Choice and Moral Responsibility in Nichomachean Ethics iii 1-5[1]

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1. Introduction

The passage *NE* iii 1-5 is located at the end of Aristotle's account of the character-virtues and their acquisition in general in book ii and before his main discussion of the particular virtues in books iii 6 - v 11. In the passage, Aristotle considers – in traditional translations – praise and blame, voluntariness, choice, deliberation, wanting and the things in our power.[2]

Aristotle never explicitly states the purpose of *NE* iii 1-5. Here are some major views of Aristotle scholars: Aristotle intends

1. to provide the notions required for the discussion of the individual virtues and vices;
2. to show that praise and blame are justified for our being noble or base in our actions and/or our virtuous or vicious dispositions, because these are voluntary;
3. to capture the causal conditions of praise and blame;
4. to discuss intentional action;
5. to discuss the efficient cause of action;
6. to discuss Socrates' view that no-one is willingly bad;[3]

De facto, Aristotle does all of 1.-6. We prefer a version of 2., for reasons expounded below. There is no dispute that, if anywhere in the *NE* Aristotle considers what renders people responsible for their actions and character and justifies praise and blame, he does this in *NE* iii 1-5. The chapters are also central for Aristotle's theory of action. In addition, many scholars have espoused the views that *NE* iii 1-5 is pivotal in Aristotle's works for his treatment of freedom of choice, free-will and freedom-to-do-otherwise.[4] For all these reasons, *NE* iii 1-5 remains one of the most-discussed passages of Aristotle's oeuvre.

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[1] I would like to thank Susan Sauve Meyer, Carlo Natali and Ronald Polansky for their most helpful comments on a draft version of this paper.

[2] *NE* iii 1-5 is one of the parts of the *NE* which is not shared with Aristotle's *Eudemian Ethics* (*EE*) and where there is a long parallel treatment of mostly the same issues (*EE* ii 6-11). Although one should always allow for the possibility that Aristotle changed his mind or refined his theory in the interval between writing (and revising) one and the other, the close similarities make *EE* ii 6-11 an invaluable source for better understanding *NE* iii 1-5. Any reader with a serious desire to master *NE* iii 1-5 is advised to study *EE* ii 6-11. (See the commentary in Woods 1992 and Meyer 2006 for helpful notes on the *EE* passage.) It is also worth keeping in mind that *NE* iii 1-5 is bound into the whole treatise of the *NE* and involves many philosophical notions and distinctions which Aristotle introduces elsewhere in the *NE* (especially in books i, ii, vi, vii), as well as in other writings, and that these passages, too, help understanding *NE* iii 1-5. Furthermore, *NE* v 8 overlaps in content with *NE* iii 1.

[3] See e.g Grant, 1874, vol. 2, iii, Taylor 2006, 125 for 1.; Irwin 1985, 315, 319 for 2.; Meyer 2006, 137-8, 139, 144, 152, 154 for 3., Charles 1984 for 4, Burnet 1900, Joachim 1951 for 5, Gauthier/Jolif 1959, 168-9 for 6.

[4] This interpretative tradition starts already in antiquity and is still going strong today (Broadie 1991, Destree 2011), but has little basis in the text, see Bobzien 1998, Frede 2007, 2011 ch. 2, Bobzien forthcoming; also Grant, 1866, 316-8.

In the following, we focus on Aristotle's theory of what makes us responsible for our actions and character. After some preliminary observations about praise, blame and responsibility (*Section* 2), we set out in detail how all the key notions of *NE* iii 1-5 are interrelated (*Sections* 3-9). The setting-out of these interconnections makes it possible to provide an overall interpretation of the purpose of the passage. The primary purpose of *NE* iii 1-5 is to explain how agents are responsible for their actions not just insofar as they are actions of this or that kind, but also insofar as they are noble or base: agents are responsible for their actions qua noble or base, because, typically via choice, their character dispositions are a causal factor of those actions (*Section* 10). We illustrate the different ways in which agents can be causes of their actions by means of Aristotle's four basic types of agents (*Section* 11). A secondary purpose of *NE* iii 1-5 is to explain how agents can be held responsible for consequences of their actions (*Section* 12), and in particular for their character dispositions insofar as these are noble or base, i.e. virtues or vices (*Section* 13). These two purposes are not the only ones Aristotle pursues in the passage. But they are the ones Aristotle himself indicates in its first sentence and summarizes in its last paragraph; and the ones that give the passage a systematic unity.[5] We briefly consider the issues of freedom-to-do-otherwise, free choice and free-will in the contexts in which they occur (in the final paragraphs of *Sections* 6, 7, 12, 13).

Notes on terminology: For the central terms of *NE* iii 1-5 we generally follow standard translations and add alternatives in footnotes – both for the benefit of Greek-less readers. We use the expression "virtuous agent" ("virtuous individual" …) for an agent, who has as character dispositions the character-virtues. Aristotle sometimes uses the term *spoudaios* for such individuals. We use the expression "vicious agent" for an agent who has some character-vices as dispositions. For such individuals Aristotle sometimes uses *phaulos*. We use "virtuous disposition" as short for "character dispositions which are identical with the character-virtues"; and "vicious disposition" as short for "character dispositions which are identical with the character-vices". We use the word "moral" exclusively as a generic term which covers the evaluative element, aspect or dimension of what Aristotle calls noble (*kalos*), good (*agathos*), fine (*epieikēs*) or virtue (*aretē*) on the side of positive value, shameful (*aischros*), base (*phaulos*), wicked (*mochthēros*), bad (*kakos*) or vice (*kakia*) on the side of negative value (when using these terms in the context of human agency and character respectively).[6] Accordingly, we also use the expression "moral disposition" as a generic term for virtuous and vicious disposition. Our use of "moral" should not be conflated with modern notions of rule-following, altruistic or utilitarian norms, religion-based morality, etc., as we find them only in Post-Aristotelian thought.

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[5] These two purposes also tie in with Aristotle's claim at *NE* ii 4.1105a28-33 that for actions to be performed in a virtuous way, (i) the agent has to choose them insofar as they are good (just, temperate, …) and (ii) the choice has to be based in a firm and unchangeable character disposition (i.e. in the virtues of justice, temperance, …).

[6] We make no attempt at interpreting what it is that Aristotle considers to be of positive value in nobility, goodness, fineness or virtue and what it is that Aristotle considers to be of negative value in shamefulness, baseness, wickedness, badness or vice. We simply take it that his consistent use of the respective Greek terms is sufficient indication that he assumed there to be some relevant positive or negative value to these things.

2. From praise and blame to moral responsibility

Aristotle considers it a fact that we praise and blame people with respect to their virtues and vices (e.g. *NE* 1106a1-2). In effect, for him virtues *are* the character dispositions that are praise*worthy* (*NE* 1103a8-10; cf. 1101b13-15, 30-1). He argues that what makes these dispositions virtues is that they are directed towards the intermediate in action (*NE* 1106b36-1107a1); and that this is also what makes them praiseworthy (*NE* 1109b24).[7]

At the beginning of *NE* iii 1, Aristotle draws the connection between virtue and vice, praise and blame, and voluntariness, if in a rather unspecific way: Praise and blame are bestowed only on actions and emotions[8] that are voluntary (*NE* 1109b30-1), and virtue is concerned with actions and emotions. In his summary at the end of *NE* iii 5, Aristotle states that he has shown that the virtues are voluntary, and that virtues and actions are voluntary in different ways (*NE* 1114b26-31).

This suggests that Aristotle assumes that voluntariness is a necessary condition for justified praise and blame; a fact commonly used to support the assumption that *NE* iii 1 presents a discussion of *moral responsibility*. It is worth pointing out, though, that Aristotle does not have an expression for moral responsibility,[9] and that in *NE* iii 1 he talks mostly about people's *actual* practices of praising and blaming, not about praise*worthiness* and blame*worthiness*. Thus in *NE* iii 1 Aristotle may – as he often does – simply start out from empirical considerations: People bestow praise and blame for certain things; they only do this when they believe that these things have certain characteristics; these characteristics are those commonly collected under the heading of voluntariness.

Consider societies, like those in ancient Greece, which are simpler than ours in that they do not have the complex intellectual, religious and ethical traditions instilled in us from childhood. Imagine typical cases of praising and blaming in such societies: A runner is praised for winning a sports contest ("We are proud of you!"); an adolescent for their beauty ("Your looks are those of a god(ess)."); a wife is blamed for poor cooking skills ("You dimwit, why can't cook like our neighbour?"); a slave for having broken a vessel ("It's your fault I have to buy a new vessel!"). The expression 'moral responsibility' does not come to mind readily to characterize such cases. It is far from clear whether morality, in any sense, is at issue. Praising and blaming are human activities which are reactive to certain kinds of – mostly – human behaviour and habits that please or annoy. The purpose

[7] Aristotle also uses the fact that we praise people who hit the intermediate in order to support his view that virtue is the mean, cf. e.g. *NE* 1106b25-8, 1108a14-16. But one must not confuse (i) Aristotle's use of people's actual praise and blame as evidence for his theory of the mean with (ii) Aristotle's own theory of what makes the character dispositions praise*worthy* or blame*worthy*.

[8] "Emotions" translates *pathē*. Alternative translations are "feelings", "passions", "undergoings", and with them come different interpretations. Accordingly, some have questioned whether for Aristotle *pathē* are voluntary. We disregard these difficulties and focus solely on actions.

[9] We use "moral responsibility" as a generic term that covers praiseworthiness and blameworthiness of someone for something with regard to the nobility, fineness and/or goodness on the one hand, shamefulness, wickedness, baseness and/or badness on the other of that someone or that something.

of praising and blaming may simply be that (i) of expressing one's appreciative or disapproving sentiments or (ii) of encouraging or discouraging repetition of the relevant behaviour. There are certain conditions that have to be met for such activities to be appropriate. That is, conditions not for whether the appropriate re-action is praise *or* blame, but for whether *any* such re-action is appropriate. (For example, it is not appropriate to blame anyone for the weather, or to praise a stone for its weight.) No notions like noble (*kalos*), shameful (*aischros*), fine (*epieikēs*) or base (*phaulos*) need to be involved in this context. We can first sort things according to whether they are the kind of thing that can be praised or blamed, and then correlate these things with acts of praising or blaming.

To get from the situations of blaming and praising considered by Aristotle in *NE* iii 1 to *moral* responsibility (that is responsibility related *in some sense yet-to-be-determined* to what is noble or shameful) the things that are praised or blamed must in addition be classified as noble or shameful, and the praise or blame must attach to them because of their being noble or shameful.[10] In the remainder of this paper, we show that in *NE* iii 2-5 Aristotle provides a theory of the conditions of moral appraisal that does precisely this.

Aristotle's move from generally accepted conditions of praise and blame to *moral* responsibility is in parallel with his move from common-sense and common-opinion based discussion of the voluntary as a requirement for praise or blame in *NE* iii 1 to his explanation of the underlying psychological apparatus in *NE* iii 2-5; an explanation which is based on his own view of the soul (as set out in *NE* i 13 and *NE* vi 1). Aristotle introduces choice as a psychological feature which characterizes the appropriate subjects and objects of praise and blame and which provides the channel by means of which both rationality and the moral dispositions of character can manifest themselves in adult human action. Choice turns out to be characteristic for any kind of moral responsibility. We begin with the manifestation of moral responsibility in action (*Sections* 3-11). We consider moral responsibility for character in *Section* 13.

3. Action and voluntariness

According to Aristotle, action (*praxis*) is a specifically human activity.[11] An action is a change (*kinēsis*) which has its origin (*archē*) in the human being, who is also the efficient cause of the actions (*EE* 1222b28-31).[12] All action is goal-directed, i.e. aims at an end

[10] Aristotle is aware of the difference of praising someone or something (i) for their/its nobility or character-virtue related goodness and (ii) for some other not character-virtue related trait: "(i) we praise the just or brave person, and generally both the good person (*ton agathon*) and virtue itself, because of the actions and pursuits involved, and (ii) we praise the strong person, the runner, and so on, because they are of a certain kind and are related somehow to something good and excellent." (*NE* i 12.1101b14-18).

[11] *EE* 1222b18-20, *NE* 1139a19-20. The classic work an Aristotle's theory of action is Charles 1984.

[12] Aristotle says or implies that actions are changes (*kinēseis*) both in the *EE* (e.g. 1222b29) and in the *NE* (e.g. 1139a31-2). This is in line with his assumption that actions have an efficient cause (ibid.). Here "efficient cause" is the standard translation for the kind of cause which Aristotle refers to as "that from which" (ibid.) or as "the origin of change" (*Phys*. 195a11), and which he defines as "that from which the alteration or absence of alteration has its origin" (*Phys*. 194b29-30). In the *NE* Aristotle refers to actions both as changes (*kinēseis*) and as activities (*energeiai*) (e.g. *NE* i 1; iii 5). We assume that, rather than

(*telos*), though its end may lie in itself (*NE* i 1). Action requires the agent to have a reasoning capacity (*EE* 1224a29-30). This is why people don't say of toddlers or animals that they perform actions (*EE* 1224a28-30).

Although Aristotle defines action as change, when he discusses voluntariness he is concerned equally with situations in which individuals perform an action and in which they refrain from performing an action. (For something to be a refraining from an action, broadly, the action must be something the agent could have considered doing.) Praise and blame are bestowed on both action and refraining from action. Accordingly, Aristotle uses "action" (*praxis*) sometimes in the wider sense that covers both action and refraining. This is in line with Aristotle's theory of efficient causation, which allows for the case in which someone is an efficient cause of an absence of change, as opposed to an efficient cause of change (*Phys*. 194b29-30, 195a11-14). We, too, shall use 'action' in places to cover actions and refrainings.

Aristotle holds that an action is voluntary (*hekousios*)[13] precisely if both the origin of the action is in the agent and the agent knows the relevant particular circumstances of the action.

The action's origin is in the agent, when the agent is the action's efficient cause and the action is not the result of external force. Aristotle is aware that there are cases in which it is doubtful whether the agent was externally forced, and that the boundary between the unforced and forced cases is difficult to draw. We will not dwell on the details.[14] What matters for us are the following – undisputed – points. (i) For an action to be unforced, the agent has to contribute something (*NE* 1110b2-3); that is, the agent has to be at least a causal co-contributor. (ii) The problematic cases are those in which the force seems to take the form of compulsion.[15] By and large, Aristotle maintains that compulsion, as long as it does not put the agent under duress that overstrains human nature (one may envision severe torture),[16] does not render the act forced. (iii) Aristotle explicitly rejects the suggestion that an agent's action is forced when it is the result of a desire (for pleasure or avoiding pain) in the agent that conflicts with the agent's end. (Imagine someone following their desire for donuts despite having adopted eating healthy as an end.) The possibility of a conflict between non-rational desires (e.g. appetite and anger) with rational ones is characteristic of humans. Aristotle argues that the agents' appetites and

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contradicting himself, Aristotle does not use *energeia* in its narrow, technical sense, when calling actions activities. This assumption is supported by the fact that Aristotle's practical sciences tend not to make direct appeal to his theoretical positions.

[13] Alternative translations of *hekousios*: "willing", "intentional", "witting". For discussion of voluntariness in the *EE* see *EE* ii 7-8.

[14] For an excellent discussion see Meyer 2006, 141-9. The classical treatment is Kenny 1979.

[15] By compulsion I mean a force that does not cause or prevent movement of the individual's body directly (like strong winds or shackles); but that instead makes the agent move (or refrain from moving) as a result of action-(or-refraining-)promoting activity in the individual's soul. Thus if an agent utters "he is in the basement" in order to avoid further beatings, the compulsion works via the agent's soul and is *thus* psychological. The force would be solely physical, if it were to work directly on the agent's vocal cords, making them produce the phonetic sounds "he is in the basement".

[16] *NE* 1110a24-6, *EE* 1225a21.

emotions are no less human than their reason, and originate no less from the agents than their reasoned ends.[17]

The second criterion for voluntariness, absence of ignorance, covers only ignorance regarding specific circumstances of the action. Aristotle provides many examples. Thus one may be unaware that one's fencing sword is missing its button, and subsequently involuntarily injure a friend. Again, there may be doubtful cases: it may be unclear whether in a particular case the ignorance at issue qualifies for removing voluntariness (see *Section* 12). Aristotle himself does not discuss such doubtful cases. But he explicitly excludes ignorance of general truths, including what the right end is (*NE* 1110b28-33), and ignorance that is itself the result of a voluntary action (see *Section* 12).[18]

With both criteria (agent-internal origin, absence of ignorance) Aristotle seems to capture common sense opinion. From a contemporary perspective, it is remarkable, how close Aristotle's criteria tally with those of present-day criminal law. Even with much advanced psychological and technological methods, the problems a judge or jury faces as to whether an agent can be held responsible are pretty much the same.

4. What happens in the agent's soul

The common sense account of voluntary action in *NE* iii 1 only explains why actions like throwing cargo overboard or eating donuts are praised or blamed. A – positive – connection between the agent's praiseworthy and blameworthy dispositions (i.e. virtues and vices) and voluntary action is not drawn. Nor do we obtain any information about what happens in the agent's soul in cases of voluntary action. Yet Aristotle thinks virtues and vices are dispositions of the human soul. Thus to draw the relevant connection, Aristotle needs to provide the psychological details of human agency. He does this in *NE* iii 2-5, where it becomes clear that, with the exception of spur-of-the-moment acts (for which see *Section* 9), human agency essentially involves choice, and that via choice the connection between voluntary action and virtues and vices is drawn.

Aristotle defines choice (*prohairesis*) as an agent's deliberated desire for things that are in their power.[19] Every choice has two aspects: it is *for the sake of* something and *of* something (*EE* 1227b36-7). In the *NE*, Aristotle expresses these two aspects by saying that choice is with regard to an end and concerns the means to that end.[20] Choice occurs

[17] *NE* 1111a24-b3, cf. *EE* 1224b7-14, *EE* 1224a23-5. Aristotle also rejects the possibility that pleasant things (the donut over there) can externally force an agent to act. Rather, insofar as they are envisaged as good, such external things function as final cause or goal of the action (*NE* 1110b9-15).

[18] Aristotle never says or implies that responsibility is a matter of degree. Rather, either one is morally responsible for something (i.e. one deserves praise or blame) or one isn't. Of course, if one *is* responsible, there is the independent question of what kind or amount of praise or blame, respectively, would be appropriate, and this will depend on the circumstances of the action and agent. Aristotle shows awareness of this second point where he mentions that the punishments for actions DUI are double (*NE* 1113a30-4).

[19] Alternative translations: "decision", "intention", "purpose", "resolution". The reason for these alternatives will become clear in what follows.

[20] *ta pros to telos*, *NE* 1111b27, 1113b3-4.

in the agent's soul, more specifically in the ruling part in the agent's soul (*NE* iii 3 1113a6), and for each of the two aspects, a different sub-part of this part of the soul is responsible, one rational-in-itself, one desiring and capable-of-listening-to-and-obeying reason.[21]

The desiring part of the human soul is one of its two non-rational parts.[22] It comprises all human desires (*orexeis*), including appetite, anger, wanting.[23] A person's character (*ēthē*) is manifested primarily in this desiring part of the soul. What type of character a person has is determined by what character dispositions (*ēthikai hexeis*) it comprises. For example, if the character is excellent, these character dispositions will be the character-virtues (courage, generosity, etc.): the character-virtues *are* the excellences of this part of the soul (*NE* ii and iii 6-v). The agent's character dispositions determine what ends the agent has, that is what the agent's goal-directed desires are directed towards. The specific desire a person has for their ends is called wanting (*boulēsis*).[24] It is this wanting which is causally responsible for the "for-the-sake-of-which", or the end, of the choice. Without character dispositions which determine what a person wants, there can thus be no choice (1139a33-4). (In short: The desiring part, via the agent's character dispositions, including virtues or vices, determines the agent's ends and provides the agent with a certain kind of desire, a wanting, for that end.)

The relevant rational part of the soul is the one which deals with contingent or changing (as opposed to necessary, unchanging) things. This part is called calculative. Aristotle states that calculation and deliberation are the same (*NE* 1139a11-13). This explains why this part is responsible for deliberation. The excellence of this part of the soul is practical wisdom.[25] Via deliberation, the calculative part determines the means by which the wanted end can be realized.

Thus the desiring part of the soul provides that *for-the-sake-of-which* a choice is; the calculative part provides that *of which* that choice is. Together, the two parts make up the efficient cause and origin of the choice (*NE* 1139a31-4). Every choice necessarily needs both. Without a wanted end, there is nothing that can function as a means, and hence no action to choose. Without the means, there is no way to reach the end. We consider each aspect separately.

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[21] The main passages about the parts (or aspects) of the human soul *NE* i 13 and vi 2 and *An* iii 9, cf. also *An* ii 2.

[22] The other is the vegetative part, responsible for digestion, sleep, breathing, growth, *NE* i 13, *An* ii 2.

[23] The desiring element, though non-rational, shares in reason insofar as it "can listen to it and obey it" and thus differs from the desiring part in non-rational animals. The human desiring part can wholly or partly be in conflict with the rational part or "speak on all matters with the same voice" as it (*NE* 1102b13-31). *Section* 11 provides details.

[24] Wanting is a desire that requires the listening and obeying ability of the desiring soul part to have been used. It presupposes, and depends on, the agent's rational part of the soul. (For a different interpretation of how wanting is related to the soul see Lorenz 2009.)

[25] *Phronēsis*, cf. *NE* 1103a3-6 and Natali, this volume, for details.

5. Choice *of*, deliberation, and the things within the agent's reach

A choice is *of* the action-to-be-performed, where an action can also be a refraining (*Section* 3). The calculative part of the soul is needed to figure out what action this is going to be. It does so by means of a certain activity: a process of deliberation (*bouleusis*)[26]. For Aristotle, deliberation is practical inquiry (*NE* 1112b22-3) that regards the possible means that allow agents to reach their ends. In terms of Aristotelian syllogistic, deliberation is the search for the middle term (*NE* 1142b24) or terms of a practical (i.e. action-related) syllogism. For Aristotle, practical reasoning seems to be a form of syllogistic reasoning which involves at least one universal term which expresses something the agent has adopted as end (e.g. eating healthy), and whose conclusion states the action-to-be-done as a case of the universal term.[27]

Our main interest regards the things which deliberation is about, i.e. the objects of deliberation (*bouleuta*). Aristotle states that the objects of deliberation must belong to the class of things that are in the agent's power.[28] There are two features of the things in the agent's power that cut them out as the proper objects of deliberation and choice: (i) that they are things that are within the agent's reach; and (ii) that they provide alternative options.

Deliberation is aimed at action that leads towards one of the agent's ends. Hence deliberation is about things which are within our reach, and allow us to obtain our ends. Deliberating about any other things would be pointless. Aristotle argues this point repeatedly,[29] listing all the things that aren't within our reach, in order to arrive by elimination at those which are. He rules out:

- Eternal, i.e. unchanging, things, like mathematical truths or astronomical facts
- Changing things that always happen the same way, like the rising of the sun
- Changing things that follow unpredictable patterns, like the weather
- Chance events, like finding a treasure
- Human affairs that are out of our reach, like the political affairs of remote States
- Particular facts, like whether this is bread
- The past, like to have sacked Troy
- Our own ends, since we have them or set them, but don't deliberate about them.
- Things that happen through us, but always in the same way.[30]

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[26] Also *boulē*, alternative translation: "reasoning". Aristotle discusses deliberation also in *NE* vi 9 and in *EE* ii 10.

[27] For more information on deliberation see Segvic 1011, Sections 1-3 and Natali, this volume.

[28] *epi* with dative. Aristotle uses this mostly, but not exclusively, in the form *ta ēph'hmin*, "the things in our power" and *eph ēmin* plus infinitive of verb of action, "in our power to do" something. Alternative translations are "up to us", "depending on us", "lie within us". Aristotle takes this phrase from ordinary language. Only in Post-Aristotelian philosophy do we find *to eph ēmin*, used as a philosophical term; see Bobzien 1998.

[29] *NE* iii 3.1112a21-1112b16, vi 2.1139b5-11, *EE* ii 10.1226a21-32.

[30] Aristotle does not explain these last ones. He may have in mind things like sleeping, breathing, blinking. We don't deliberate whether we should sleep, breathe, blink, although we may deliberate whether we should sleep, breathe, blink, *now*. Alternatively he intends unreflective habits; e.g. we may always puts our

By way of this elimination argument, Aristotle determines the possible objects of deliberation, i.e. the things in our power. His narrowing of the scope is entirely common sense. As Aristotle himself says, he is concerned with what reasonable people would deliberate about; people who are mentally handicapped or unstable may deliberate about things not in their control.[31] Aristotle is correct that reasonable people do not deliberate about the types of things excluded. They deliberate only about things which they consider to be, with a reasonable certainty,[32] within their control to achieve.[33]

Positively, Aristotle determines the possible objects of deliberation as those things that *can be brought about through us by action*.[34] As sufficient condition for this he mentions that the origin of the action is in us (1112b27-8). As we know, this entails that we are the efficient causes of those actions. Presumably pre-empting a possible objection, Aristotle notes that things we ask our friends to do *for us* count among the things brought about through us by action. Thus the possible objects of deliberation turn out to be what we consider possible actions of ours – in a suitably loose sense.

6. The necessity of alternative options

Voluntariness was a necessary condition for praise and blame for actions. As such, it is a property of actions,[35] and that is of things that actually occur. But restriction to things that actually occur, and their properties, is insufficient to capture a vital aspect of human agency. This is that the agent must have *alternative options*. These come in at the stage of deliberation: Agents will only deliberate about a possible course of action, if they have more than one possible course of action. It does not suffice that the agent is the origin and efficient cause of some change. (For the agent is also, say, the origin and efficient cause of her digestion and her reflex actions, but does not deliberate about these.) Deliberation and choice both require that the agent has alternative options. It is an essential feature of the things we deliberate about, and which are in our power, that they come in pairs.[36] Following ordinary Greek language use, Aristotle uses the phrase 'in our power' also to express this necessary feature of human agency. We articulate this by saying that he uses the expression as two-sided. That is, he assumes the following principle: if it's in the

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left sock on before our right. There is nothing to deliberate about this (in ordinary circumstances); we may never have deliberated and chosen to do it this way round. We just do it.

[31] *NE* iii 3 1112a19-21.

[32] There is no guarantee ever: external circumstances can prevent the action. Aristotle indicates that the agent is aware of this, when he states that agents deliberate about things that happen for the most part (*hōs epi to polu*, 1112b8-9). They don't need certainty that they will bring about the action, just that, regarding comparable situations, for the most part this is so.

[33] Even reasonable people may err, of course, due to ignorance of circumstances: you may think you can take the train, yet unbeknownst to you, it just derailed. Whether such deliberation would be apparent only, as opposed to actual, Aristotle doesn't say.

[34] *NE* 1112a31-2, 1111a33-4. It seems that Aristotle takes it for granted that all agree that the things he needs to demarcate are the things in our power. His question is *what classes of things satisfy this condition*.

[35] Or a relation between an action (or refraining) and the agent.

[36] The pairs are related to each other as *F* and not-*F* are. Of course there may be many other options, *G*, *H*, *I*, etc. (with which there then also come not-*G*, not-*H* and not-*I*, etc.).

agent's power to do something, then it's also in the agent's power not to do it, and vice versa.[37] Aristotle also sometimes uses "being master of" (*kurios*) and expressions of possibility (*exēn*) in this two-sided way to express the same requirement for human agency.[38]

For agents to act, it is not sufficient that they *have* alternative options. They also need to *be aware* that they have them. If agents don't believe that both doing and not doing something are in their power, they will not deliberate whether to do it.[39] Possibly, when Aristotle says that it is unclear how the things we deliberate about will turn out (*NE* 1112b9), he wishes to draw attention to this fact.[40]

In any event, in *De Interpretatione* 9, where Aristotle draws out the consequences of the hypothesis that everything happens by unconditional necessity,[41] he states "there would be no need to deliberate or busy oneself with anything, thinking that if we do this, this will happen, but if we do not, it will not".[42] This shows that Aristotle assumes (i) that agents generally believe that they have alternative options, and consider them part of their deliberation; moreover (ii) that they (or at least the reflective agents) believe their deliberation is a determining factor for which option is going to be realized. (ii) is confirmed when Aristotle, in the same context, appeals to the facts, writing "we see that what will be has an origin both in deliberation and in action".[43] Thus Aristotle takes it for granted not just that agents have alternative options, but also that they are aware both that they have these options ("if I do this, this will happen, if not, it won't") and that their deliberation process and its result are necessary causal factors which (co-)determine what action they will perform and whether they reach the goal the action was directed at.

The required alternative options and the agents' awareness of these neither entail (i) that the agents are causally undetermined in their action nor (ii) that the agents *believe* they are causally undetermined in their action. That is, Aristotle's *NE* iii 1-5 and *Int* 9 are compatible with (i) that, the agent and the circumstances being what they are, they together are sufficient causal factors to bring about the action and (ii) that the agents do not hold beliefs that they are causally undetermined in their action. All that the text suggests is that (reflective) agents are aware that without their deliberation the action would not take place, i.e. that their deliberation is a necessary causal factor in the process that brings about the action (18b31-2, 19a7-9); and that Aristotle holds that through their deliberation (and choice) the agents themselves become a decisive causal factor of the

[37] See *NE* 1110a17-18, 1113b7-8 and *Section* 9.

[38] E.g. *NE* iii 5 1113b32-3, 1114a2-3, 16-17, 19-20.

[39] Of course, in the course of a deliberation, there may be dead ends, discoveries that presumed options are actually not options, etc. Aristotle is aware of this, cf. *NE* 1112b24-6.

[40] This is one of several possible interpretations of this sentence. Alternatively, Aristotle could refer to the fact that the type of actions deliberated about do not always reach their end (see Joachim 1951, 101, Taylor 2006, 150). But this would make either this or the "for the most part" clause (see above note xx {{32}}) redundant.

[41] Unconditional necessity: necessarily *p*, no matter what else is the case.

[42] Arist. *Int*. 9.18b31-2, tr. Ackrill, modified.

[43] Arist. *Int*. 9.19a7-9, tr.Ackrill.

action and its direct consequences (*Int* 18b31-2 and 19a7-9 together with *NE* iii 2, 5, e.g. 1113b30-3).

7. How deliberation and choice are related

Aristotle holds that the objects of choice (*prohaireta*) are taken from the same pool of things as the objects of deliberation: the things within our reach. Every object of choice was at some point an object of deliberation. However, being an object of choice is not the same as being an object of deliberation. An object of deliberation is something the agent deliberates about. An object of choice is something the agent has come to be choosing. There is a significant difference here. The object of deliberation has an element of indefiniteness to it. By contrast, the object of choice, i.e. the chosen course of action, is determinate (1112b9, 1113a3). An object of deliberation becomes an object of choice via the agent's judging or deciding (*krinein* 1113a4, 1113a12). At the moment when the agent judges to pursue one of the courses of action they deliberated about, the agent starts to have a deliberated desire, that is, a desire in accordance with the judgement (*krisis*) resulting from the deliberation (1113a11-12), for pursuing the respective course of action. This desire *is* the agent's choice.[44] Hence, where there was an indeterminacy between at least two possible courses of action, there is only one course, once the choice has come into being. The object of choice is thus determined and rationally desired, whereas the object of deliberation was not (yet). Qua being a desire, choice essentially has a duration, which in the standard case continues from the moment of judgement to the completion of the action.[45] The English translation "choice" does not (clearly) capture this point; but it is important for a full understanding of Aristotle's theory of agency.

What is it that determines which course of action (of those under deliberation) becomes rationally desired or the object of choice? The answer is: the agents' deliberation and ends. The agents assemble the premises and go through a – potentially rather complex – course of reasoning, and it is their drawing the conclusion which is the judgement that brings into being their choice. What conclusion an agent arrives at likely depends on a variety of factors. These include what ends the agents started with as general premises (*Section* 8), how well developed their reasoning ability is, how well their memory and perception function,[46] and probably various external circumstances during the deliberation process such as possible distractions, time pressure, as well as which people the deliberator consults for help, if any (*NE* 1112b10-11, 27-8).

[44] In fact, Aristotle wavers about how to categorize choice. Since both elements of reason (via reasoning process) and of desire (via character disposition, see also Section 8) are preserved in choice, Aristotle alternatively calls it reasoned desire and desiring reason (*NE* 1139b4-5, *EE* 1227a3-5, 1226b17).

[45] This becomes more intelligible, if we consider that for Aristotle the choice (*prohairesis*) of a particular action is the actuality (*energeia*) of a dispositional state of the soul, and as such is complete at any moment and can be continued (until the action is completed).

[46] Cf. the mention of intellect (*nous*) in *NE* 1139a33 and Aristotle's description of its role in deliberation in *NE* vi 11.

Hence Aristotle's choice (*prohairesis*), as he uses it in *NE* iii 1-5, is nothing like an act of deciding or an act of choice between alternatives.[47] Nor is it (or is it issued from) a faculty for causally undetermined choice or decision, or of free-will, as is sometimes assumed.[48] The judgement (*krisis*) that co-causes this desire, too, is not a faculty for undetermined decision-making, nor is there any decision-making faculty like a Will in the agent that determines which way the judgement will go.[49]

8. Choice *for the sake of*, wanting & the transfer of the moral aspect to choice

Aristotle's discussion of *choice of* in *NE* iii 2-3 elucidates the relation between the things in our power, deliberation and choice, but links the voluntariness of actions neither with moral responsibility nor with virtue and vice. For this connection to become apparent, we need to examine *for-the-sake-of-what* a choice is. Aristotle tackles this issue in *NE* iii 4, and draws the connection explicitly in *NE* iii 5.[50]

We saw that the part of the soul causally responsible for the *for-the-sake-of-what* of choice is the desiring part; that is the part where a person's desires, including their wants, as well as their character dispositions (e.g. their virtues and vices), are manifested (*Section* 4). Without character dispositions which determine a person's ends there can be no choice (*NE* 1139a33-4, b3-4).

Virtuous agents have as end that which is truly good, since they have the correct view of what is good. In *NE* ii, Aristotle established this end to be the intermediate in action. In the *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle explicitly considers the function of the desiring part of the soul for the case of virtuous and vicious agents (*EE* 1227b34-1228a5): Since virtuous individuals have (hitting) the intermediate as their end, their choice is *for the sake of* (hitting) the intermediate. Thus a character-virtue is the *cause* of the intermediate *qua* being intermediate (*EE* 1227b36-8). It causes the end of the choice to be correct. That is, the virtuous agent, when judging, brings about a choice with a view to (hitting) the intermediate *qua* intermediate. (An agent may choose to tip a certain amount because it is the intermediate between being stingy und being wasteful; or because this happens to be the amount of cash in their pocket. In the latter case, tipping that amount is not chosen *qua* intermediate.)[51]

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[47] When Aristotle says, at *NE* 1112a16-17, that the name *prohairesis* suggests that *prohairesis* is something (to be) chosen before, or in preference to, other things, this does not imply that *prohairesis* is an act of choice between alternatives. Rather, one needs to read it in its context, where Aristotle emphasizes that reason and deliberation are necessary conditions for *prohairesis*. It is since *prohairesis* requires reason, that *prohairesis* is of what is preferable to other things.

[48] E.g. Grant, 1874, vol. 2, p. 14.

[49] In the virtuous agent, the dispositional state of the soul of which a choice is the actuality, is the respective virtue (see Sections 8 and 10). This is why Aristotle sometimes says that virtue is *prohairesis* (*NE* 1106a2-4), where he intends the dispositional state from which the desire issues.

[50] Commentators of *NE* iii 1-5 are often somewhat unclear about what the purpose of *NE* iii 4 and its location between *NE* iii 3 and *NE* iii 5 are. A reading of the passage like the one presented here that explains the purpose of *NE* iii 4 in its context thus has the edge over those.

[51] For this distinction see also Aristotle *NE* v 8.

In *NE* iii 4, Aristotle explains by means of which element of the desiring part of the soul this causation works: It is via wanting.[52] Wanting is *of* the end (*NE* 1111b26-8, 1113a15, 1113b3), which in the case of action is (truly or apparently) good action and their (truly or apparently) good consequences. Virtuous agents both want what is truly good (1113a31-3, *eupraxia*, 1139a34) and have all their other desires aligned with their wanting. It is by this internally unchallenged want for the intermediate that a virtuous character disposition causes the intermediate. Vicious agents may not want what is truly good, but only what – since pleasant – *appears* good to them. Their vices make them want incorrect ends, and thus causes their not realizing the intermediate.

Generally, the agents' character dispositions (in the case of the virtuous and the vicious their virtues and vices) cause the agents to have a certain type of goal-directed desire: wanting. This wanting provides the deliberative part of the soul with the *starting point* for their deliberation, by providing a universal term (e.g. healthy eating) for the major premise, to which term is tied the agent's desire for its realization.

Since the virtuous and vicious agents' character disposition has essentially a moral aspect to it (it *is* virtue, or *is* vice), this moral aspect is, via their wanting, transferred to their choice. For example, if the agent's end wasn't the intermediate, their choice would – mostly – not be for actions that are intermediate.[53]

9. From choice to action

Choice is caused by a co-operation of two causal factors, issued from two different parts of the agent's soul. They both together make up the origin and efficient cause of choice (*NE* 1139a31-4). It is in choice, that a person's reason and their desire (which is expressive of their character disposition) are joined and preserved. This is a pre-condition for human agency – as opposed to animal behaviour.

Choice, in turn, is the efficient cause and origin of action (*NE* 1139a31-2).[54] We saw that choice is a type of desire and as such has a duration. But not every choice ends in the action chosen. Choice continues from its beginning until either (i) the action has been completed, or (ii) something external interferes with the realization of the action, or (iii) the agent reconsiders their options and re-deliberates, with a different choice as result, or (iv) (assuming there is a time limit on its possible realization) the agent fails internally to realize the action – a case taken up in *Section* 11.

There are two further reasons why there is no one-to-one correlation between choice and adult human action. On the one hand, Aristotle acknowledges spur-of-the-moment acts that are voluntary (*NE* 1111b9-10, *EE* 1224a2-4, 1226b3-4). So we may incur praise or blame for them. (We may shoo away a fly, thereby brushing a glass of the table; throw

[52] Translators of the *NE* have also chosen "wish" or "will" (Rolfes 1921: "Wille") or "willing" instead of "wanting" for *boulēsis*.

[53] *NE* 1113a18; 1113b1-2; 1139a33-6; a39; *EE* 1128a4-5; cf. *NE* 1144a 20: the virtue makes the choice right.

[54] See also Segvic, 2011, Section 4.

ourselves in front of a car to save a child.) But, Aristotle holds, these spur-of-the-moment acts do not involve choice. No deliberation precedes them. They may be reflex actions or caused directly by one's dispositions (*NE* 1117a20-2). On the other hand, one choice can be sufficient for repeated action. For example, you may resolve to floss your teeth daily, and then, caused by this reasoned desire for daily flossing, floss every day. It may be that Aristotle thought – correctly – that a large part of our actions are of this type.

10. Transference of the moral aspect from choice to action

Via choice, the moral aspect, i.e. the element of good or bad, is transferred from the agent's character disposition to their action. It is this transference of the moral aspect to action, and consequently the voluntariness of this aspect in the action, which Aristotle explains in the first part of *NE* iii 5, taking up what he laid out in *NE* iii 4:[55]

> (1) The *end* being the object of wanting (2) and the means *to the end* being the objects of deliberation and choice, (3) the actions with regard to these <means *to the end*> would be in accordance with choice and <that is> voluntary. (4) And the activities of the virtues are <activities> with regard to these <means *to the end*>. (*NE* 1113b3-6, italics mine)

This is the first time, since the beginning of *NE* iii 1,[56] that Aristotle mentions virtue, action and voluntariness together. Naturally, here, we should expect him to provide information about the connection between them which he hinted at there. Read carefully, the passage does just this: (1) and (2) introduce the two causal strands that together cause choice. (1) Wanting, the goal-directed desire whose end is determined by the agent's character dispositions, is responsible for *what the end of an action is*. (2) Deliberation, the process of reasoning determined by the agent's calculative part of the soul, is responsible for *what kind of action the action is*. (3) Since these two together cause choice, and the choice causes the action (*Section* 9), the action is expected to be in accordance with choice and hence voluntary.[57]

It is in (4) that Aristotle expressly draws the connection to virtue. We assume that by 'activities of the virtues' Aristotle denotes the actions of the virtuous agent.[58] Thus the character-virtues are active via actions in which the intermediate is realized. In fact, the *only way* in which character-virtues can be realized in action is via realizing the intermediate in action. As (1)-(3) make clear, not just any action of the agent will do. For the moral aspect of virtue (or vice) to be transferred to action, it has to be the result of choice. Thus we can make explicit an implicit conclusion of Aristotle's argument: the activities of virtues are actions that are in accordance with choice. Thus the only way in which virtues can be realized in action is via *choice and* realization of the intermediate in

[55] Remember that the division into chapters is not Aristotle's, so the beginning of *NE* iii 5 would have followed without pause upon the end of *NE* iii 4.

[56] *NE* 1109b30-1. Cf. *Section* 2.

[57] Anything that occurs in accordance with choice is voluntary, cf. e.g. *NE* 1112a14-15, *EE* 1226b34-5.

[58] Cf. *NE* 1094a4, 6, 16: actions are a kind of activities.

action. For example, the only way the end of healthy living can be reached is (via wanting of that end) by *choices and* actions that realize that end, e.g. *choosing and* eating a balanced meal rather than donuts galore.[59]

And since all action in accordance with choice is voluntary, we can make explicit a second implicit conclusion in Aristotle's argument: the activities of the virtues are voluntary. This squares with Aristotle's account of the voluntary. As the virtues (or vices, respectively) are one of the two causal factors of choice, and there is no external force, nor ignorance of the relevant kind, involved in their co-causing choice, what they contribute to the action (i.e. its moral aspect) should be expected to be voluntary.

In the next-following lines, Aristotle provides an argument that has the function of explaining how it is that virtue and vice in action themselves are in our power (and thus voluntary). This argument is based on the point established in (1)-(4) that the activities of the virtues (and vices) concern the means to the end.[60] Here is, first, the passage:

> (5) And virtue, too, is in our power, and equally vice. (6) For where it is in our power to act, it is <also in our power> to not act, and where <it is in our power> to not <act>, also to yes. (7) Hence if acting, being noble, is in our power, not acting, being shameful, will also be in our power, and if not acting, being noble, is in our power, acting, being shameful, <will> also <be> in our power. (8) But if doing noble things and doing shameful things are in our power, and equally, too, not doing <noble things and not doing shameful things>, (9) and this was <as we said earlier> being good and being bad, (10) then being fine and being base will be in our power. (*NE* 1113b6-14)

Aristotle's use of the singular terms "virtue" and "vice" suggests that he is talking about virtue and vice as characteristics manifested in an action, and about the agent qua agent of the action, rather than about the character dispositions.[61] (In (4) he made the move from (i) virtue as character disposition to (ii) the manifestation in action of the character disposition that is virtue. In (5) to (10) he is talking about (ii).)

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[59] This fact, that the moral aspect can only be expressed (or failed to be expressed) if there is choice explains why toddlers and dogs, though they may be *de facto* praised and blamed, are not held *morally* responsible for what they do.

[60] Aristotle never states the purpose of these lines; moreover, they contain some textual issues. We here provide what we consider the most plausible reading and mention and assess alternative suggestions in footnotes.

[61] We agree with Meyer 2006, 129-31, that Aristotle appears to use the expressions for virtue and vice, and for our being good and bad, noble and base, in two quite different ways. When he uses the expressions in the plural, he talks about the moral dispositions, and our having virtue or vice, in this context, means that we have those character dispositions. When he uses the expressions in the singular, he often simply means the goodness and badness manifested in an agent's action: "you were bad, you lied to me"; "you were good, you didn't have dessert". Here, when agents are called good or bad, etc., this is a "punctual" and "reflective" (from the action back to the agent) use: the agents are called good or bad insofar as their action was good or bad.

We believe that Aristotle assumes an implicit conclusion (C) "the activities of the virtues are activities in accordance with choice and voluntary"; and parallel to (4), "the activities of the vices are <activities> with regard to these <means to the end>" and to (C) "the activities of the vices are activities in accordance with choice and voluntary". In other words, we believe that Aristotle takes it for granted that the same psychological structure-and-procedure by which virtues become active are in play when vices become active. The purpose of 1113b7-14 is then to set out how the moral aspects of the virtues and vices (that which makes them virtues or vices) are manifested in action in such a way that praise and blame can be attached to the agents for the resulting noble or base action (qua noble or base action).

The argument starts with a statement of the thesis to be proved, i.e. (5). This is standard procedure from Aristotle's dialectic. Next, Aristotle introduces a two-part premise, (6), stating the two-sidedness of things being in our power. Its truth seems taken for granted. The points that human actions are goal-directed, and their end, which is an aspect of them, is determined by the agent's character dispositions (including their virtues or vices), are taken from (1)-(4) as additional premises. Thus a full description of the actions at issue would not be "(not) doing *x*" but "(not) doing *x*, *x* being noble" or "(not) doing *x*, *x* being shameful" respectively. In (7), Aristotle combines (6) with (1)-(4), and draws an intermediate conclusion ("hence"): Since between good and bad actions the relations hold that if by doing *x* one is hitting the intermediate, then by not doing *x* one is not; and if by not doing *x* one is hitting the intermediate, then by doing *x* one is not, we get the expanded statement of the two-sidedness of things being in our power. From (7), there follows the antecendent of (8)-(10), i.e. (8), which re-arranges the possible cases, putting the cases of acting before those of refraining. In (9), Aristotle restates as additional premise an account of what it is do be good or bad in action which he used before. Finally, from (8) and (9) he concludes (10), assuming that if *x* is in our power and *x*=*y*, then *y* is in our power. The conclusion (10) is an alternative formulation of the thesis (5): being fine and being base are in our power.

Aristotle's argument (1113b3-14) is then in short: All action is goal-directed. The end is determined by the agent's character dispositions and wanted by the agent because of this character. An action with which the agent aims at the intermediate is a good-and-noble action, an action with which the agent aims at an extreme is shameful-and-bad. The goodness or badness are transferred to the action from the character disposition virtue and vice, by means of a choice. (Character-virtue is good; character-vice is bad.) Actions that are the result of choice are in our power, and so are their opposites. But the actions at issue that result from a choice have a moral aspect, which is manifested in them because the moral disposition is a co-cause of the choice.[62] Thus it is correct to say of these actions, that they are in our power, being good, and that they are in our power, being bad, respectively; and hence that the good actions and the bad actions are in our power, respectively.

[62] Aristotle only considers the character dispositions of vice and virtue here – not any in-betweens, for which see Section 11.

And in the sense in which we are fine-and-good or base-and-bad, insofar as we performed a good or bad action, it is also correct to say that our being good, or our being bad, is in our power. Aristotle is here not talking about it being in our power that we are fine or base in the sense of *having virtuous or vicious dispositions*. Evidently, the argument proves no such thing.[63] Rather, the goodness or badness of the agent that is in the agent's power is derived from the good or bad actions. And this is all that is required to establish the *moral* responsibility of the agent for their actions. As their being good/bad (qua doing something good/bad) is in their power and thus voluntary, they can be praised/blamed as being fine/base (qua having done something good/bad).[64]

At this point, Aristotle has completed showing how virtue concerns actions (*NE* 1109b30) in such a way that its manifestation in action is voluntary and in our power, so that praise or blame can be attached to the agent for having performed a noble or shameful action: we can say "you are noble insofar as you did this", "your doing this was bad", etc. The blame or praise can be attached to the agent, since it was something in the agent, their character disposition, which is causally responsible for the moral dimension of the action.[65]

11. Choice and Aristotle's four types of agents

It is instructive to consider the causal sequences from an agent's dispositions and intellect, via their wanting, deliberating and choice, to action, as they occur in Aristotle's

[63] There are several alternative interpretations of *NE* 1113b3-14. These (i) either leave Aristotle arguing fallaciously, or (ii) needlessly change the text, or (iii) face some other interpretational difficulties. *Ad* (i): both the interpretations (a) that the passage is a self-contained proof that virtue and vice in action is in our power and (b) that the passage is a proof that virtuous and vicious dispositions are in our power make Aristotle reason incorrectly (cf. Meyer 1993, 129-131). *Ad* (ii): the interpretation that in this passage Aristotle shows that we have undetermined, free, choice (Broadie 1991, Destree 2011) is based on an emendation, introducing a verb of saying into (6), and reading 'no' (*ou*) instead of 'not' (*mē*) (cf. Bobzien forthcoming). *Ad* (iii): the asymmetry interpretation of this passage (e.g. Broadie/Rowe 2002, 317, Pakaluk 2005, 145-6) assumes either (a) that it is assumed *ad hominem* that virtue is in our power or (b) that this has been shown in lines 1113b3-6; and argues from there that vice, too, is in our power. One problem with this interpretation is that it sits badly with Aristotle summarizing iii 1-5 by saying that virtue is voluntary and in our power: (a) makes his summary equal an *ad hominem* assumption of his. (b) makes his summary regard only four lines of *NE* iii 5 and leads to the philosophical oddity that while the voluntariness of virtue was justified with its being caused by our virtuous disposition, via choice, the voluntariness of vice is justified in an entirely different and needlessly complex argument, although an equivalent argument to that for virtue would have suggested itself and is assumed e.g. in *EE* 1228a4-5.

[64] Cf. also *NE* iii 5.1113b21-26 where private individuals and lawmakers are said to punish people who do wicked things and praise people who do noble things: it is only after the argument 1113b3-14 that the praise of noble actions is mentioned in *NE* iii 1-5. But Aristotle noted the link between virtue and noble action already at *NE* i 12 1101b31-2: "as a result of <virtue> people tend to do noble things (*ta kala*)".

[65] Perhaps this transference might be expressed using Aristotle's model of efficient causation in *Met* Z: As the form of health in the doctor's soul is the efficient cause of any particular coming-to-be-healthy produced (1032b21-4), so the form of good action (its intermediateness) in the agent's soul is the efficient cause of the agent's particular good (i.e. intermediate) action. Either way, it is the person's desire (the doctor's desire to heal, the agent's *prohairesis*) *via* which the efficient cause realizes the effect.

four main types of agents, the virtuous, vicious, strong-willed, and weak-willed.[66] We disregard all possible external interferences in the process from forming the choice to completing the action. These would include cases in which, unbeknownst to the agent, external factors cause something usually in the agent's power not to be so; and cases in which, unforeseeable for the agent, external factors thwart the realization of their choice. We consider only cases in which, in Aristotle's view, the agent is the origin of the action.

The virtuous agent: The virtuous agent is one in whom all factors of voluntary action are realized in an excellent way. (i) The agent's character dispositions are good; they are virtues. They cause the agent's ends, which are the intermediate relative to each dimension of virtue. Since the character dispositions are states of the desiring part of the soul, the virtuous agent desires, more precisely, wants, the intermediate with respect to each dimension of virtue. (ii) The agent's practical intellect works without flaws. The agent has practical wisdom. As a result, and given the agent's wants, the agent reasons correctly about how to realize the intermediate in their action, using an accurate assessment regarding what is in their power. (iii) All other desires of the agent are fully aligned with what the agent wants. (Not only does the agent want health-promoting food, and deliberates that leafy greens are health-promoting, she also loves leafy greens, that is, has an appetite from them, and has a heartfelt dislike for fast food.) The agent's wanting-of-the-end and deliberation-of-the-means together then cause a choice.[67] (iv) Since the agent's other desires are fully aligned with what the agent wants, at the appropriate time the agent's choice causes the action. Thus the action is voluntary. It is also (internally and externally)[68] noble (*kalos*), and that aspect of the action is also voluntary. The action, qua being noble, is thus praiseworthy.

One noteworthy aspect of the actions of completely virtuous agents is that, although nothing forces the agents to act, for psychological reasons (i.e. for reasons to do with their soul), the agents cannot choose or act otherwise than they do. In the same circumstances the same virtuous agent will always choose and follow up the same noble course of action. There is nothing in the agent that could interfere with this. For Aristotle, this is no reason to question the voluntariness of the action or the agent. On the contrary, completely virtuous agents act with the minimal possible amount of force, since in

[66] Of the remaining two named types, Aristotle mentions at *NE* vii 1 and 5, brutes may be beyond blame, god-like heroes beyond praise.

[67] What happens if there are two equally good actions towards reaching the end? In that case, we can assume, external circumstances or non-moral elements of the agent's character (a preference for red over blue, say) will determine the agent's choice. If there are no such circumstantial elements, rather than not acting at all (like Buridan's Ass) the rational agent would do something comparable to throwing a coin.

[68] An internally good/bad action is one co-caused by the respective virtue/vice. And externally good/bad action is one that is indistinguishable from an internally good/bad one, except for the fact that it is not co-caused by the respective virtue/vice. The internal/external terminology is ours. But the distinction is Aristotles: cf. *NE* 1105b5-9. (From the externally good actions one must distinguish the accidentally (*kata sumbebēkos*) good actions from *NE* v 8 that were illustrated by our tip-example in Section 8. The do not have the intermediate as end.)

addition to the absence of external force, there is also a total absence of psychological, internal factors that could be considered as compelling them to act.[69]

The strong-willed agent: (i) The strong-willed and the virtuous agents have and want the same ends: the intermediate in actions.[70] The ends wanted are thus good (as opposed to just appearing good to the agent). What differentiates the strong-willed from the virtuous is that not all their desires are aligned with their wanted ends. (ii) The agents may or may not reason correctly about the means to their ends, and they may or may not accurately assess what is in their power. For simplicity, we assume they do both right. (iii) The agent's willing-of-the-end and deliberation-of-the-means together cause a choice for the action that promotes the intermediate. (iv) Despite the agent's desires that conflict with their wanted end, at the appropriate time, the agent's choice causes the action (*NE* 1111b13-15). (The agent wants health-promoting food, chooses to eat, and eats, the leafy greens, although their appetite is for the greasy sugary donuts.) Thus the action is voluntary. It is also (externally) noble,[71] and the result of a strong-willed disposition.

The weak-willed agent: In points (i) to (iii), the weak-willed agent does not differ from the strong-willed. (iv) The element of weak-willedness (*akrasia*) comes to the surface in the relation between choice and action. It is at the point when one would expect the choice to cause the action, that the agent's conflicting desires interfere (*NE* 1111b13-14). They cause a temporary state of ignorance about some property of some object involved in the action (e.g. that this thing is sugary; that donuts are sugary; that sugary food is unhealthy).[72] As a result, the persons' behaviour is aligned with their conflicting desire, say their appetite for donuts. It is this desire which causes an alternative to the chosen action (not eating the leafy greens; eating the donuts instead). The action is thus neither externally nor internally noble.

Actions caused by weak-willedness are nonetheless voluntary. Aristotle is unequivocal on this point. First, he argues that actions that might be described as actions in which the agent was compelled to act the way he did by irrational desires like appetite or anger do not thereby become involuntary. Rather, appetite and anger are no less manifestations of who the agent is than is his reason; hence actions that "come from anger or appetite, too, are the actions of the person" (*NE* 1111b1-2). Such actions satisfy the account of voluntariness, since external force is absent and the action's origin is in the agent. Moreover, the temporary forgetfulness or ignorance is also not of the kind that exempts

[69] Cf. also *NE* 1111a29-31, where Aristotle mentions that it would be absurd to call involuntary the things that one ought to desire. The fact that for Aristotle the completely virtuous person cannot choose other than they provides not support the assumption that Aristotle was a determinist. (After all, few of us, if any, are completely virtuous, and thus barred from the exhilarating experience of conflicting desires.) Rather, what the fact shows is that being able to choose otherwise was for Aristotle in no way a condition for justified praise. (Cf. also Frede 2011 ch. 2.)

[70] Arguably, one could have an ignoble end and be strong-willed, or an ignoble end and be weak-willed, but we disregard these possibilities here, too. A full classification of actions based on the various factors involved would provide a much larger number of possible cases than four.

[71] If the deliberation process was flawed, there would be no guarantee that the action is noble.

[72] Different interpretations of Aristotle's theory of weak-willedness assume different objects of ignorance. For an in-depth discussion of the topic see Lorenz, this volume.

actions from voluntariness. For the cause of the forgetting is internal to the agent, not external. Virtuous and strong-willed individuals would not have forgotten. Thus, although for Aristotle choice is characteristic for actions that are not "spur-of-the-moment", it does not follow that the choice is always the *cause* of the action. In weak-willed actions it is not.

The vicious agent: (i) The vicious agents' character dispositions are bad. They are character vices. They cause the agent's ends, which are bad, although they appear good to the agent. The ends are extremes, rather than the intermediate, with respect to a dimension of virtue. The vicious agent wants those extremes. (ii) Vicious agents may or may not deliberate correctly or accurately assess what is in their power. For simplicity, we assume they do both right. (iii) None of the other desires of the agent seem in conflict with what the agent wants. (Not only does the agent *want* to eat huge amounts of fast food, he also *loves* quadruple cheese-burgers and grease-dripping donuts.) The agent's want for some extreme together with their deliberation cause a choice. (iv) Since the agent's other desires don't conflict with their wants, their choice causes the action, which is thus voluntary. It is also (internally and externally) bad, and that aspect of it is also voluntary. The action, qua being bad, is thus blameworthy. (Qua being an action of burger-eating it may be praiseworthy: no ketchup on the shirt, no pickles on the pants, no choking on the bun.)

Agents with not yet fully developed character: Thus the actions of all four agent types involve choice, but only in three cases does their choice cause the action. Yet the conditions of voluntariness are satisfied each time. Each case involves choice and thus the relevant rational psychological process. Each time, the origin of the action is in the agent, and there are neither external force nor ignorance of the kind that eradicate voluntariness. Of course, for Aristotle, adult humans do not start out with a fully developed character. Hence we consider how action is brought about in agents with not yet fully developed character. (i) Such agents do not yet have moral dispositions. Still, they have wanting (*NE* 1114a11-13), i.e. goal-directed desire, in the desiring part of their soul. Depending on their *natural* dispositions, their ends may or may not coincide with the intermediate (*NE* vi 13). The agents also have other desires, which are likely in conflict with some of their wants. (ii) Such agents have an ability for practical reasoning, and for assessing what is within their reach. They may not be very accurate on either front. (iii) This notwithstanding, the agent's wants and deliberation together (and, thus, the agent) will cause a choice. (iv) Depending on the strength of the agent's conflicting desires, the choice either causes the corresponding action, or the conflicting desires prevail. Either way, the action is voluntary. The action may be externally noble or bad. If it is bad, whether by choice or weak-willedness, the agents may be blamed for it. If it is good as result of choice, they may be praised.

12. Voluntary consequences of adult voluntary action

People are praised and blamed not just for things they do or don't do, but also for consequences of things they did or didn't do. Since voluntariness is a prerequisite for praise and blame, Aristotle also discusses voluntariness as it attaches to consequences of

things people did or didn't do. We call this indirect voluntariness. The main case of indirect voluntariness which Aristotle explains in *NE* iii 5 is that of the moral dispositions. But he starts with a more straightforward kind of indirect voluntariness, using examples.

In his first example, a drunk person does something which she would not have done, had she had some relevant circumstantial information, and which is punishable by law (and thus assumed to be blameworthy). Since the person lacks some relevant circumstantial information, what she *did* would not count as directly voluntary. It is no voluntary action. How can blame be attached to it nonetheless? The answer is that it is a consequence of an action which *was* directly voluntary. The person desired to drink, deliberated, chose and drunk. (Whether the choice was to drink or the drinking resulted from weak-willedness is irrelevant.) Nothing external forced her to drink. Hence her drinking – at least of her first few drinks – was voluntary. It was a foreseeable consequence of her drinking that she became drunk. This consequence, being drunk, a temporary condition, is indirectly voluntary. It is a consequence of being drunk, that the person did not have certain information, which, had she had it, would have prevented her from acting. Thus her acting is also indirectly voluntary (twice removed from the action, as it were). Hence it can be blamed.

In a second example, a person breaks a law which he didn't know existed, but whose existence would have been easy for him to discover, had he cared to find out. Such persons are punished by law (and Aristotle assumes they are blameworthy). Perhaps the person did not know that it is illegal to dump dioxin in the public garbage site. A quick online search would have revealed this to him. Common sense would have suggested he check. Here we have a refraining (i.e. from checking), which is directly voluntary. The refraining is an instance of not taking care. (Not taking care here is neither a temporary condition, nor a character disposition, of the agent.) The refraining caused the condition of ignorance, which is indirectly voluntary; it in turn led to an act of law-breaking, which is indirectly voluntary (twice removed from the refraining).[73]

What Aristotle's examples have in common (what makes them blameworthy) is that they are foreseeable consequences of voluntary action.[74] In terms of causation, there is a foreseeable causal chain that has its origin in the agent (*NE* 1113b30, 33). To express this fact, Aristotle invokes the alternative options the agent had when performing the (directly voluntary) actions.

[73] The action of breaking the law is indirectly voluntary. The action of dumping dioxin in the garbage site is directly voluntary.

[74] At this point we see how the criterion of absence of ignorance for direct voluntariness can produce borderline cases. The person who injured her friend when fencing since she didn't know the button was off, was assumed not to have injured her friend – directly – voluntarily (see *Section* 3). But if it was a case in which she simply didn't bother to check, she injured her friend voluntarily nonetheless; just indirectly so. And there may be no natural cut-off points for situations in which people are expected to check from those in which they aren't. (In ordinary circumstances, we would not be expected to do a chemical analysis of a drink we offer a friend, to check on potential poisoning.)

Here he uses the expression "master of" (*kurios*, 1113b32) in a two-sided way: at the time of their actions, the agents were masters both of doing and of not doing those actions. This kind of formulation has been used to argue that Aristotle was an indeterminist with respect to voluntary actions: If at a time *t* the agent was master of not doing what they did at *t*, then at *t* the agent must have been causally undetermined with respect to doing or not doing what they did. They had the – indeterminist – freedom to do otherwise. However, just as in the case of Aristotle's use of "in our power" (*Section* 6), this is not so. For Aristotle, it is the fact that the agents (including their ends, awareness of alternative options, deliberation and choice) are causally responsible for what they do that makes their actions and their foreseeable consequences voluntary – not that their actions or choices were causally undetermined.

13. The voluntariness of virtuous and vicious dispositions

So far, we have seen that for Aristotle, praise and blame can be (and are) bestowed on people for their individual actions, for the moral aspects of those actions and for the foreseeable consequences of individual actions, including temporary mental states of the agent.

Aristotle recognizes that people are also praised and blamed for who they are, in the sense of what moral dispositions they have.[75] People may be blamed for being bad, that is, not for any particular bad action, but for those character dispositions which make them perform bad actions with some regularity; likewise, they may be praised for being virtuous. People may also be blamed for being weak-willed, in the sense of continuously falling short of their choices owing to conflicting desires. In *NE* iii 1, Aristotle introduced voluntariness as a necessary condition for praise and blame. Accordingly, in *NE* iii 5, he provides a theory of the voluntariness (and being-in-our-power) of character dispositions (1114a3-1114b25). Whatever his primary purpose of the passage may be,[76] in it, he explains that, how, and why virtuous and vicious dispositions are voluntary. At the end of the passage he believes to have shown that the virtues, qua character dispositions, are in our power and voluntary; and the text where he shows this is *NE* iii 5 1114a3-1114b25.[77]

In outline, Aristotle's theory of the voluntariness of moral dispositions is the following. Virtues and vices are character dispositions. They are produced by an agent by repeatedly performing the actions which the disposition, once developed, will be a disposition for. Any agent who is not entirely uneducated knows this. The disposition-producing actions

[75] *NE* 1101b14-15, 1101b31-2, 1103a8-10, 1114a28-31. For an excellent discussion of Aristotle's theory of our responsibility for our character see Meyer 1993.

[76] The purpose (in fact of all of 1113b14-1114b25) is debated. Some think it is to show that the character dispositions are voluntary. Others think that the passage presupposes that *virtuous* dispositions are voluntary and argues from this to the conclusion that *vicious* dispositions are voluntary, too (e.g. Meyer 2006). Still others think that the purpose of the passage is to show that we are morally responsible for our character since causally undetermined, free actions are a partial cause of our character formation (e.g. Destree 2011). For a counter to this assumption of causally undetermined choice see below.

[77] *NE* 1114b20-5 uses "voluntary" for virtues and vices, in the plural; *NE* 1114a28-31 uses "in our power" for dispositions (of body and soul).

are voluntary and usually the result of choice – which warrants their voluntariness. Thus, (i), the disposition can be regarded as foreseeable consequence of accumulative voluntary action of certain types. Moreover, (ii), the origin of the disposition lies in the agent – since the agent is the originator of the repeated action. Factors (i) and (ii) together qualify the disposition itself as voluntary – even though the process of its coming into being is a long, complex one, and is more vulnerable to external interferences than individual actions. Agents can work towards having certain character dispositions (e.g. certain virtues) similar to the way they can work towards achieving certain consequences of individual actions. The main differences are, first, that the kind of action needs repetition and, second, that the location of the consequence is the agent's own soul.

Aristotle brings to the reader's attention one fundamental difference between direct and indirect voluntariness. This is the fact that agents can end directly voluntary things (like actions) at any point, but not indirectly voluntary things, including character dispositions (*NE* 1114a13-21; 1114b30-1115a3). Take a voluntary action: in standard cases, it is possible for agents to "change their mind", i.e. to reverse their choice, at any point during their performing the action, and consequently stop the action. For example, on your way to the store you can turn around and go home; or you can terminate your daily flossing any day. In the case of voluntary character dispositions, the equivalent does not hold. Here a change of mind would amount to a reversal of wanting (*NE* 1114a13-14). But the reversal of wanting, say, from wanting extremes as the end to wanting the intermediate as the end, or the change from wanting a vicious disposition to wanting a virtuous one, does not enable the person, as a result, to cease to have the disposition they have; or in any case not instantaneously.

Thus it is not a prerequisite for something *x* to be voluntary that at any time during which *x* is present, *x*'s originator can, upon reversing her desire for *x*, make *x* stop or cease to exist – even if at no point during that time *x* is externally forced or the originator is relevantly ignorant. This should not surprise. First, it is a common feature of many indirectly voluntary things that they are not, or not instantly, reversible upon the originator's desire for reversal: consider being drunk or serious self-mutilation. Second, voluntariness helps single out cases for justified praise or blame; and it would be absurd if it was a requirement for justified praise or blame that its object could be reversed or undone by its originator. Persons could then only be blamed for the death of someone they deliberately killed if they could bring them back to life upon accordingly reversing their desire.

It is sometimes claimed that Aristotle maintains that the reason why actions of a vicious agent are voluntary and hence blame-worthy lies in the fact that at some point in the past the agent could have reversed their development towards a vicious disposition (and *mutatis mutandis* for virtuous agents). But Aristotle never suggests or implies anything like this. His view is that any action that satisfies the criterion for direct voluntariness is voluntary *for that reason*. The fact that at some past time it was in the agent's power to reverse their path towards a vicious disposition is as irrelevant to the action's blameworthiness or praiseworthiness, as is the fact that for psychological reasons an agent may be unable to act otherwise than they do.

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