas Aggressionstheorie, ihre philosophischen Vorstufen und ihre literarischen Auswirkungen* (Frankfurt am Main–Bern: Verlag Peter Lang, 1982), 34f.

¹¹ For a criticism of the interpretation seeing in 1145a32–33 a reference to brutish dispositions acquired by habit, see fn. 28 below. By contrast, Bäumer’s (*Die Bestie Mensch*, 34f.) interpretation mentioned in fn. 10 assumes that the causes in 1145a30–33 are respectively: a lower level of culture (barbarians), illness or deformity, or an individual characterological predisposition.

¹² For such typological interpretations, see Section III below.

¹³ Thus Carlo NATALI, *Nicomachean Ethics VII.5–6*, 104; Harris RACKHAM, *Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Harris Rackham (London–Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 367, fn. a; Olof von GIGON, *Aristoteles*, 505; cf. also John BURNET, *The Ethics of Aristotle*, edited with an introduction and notes by John Burnet (London: Methuen & Co., 1900), 290.

(3) The third possible interpretation of the sentence: “καὶ τοὺς διὰ κακίαν δὲ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὑπερβάλλοντας οὕτως ἐπιδυσφημοῦμεν,” is based on the observation that the mentioned “going beyond all ordinary standards (ὑπερβάλλοντας) by reason of vice (διὰ κακίαν)” can be understood not only as achieving the maximum intensity of the vice, but also as achieving a level of evil which already lies beyond the definition of a vice and must be considered a certain new quality. This interpretation comes to mind especially in the light of the earlier claim that divine virtue corresponding to brutishness is attained by ἀρετῆς ὑπερβολή (1145a23–24). On this interpretation, the mention of the occurrence of brutishness among barbarians and of diseases as its possible genesis would only be a side remark explaining the thesis of its rare occurrence, while the sentence 1145a32–33 would constitute an independent statement continuing the discussion of the correspondence of divine virtue and brutishness—just as divine virtue is rare, so is brutishness, and just as divine virtue arises through ὑπερβολή ἀρετῆς, brutishness is a result of ὑπερβολή κακίας. This would mean that the last sentence in the passage on brutishness in EN VII 1 finally provides a more precise definition of the essence of this state, characterizing it as such a moral vice that no longer falls under the definition of a vice, but rather falls under a new category, which is analogous to divine virtue.

Although the latter interpretation may seem the least obvious reading of Aristotle’s statement, it is noteworthy because, in the course of the discussion of brutishness in Chapter 5 of Book VII, there appears a passage that describes the brutish disposition as an excessive (ὑπερβάλλουσα) vice (cowardice, self-indulgence, etc.) (1149a4–12). Thus, the connection with the description in 1145a32–33 seems highly probable; however, the status of this text (1149a4–12), sometimes considered only as another marginal remark, requires closer examination.

II. BRUTISHNESS AS ὑπερβολή κακίας (EN VII 5, 1149a4–12)

The text in Chapter VII 5, 1149a4–12 is part of a longer discussion (VII 4, 1147b20–VII 6, 1150a8) on the connotation of the term “ἀκρατής” in an absolute sense (i.e. without any closer attributes: “ἀπλῶς ἀκρατής”), in particular on the scope of objects or the type of pleasures with which ἀκρασία as such is concerned (1147b20–21; cf. 1146b9–11). In 1147b21–1148b14, preceding the immediate context of the passage under examination,

Aristotle concludes that ἀπλή ἀκρασία means to follow the necessary (ἀναγκαῖα) pleasures, i.e. the corporeal (σωματικά) pleasures arising from the sense of taste and touch (i.e. those related to food and love), contrary to one's decision and judgement (“παρὰ τὴν προαίρεσιν καὶ τὴν διάνοιαν”—a feature distinguishing akrasia from self-indulgence, ἀκολασία); in contrast, exaggerated efforts to find those pleasant things which in themselves are worth choosing (αἰρετὰ καθ' αὐτά, such as victory, reverence, wealth, family) as well as incontinence in respect of anger (θυμός) are not proper referents of the term “akrasia,” but it is applied to them only by analogy (καθ' ὁμοιότητα) and with a specifying addition (κατὰ πρόσθεσιν, e.g. ἀκρασία θυμοῦ, τιμῆς, κέρδους). The argument presented in 1148b15–1149a24 is aimed at further specifying akrasia in the absolute sense; Aristotle wants to limit the scope of its objects to such pleasures of taste and touch which he considers to be natural for the human. To this end, he distinguishes between natural (φύσει) and unnatural pleasures, seeing the origins of the latter in mutilations (“διὰ πηρώσεις”), i.e. physiological deformities, in customs (“δι' ἔθην”) and in “bad natures” (“διὰ μοχθηρὰς φύσεις”), i.e. inherent moral weakness (1148b15–18). He then gives concrete examples of—as he puts it—“the corresponding dispositions” (“παραπλησίας [...] ἕξεις”, 1148b19), which he divides into:

a) brutish dispositions (“θηριώδεις”) (1148b19–24) which—as it can be clearly concluded from the text—correspond to the innate disorders in experiencing pleasures (“διὰ μοχθηρὰς φύσεις”) mentioned in 1148b18; the examples given here are: (1) a woman who ripped up pregnant women and devoured their offspring; (2) some savage tribes on the coasts of the Black Sea who delight in raw meat¹⁴ or in human flesh; (3) other tribes which—in Aristotle's words—“lend their children (τὰ παῖδιά) to one another for a banquet”¹⁵; (4) Phalaris committing (unspecified) depravities¹⁶;

¹⁴ For a discussion on the Greek perception of omophagy as an indication of savagery and civilizational deficiencies, see Charles SEGAL, “The Raw and the Cooked in Greek Literature: Structure, Values, Metaphor,” *The Classical Journal* 69 (1974): 289–308.

¹⁵ According to the standard interpretation, children are “borrowed” to be eaten (see e.g. John THORP, “Aristotle on Brutishness,” 675; Carlo NATALI, *Nicomachean Ethics VII.5–6*, 108; John M. COOPER, “Nicomachean Ethics,” 17; David C. REEVE, *Aristotle*, 121; Rene A. GAUTHIER & Jean Y. JOLIF, *L'éthique*, 2002B, 627; in EN 428.3: “ἵνα ταῦτα κατεσθίωσι”). However, the image of “borrowing to one another” is not quite convincing since it implies a return of the borrowed, killed and consumed child which could only mean that another, foreign child was delivered to the parents as an equivalent of the consumed one (just as we give back an equal amount of borrowed and consumed meal or sugar), and this is hard to imagine as a general custom. Perhaps, as Rackham (*Aristotle*, 402, fn. 2) suggests, we should read ἐπανάζειν (“bring to the feast as own contribution”)

(b) dispositions acquired as a result of disease (“διὰ νόσους”), including mental illness (“διὰ μανίαν”) (1148b25–27)—they seem to correspond to the previously mentioned experience of unnatural pleasures due to “mutilations” (“διὰ πηρώσεις,” 1148b17); examples include here (5) a man who sacrificed and ate his mother, (6) and a slave who ate the liver of his fellow;

c) morbid dispositions acquired by habit (“ἐξ ἔθους”¹⁷) (1148b27–31) which correspond to unnatural pleasures experienced as a result of certain customs (“δι’ ἔθου,” 1148b17); e.g. (7) pathological plucking out the hair (trichotillomania); (8) nail biting (onychophagy); (9) eating cinders, earth

instead of δανείζειν. Alternatively, and more probably, the children were “borrowed for a feast” not to be eaten, but for erotic purposes; in this case, there would be a clear sense of and reason for “borrowing” them: they would be exchanged between families to avoid incestuous relationships. (An anonymous reviewer pointed out that the verb χράω should have been expected then; but this verb would not transmit the idea of exchanging children between families). In this case, the phrase τοὺς μὲν ὠμοῖς τοὺς δὲ ἀνθρώπων κρέασιν [sc. χαίρειν], τοὺς δὲ τὰ παῖδια δανείζειν ἀλλήλοισι εἰς εὐωχίαν (1148b22–24) would mention two types of brutish behaviours, one related to culinary, the other to sexual pleasures.

¹⁶ Phalaris, the tyrant of Syracuse in the 6th century BC. Today, he is associated mainly with inhuman cruelty, especially with the famous bronze bull used as an instrument of torture; according to some researchers, Aristotle refers here to this very part of his legendary biography (cf. John BURNET, *The Ethics*, 311; Franz von DIRLMEIER, *Aristoteles*, 485 ad 151,2; David W. ROSS & Lesley BROWN, *Aristotle, The Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by W. David Ross, revised with an Introduction and Notes by Lesley Brown (Oxford: University Press, 2009), 248). However, the context of the passage outlined above requires an example of the unnatural pleasure of sensory experience; indeed, further in the text Aristotle actually attributes to Phalaris cannibalism and unnatural sexual practices (1149a13–15); hence it seems likely that he has them in mind here also (thus, e.g., Hippocrates G. APOSTLE, *Aristotle, The Nicomachean Ethics*, translated with commentaries and glossary by Hippocrates G. Apostle (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1980), 304, fn. 13). For a discussion of this controversy, see also John THORP, “Aristotle on Brutishness,” 675.

¹⁷ The phrase 1148b27 “αἱ δὲ νοσηματώδεις ἐξ ἔθους” (thus Laurentianus and, among others, W. David ROSS, *Aristotle* and Harris RACKHAM, *Aristotle*; while other manuscripts and scholars such as Immanuel BEKKER, *Aristoteles Graece ex recensione Immanuelis Bekkeri*, editio Academia Regia Borussica, vol. II (Berolini: Apud Georgium Reimerum, 1831), Ingram BYWATER, *Aristotelis Ethica Nicomachea*, edited by Ingram Bywater (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894) and Carlo Natali (*Nicomachean Ethics VII.5–6*) read “αἱ δὲ νοσηματώδεις ἢ ἐξ ἔθους”) is difficult to understand and sometimes emended (“ἢ <φύσει ἢ> ἐξ ἔθους”, following Rassow, among others, Franz SUSEMIHL & Otto APELT, *Aristoteles, Ethica Nicomachea*, recognovit Franz Susemihl; editio altera, curavit Otto Apelt (Leipzig: Teubner, 1903) and Olof von GIGON, *Aristoteles*). I interpret it as introducing the second type of morbid states, i.e. those resulting from a habit or custom (in accordance with the meaning of the expression “ὅσοι νοσηματώδως ἔχουσι δι’ ἔθου” in 1148b33–34). Cf. the short discussion in Natali (*Nicomachean Ethics VII.5–6*, 109n.), who shares this view. For different approaches, see John BURNET, *The Ethics*, 312, ad loc., John A. STEWART, *Notes on the Nicomachean Ethics*, 180, Gottfried RAMSAUER, *Aristotelis Ethica Nicomachea*, 453f., ad loc.

etc. (*pica*); (10) homosexual contacts practiced by men who have been abused from childhood (“ἐκ παίδων”).¹⁸

The subsequent passage 1148b34–1149a20, regarded as unclear and chaotic, turns out to be quite transparent if we keep in mind that the purpose of the argument is to exclude incontinence in respect of unnatural pleasure from the area of ἀπλή ἀκρασία.¹⁹ Aristotle proceeds in the following way:

- 1148b34–1149a1: he declares that the dispositions to experience unnatural pleasures illustrated in 1148b19–31 do not fall under the category of moral vice (“ἔξω τῶν ὄρων ἐστὶ τῆς κακίας”)²⁰;
- 1149a1–4: he states that in the cases where such dispositions do not have a status comparable to that of an ethical vice (i.e. they are not permanently founded in the moral character of a person), but the person either masters them or succumbs to them (“κρατεῖν ἢ κρατεῖσθαι”), as is the case in ἐγκράτεια or ἀκρασία, one should not simply speak of *akrasia* (“ἡ ἀπλή ἀκρασία”), but only of some analogy to it (“ἡ καθ’ ὁμοιότητα sc. ἀκρασία”), similarly to the already discussed ἀκρασία θυμοῦ.

Aristotle could basically stop at this statement, but, as the continuation shows, he wants to introduce a more precise terminology for the subtype of the “*akrasia* by analogy” which refers to unnatural pleasures—probably in order to emphasize its distinctness from the “*akrasia* by analogy” with respect to anger or objects worth choosing by themselves. For this purpose, he uses another analogy:

- 1149a4–12: he states that every excessive (“ὑπερβάλλουσα”) vice (e.g. cowardice, thoughtlessness, self-indulgence or harshness)—i.e. not ordinary human villainy (cf. “ἡ [...] κατ’ ἄνθρωπον [...] μοχθηρία,” 1149a16–17), but

¹⁸ In the controversial sentence following this example (1148b31–34), Aristotle compares those whose disposition is caused by nature (“ἔσοις μὲν οὖν φύσις ὀπίουσιν”) to women who “οὐκ ὀπίουσιν ἀλλ’ ὀπίονται” (cf. transl. by Robert C. BARLETT & Susan D. COLLINS, *Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics*, 146: “are passive rather than active in marital relations”) in order to show that they do not deserve to be called akratic. It thus clearly refers to the homosexual relations mentioned in 1148b29, not to all the previously mentioned examples (for a discussion of this controversy, cf. NATALI, *Nicomachean Ethics VII.5–6*, 110). In addition, this remark suggests that Aristotle refers in 1148b29 not to all homosexual contacts, but rather specifically to passive homosexuality, i.e. the tendency of an adult man to take on the role of a patient; cf. Ps.-Arist., *Probl.* IV 26 and Thorp (“Aristotle on Brutishness,” 676f.). As Natali (*Nicomachean Ethics VII.5–6*, 110) rightly points out, the sentence in 1148b31–34 also serves as a bridge to the ensuing discussion on the classification of all the dispositions listed.

¹⁹ Cf. the conclusion in 1149a21–24 and a more detailed summary in 1149b23–1150a8 (in particular 1149b25–31).

²⁰ Cf. “ἕτερόν τι γένος κακίας” in VII 1, 1145a27.

its analogon that requires a specifying addition (cf. “ἢ [...] κατὰ πρόσθεσιν sc. μοχθηρία,” 1149a17)—is either brutish (θηριώδης), i.e. innate, or morbid (νοσηματώδης), i.e. acquired as a result of a disease;

- 1149a12–20: he proposes a similar distinction for the “akrasia by analogy” concerning unnatural pleasures, namely a distinction between brutish akrasia (θηριώδης), i.e. innate, and morbid akrasia (νοσηματώδης), i.e. acquired as a result of a disease.

As it can be seen from the above argument, the passage 1149a4–12 is not the main point of Aristotle’s deliberations in VII 5, but only a means to introduce the concepts of brutish and morbid akrasia. However, regardless of its ancillary function, it contains interesting information, the interpretation of which might be crucial for the understanding of the Aristotelian category of θηριότης. Thus it is worth examining more closely:

πᾶσα γὰρ ὑπερβάλλουσα καὶ ἀφροσύνη καὶ δειλία καὶ ἀκολασία καὶ χαλεπότης αἱ μὲν θηριώδεις αἱ δὲ νοσηματώδεις εἰσίν· ὁ μὲν γὰρ φύσει τοιοῦτος οἷος δεδιέναι πάντα, κἂν ψοφήσῃ μῦς, θηριώδη δειλίαν δειλός, ὁ δὲ τὴν γαλῆν ἐδεδειε διὰ νόσον· καὶ τῶν ἀφρόνων οἱ μὲν ἐκ φύσεως ἀλόγιστοι καὶ μόνον τῇ αἰσθήσει ζῶντες θηριώδεις, ὥσπερ ἔνια γένη τῶν πόρρω βαρβάρων, οἱ δὲ διὰ νόσους, οἷον τὰς ἐπιληπτικάς, ἢ μανίας νοσηματώδεις (1149a4–12).

For every excessive state whether of folly, of cowardice, of self-indulgence, or of bad temper, is either brutish or morbid; the man who is by nature apt to fear everything, even the squeak of a mouse, is cowardly with a brutish cowardice, while the man who feared a weasel did so in consequence of disease; and of foolish people those who by nature are thoughtless and live by their senses alone are brutish, like some races of the distant barbarians, while those who are so as a result of disease (e.g. of epilepsy) or of madness are morbid.

The question of what an excess of vice—examples of which are mentioned here—is, can be answered *prima facie* in three different ways (which, as it can easily be seen, correspond to the above mentioned ways of understanding the statement from Chapter VII 1, 1145a32–33):

- 1) ὑπερβολή of vice is one of the types of θηριότης, secondary to θηριότης *par excellence*, discussed in 1148b19–24 (or 1148b19–1149a1 if, in accordance with the more loose terminology of Chapter VII 1, we include in θηριότης also the dispositions described in VII 5 as morbid), and differing from it in that it is limited to a selected sphere of personality (e.g. brutish cowardice, self-indulgence, etc.);

- 2) ὑπερβολή of vice is a case that in principle does not fall under the category of θηριότης, but is thus defined due to linguistic convention or metaphorically;

3) ὑπερβολή of vice is the essence of θηριότης, in other words—brutishness is a disposition characterized by such an extreme intensity of villainy that it is no longer within its scope.

Interpretation (2)²¹ is a result of the analogous interpretation of passage VII 1, 1145a32–33, which shows some similarity to 1149a4–12. However, nothing in 1149a4–12 (or in the whole of Chapter VII 5) suggests such a direction of interpretation; it is even undermined by the fact that Aristotle bases his postulate of distinguishing between brutish and morbid akrasia, on the one hand, and akrasia as such, on the other, on the terminological distinctions made in 1149a4–12—it thus seems unlikely that the argument is built on the non-terminological and secondary use of the word θηριότης (or θηριώδης).

Therefore, only interpretations (1) and (3) remain to be examined. The statements about brutishness preceding 1149a4 might give the reader an image of a raging beast, a completely twisted personality capable of terrifying acts such as murder and cannibalism, while the text in 1149a4–12 illustrates a brutish vice with an example of a person who was afraid of a weasel—obviously, a person who manifests cowardice of this kind does not fall under this image. This discrepancy seems to suggest interpretation (1), which distinguishes θηριότης *par excellence* from excessive moral vice.

On the other hand, however, it turns out that this distinction encounters several important difficulties. Firstly, the excessive thoughtlessness (ὑπερβολή ἀφροσύνης), mentioned among the brutish vices (1149a9–12), is explained as a complete lack of reason, implying a limitation of cognitive capability to sensory perception (“ἀλόγιστοι καὶ μόνον τῆ αἰσθήσει ζῶντες”)—it is thus not a deformation of a narrow section of personality, but a general state very close to the image of the beast, which we associate with θηριότης *par excellence* (and this state, like the latter, is also attributed to certain barbaric peoples). On the other hand, among the examples of dispositions that would be considered as illustrations of θηριότης *par excellence* (1148b19–24), we can find, for example, consumption of raw meat—an act that is not a stronger indication of an animalistic personality than, e.g., the irrational fear of “everything” which exemplifies the exaggerated vice. Besides, lightness and limitation to the narrow sphere of personality is characteristic of the examples of morbid dispositions, falling under θηριότης in the broader sense of the term (known to us from VII 1): eating earth and cinders, nail biting,

²¹ Its main supporter is Natali (*Nicomachean Ethics VII.5–6*, 112 and 113).

homosexuality—of which it can hardly be said that they transform a person into a beast. This problem leads us to the third, more general difficulty—what would θηριότης *par excellence* be if we distinguished it from the brutish intensity of moral and intellectual shortcomings? Aristotle’s statements in EN VII 1 and examples of brutish behaviour given in 1148b19–1149a1 do not allow for formulating any convincing definition of this state. The reason for this difficulty becomes clear when we realize that what connects all the brutish behaviours listed in 1148b19–1149a1, which are supposed to illustrate θηριότης *par excellence*, is not a manifestation of the personality of a raging beast, but the fact that as examples of degeneration in the area of sensory pleasures, they fall under the concept of brutish self-indulgence (ἀκολασία), which is listed among the excessive vices in 1149a5–6.²² Indeed, if we were to try to give examples of brutish and morbid ὑπερβάλλουσα ἀκολασία, comparable to the Aristotelian examples for ὑπερβάλλουσα ἀφροσύνη and δειλία in 1149a7–12, they would have to be behaviours of the same type as the cases described in 1148b19–1149a1—the search for sensory pleasure in the areas which, in the eyes of the civilized Greek society, are definitely excluded from the scope of the objects giving ἡδονή.

Therefore, it turns out that the most convincing answer to the question about the meaning of the excessive vice discussed in 1149a4–12 is interpretation (3) which sees in it the essence of the disposition described by Aristotle as θηριότης. Whereas the heroic virtue juxtaposed with it in EN VII 1 is ἀρετῆς ὑπερβολή—a state exceeding ordinary virtue (1145a23–24), brutishness is κακίας ὑπερβολή—a disposition situated outside of moral or intellectual vice. The terminological correspondence between 1149a5 (“ὑπερβάλλουσα”) and 1145a32–33 (“καὶ τοὺς διὰ κακίαν δὲ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὑπερβάλλοντας οὕτως ἐπιδυσφημοῦμεν”)²³ seems to suggest that also the latter text refers not just to one of the types of θηριότης or to the non-terminological use of the word “θηριώδης,” but—in line with the third type of interpretation of this sentence discussed above (see above, part I)—to the very essence of the phenomenon of brutishness.

²² Thus, implicitly, also Howard J. CURZER, *Aristotle*, 69, fn. 6. In contrast to this approach, some researchers influenced by the examples in 1148b19ff. reduce the category of θηριότης to brutish self-indulgence; cf. Hofmann (*Die heroische Tugend*, 12), who defines θηριότης as “eine vollkommen verkehrte und widernatürliche Stellungnahme zu den Sinnengenüssen (...), so daß diese—zum Teil in gänzlich widersinniger Einschätzung—das einzig leitende Motiv für das menschliche Tun darstellen.”

²³ This correspondence and the thesis based on it, i.e. that both texts concern the same issue, are accepted by, *inter alia*, Natali (*Nicomachean Ethics VII.5–6*, 112) and Burnet (*The Ethics*, 312).

III. THE TYPOLOGY AND ETIOLOGY OF BRUTISH DISPOSITIONS

Before we attempt to characterize θηριότης in a more detailed way under its psychological and moral aspect (Section IV) we should systematize the information about the forms and genesis of brutish dispositions in Chapters VII 1 and VII 5. If we accept the definition of θηριότης as an excessive vice proposed above, it will turn out that, first of all, we can distinguish within it two main types: ὑπερβολή of moral vice and ὑπερβολή of intellectual vice, analogously to the well-known division of virtues (and the parallel division of vices) into ethical and dianoetic (EN I 13). The first category includes those listed in 1149a5–6: excessive cowardice (δειλία), self-indulgence (ἀκολασία) and harshness (χαλεπότης),²⁴ which probably should be treated as the most representative forms of brutish dispositions, although they do not exhaust this category. The content of the second category is slightly more problematic because the example of brutish ἀφροσύνη given in 1149a5 is so broad and radical (total absence of reason) that in principle it does not allow for the existence of other intellectual distortions of equivalent intensity, except for some weaker forms of intellectual impairments, about which there is no certainty whether they would already fall into the category of brutish vices.

However, this is not the end of Aristotle's typology of brutish dispositions. As we have seen above, in EN VII 5 Aristotle distinguishes brutish akrasia from θηριότης as an excessive vice (1149a12–20), but akrasia is used here only in an analogous sense (καθ' ὁμοιότητα, 1149a3). Its positive counterpart consists in restraining the desires to experience unnatural pleasures—a disposition that Aristotle recognizes (1149a2) and even illustrates with a purely hypothetical example of Phalaris restraining the desire to eat a child or the desire for unnatural corporeal pleasure (1149a12–15).²⁵ For obvious

²⁴ ὑπερβάλλουσα χαλεπότης (probably resulting in inhumane cruelty) is ὑπερβολή of the vice of anger (to be precise, one of its types, see EN IV 5, 1126a26–28), standing in opposition to gentleness (πραότης).

²⁵ The fact that Aristotle evokes here the attitude of Phalaris as an example of mastering brutish desires, although he was earlier described as having “ordinary” brutish disposition (1148b24), has caused a lot of confusion among researchers; for instance, Burnet (*The Ethics*, 313) excludes his name from the text, postulating that it was added by a copyist who did not understand the subjectless use of the verb “κατεῖχεν”; Gauthier & Jolif (*L'éthique*, 2002b, 630) find this hypothesis plausible. However, contrary to the view of many translators and interpreters, the phrase “λέγω δὲ οἷον εἰ” in the sentence “λέγω δὲ οἷον εἰ Φάλαρις κατεῖχεν ἐπιθυμῶν παιδίου φαγεῖν ἢ πρὸς ἀφροδισίων ἄτοπον ἠδονὴν [...]” (1149a13–15) introduces a hypothetical situation (“I mean, for example, if

reasons, Aristotle does not describe this disposition as “ἡ θηριώδης ἐγκράτεια”²⁶—for working purposes we can use a provisional formula “ἡ τῶν θηριωδῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν ἐγκράτεια.” Eventually, the six-element classification of dispositions presented in VII 1 can be extended by two further elements on the basis of VII 5:

Positive dispositions	Negative dispositions
ἡ ὑπὲρ ἡμᾶς ἀρετή	θηριότης
ἀρετή	κακία
ἐγκράτεια	ἀκρασία
ἡ τῶν θηριωδῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν ἐγκράτεια	ἡ θηριώδης ἀκρασία

However, this classification would require further clarification, since within the dispositions related to unnatural pleasure Chapter VII 5 introduces a terminological distinction between brutish dispositions in the strict sense (θηριώδεις) and morbid dispositions (νοσηματώδεις). The first type refers to the already mentioned innate dispositions (“φύσει,” 1149a7; “ἐκ φύσεως,” 1149a9), and the second to dispositions acquired as a result of illness (“διὰ νόσου [...] καὶ διὰ μανίαν,” 1148b25; “διὰ νόσον,” 1149a9; “διὰ νόσου, οἷον τὰς ἐπιληπτικὰς, ἢ μανίας,” 1149a11–12) or by habit (“ἐξ ἔθους,” 1148b27, 30; “νοσηματώδως ἔχουσι δι’ ἔθος,” 1148b33–34).²⁷ In Chapter VII 1 (cf. above, Section I), Aristotle briefly mentions a classification of the genesis of brutish dispositions which is similar but somewhat simplified (as it lacks the last segment, i.e. habitual dispositions)²⁸—speaking of the

a Phalaris had restrained his appetite [...],” as Martin OSTWALD, *Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics*, translated, with introduction and notes, by Martin Ostwald (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill Educational Publishing, 1962), 190) rightly translates, as opposed to e.g. Gromska (*Arystoteles*, 220) whose Polish rendition states: “[...] przykładem Falaris, który pohamował żądze [...]”—[lit. ‘by the example of Phalaris, who restrained his desire’]. The function of the text in 1149a13–16 is only to illustrate a theoretical situation in which the brutish tendencies could have been tamed, and the already mentioned (1148b25) Phalaris is only the easiest example to invoke (the only person called earlier by name). This issue is also important for the problem of the moral responsibility of the man-beast, as discussed in fn. 78.

²⁶ Cf. Howard J. CURZER, *Aristotle*, 383: “the brutishly continent.”

²⁷ For the allocation of habitual dispositions to the category of morbid dispositions, see fn. 17 above.

²⁸ Some researchers believe that the reference to dispositions acquired as a result of habits appears in the reference to barbarian brutishness (Carlo NATALI, *Nicomachean Ethics VII.5–6*, 107), while others (Frank H. PETERS, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 209, Anm.; John A. STEWART, *Notes on the Nicomachean Ethics*, 118; John THORP, “Aristotle on Brutishness,” 678) prefer to see it in the

presence of θηριότης among barbarians he probably means the innate form,²⁹ next to which he also distinguishes a form acquired “διὰ νόσους καὶ πηρώσεις” (1145a31–32).

It has already been shown above (Section II) that these three types of brutish dispositions are matched by three types of unnatural pleasure listed in 1148b15–18. They are a result of natural deficiencies (“διὰ μοχθηρὰς φύσεις”), mutilation, i.e. diseases (“διὰ πηρώσεις”), and customs (“δι’ ἔθη”).

At this point, two important issues require clarification. Since Aristotle does not specify the particular types of disposition (whether it is a brutish akrasia or continence, or an excessive ethical vice or, finally, an excessive intellectual vice) while discussing these three types of pleasure (1148b15–18) and the corresponding brutish, morbid and habitual dispositions (1148b19–31), the question arises, firstly, whether the division of pleasures is relevant to all types of brutish dispositions (akrasia, continence, ethical and intellectual vice), and, secondly, whether all these types of dispositions can be habitual (1149a4–20 mentions, as we saw, only brutish and morbid akrasia and vices), i.e. whether there are habitual forms of morbid akrasia and excessive vice.

If we recognise the above postulated definition of θηριότης as an excessive ethical or intellectual vice, the first question does not present any major difficulties: the division of pleasures is then relevant only to that vice which consists in experiencing unnatural pleasures, i.e. to brutish self-indulgence (ἀκολασία), as well as to brutish akrasia and control over brutish desires. Obviously, other ethical brutish (or brutish and morbid) vices are—just as all ethical vices and virtues—connected in various ways with pleasures and

sentence about “men who go beyond all ordinary standards by reason of vice” (1145a32–33). As for the first interpretation, cf. the next footnote; the second interpretation, referring to the Aristotelian thesis that the way of acquiring a vice is by habit, is possible only when the correspondence between 1145a32–33 and 1149a4–12 is negated, since 1149a4–12 acknowledges nature or disease as the genesis of excessive vices.

²⁹ Natali (*Nicomachean Ethics VII.5–6*, 107) is of a different opinion and considers the brutishness of barbarians mentioned in 1145a30–31 an acquired disposition and associates it with the degeneration of the feeling of pleasure under the influence of customs as mentioned in 1148b17–18. This problem can be captured by the question: Does Aristotle explain the (allegedly) more frequent cases of brutishness among barbarians, as compared with Greeks, with the civilizational level of these peoples, or do the more frequent cases of brutishness and the lower civilizational level result, according to him, from the innate deficits of these peoples? The latter approach (which is in line with the proposed interpretation of 1145a30–31) seems to be supported, among others, by the well-known paragraphs from *Politics*: III 9, 1285a19–21 and VII 6, 1327b23–27.

pains, but these are not the unnatural pleasures of the sense of touch and taste referred to in 1148b15–18.³⁰

The second question, which boils down to the question which of the specific morbid dispositions can be developed as a result of habit, is much more difficult because the very concept of a brutish disposition resulting from “ἐξ ἔθους” does not receive sufficient explanation in VII 5. The examples listed in 1148b27–29 (including, as mentioned above, trichotillomania, onychophagy, pica, and passive homosexuality) illustrate, as all other examples in 1148b19–29, only excessive self-indulgence. But since such inclinations can certainly coexist with legitimate beliefs and since conscious (and sometimes effective) efforts to quit addictions, such as nail biting, must have been known to Aristotle, there is certainly also a place for these inclinations within brutish *akrasia* and control of brutish desires. However, is it possible to acquire the other brutish vices—such as cowardice, harshness or thoughtlessness or mindlessness that were mentioned in the text—under the influence of habits? It does not seem to be possible in the case of brutish ἀφοροσύνη. As to the ethical vices, we acquire them by repeatedly performing a certain inappropriate behaviour³¹; therefore, it might be supposed that also the brutish ethical vices can be acquired simply by repeatedly performing the brutish acts. However, the contemporary reader will probably not agree with the approach that the real reason for morbid timidity acquired due to a habit (Aristotle might possibly include here e.g. compulsive checking to see if the door is locked) or the actual reason for morbid extravagance (e.g. in form of compulsive shopping), is just a repetition of these acts (this assumption seems to be psychologically doubtful also in the case of trichotillomania, onychophagy and pica). Hence (following the *principle of charity*) the question of the existence of habitual forms of brutish vices other than the explicitly mentioned self-indulgence will be left open.

Ultimately, the answer to the question about the types and causes of brutish dispositions would be as follows:

³⁰ For a discussion of the link between virtues and pleasure or sorrow, see EN II 3.

³¹ See EN II 1 and 4.

Types of brutish dispositions (θηριώδεις) in a wider sense)	Etiology		Innate form (θηριώδης—brutish in a narrower sense)		Acquired form (νοσηματώδης—morbid)	
					as a result of illness (especially mental illness) or physiological deformity	as a result of habit
(1) ὑπερβολή of ethical vice	(1.1) of cowardice	(1.1a) [fear of “everything”]	(1.1b) [fear of a weasel]	?		
	(1.2) of self-indulgence	(1.2a) [devouring human foetuses; omophagy, cannibalism and paedophilia among barbarians; Phalaris] ³²	(1.2b) [sacrificing and eating one’s mother; eating the liver of a fellow]	(1.2c) [trichotillomania, onychophagy, pica, passive homosexuality ³³]		
	(1.3) of harshness	(1.3a)	(1.3b)	?		
(2) ὑπερβολή of intellectual vices	(2.1) of thoughtlessness	(2.1a) [innate lack of reason]	(2.1b) [intellectual disability due to epilepsy or madness]	—		
(3) brutish akrasia (ἡ θηριώδης ἀκρασία)		(3a)	(3b) ³⁴	(3c)		
(4) control (ἐγκράτεια) over unnatural desires		(4a)	(4b)	(4c)		

IV. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND MORAL DETERMINANTS OF BRUTISH DISPOSITIONS

Understanding the essence of the brutish dispositions listed above (brutishness in the sense of an excessive ethical or intellectual vice, brutish akrasia

³² Probably the innate form of passive homosexuality mentioned in 1148b29 should also be include here (cf. the next fn.).

³³ In the sense specified above, see fn. 18.

³⁴ Contemporary neurological research seems to support Aristotle’s thesis that the brutish forms of akrasia may be of physiological origin, see e.g. *Archives of Neurology* 60 (2003): 437–440.

and control over brutish desires) requires capturing the specific mental and moral condition of the people affected by them, i.e. identifying all those qualities that distinguish brutish dispositions from ordinary vice, *akrasia* and continence. Before we attempt at reconstructing such a description on the basis of Aristotle's few relevant statements, let us recall that the basic Aristotelian ethical category, i.e. ethical virtue in the proper sense is defined as ἔξις προαιρετική and implies not only—as innate virtues do—a proper measure in experiencing passion (i.e. an affective reaction adequate to the situation), but also an accurate ethical judgment, which determines this measure. On the other hand, an accurate ethical judgment regarding a particular situation depends on the correct interpretation of the general principle (ἀρχή) defining the goal of the action, i.e. the good (in contemporary terms: the superior value that should guide the action).³⁵ This means that the complete characterization of brutish dispositions should take into account three aspects: the sphere of desires and emotions, the knowledge of the superior principle of action and the ability to make a right ethical judgment about the action in a specific situation. It should be remembered that all the definitions that characterize ethical dispositions in these three areas are only approximate; consequently, they obviously do not reflect all the nuances and facets of human morality, but they provide a convenient tool for their description at the general level.

We shall start with a brief description of ordinary vice and *akrasia*, which Aristotle distinguishes from θηριότης at the very beginning of his discussion on brutishness (EN VII 1, 1145a15–17). The essence of incontinence is the conflict between a right ethical judgement (ὁ ὀρθὸς λόγος)³⁶ and passion (πάθος): an akratic is not able to be guided in his actions by a decision taken on the basis of a right judgement of the situation (προαίρεσις)³⁷, because he is overcome³⁸ by a desire (ἐπιθυμία)³⁹ that contradicts it; however, he distin-

³⁵ Virtue as ἔξις προαιρετική: EN II 6, 1106b36 and VI 2, 1139a22–23; virtue as due measure in experiencing emotions: EN II 6–9; innate virtues: EN VI 13, 1144b1–17; the proper virtue as not only κατὰ τὸν ὀρθὸν λόγον, but also μετὰ τοῦ ὀρθοῦ λόγου: EN VI 13, 1144b16–28; ethical principle defining the ultimate goal of the action: EN VI 12, 1444a31–33 and VII 8, 1151a16–17; ethical principle understandable only to a virtuous person: EN VII 8, 1151a17–19; VI 12, 1144a34; I 4, 1095b4–8.

³⁶ For a discussion of ὀρθὸς λόγος, see EN VI 1, 1138b18–25 and VI 13, 1144b21–30.

³⁷ For προαίρεσις, see EN III 2–3, VI 2.

³⁸ Aristotle addresses the question of what happens to the ethical knowledge of a man at the moment of his akratic behaviour in greater detail in EN VII 3, 1146b8–1147b19.

³⁹ EN VII 3, 1147b2–3; VII 8, 1151a11–13 and 1151a20–24.

guishes between right and wrong actions, because the principle of action (*ἀρχή*)—as Aristotle puts it—remains intact (“σώζεται”⁴⁰) in his case, and therefore he correctly grasps the ultimate goal of the action. In contrast, an ethical vice is a permanent disposition leading to the same mistaken behaviour but consisting in the degeneration of not only desire and emotion (experiencing passion of improper intensity, at the wrong time, towards the wrong people etc.), but also of ethical understanding: a vicious person is not able to make an accurate judgement about the correct behaviour in a given situation, because the highest principles of action are degenerated in her⁴¹; consequently, she possesses erroneous ethical beliefs on the basis of which she makes morally incorrect decisions and acts in accordance with them.⁴²

In Chapter VII 5, Aristotle gives important information on desires and emotions of people affected by brutish dispositions, and specifically—according to the interpretation proposed above—by brutish self-indulgence (1148b19–31): he attributes to them unnatural desires that are innate or result from a disease or a habit (1148b15–19). Aristotle does not formulate a definition of unnatural desires; he only separates them from desires which are natural either “simply” (“ἀπλῶς”) or “by species” (“κατὰ γένη καὶ ζῶων καὶ ἀνθρώπων”). This implies that in addition to general natural desires, such as the desire to satisfy hunger, there are species-specific natural desires which may be unnatural to another species (e.g. the desire to consume raw meat or human flesh). All examples of brutish self-indulgent behaviours listed in 1148b19–31 consist in satisfying a desire which is not so much too intense, as directed at a wrong object, i.e. at something which is not the proper object of natural sensory pleasure either generally (as probably in the cases of trichotillomania, onychophagy, pica, passive homosexuality and paedophilia), or specifically for human beings (cannibalism, omophagy). On the other hand, while recalling the division of desires into natural and unnatural in the summary of the discussion on the meaning and the range of objects of *ἀπλῆ ἀκρασία* in EN VII 6, 1149b23ff., Aristotle refers to natural desires as “φυσικαὶ καὶ τῷ γένει καὶ τῷ μεγέθει” (1149b28–29), from which

⁴⁰ EN VII 8, 1151a24–25.

⁴¹ EN VI 5, 1140b13–20; VI 12, 1144a29–b1; VII 8, 1151a14–16.

⁴² The traditional approach to ethical vice adopted here, according to which the vicious person's action is guided by an erroneous (degenerate) ethical principle, was recently challenged by Müller (Jozef MÜLLER, “Aristotle on Vice,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 23 (2015): 459–477). Basing mainly on EN IX 4, 1166b6–25 (without discriminating between wicked people and οἱ πολλοί), he denies that a vicious person is guided by a stable principle of action and attributes to him internal conflicts, similar to those found in an akratic.

it follows that a simple intensification of natural desires may also, after exceeding a certain measure (“τῷ μεγέθει”), lead to their transition into the category of unnatural desires.

Since, according to Aristotle, *akrasia* and continence concern the same objects as self-indulgence (ἀκολασία) and temperance (σωφροσύνη),⁴³ people characterized by brutish *akrasia* and continence will possess the same desires which are present in persons affected by brutish self-indulgence. Thus, the difference between them will lie mostly in the cognitive sphere.

The emotions of persons affected by the other brutish ethical vices seem to be analogous to the desires of persons affected by brutish self-indulgence. Although Aristotle does not refer directly to their unnaturalness, his examples of brutish (or morbid) cowardice illustrate the fear caused by objects that by their nature should not frighten the human being (a weasel or generally “everything”). On the basis of the remark in 1149b28–29 (“φυσικαὶ καὶ τῷ γένει καὶ τῷ μεγέθει”), we can also assume that the emotions experienced in brutish vices are not only completely unjustified, inadequate and in this sense irrational affective reactions to common situations and things, but also too intense (exceeding the scope of an ethical vice) reactions to objects and situations which evoke a certain emotional response also in a virtuous man.

Finally, the question about the sphere of desires and emotions can also be asked with reference to brutish ἀφροσύνη. Since we deal here with an intellectual vice, not an ethical one, we can presume that the desires of a man completely devoid of reason could initially be natural; however, Aristotle’s observations on the nature of desire presented in EN III 12—as an insatiated appetite which in the absence of limitations becomes stronger and more violent, and which in the case of a mindless being (“τῷ ἀνοήτῳ”)⁴⁴ is aroused by almost everything (1119b8–10)—suggest that a person affected by brutish ἀφροσύνη will finally develop unnatural desires (at least in terms of their intensity). We can also assume that similar degeneration will occur in the case of emotions lacking the guidance of reason—a process which may lead to the development of a whole array of brutish vices.

The situation looks different in the sphere of practical thinking in people with brutish dispositions. A person who is characterized by brutish thoughtlessness will, by definition, be deprived both of the knowledge of ethical

⁴³ EN VII 5, 1149a21–22.

⁴⁴ The context of this statement in EN III 12 is a comparison of self-indulgence to the wilfulness of childhood, particularly susceptible to pressure due to the lack of a developed inhibitory function, i.e. reason.

principles and of the right ethical judgment in relation to the concrete situation; similarly to an animal, she will not be able to make a decision (*προαίρεσις*), which is an act requiring rational consideration.⁴⁵ In the case of brutish *akrasia* and the corresponding continence, we can suppose, on the basis of an analogy to the definition of ordinary *akrasia* and continence, that there is both an accurate understanding of the principle of action and the ability to make a right ethical judgment and an ethically accurate decision which, however, only in the case of *ἐγκράτεια* of unnatural desires will result in an actual action, whereas in the case of brutish *akrasia* it is abandoned under the influence of a desire, although the subject is aware of the vicious and unnatural character of this desire.

Finally, the question remains about the sphere of practical understanding in the case of a brutish ethical vice. An analogy to an ordinary vice could lead us to believe that here, too, the person adopts a degenerate ethical principle, makes an erroneous judgement and an immoral decision which she follows in her actions with full awareness. However, this interpretation does not seem to be correct in the case of brutish cowardice (which seems to be an irrational phobia rather than a conscious implementation of rational decision), compulsions falling under the category of brutish self-indulgence (such as trichotillomania, onychophagy or pica) or self-indulgent behaviours resulting from madness (*μανία*). Seeking a solution, it is worthwhile to turn to the text in which Aristotle himself (summarizing his discussion of *ἀπλή ἀκρασία*) makes a comparison between *θηριότης* and ordinary human vice⁴⁶ (EN VII 6, 1150a1–8):

ἔλαττον δὲ θηριότης κακίας, φοβερώτερον δέ· οὐ γὰρ διέφθαρται τὸ βέλτιον, ὡς περ ἐν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἔχει. ὁμοιον οὖν ὡς περ ἄψυχον συμβάλλειν πρὸς ἔμψυχον, πότερον κάκιον· ἀσινεστέρα γὰρ ἢ φαυλότης ἀει ἢ τοῦ μὴ ἔχοντος ἀρχήν, ὁ δὲ νοῦς ἀρχή· παραπλήσιον οὖν τὸ συμβάλλειν ἀδικίαν πρὸς ἀνθρώπον ἀδικον· ἔστι γὰρ ὡς ἐκότερον κάκιον· μυριοπλάσια γὰρ ἂν κακὰ ποιήσειεν ἄνθρωπος κακὸς θηρίου.

Now brutishness is a less evil than vice, though more alarming; for it is not that the better part has been perverted, as in man—they *have* no better part. Thus it is like comparing a lifeless thing with a living in respect of badness; for the badness of that which has no originative source of movement is always less hurtful, and reason is an

⁴⁵ There is no *προαίρεσις* in animals (and children): Ph. II 6, 197b7–8, EN III 2, 1111b8–9.

⁴⁶ Most researchers accept the interpretation that the subjects of the comparison in EN VII 6, 1150a1–8 are brutishness and ethical vice, see e.g. Carlo NATALI, *Nicomachean Ethics VII.5–6*, 121–125, Howard J. CURZER, *Aristotle*, 383, John THORP, “Aristotle on Brutishness,” 680, Franz von DIRLMEIER, *Aristoteles*, 487f. For alternative interpretations, see below and fn. 49.

originative source. Thus it is like comparing injustice in the abstract with an unjust man. Each is in some sense worse; for a bad man will do ten thousand times as much evil as a brute.

In order to interpret this enigmatic and controversial⁴⁷ statement it is necessary to have a closer look at its context. In the preceding passage, Aristotle explains that animals (τὰ θηρία, τὰ ζῷα) are not self-indulgent or continent because they lack the ability to reason and to make decisions. This suggests that θηριότης is understood here not as a specifically human ethical disposition but rather as an essentially animal state, which exceptionally may also be experienced by a human being.⁴⁸ This interpretation helps explain the problematic phrase “ὡσπερ ἐν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ” (1150a2–3), which in the context of the previous passage may erroneously suggest that Aristotle here compares the moral condition of the man with the state of an ordinary animal.⁴⁹ Instead, it is to be assumed that since a person affected by θηριότης is no longer a human being in the full sense of the word, Aristotle can juxtapose the beast with the man, although the beast, which interests him here the most, is obviously a man⁵⁰ who has been downgraded to the level of an animal.

Accordingly, in the quoted text Aristotle states that, on the one hand, brutishness is more terrifying⁵¹ than a moral vice, but on the other hand, in

⁴⁷ “No two commentators read the same sense into this section” (Harris RACKHAM, *Aristotle*, 410, fn. b).

⁴⁸ Contrary to Natali (*Nicomachean Ethics VII.5–6*, 122f.), this perspective is not entirely foreign to Aristotle—it can also be seen in EN VII 1 (see, in particular, 1145a25–26; cf. Section I above).

⁴⁹ Cf., e.g., Bäumer (*Die Bestie Mensch*, 36) and Richard Loening (*Geschichte der strafrechtlichen Zurechnungslehre*, Bd. I: *Die Zurechnungslehre des Aristoteles* (Jena: Verlag von Gustav Fischer, 1903), 239). This is also the source of interpretations according to which the words “φοβερώτερον δέ” introduce a comparison of human brutishness to that of an animal, e.g. Gauthier & Jolif (*L'éthique*, 2002a, 202) translate: “La bestialité est un moindre mal que le vice, encore qu'elle soit plus redoutable chez l'homme que chez la bête. Dans le cas de la bête, en effet, on ne peut dire que la partie la meilleure est dépravée, comme cela se produit chez l'homme: la bête ne possède pas cette partie.” Burnet (*The Ethics*, 317) and Jules Tricot (ARISTOTE, *Éthique à Nicomaque*, nouvelle traduction avec introduction, notes et index par Jules Tricot (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1987), 347f, fn. 6) adopt a similar interpretation; cf. also the translations by Ostwald (*Aristotle*, 193) and Gromska (*Arystoteles*, 223).

⁵⁰ Cf. the translation by Rackham (*Aristotle*, 411): “for «in a bestial man as in an animal» the highest part [...] is not corrupted, as it is in a man «who is wicked in a human way,» but entirely lacking.”

⁵¹ The attribute φοβερώτερον probably results from the spectacular effect of brutish behaviours that break human taboos, although, as Natali (*Nicomachean Ethics VII.5–6*, 123) believes, at the same time, it can also refer to brutishness as an existentially terrifying condition, because it deprives the man of the essential elements of his humanity.

a sense, it is a lesser evil (“ἔλαττον”)—a judgment which is justified by the statement that in the case of brutishness “what is better” (or “what is the best”⁵²), does not exist at all (“οὐκ ἔχει”), while in a person burdened with a moral vice it is destroyed, i.e. corrupted (“διέφθαρται”). The thesis of the lesser evil of brutishness is then illustrated by reference to a series of analogous pairs (inanimate—animate, injustice—unjust man, animal—vicious man) and by the explanation that the beast—like the first members of the mentioned pairs (i.e. the inanimate being, the abstract notion of injustice and the animal) does not have in itself an ἀρχή, a principle (of action), and is therefore less harmful (and in this sense less evil than the vicious man). The principle of operation mentioned here is equated in 1150a5 with νοῦς (“ὁ δὲ νοῦς ἀρχή”), which seems to indicate that the term “what is better” (or “what’s the best”) in 1150a2 refers to νοῦς.⁵³

The key to the interpretation of this text is therefore the question of how to understand the νοῦς which is absent in the man-beast and corrupted in the vicious man. While this term is usually understood here very broadly (“reason,” “intellect” or “intelligence”⁵⁴), David Sedley (“Aspasius on akrasia”) aptly reminds us that what is “destroyed” in a vicious person, is—according to Aristotle’s ethics—not the intellect in the sense of the ability to reason, but the capability of practical reason to grasp the highest principles of action, i.e. the superior goal or the good. As Aristotle explains in EN VI 5, 1140b13–20:

For it is not any and every judgement that pleasant and painful objects destroy and pervert [διαφθείρει οὐδὲ διαστρέφει], e. g. the judgement that the triangle has or has not its angles equal to two right angles, but only judgements about what is to be done. For the originating causes of the things that are done [αἱ μὲν γὰρ ἀρχαὶ τῶν πρακτῶν] consist in the end at which they are aimed; but the man who has been ruined by pleasure or pain [τῷ δὲ διεφθαρμένῳ δι’ ἡδονὴν ἢ λύπην] forthwith fails to see any such originating cause [ἀρχή]— to see that for the sake of

⁵² The reading “τὸ βέλτιον” is accepted by, among others, Bywater (*Aristotelis Ethica*) and Burnet (*The Ethics*, 318); the alternative reading “τὸ βέλτιστον” is adopted by, among others, John S. Brewer (*The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, with English Notes (Oxford: Henry Slatter, 1836), 284), Alexander Grant (*The Ethics of Aristotle*, illustrated with essays and notes by Alexander Grant, vol. II (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1866), 219), Ramsauer (*Aristotelis Ethica Nicomachea*, 461), Franz Susemihl & Otto Apelt (*Aristoteles*, 157), Rackham (*Aristotle*, 410) and Natali (*Aristotele*, 282). Resolving this issue does not seem to be crucial for the interpretation of the passage.

⁵³ Cf. the descriptions of νοῦς in EN X 7: “τὸ κράτιστον τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ” (1177b34), “τὸ κύριον καὶ ἄμεινον” (1178a3).

⁵⁴ See, e.g. NATALI, *Nicomachean Ethics VII.5–6*, 123 and 125.

this or because of this he ought to choose and do whatever he chooses and does; for vice is destructive of the originating cause of action [ἔστι γὰρ ἡ κακία φθαρτικὴ ἀρχή]⁵⁵.

This interpretation is also convincing because understanding the term νοῦς in the broad sense of intellect or intelligence would imply that the man-beast has no intellect at all, which, as we have seen above, is true for only one type of brutish disposition, which is brutish ἀφοροσύνη. By contrast, neither Phalaris ruling in Akragas, nor the barbarians who “lend” their children for a feast, nor compulsive persons can be suspected of having no intelligence. What these people lack is therefore, according to the text quoted in 1150a1–8, not so much the general capacity to reason, but a principle that is the starting point for drawing conclusion in the practical sphere, in the form: “since the end (τὸ τέλος), i.e. what is best (τὸ ἄριστον), is of such and such a nature [...]”.⁵⁶ In the case of a vicious man, this principle is present and gives rise to a conclusion, but it is corrupted, i.e. ethically false (e.g. “the end, i.e. what is best, is my own benefit / pleasure⁵⁷ etc.”), so that the reasoning leads to an incorrect conclusion, even if it is formally correct. The man-beast, on the other hand, according to 1150a1–8, does not possess such a principle at all; his action—obviously not any activity at all, but the action in a given sphere affected by brutishness⁵⁸—does not focus on any general maxim and value, but is a simple realization of his drives.⁵⁹ Owing to this, he is also, as stated in 1150a1–8, less harmful—he is unable to undertake targeted, large-scale actions that the vicious man is capable of.

This approach seems to be quite accurate for cases of self-indulgence caused by madness, for compulsive behaviours, and even for brutish cowardice. While the (simplified) reconstruction of reasoning: “Because my life is the highest good and this battle threatens it, I run away” (the syllogism and

⁵⁵ See also EN VII 8, 1151a14–16 (“ἡ [...] μοχθηρία τὴν ἀρχὴν [...] φθείρει [...], ἐν δὲ ταῖς πράξεσι τὸ οὐ ἔνεκα ἀρχή”) and EN VI 12, 1144a34–36 („διαστρέφει γὰρ ἡ μοχθηρία καὶ διαψεύδεται ποιεῖ περὶ τὰς πρακτικὰς ἀρχάς”).

⁵⁶ EN VI 12, 1144a31–33.

⁵⁷ Por. EN VII 3, 1146b22–23: “νομίζων ἀεὶ δεῖν τὸ παρὸν ἡδὺ διώκειν.”

⁵⁸ Aristotle’s statements do not give grounds to believe that a man affected, for example, by a brutish fear of weasels, suffers from analogous disorders in other spheres of his activity.

⁵⁹ The psychological activity leading to the act will probably resemble the animal process outlined in MA 7, 701a32–33, limited to the association of thirst (“I want to drink”) with a sensory experience or imagination (“this is a beverage”). This process can be called a practical syllogism only in a very broad and imprecise sense of the term; cf. Martha C. NUSSBAUM, *Aristotle’s De motu animalium*, Text with Translation, Commentary and Interpretive Essays by Martha C. Nussbaum (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 187.

decision of an “ordinary” coward) sounds quite credible, a reasoning of the kind: “Because my life is the highest good and this domesticated weasel threatens it, I run away” is problematic, amongst others, because it contains a false premise—the fear of weasels is clearly an irrational phobia and Aristotle rightly does not make it conditional upon reasoning from general principles and making rational decisions. By contrast, the case of innate self-indulgence leading to, among others, cannibalism is slightly less obvious. Assuming that the simplified syllogism of an ordinarily self-indulgent person would be: “Since my pleasure is the highest good, and eating this cake would be pleasant, I will eat it,” the syllogism of a self-indulgent brutish person could be: “Since my pleasure is the highest good, and eating this person would be pleasant, I will eat her”—it is actually difficult to exclude such a reasoning as impossible. Aristotle’s rejection of such a genesis of self-indulgent brutish behaviours seems to indicate that the psychological and moral state he describes is not the same state that modern psychology describes as psychopathy⁶⁰: Aristotle’s beasts are not intelligent and ruthless manipulators, but beings whose affective responses and resulting actions (in a certain area of behaviour) completely escape rational conditioning, analysis and control, thus resembling the instinctive behaviours of animals rather than normal human actions. If, on the other hand, such irrational behaviour is accompanied by the awareness of its inappropriateness and an attempt to stop it, this will be brutish *akrasia*, which in turn will turn into *ἐγκράτεια*, if the actual action will follow the decision made.

To sum up, the most important elements of the psychological and moral condition of people affected by brutish dispositions would be as follows:

	sentiments and desires	presence of the principle of action	ability to make the right judgement
ὑπερβολή of ethical vice	unnatural	no	No
ὑπερβολή of thoughtlessness	unnatural (initially potentially natural)	no	No
brutish ἀκρασία	unnatural	yes	Yes
ἐγκράτεια of unnatural lusts	unnatural	yes	Yes

⁶⁰ Contrary to Moline’s judgement (“Aristotle on Praise and Blame,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 71 (1989): 292, fn. 21).

V. BRUTISHNESS AND THE PROBLEM OF
MORAL AWARENESS AND RESPONSIBILITY

In order to better understand the Aristotelian view of the psychological and moral condition of persons affected by brutish dispositions and the social significance of their behaviour, it is essential to consider the problem of the awareness accompanying their actions and the freedom of their choice, as well as the closely related moral issue of their responsibility for these actions.⁶¹ This question does not apply to all brutish dispositions to the same extent. It is important mainly for those of them which are the source of acts that are harmful or detrimental to other people (possibly also to themselves). It is also clear that in the case of continence (ἐγκράτεια) of unnatural desires, the problem of moral responsibility does not arise, hence in the following considerations this disposition will be taken into account only as a background for the analysis of brutish akrasia.

Do the perpetrators of brutish acts commit them consciously? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to specify how, within the framework of Aristotle's ethics, one should understand consciousness and the lack of it. The meanings of this notion which are pertinent to ethics can be distinguished based on Aristotle's considerations in EN III 1. Four different types

⁶¹ The question of the awareness of brutish agents has been raised by Natali (*Nicomachean Ethics* VII.5–6, 113, 125) but, eventually, the author concludes that Aristotle's statements are ambiguous (see p. 125, *Conclusion*). The most detailed examination of the problem of moral responsibility for brutish acts has been provided by Thorp ("Aristotle on Brutishness," 679f.), but he draws contradictory conclusions—the text in 1150a1–8 suggests according to him that Aristotle justifies the man-beast ("the point is presumably that just as we do not blame an inanimate object for the hurt it may cause, so we should not blame a brutish person for the hurt which he or she may cause", p. 680), while the possibility to stop brutish desires mentioned in 1149a1ff and the text in 1149b4–8 ("[...] we pardon people more easily for following natural desires, since we pardon them more easily for following such appetites as are common to all men, and in so far as they are common; now anger and bad temper are more natural than the appetites for excess, i.e. for unnecessary objects") seems to mean to him that the man-beast deserves a moral reprimand. However, neither the passage in 1150a1–8 nor the statement in 1149b4–8 provide a sufficient basis for conclusions concerning the moral responsibility of brutish agents: the latter text compares the degree of naturalness of anger and lusts and does not address the question of unnatural desires *par excellence*; for the meaning of 1150a1–8 see above, Section IV. Finally, Aristotle's conviction that sometimes a brutish desire can be stopped (1149a1ff.) is irrelevant to the question of responsibility in the case of those of brutish dispositions in which the desire and emotions cannot be restrained (in fact, this is possible only in the case of ἐγκράτεια). See also Thorp ("Aristotle on Brutishness," 687f.), where the author, similarly to the analysis below, relies on EN III, but reaches quite different conclusions (see below, fn. 78).

of awareness that are ethically relevant may potentially be restricted are mentioned in this discussion⁶²:

1) consciousness in the sense of awareness of internal and external phenomena—limited or suppressed in sleep, during fainting or after ingesting certain chemical substances (in Aristotle's text: alcohol);

2) sober assessment of the actual situation—disturbed especially by strong emotional stimuli (e.g. anger, desire);

3) knowledge of specific circumstances of a given situation (such as object of action, goal, time, place, matter, tool of action, etc.)—limited due to lack of essential information (e.g. about possible consequences of administering a given medicine to someone or using a given type of weapon);

4) moral awareness, or understanding of what must be done, what is right in a given situation or generally—according to Aristotle, it is absent in vicious people.

As far as awareness in the first sense is concerned, none of the types of brutishness mentioned above necessarily imply its disorder.⁶³

We also have no reason to believe that θηριότης necessarily reduces the awareness in the third sense, i.e. the knowledge of the specific circumstances of a given situation; an exception may be only ὑπερβολὴ ἀφροσύνης, which also entails serious deficiencies in moral awareness (sense 4) and in the ability to soberly judge a situation (sense 2).

This ability (2) and the situation-specific ethical awareness (4) are the points that distinguish ὑπερβολὴ of ethical vice from brutish akrasia—while a man with an ethical vice correctly assesses the meaning of the situation in which he finds himself (2), but in reality does not understand what should and what should not be done (4), an akratic by definition has a correct ethical judgment (4), but is confused in area (2); according to Aristotle's analysis, his desire removes or deactivates a smaller premise of a practical syllogism concerning what is here and now.⁶⁴ This intriguing process, however, does not take place in a human being capable of mastering his (unnatural) desires, hence ἐγκράτεια of unnatural desires is the only brutish disposition showing no significant deficiencies in the area of awareness.

⁶² Aristotle uses the expressions “εἰδέναι,” “εἰδῶς,” “ἀγνοεῖν,” “ἀγνοῶν,” “ἄγνοια.”

⁶³ Within the Aristotelian philosophy, this type of awareness is a function not of intellect but of perception, αἴσθησις, which is also present in animals (more on this subject, see e.g. Charles H. KAHN, “Aristotle on Thinking,” in Martha C. NUSSBAUM, Amélie O. RORTY, *Essays on Aristotle's „De anima”* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 359–379), and therefore also in people affected by ὑπερβολὴ ἀφροσύνης.

⁶⁴ For more detail on this subject, see EN VII 3, 1146b8–1147b19.

The answer to the question of awareness of brutish agents would therefore be as follows:

	consciousness	sober assessment of the situation	knowledge of the circumstances	moral awareness
ὑπερβολή of ethical vice	+	+	+	–
ὑπερβολή of intellectual vice	+	–	–	–
brutish ἀκρασία	+	–	+	+
ἐγκράτεια of unnatural desires	+	+	+	+

Starting from these findings, the question may be asked whether, from the perspective of Aristotle's ethics, an action resulting from the first three brutish dispositions is a voluntary action, congruous with the will of the subject, or an involuntary action, accidental in relation to the agents' real intentions, although *de facto* it takes place as a result of his acts. It is obvious that the lack of awareness in the first, fundamental sense does not allow us to talk about volitional action—however, as we have seen, brutishness does not entail a deficit in this sphere. It remains to be considered how other spheres of awareness translate into the question of will. In EN III 1 Aristotle gives clear guidelines for how to assess the voluntariness of an action based on the state of awareness. He points to the difference between a voluntary act (which he describes as ἐκούσιον) and an act independent of or committed against the will (ἀκούσιον), i.e. either due to compulsion or owing to unawareness.⁶⁵ According to his analysis, the concept of the involuntary act committed owing to unawareness only covers acts performed as a result of ignorance of the specific circumstances of a given situation (e.g. due to ignorance that a medicine administered to a patient will turn out to be fatal to her), and only when they cause regret and remorse (EN III 1, 1110b31–1111a21).⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Aristotle also allows for the type of mixed acts which, however, he ultimately categorises as voluntary acts; see 1110a4–b1 and the pertinent analysis in: Ursula WOLF, *Aristoteles' Nikomachische Ethik* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2002), 118–120.

⁶⁶ Cf. reflections on this subject in Wolf (*Aristoteles' Nikomachische Ethik*, 120–124) and Moline ("Aristotle on Praise and Blame," 290–295), who tries to show that the lack of regret in this case reveals a lack of moral awareness, i.e. an ethical vice.

This approach is of obvious importance for the classification of acts committed as a result of the brutish dispositions. When it comes to the actions of a person characterized by *ὑπερβολή* of ethical vice, they turn out to be entirely voluntary. The acts of a person affected by *ὑπερβολή* of intellectual vice will often be accompanied by ignorance of the specific circumstances of a given situation, but we have no reason to believe that they cause regret and remorse, hence—although they do not fall within the category of voluntary acts (*ἐκούσια*)—they also do not fall into the category of acts independent of will or committed against it (*ἀκούσια*), but into a broader category of acts specified in EN III 1 as *οὐχ ἐκούσια* (not dependent on will or not voluntary). Finally, the question of the voluntariness of the acts performed by a brutish akratic is quite clear. Aristotle explicitly questions the legitimacy of regarding acts performed in a fit of anger or from desire (i.e. in the absence of a sober assessment of the situation) as involuntary—on this approach, as he states, the behaviour of children and animals, which is a simple implementation of their non-rational desires, could never be considered voluntary (1111a24–b3). A voluntary action is defined here as “οὗ ἡ ἀρχὴ ἐν αὐτῷ εἰδότει τὰ καθ’ ἕκαστα ἐν οἷς ἡ πρᾶξις” (1111a23–24)—“that of which the moving principle is in the agent himself, he being aware of the particular circumstances of the action.” An act committed in a fit of anger or from desire falls under this definition, because these factors are, of course, within us. Aristotle also notices that actions performed under the influence of *ἄλογα πάθη* are even specifically human, thus there is no point in considering them as involuntary (1111b1–3). This analysis, although conducted with reference to affects and desires considered to be normal, seems to be valid also for unnatural desires found in brutish *akrasia*. To sum up, it turns out that the brutish acts committed by people suffering from a brutish vice or *akrasia* are fully voluntary, whereas the acts committed by a person with brutish thoughtlessness are in many cases probably not voluntary, although even then they are not completely involuntary.

Therefore, are the persons with brutish dispositions responsible for their actions? Or, in other words, are they guilty? Essentially, Aristotle recognizes that voluntary actions are subject to praise or reprimand,⁶⁷ which seems to imply moral responsibility.⁶⁸ It has been noted,⁶⁹ however, that this approach

⁶⁷ EN III 1, 1109b30–35; V 8, 1135a19–23.

⁶⁸ Cf. EN V 8, 1135a19–20, where Aristotle, by means of the thesis that the voluntary act is subject to reprimand, justifies the assertion that the voluntariness of the act is a criterion for it being subject to moral assessment (qualification as just or unjust).

is too broad, because, as it has already been mentioned, in Aristotle's view, even actions performed by animals and children are not involuntary, and it seems that Aristotle did not attribute to them moral responsibility.⁷⁰ In search of a more accurate criterion, it has often been pointed⁷¹ to προαίρεσις, which is foreign to children and animals⁷²—a decision based on a rational reflection, expressing the ethical disposition of a man. However, this criterion seems to be too narrow, as Aristotle's insistence on the voluntary character of actions under the influence of ἄλογα πάθη and actions performed suddenly (i.e. without reflection and decision)⁷³ suggests that he includes them in the class of actions burdened with moral responsibility⁷⁴. An interesting solution to this problem is a formula proposed by Irwin ("Reason and Responsibility in Aristotle," 132), which is in line with the spirit of Aristotle's arguments, although not recorded in his writings: "A is responsible for doing x if and only if (a) A is capable of deciding effectively about x, and (b) A does x voluntarily"—a voluntary act is a responsible action only when the agent *could* reflect on it and make a decision (i.e. both when he did it and when he did not *actually* do it, although it was in his power).

If we refer this (hypothetical) formula to the behaviours resulting from brutish dispositions, it turns out that the agents affected by brutish ἀπροσῶνη and brutish vice will not be responsible for their actions: in the first case, consideration and decision are impossible due to a complete lack of reason, in the second case—in accordance with the interpretation of 1150a1–8 presented above—due to the fact that the relevant sphere of action is excluded

⁶⁹ E.g. Terence H. IRWIN, "Reason and Responsibility in Aristotle," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, edited by Amélie O. Rorty (Berkeley–Los Angeles–London: University of California Press, 1980), 124f. and Christof RAPP, "Freiwilligkeit, Entscheidung und Verantwortlichkeit," in ARISTOTELES, *Die Nikomachische Ethik*, Otfried Höffe, (Hrsg.), (Berlin: Akademie Verlags, 1995), 121.

⁷⁰ Aristotle neither confirms nor rejects the common-sense belief (widespread also in antiquity) that children and animals do not bear moral responsibility for their behaviour; moreover, he repeatedly points directly to the significant differences between adult agents on the one hand, and children and animals on the other (see Susan Sauvé MEYER, *Aristotle on Moral Responsibility: Character and Cause* (Oxford–Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993), 22–24; Terence H. IRWIN, "Reason and Responsibility," 126f.).

⁷¹ E.g. Rapp ("Freiwilligkeit, Entscheidung und Verantwortlichkeit," 121–127). The other proponents of this solution and their specific approaches are presented and critically discussed by Irwin ("Reason and Responsibility," 151f., fn. 32).

⁷² EN III 2, 1111b8–9; Ph. II 6, 197b7–8.

⁷³ EN III 2, 1111b9–10.

⁷⁴ Cf. also EN V 8, 1135b19–24: an act that someone performs knowingly (εἰδώς), though without hesitation (μὴ προβουλεύσας), is classified as ἀδικημα, although its perpetrator is not ἄδικος or πονηρός.

from the general reasoning starting from the ethical principle and leading to the decision.⁷⁵ By contrast, a brutish akratic, who grasps the ultimate goal of action and conducts a reasoning that ends with a decision concerning the correct behaviour in a given situation, but abandons that decision under the influence of unnatural desire, is responsible for his actions. Nevertheless, it is highly probable that Aristotle would have partly lifted moral responsibility from the brutish akratic, as he does in relation to the “ordinary akratic” who, as Aristotle states in EN VII 10, 1152a14–17, only in a certain sense knows what he is doing, resembling in this respect a man who is asleep or drunk, and is not evil in the proper sense of the word, because his resolution is right.⁷⁶

However, the question of the responsibility of people affected by brutish dispositions can be answered more precisely without resorting to the concept of *προαίρεσις* and the hypothetical formula by Irwin. A promising starting point for the analysis is provided by Aristotle’s discussion of the responsibility for one’s own moral condition in EN III 5. Aristotle proves here that a man himself is the cause (*ἀρχή*) and, as he puts it, the parent (*γεννητήης*) of his actions (1113b18). For this purpose, he rejects, among others, the view which would deny the responsibility for evil deeds on the basis of the argument that a person characterized by an ethical vice (e.g. self-indulgence), behaves in a given way (e.g. self-indulgently), precisely as a result of his vice, so that the correct behaviour (in this case abstinence) does not lie in his power at all (1114a4–31). Aristotle agrees that a self-indulgent person cannot at will cease to be self-indulgent, but he argues that becoming self-indulgent is a result of this person’s previous actions,⁷⁷ because we develop an ethical vice by repeating and getting used to bad behaviour. He compares this situation to the throwing of a stone: the fact that a thrown stone can no longer be withdrawn does not imply that the thrower is not responsible for it

⁷⁵ The lack of knowledge of the primary principle of action, i.e. the goal, excludes the decision because *προαίρεσις* is, by definition, an act of rational desire based on the deliberation of means to given ends in the light of the ultimate end (i.e. happiness), see Terence H. IRWIN, “Reason and Responsibility,” 128f., Susan Sauvé MEYER, *Aristotle on Moral Responsibility*, 24–27 and EE 1227a3–5.

⁷⁶ See also EN VII 8, 1151a5–11 and 24–25.

⁷⁷ As it has been noted many times in research, Aristotle does not seem to take here into account the influence of early childhood on the moral development of the individual, even though this influence was otherwise evident to him (cf. e.g. EN X 9, 1179b20–1180a1). Perhaps Irwin (“Reason and Responsibility,” 140 fn. 43) is right to suggest that his thesis refers only to dispositions developed in adulthood.

(1114a16–19) (This approach allows to justify the responsibility for a given act even in some people who committed it with a limited awareness: firstly—intoxicated people who had the power of not getting drunk, secondly—those who do not know important circumstances of an act if the avoidance of this ignorance was in their power, thus unaware because of their own negligence (1113b30–1114a4)).

This analysis points to a fundamental difference between the act committed as a result of an ordinary ethical vice and the act committed as a result of a brutish vice—it is only in the first case that the subject is, by definition, responsible for acquiring the disposition which is the source of the act. In the case of an innate brutish vice, or one acquired as a result of illness, the person is clearly not responsible for that vice and therefore cannot be held responsible for the act resulting from it.⁷⁸ This conclusion can also be repeated as an answer to the question about a brutish intellectual vice, which, as we saw above, is exclusively innate or acquired as a result of illness.⁷⁹ However, in the case of a brutish vice resulting from habit, the question of responsibility is somewhat more difficult. We can assume that the responsibility is minimal or even eliminated in the case of tendencies acquired as a result of being subject to certain practices from early childhood (as mentioned in 1148b30–31). However, Aristotle's analyses do not provide a clear basis for questioning the responsibility for the development of pathological habits in adulthood. The situation looks similar in the case of brutish *akrasia* acquired as a result of habituation.

What is less clear, however, is the case of innate brutish *akrasia* or that acquired as a result of an illness, in which the subject has a correct ethical judgement and the full capacity to think rationally about his conduct, so that it would appear that he has the power to refrain from the evil act. On the other hand, the *acratic*, by definition, has no control over his desires, and

⁷⁸ This consequence of the doctrine presented in EN III is also recognised by Thorp ("Aristotle on Brutishness," 687f.). However, he believes that it stands in contradiction to the text about Phalaris in 1149a13–16—according to Thorp, this text says that Phalaris, despite the innate nature of his brutishness (1148b24), was able to abstain from beastly acts, which implies that he was responsible for them. However, this conclusion is based on a problematic interpretation of 1149a13–16; see above, fn. 25.

⁷⁹ Cf. also Aristotle's statement in EN III 5: "[...] no one blames those who are ugly by nature, we blame those who are so owing to want of exercise and care" and "[...] no one would reproach a man blind from birth or by disease or from a blow, but rather pity him, while every one would blame a man who was blind from drunkenness or some other form of self-indulgence" (EN III 5, 1114a23–25, 25–28, transl. by W.D. Ross)—as suggested in 1114a29–31, Aristotle approaches spiritual mistakes and vices in a similar way.

thus it is not in his power to follow a rational decision. Aristotle therefore believes that the ordinary akratic has limited responsibility for his behaviour and specifies that the scope of his responsibility depends on the power of his desire and on the power his resistance. As stated in Chapter 7 of Book VII: “For if a man is defeated by violent and excessive pleasures or pains, there is nothing wonderful in that; indeed we are ready to pardon him if he has resisted, [...] as people who try to restrain their laughter burst out into a guffaw, [...]. But it is inexcusable if a man is defeated by and cannot resist pleasures or pains which most men can hold out against, *when this is not due to heredity or disease* [...]” (EN VII 7, 1150b6–14; emphasis added by MMR). The reference to the genesis of akrasia at the end of this quotation is of course crucial to our question about responsibility in the case of brutish akrasia, innate or acquired as a result of a disease—it turns out that also in this case Aristotle recognizes the genesis of the weakness of will as the decisive factor. Thus, the brutish akratic deserves to be forgiven, which implies that his responsibility is either very much limited or, which seems to be more probable, even abolished.

To sum up, although the acts performed by persons with brutish dispositions are essentially voluntary (or—as in the case of brutish thoughtlessness—are not committed against their will), the agents are not responsible for them—the only exception might be the case of the acts resulting from dispositions acquired as a result of a repetition of initially voluntary, improper acts in adult life. These behaviours, however, are usually not socially harmful, leading at most to self-inflicted harm, which quite significantly modifies the question of the moral responsibility of the agents.

However, with regard to brutish behaviour harmful to others, the question arises as to the adequate response of the society, i.e. the appropriate response of the legal system, the corrective measures that can be taken and the protection methods that should be used. As to the first point, it seems evident that the law—taken in its function of reinstating justice by compensating for damage through “taking away from the gain of the assailant” (EN V 4, 1132a10)⁸⁰—does not have an adequate response to these acts, the cruelty of which exceeds certain standards. As far as corrective measures are concerned, it should be assumed that the ordinary methods of resocialization (such as instruction and reprimand, as well as punishment in the function of

⁸⁰ For a discussion of compensatory justice (τὸ διορθωτικὸν δίκαιον), see Richard LOENING, *Geschichte der strafrechtlichen*, 338–344.

inflicting therapeutic distress,⁸¹ recognised by both Aristotle and Plato) will not be effective in the case of dispositions caused by a physiological or congenital (and thus probably also physiologically established) mental structure. In the situation of the actual impossibility of removing brutish dispositions, it seems crucial to ask about the methods of protecting the society from potentially drastic actions undertaken by people affected by them. The ordinary means of dealing with persons that are not responsive to arguments and instructions is punishment—in this case understood not as a method of “treatment,” but only as an immediate deterrent against (repeated) wrongdoing. Furthermore, Aristotle believes that this is actually a strategy necessary to maintain the discipline in the majority of the society (EN X 9, 1179b4–16; 1180a4–5).⁸² However, in the case of people with physiologically induced dispositions this method is unlikely to be successful. It remains, therefore, to resort to the means that Aristotle, citing Plato, approves of with regard to “incurable” (ἀνίατοι) people, namely exile (EN X 9, 1180a9–10). Their removal from society could be justified by the fact that they never actually belonged to it—as we read in the first book of *Politics*: “But he who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast [θηρίον] or a god [θεός]: he is no part of a state.”⁸³

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⁸¹ Cf. EN II 3, 1104b16–18 and Loening (*Geschichte der strafrechtlichen*, 345f; 348f.).

⁸² For the preventive function of punishment in Aristotle, see Richard LOENING, *Geschichte der strafrechtlichen*, 346–348.

⁸³ *Politics* I 1, 1253a27–29; transl. by Benjamin Jowett.

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THE CONCEPT OF BRUTISHNESS (*THĒRIOTĒS*)
IN ARISTOTLE’S *NICOMACHEAN ETHICS*

Summary

The article deals with “brutishness” or “beastliness” (*thēriotēs*), a concept introduced by Aristotle in the seventh book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and defined by him as a negative ethical disposition, different both from vice (*kakia*) and from incontinence (*akrasia*), and leading to such

pathological behaviours as cannibalism, paedophilia, omophagy, phobias and compulsions. Aristotle's statements concerning brutishness (VII 1, 1145a15–35, VII 5, 1148b15–1149a24 and VII 6, 1149b23–1150a8) are examined and interpreted in order to clarify the following issues: the essence of *thēriotēs* as a specific ethical disposition (Sections I–II), its concrete forms and their causes (Section III), the moral-psychological condition of persons with a brutish *hexis* (Section IV), and their self-consciousness and moral responsibility for their brutish acts (Section V).

Key words: brutishness / beastliness; vice; akrasia; moral psychology; *Nicomachean Ethics*; Aristotle.

Translated by Rafał Augustyn



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