Aristotle's Functional Theory of the Emotions

Angela Chew

Abstract: Placing Aristotle's ethical works in dialogue with the work of G.E.M. Anscombe, this paper outlines a functional definition of emotions that describes a meta-theory for social-scientific research. Emotions are defined as what makes the thought and action of rational and political animals ethical.

Keywords: Aristotle, emotion, action.

Introduction: An unpromising theory of natural human functioning?

My purpose in this paper is to provide a sketch of how Aristotle's account of what kind of thing a virtue is provides a functional theory of the emotions that is worthy of consideration by contemporary philosophers of social science.

For Aristotle a human being flourishes by exercising his natural function excellently (*EN* I.7.1097b22-33, II.1.1103a25-26, II.6.1106a14-24).[1] Moreover, each physically and psychologically healthy human being exercises his natural function always or almost always, whether he realises this or not (*Phys* II.5.196b10-13, 8.199a8-b4 cf. *EE* VII.2.1236a1-4). But a human being's natural function is to live a practical kind of life proper to an animal of the following sort: an animal that has a kind of reason that directs and structures desires and emotions (henceforth 'emotion-

---

[1] All works by Aristotle are cited under traditional abbreviations of Latin titles, as listed in Liddell & Scott. Line numbers are as in current Oxford Classical Texts editions, except *MA* where line numbers are from ed. Nussbaum (1978). Translations are my own, of texts as in the above editions.

enforming reason') (*EN* I.7.1098a3-5 cf. I.13.1102b11-1103a10). To live such a life excellently one must engage in psychological activity and action with reason and in accordance with virtues (*EN* I.7.1098a12-18). (By 'psychological activity' here are meant things like thinking, desiring, emoting etc.) Therefore, first, a human being flourishes only if he emotes and acts with reason and in accordance with virtues. If he does this, he might yet be subject to too much ill fortune to count as flourishing; but if he does not do this, he will not count as flourishing, no matter how fortunate he is (*EN* I.8.1099a31-b8, 1099a13-16, I.10.1100b33-1101a3, V.1.1129b1-6, VII.13.1153b14-25). Second, every healthy human being is always or almost always trying to emote and act with reason and in accordance with virtues, whether he realises this or not; he is trying to do this just as long as he thinks, feels and does in an ordinary way (cf. *EN* X.8.1178a9-b7). Thus, Aristotle will give an account of emotions by and in the course of delineating a natural human function in terms of virtues and emotion-enforming reason.

At first glance, this approach is liable to strike modern ethicists and social scientists as highly unattractive. Isn't Aristotle assuming that there is some one set of virtues by having and exercising which all humans flourish, if they flourish at all? Worse yet, isn't he assuming that we are all striving to feel common kinds of emotion in the same way (viz. in conformity with the supposed common virtues), regardless of culture and whether we realise this or not? Perhaps this was all very well for Alexander the Great, Greek by education and conqueror by ambition, but it will not do for us. Now almost certainly, Aristotle thought that there was a unique set of virtues by having and exercising which every man flourishes, if he flourishes at all. Moreover, he probably also thought that these virtues were those that would be thrown up by sufficiently careful reflection on contemporary local practice, give or take a little tweaking. However, if Aristotle held these opinions, as I will now explain, this is not the fault of his theory of natural human functioning.

(1.1) Function as a methodological presupposition and what kind of thing a virtue is

The theory of natural human functioning forms the first stage of an investigation into what kind of thing a virtue is that is prior to and regu-

lative of Aristotle's reflection on contemporary local practice. Before setting out to identify and sketch particular virtues, Aristotle seeks a definition of virtue that is to be adequate in the following two ways. First it is to be good enough to allow us to count virtues (*EN* III.5.1114b26-27, 1115a4-6); we must be able to identify which among the things that we might initially think are virtues are really the right sort of thing to be virtues (cf. *EN* IV.9), and we must be equipped to spot other virtues that we might otherwise miss (cf. *EN* IV.5-8). Second, the definition is to provide us with an adequate framework for reflecting upon and clarifying those virtues that pass the test (*EN* I.7.1098a20-26 cf. I.3.1095a8-11, I.4.1095b2-4). To this end, Aristotle seeks to extract from available intuitions abstract universal generalisations that are to apply to all and any particular virtues, whatever they turn out to be, and which will together say what it is for something to be a virtue (see especially the definition at *EN* II.6.1106b36-1107a8 and its extension at *EN* III.5.1114b26-1115a3).

The theory of natural human functioning provides a methodological presupposition to guide this search for a general definition and get it off the ground. It says: 'Figure out what is essential to an excellence of psychological activity and action with reason that is to be an excellence of a kind of life proper to an animal with emotion-enforming reason.' True, for Aristotle, this methodological presupposition itself follows from a more general theory of nature: Every animal, and indeed every living thing, flourishes by exercising its natural function well. Plants live lives of nutrition, undergoing natural processes but not acting. Non-human animals live lives of perception, acting always and only on instinctive desire. Humans live lives of emotion-enforming reason, acting out of reason-enformed emotions and reason-directed desires of a higher and more complex kind than instinct. To find what human excellence is therefore, find what is essential to an excellence of a life of emotion-enforming reason (*EN* I.7.1097b30-1098a12, cf. I.13.1102a32-b14). However, the above adequately summarises all the use Aristotle ever makes of his metaphysics of biology in his ethical enquiries.[2] So, we can, without difficulty, regard him as making no more than the following claim: Ethology about an animal with emotion-enforming reason should be

---

[2] See Irwin (1980) for a strong reading of Aristotle's use of his metaphysics in his ethics; my summary does justice to even this strong reading.

conducted by seeking excellences of psychological activity and action with reason. And we can treat this claim as a methodological presupposition that will be justified (if at all) by its fruitfulness.[3]

This methodological presupposition is a first stage of Aristotle's enquiry into ethics, more as the source of a fountain, than as the source of a laser-beam; the enquiry spreads out in several directions. The relevant stream for our purposes, however, is the following. One thing we mean when we say that virtues are excellences of psychological activity and action with reason is that virtue-concepts structure rational evaluation of emotion and emotion-enformed action. We manage to make explicable value-judgments about the emotion and emotion-enformed action of particular persons in particular situations because we use virtue-concepts to do so. So Aristotle first finds and states an initial definition of what kind of thing a virtue is, given that virtue-concepts have this role (EN II.6). He then goes on to extend this definition by undertaking an investigation into responsibility for action as follows (in EN III.1-5).

The relevant structuring concepts just analysed are used in imputing action for the purposes of blaming, chastising and penalising, on the one hand, and praising, honouring and rewarding on the other (henceforth 'practices of ethical imputation') (*EN* III.1.1109b30-34, cf. III.5.1113b21-30). So Aristotle analyses how these structuring concepts work and what kind of thing a virtue must therefore be, given that this is the case. (Cf. *EN* III.5.1114b29-1115a3, where the whole investigation of responsibility is called into service to construct the new extended 'definition in outline of what kind of thing a virtue is', 1114b26-27). At the same time, Aristotle's reflections show, we use the same structuring concepts in explaining action as with reason (see *EN* III. 2.1112a15-16, 3.1113a5-4, 4.1113a29-33). So Aristotle explains (in *EN* III.2-4) how the concepts do this work and what kind of thing a virtue must therefore be, in a manner that aligns this form of explanation with our practices of ethical imputation (cf. *EN* III.5.1113b3-7 with b21ff). This last shows how virtue is not only what makes our evaluation of emotion and action 'with reason', but also what makes the emotion and action itself 'with reason'.

---

[3]   Cf. Whiting (1988, esp. SSV-VIII).

(1.2) Relative rational functions and a functional definition

Taken together, the investigations traced in SS(1.2) explain what it is to specify *a* (not necessarily the sole) function that belongs to an animal with emotion-enforming reason. It says what counts as a function by reference to which the emotion and action of an individual with emotion-enforming reason can legitimately be explained and evaluated. From now on, I will refer to this sort of function as 'a rational-and-social function'. By following the stream of investigation traced in SS(1.2), this paper will provide an account of what it is to specify an Aristotelian rational-and-social function.

My term echoes Aristotle's two famous claims that the human being is a rational animal (e.g. at *EN* I.7.1097b33-1098a4) and that the human being is a social or 'civic' (*politikon*) animal (e.g. at *EN* I.7.1097b11).[4] But it is intended to indicate more than a mere amalgamation of these two ideas. The intrinsically social nature of whatever counts as a specification of a rational-and-social function will not have escaped the reader's notice. Any time we come up with a substantive specification of a function that does the jobs it must do according to SS(1.2), we will have circumscribed the 'we' that does all the relevant evaluating, imputing and explaining, and our theory will be about this 'we' and this 'we' alone. As with virtues and kinds of emotion, although Aristotle himself thought that the relevant 'we' would invariably be a small city-state (*polis*) of a sort found in the Mediterranean in the 4th century BC, this is not entailed by his theory of natural human functioning. In this way Aristotle's investigations provide a definition of what is *a* rational-and-social function, and not a definition of what is *the* rational-and-social function.

Further, however, in specifying a rational-and-social function, we will not only identify virtues and kinds of emotion recognised by some society or community (some 'we'), we will *thereby* explain what counts as acting with reason in that society or community. So we cannot separate how a rational-and-social function is rational from how it is social (cf. *Pol* I.3.1253a1-18); hence the hyphens.

Now Aristotle's theory is also functional in another sense; not only is the theory a theory of what is a rational-and-social function, it also pro-

---

4   Rowe (2002) translates 'civic' *ad loc.*

vides a *functional definition* of its key terms.[5] When we have said what it is to specify a rational-and-social function, this definition will tell us what are emotions, what are virtues and what are each of whatever other entities we need to introduce to specify a rational-and-social function. It will do so by exhibiting the structure of their interrelated roles in explanation and evaluation of the emotion and action of those having some rational-and-social function. In particular, Aristotle's account of what is a rational-and-social function will provide a functional definition of emotion.

Accordingly, the remainder of this paper proceeds by following, without further apology, the Aristotelian line of investigation indicated in SS(1.2): I begin in SS(2.1) with how, according to Aristotle, virtue-concepts structure rational evaluation of emotion and emotion-enformed action. In SS(2.2) I explain how, according to Aristotle, these concepts are used in practices of ethical imputation. In SS(3.1)-(3.2) I set out Aristotle's distinctive perspective on human intentional action and reasons for action. This puts me in a position to clarify in detail, in SS(4.1)-(4.4), what it is to explain action as with reason according to Aristotle. The clarification completes our functional definition and I conclude by saying why the theory that has been sketched is worthy of consideration by contemporary philosophers of social science.[6]

(2.1) Aristotle's Schematisation of Virtue-concepts

In *EN* II.6 Aristotle represents virtuous emoting and acting in terms of a schema of 'shoulds'.

> For example, in fearing and daring, and desiring (*epithumia*), and getting angry, and pitying, and in being pleased or distressed in general … to be affected *when one should and in response to the features one should (eph'hois) and in relation to whom one should (pros hous) and for the sake of what one should and how one should, this* is intermediate and best, and what is proper to virtue. And in the

---

[5] See e.g. Lewis (1972).

[6] Some of the following exposition is controversial as an exercise in interpretation of Aristotle's texts. Due to space-constraints, I am obliged to omit much detailed textual defence (which I have undertaken elsewhere). The unconvinced scholar of Aristotle is invited either to suspend disbelief so as to consider the merits of my proposed interpretative approach, or to regard the present paper as an exercise in 'Aristotel*ian* ethics' (now with an unusual amount of actual Aristotle in it).

same way, concerning actions too … So then virtue is a kind of intermediacy, at any rate in that it is skilful at hitting upon (*stochastikē*)[7] what is intermediate. And whereas there are many ways to err, since 'what is bad belongs to the indefinite', as the Pythagorean simile used to have it, whereas what is good 'belongs to the delineated', there is only one way to be right (*EN* II.6.1106b18-31).[8]

This schema constitutes a universal generalisation (*katholou*, II.7.1107a28) whose domain is particular virtues, e.g. courage, temperance, justice & equanimity (*praotēs* as in *EN* IV.5), wise liberality (*eleutheriotētos* as in *EN* IV.1). Each such virtue governs particular kinds of emotion, e.g. fearing & daring, desiring, indignation, pity (respectively), and particular kinds of doing, e.g. undertaking risk, pursuing pleasure, demanding recompense, giving (respectively). Given a particular person in a particular situation, we can make and explain a judgment as to whether and how he is or is not getting things right in the following way. We apply our schema of shoulds to each relevant virtue and thereby explain how he is or is not conforming to that virtue in his emotion and action. If a person has got things right with respect to some virtue, we use the schema to explain how this is so, describing how he has relevant emotions and does relevant things when he should, in response to the features he should etc. And since the ways of erring are not susceptible of delineation in their own right, if a person has erred we again use the same schema to explain how this is so (cf. *Met* Θ.2.1046b12-15, 20-24); we describe how he has relevant emotions and does relevant things *not* when he should and/or *not* in response to the features he should and/or *not* in relation to whom he should etc. In this way, such virtue-concepts as we grasp and can use allow us to make rational evaluations of emotion and action. Or, more properly speaking, the preceding provides a framework in accordance with which to pick out, reflect upon and clarify virtues, regarded as structures of rational evaluation.

We need three further elaborations of the above outline-account of Aristotle's should-schematisation if we are to understand his view of what it is to explain action as with reason. First, virtues do not regulate

---

[7] Following Rowe (2002) *ad loc.*: 'hitting upon' carries an apt double-connotation of finding *and* attaining.

[8] The intermediacy vocabulary as applied to the schema of shoulds is unhelpful, see Broadie (1991, Ch2, SSIX); accordingly I ignore it.

kinds of doing independently of regulating kinds of emotion. Aristotelian courage, if it prescribes standing my ground now, does so by prescribing that I should have fear and daring appropriately. Moreover, if I am doing as a virtue requires, that is because I am emoting as the virtue requires. Specifically, it is because I am having the kinds of emotion that should enform *those* doings according to *that* virtue as that virtue requires. E.g. I can rightly demand recompense for a wronged party only if I have indignation rightly, according to the virtue of righteousness (as in *EN* IV.5). And if I rightly demand recompense for a wronged party it will be because I have indignation rightly. I must have indignation rightly even if I don't have *all* emotions rightly, so that I need to exercise strength of will. (E.g. while having indignation rightly, I am, at the same time, unduly fearful.) One conforms to virtue-shoulds in acting, if one does, because one rightly has emotions and thinks so as to act in accordance with them. (See e.g. *EN* III.7.1115b14-24 with III.8.1116b30-31, 1117a4-5.) Hence why the human function is 'activity of soul (*psuchēs energeia*) and action (*praxis*) with reason' (*EN* I.7.1098a13-15), and not 'activity of soul with reason and action with reason'. And hence why, as I earlier put it, virtue-concepts allow us to make explicable value-judgments about *emotion-enformed* action.

Second, a virtue can govern many kinds of emotion and many virtues can govern a kind of emotion. Also, a kind of emotion may enform many kinds of doing and many kinds of emotion can enform a kind of doing (with the proviso, indicated in the previous paragraph, that any kind of doing regulated by a virtue is enformed by at least one kind of emotion regulated by that virtue). E.g. consider Aristotle's wise liberality. This governs the kinds doing giving, spending and investing. It does so by governing a whole host of kinds of emotion: friendly feeling [towards one's friends and their projects and concerns] (1122a10-11); sympathy (*sugnōmē* as at *EN* IV.5.1126a3) [for the needy], with a [balancing] sense of responsibility [to one's own household] (*EN* IV.1.1120b2-11); daring with a [balancing] fear [in the face of risk, so as to invest well and have from which to give] (*EN* III.6.1115a10-23, *EN* IV.1.1120b18-20, 1121a4-7, 20-21). Any combination of these kinds of emotion may enform any of the kinds of doing giving, spending, investing in some case where wise liberality is operative. Moreover, friendly feeling is one of the kinds of emotion social grace (as in *EN* IV.6) also governs; sympathy is also governed by justice, reasonableness (as in *EN* V.11) and righteousness; sense

of responsibility is also governed by civic spirit (as at *EN* VIII.9.1160a7-8); daring and fear are also governed by courage. The preceding list of interrelations is in no way exhaustive. The general moral is the following. Virtues and virtue-concepts are enormously complex sorts of thing, and Aristotle's should-schematisation must in no way be taken for an attempt at simplification.

Finally, while relevant virtues may proscribe or postpone aims that cannot presently be pursued in accordance with their requirements (cf. *EN* VI.12.1144a8), these requirements are nevertheless relative to particular aims that virtues do not fully determine. For example, at a cocktail party, people engage in networking conversation with acquaintances and associates, mixed in with small-talk. An Aristotelian virtue relevant to this context is the virtue of social grace discussed in *EN* IV.6. But we cannot represent what virtue prescribes in this situation according to Aristotle's schema of shoulds until we have said something about the agent and his aims. If the agent is a young scholar, seeking to progress in his academic career, in the company of distinguished professors, then a kind of desire in play will be ambition, and kinds of emotion in play will be respect for the eminent (1126b36) and self-confidence (cf. *EN* IV.7). Social grace *admits* ambition to progress in one's academic career in these circumstances, whereas it would *exclude* seeking to enrich oneself, because to pursue it would require disregard of the interlocutors' good, ingratiation and deception (1127a8-10). But social grace regulates self-confidence and respect, *in the light of* the agent's ambition (which it also thereby regulates), and *in the light of* the agent's roles and relationships (1126b25-1127a7). Social grace need not constrain the scholar to be ambitious in the way he is, nor to desire to make an impression in this situation, and neither need there be any other virtue which constrains the scholar to be or desire thus.

This is why, according to Aristotle, a virtue is both like and unlike a technical expertise (something which has puzzled many commentators). A virtue is *unlike* a technical expertise in that its right prescription (*orthos logos*, *EN* VI.1.1138b25) has jurisdiction over all ends in pursuit of which it is exercised, whereas the right prescription of a technical expertise does not have jurisdiction over all ends in pursuit of which it is exercised (*EN* VI.5.1140b6-7 cf. *EN* VI.4). For a virtue, being concerned with choice (*prohairetikē*, *EN* II.6.1106b36), is concerned with the setting down (*protithetai*, VI.9.1142b19) of ends as well as with their further determination,

once they have been set down (*Met* Θ.5.1047b35-1048a16, *EN* VI.2.1139a34-35, 1139b1-4, *EN* VI.9.1142b27-33). And since the end for the sake of which a virtue admits, postpones, excludes and shapes aims, is nothing but its own exercise, this means that no end with which a virtue is concerned is untouched or ungoverned by its exercise (*EN* VI.5.1140b6-7,16-20).

However, a virtue is nevertheless *like* a technical expertise and any other rational disposition in that it will always prescribe relative to personal aims (*Met* Θ.2). For a virtue prescribes how emotions should be had and thereby how kinds of doing should be engaged in, but which emotions are in play and just how they should be shaped or directed depends upon the roles, relationships, standing interests and (consequent) objectives of the subject in view.[9] Thus, a virtue, although for the sake of nothing beyond its own exercise, delineates what is right 'with respect to us' (*pros hēmas*, *EN* II.6.1106a22-b7 *passim*.).[10] Like the trainer who is able to prescribe the right diet both for the Olympian and for the novice (1106b1-7), the one who truly grasps the virtues can skillfully hit upon the appropriate response with respect to whatever roles, relationships, standing interests and (consequent) objectives are in play.[11]

(2.2) Virtue-concepts and practices of ethical imputation

I turn now to how the virtue-concepts, understood according to the schematisation outlined in SS(2.1), are used in practices of ethical imputation. At *EN* III.5.1113b21-30, Aristotle explains that we chastise and penalise those who do bad things not under force or on account of ignorance for which they are not themselves responsible. For only in these cases do they voluntarily do the bad thing. But chastising and penalising are for the purposes of persuading people to change their behaviour, and people can only be persuaded to change their voluntary behaviour.[12]

---

[9] Cf. Irwin (1985, SS1-5), (1986, 73 – 74).

[10] Cf. Ackrill (1973, 248), Leighton (1995, 69 – 70).

[11] Cf. Brown (1997).

[12] 'Voluntarily' and 'voluntary' here are a rough translation of *hekōn* and *hekousion* in *EN* III.5, although elsewhere these are better translated 'intentionally' and 'intentional', see SS(3.1); on the difference relevant to my 'better' in 'better translated', see Anscombe (1957, SS49).

In *EN* III.1 and/or elsewhere, Aristotle had already clarified what it is for someone to do something bad under force, and he now sets it aside. As a simplification, I too will set aside the fraught area of responsibility in cases of coercion.[13] Although a full statement of Aristotle's functional definition of desire, emotion and virtue would include an account of this, the gist of the approach I am seeking to recommend will be clear even without it. Let us go directly, then, to what Aristotle says is ignorance for which one is oneself responsible:

> They chastise those who are ignorant of something among the things referred to in the laws (*ti tōn en tois nomois*), things which they should know and which are not difficult to know, and similarly in other cases… (*EN* III.5.1113b33-1114a1)

It is clear from the context (see especially 1114a4ff) that these 'other cases' are cases of ignorance of the parallel things where the governing prescriptions come from virtues rather than laws. For laws are delineators of constraints on doing things in pursuing one's aims, according to which lawgivers chastise and penalise. But virtues, similarly, are delineators of constraints on doing things in pursuing one's aims, in accordance with which private individuals and groups chastise and penalise (cf.1113b22-23). They do so in the following way.

Faced with doing that strikes us as bad, we seek a description of the doing as action or practice due to the absence of virtue. We assess the circumstances surrounding the subject's action in terms of when one should do things and in response to what one should do things etc. according to relevant virtues, and seek to describe the subject as having got things wrong accordingly. E.g. consider a case where I witter on to an interlocutor whose mother has just died about what a lovely time I spent with my mother yesterday. Judging that, according to social grace, one should converse for the sake of showing kindness to the berieved and in a sensitive manner, we might propose to describe what I do as 'speaking ungraciously' or 'carring on insensitively'. (The latter description gives a more precise description, saying something about how in particular the doing is contrary to social grace.) If a description like the description of my conversation as 'carrying on insensitively' is true of the bad doing, then the subject is responsible for the badness of the bad doing and he

---

13   The relevant passages are *EN* III.1.1110a1-b17 and *EE* II.8.

has done the bad thing voluntarily. (E.g. I am responsible for the inappropriateness of my conversation and I have voluntarily conversed inappropriately). By contrast, if we agree that the subject is not to be chastised or penalised, then this kind of description cannot be true of his bad doing; although the subject has done something bad, he is not responsible for the badness of his bad doing and he did not do the bad thing voluntarily.[14]

When does a subject do something bad without being responsible for the badness of his bad doing? Assuming that there is no coercion, this will be the case when the subject is ignorant of some fact about the situation and how he is affecting it by his action (*en hois kai peri ha hē praxis*, *EN* III.1.1110b33-1111a1). In particular, it will be the case when this ignorance means that although the subject does something contrary to the virtue-constraints, this is not because of an ethically relevant failure in 'activity of soul and action with reason' on his part, i.e. it is not due to the absence of virtue (cf. *EN* III.1.1110b28-32). E.g. supposing that I do not know that my interlocutor's mother has just died, and there is no particular reason that I should know this, then I should not be blamed for my inappropriate conversation. For although I involuntarily conversed inappropriately, despite appearances I was not behaving ungraciously or carrying on insensitively. Thus how we use the virtue-concepts in ethical imputation depends upon some judgments we make about what facts concerning the situation and how he is affecting it by his action the subject knows.

In *EN* III.1 (1111a3-21) Aristotle provides and illustrates a schematisation of ignorance of such facts that is to work alongside the previous schematisation of virtue-concepts.

> Well then we have who is acting and what action there is and affecting what or in [relating to] what one acts, and sometimes also with what, e.g. with what instrument, and such as to result in what (*hou heneka*)[15], e.g. rescuing, and how, e.g. mildly or gravely. Now then no-one could be ignorant of *all* these things, unless he were mad, and it is clear that one could not be igno-

---

[14] Aristotle marks this distinction by using *dran* (1113b23-24) or *poein* (*EN* V.9.11136b39-32) = 'do' for commission of bad acts that may or may not constitute voluntary bad doing and *prattein* = 'act', 'practice' (1113b12) for commission of bad acts that constitutes voluntary bad doing. Cf. *EE* II.8.1224a20-30.

[15] Cf. Gauthier – Jolif (1959) *ad loc.*, Kenny (1979, 54), Rowe's (2002) translation of *EN* V.8.1135a23-26, b12-16 *ad loc*.

rant of *who* is acting either; how could one be, since it is oneself?! But someone could be ignorant of what his action consists in [in one or more, though not all, of the remaining senses just delineated] (1111a3-8).

Ignorance of 'what action there is' refers to cases where what the subject did was not in pursuit of any aim he had, i.e. non-intentional doing (see 1111a9-11). These cases are automatically disqualified from ethical evaluation. Ignorance of 'how' refers to error of execution in implementing one's choice (see 1114a14-15). For the purposes of ethical evaluation, these cases are usually redescribed more determinately as cases of pursuing a course of action *liable to* the relevant kind of error (cf.1111a17-18). So the important schematisation for our purposes is: 'in affecting what' or 'relating to what' or 'with what' and 'such as to result in what' (1111a18-19). This last refers to ignorance of natural, non-accidental results of something one does that one wants to do: "One might give someone a drink in order to rescue, but kill" (1111a13-14), e.g. if one does not know that the drink is aconite (*EE* II.9.1225b4-5). As illustrations of 'affecting what' or 'relating to what' we have "I thought my son was one of the enemy"; of 'with what', we have "I thought the spear had a button on the end of it" (1111a11-13).

By use of this schema in conjunction with the schematisation of the virtue-concepts, we can identify two sorts of case where ignorance of facts about the situation and how one is affecting it infect action. In one sort of case, the ignorance is exculpating. In the other sort of case, the ignorance, far from exculpating, is constitutive of the offence. In this latter sort of case, blame is meted out for the bad doing just because it is on account of the relevant ignorance. To see this, let us return to my wittering on about mother.

Suppose I know that my interlocutor's mother has just died but am obtusely oblivious to the distress I am causing. This is a case of ignorance of natural or non-accidental bad results of my bad doing (here, my inappropriate conversing). In this case I should be chastised just because of my obliviousness, since the predictable bad result of which I am oblivious is something I should remark so as to converse in a socially gracious way. In this way, my ignorance goes to constitute an offence against social grace. I have knowledge that I do not use appropriately, according to social grace (cf. *EE* II.9.1225b11-14). In such a case, we say that my ignorance is ignorance of what is good or of how one should act (*EN*

III.1.1110b28-29) and that my bad conduct is due to ethically ignorant choice (*EN* III.1.1110b31-32).

Now suppose instead that I do not know, and there is no particular reason why I should know, that my interlocutor's mother has just died. Consequently, I am again oblivious to the distress I am causing, but in this case I should not be chastised. The reason is that, in this case, I could not be expected to predict the natural or non-accidental bad results of which I am oblivious, even were I emoting and thinking so as to act in a socially gracious way. For I do not have some knowledge that I would need to use, but I am neither obliged to have this knowledge, nor is it easy for me to get it (cf. *EE* II.9.1225b14-16). In such a case, we do not say that I am ignorant of what is good or how one should act, and my bad conduct is not regarded as due to ethically ignorant choice.

The preceding shows how, in ethical imputation, virtue-concepts work *on and with* judgment about what the subject knows concerning the situation and how he is affecting it by his action. When we apply a vir-tue-concept to a particular situation, we identify particular constraints on doing things in the particular situation; e.g. 'speak sensitively to this woman', or even 'speak with gentle cheerfulness about topics not too far from but not too closely related to the deceased' etc. This allows us to spot, in a manner that we can represent using our fact-ignorance schema, two sorts of particular facts ignorance of which infects the particular action under evaluation.

The first sort of facts are facts ignorance of which indicates that the subject's bad doing is due to failure to have emotion and think so as to act in accordance with the virtue. These facts are facts the subject would have remarked and factored in appropriately, had the subject been emoting and thinking so as to act in accordance with the virtue. E.g. assuming I know that my interlocutor's mother had just died, had I been emoting and thinking as I should according to social grace, I would have re-marked that wittering on about mother would upset my interlocutor, and avoided the topic. When a subject does something bad on account of ignorance of facts of this sort, his bad doing is because of an ethically relevant failure in activity of soul and action with reason; i.e. it is due to the absence of virtue. These facts are our 'things referred to in virtues' that the subject 'should know and which are not difficult to know' and for unworthy doing on account of which he is held himself responsible and chastised. They are necessarily 'not difficult to know' since, if they

were difficult to know, they could not reliably indicate failure to emote and think as virtue demands.

The second sort of facts that use of a virtue-concept to discover particular constraints leads us to spot are the following. They are particular facts that are not facts of the first sort, but such that, further, a subject emoting and thinking as the virtue requires who also knew the fact would not have done the bad thing in question. E.g. someone who both was socially gracious and knew that my interlocutor's mother had just died, would not have conversed inappropriately. The further condition excludes irrelevant ignorance and homes in on ignorance that affects the ethical quality of the subject's doing. When a subject does something bad on account of ignorance of facts of this sort, he is exculpated of that bad doing.

In this way, virtue-concepts are sources of shoulds governing emotion and action that distinguish ignorance constitutive of reprehensible activity of soul and action with reason from exculpating ignorance. Similarly (cf. *homoiōs*, *EN* III.5 *passim.*), they will also distinguish ignorance that renders apparently fine activity only accidentally good and not laudable after all from ignorance irrelevant to the value of apparently fine activity: The former is ignorance that indicates that the apparently fine activity could not have been due to the subject's emoting and thinking so as to act in accordance with virtue, the latter ignorance that, while relevant, does not infect the activity in this way. Other evaluative concepts used in practices of honouring and criticising or even penalising which do not have the preceding feature are not virtue-concepts; e.g. some aesthetic concepts and judicial concepts invoking strict liability. A virtue is not merely a disposition to do certain things, but rather a disposition to conform one's doings to certain constraints voluntarily, and virtuous action is necessarily voluntary (*EN* III.5.1114b29-30).[16]

---

[16] The preceding is at odds with a prevalent interpretation, which employs a distinction between ignorance of principle and ignorance of fact, rather than a distinction among facts. (I believe this interpretation goes back to Anscombe (1963)). My interpretation is more in keeping with Aristotle's emphasis on the particularity of the prescriptions of virtue; it is the task of practical wisdom to say what should be done *here and now*, by invoking a virtuous assessment of the particular situation. See, however, footnote 1. (Other texts relevant to providing a full textual defence include *EN* V.8, VII.3 &10, *EE* II.8).

(3.1) Intentional action and the human function

Our next task, recall, is to understand the role of virtue-concepts in explaining action as with reason. For when we have found Aristotle's account of what it is to explain action as with reason, we will finally have our functional definition of desire, emotion and virtue. Since all action with reason is intentional although not all intentional action is with reason (*EN* III.2.1111b4-10, 1112a15-17), it is helpful to begin with Aristotle's view of intentional action.

For Aristotle, those animal movements that are to be explained by reference to wanting and thinking that either gives rise to wanting or makes possible action on wanting are intentional (*MA* 11.703b3-4, cf. *MA* 8.702a17-21). These are those movements that are functionings of the animal, those movements of which the explanation is the function of the animal itself, rather than the function of the animal's body and/or external causes (*EE* II.8.1224a20-27).[17] (We can think of the distinction between the function of the animal itself and the function of the animal's body as corresponding to the distinction between the questions and theories of the ethologist and those of the anatomist.) The remainder of movements are of one of the following two kinds. They are not within the remit of wanting and thinking that enforms wanting, e.g. respiration or awaking; Aristotle calls these movements non-intentional (*ouk hekousion*) (*MA* 11.703b9-11). Or they are movements of a sort that sometimes go to constitute action on wanting, but whose present occurrence runs counter to the subject's wanting and/or thinking that enforms wanting, e.g. an unwanted erection, the racing of the heart induced by too much caffeine; Aristotle calls these movements counter-intentional (*akousion*) (*MA* 11.703b7-8,11-20, cf. 703b36-704a2, 8.701b33-702aa7). All such movements are explained by the function of the animal's body and/or external causes and are not intentional.[18]

In view of the preceding, Aristotle would agree with the following account of intentional action given by his disciple G.E.M. Anscombe in *Intention* (1957) SS33-43, 47. Intentional action is that which is explained by saying how what the subject does is a way of pursuing something the

---

[17] Cf. Nussbaum (1983, 120).

[18] On the relationship between the use of *hekousion* here and the use of *hekousion* in *EN* III.5, in which latter context I earlier translated 'voluntary', see Furley (1977, Pt.II.), Nussbaum (1983, 148 – 154).

subject wants (an *orekton* in Aristotle's Greek, SS34), where what can count as something the subject wants is defined in the following way. We think of the subject as belonging to some kind. Then, the thing wanted must meet the following two conditions.

First (SS37-40), the thing wanted must be something such that achieving it would conduce to achieving some kind of thing of the following sort: such that it makes sense for any animal of the kind to which the subject belongs to want this kind of thing, simply in virtue of its belonging to that kind. E.g. wanting to ensure an ample supply of prey and mates may explain a wolf's marking territory periodically, since to ensure an ample supply of prey and mates is something it makes sense for any wolf to want, simply in virtue of its being a wolf (cf. *de An* II.3.414a29-b16, *Pol* I.8.1256a19-29). Equally, wanting to attract this she-wolf tonight may explain a wolf's howling for some time this evening, since although not every wolf wants to attract this she-wolf, attracting this she-wolf is something that conduces to mating, something it makes sense for any wolf to want, simply in virtue of its being a wolf (cf. *de An* II.4.415a22-b7). In Anscombe's vocabulary this condition says that it must 'befit' (SS38) an animal of this kind to go in for this kind of thing. Or, "the good (perhaps falsely) conceived by the agent to characterise the thing must *really* be one of the many forms of good" (SS40, emphasis Anscombe's). One may object to an intentional explanation on the grounds that it does not befit this kind of animal to go for this kind of thing *in these circumstances*. Nevertheless, we have an intelligible intentional explanation, even if a poor one, if the present condition and the one to follow are met.

Second (SS36), the thing wanted must be something such that the subject could think of what it does as a way of pursuing the thing wanted in the circumstances, given the capacities for apprehending the situation and what can be effected in it that subjects of its kind have (cf. *MA* 6.700b13-22, 701a2-6, 7.701a32-b1, *de An* III.11.433b31-434a12). E.g. if a wolf wants to attract this she-wolf tonight, it must know that this she-wolf is about, and take it that she is a potential mate and so on; all this must be something our wolf could do, given wolf-capacities and the prevailing circumstances. We may suppose a child wants to get away from an unaffectionate carer in tearing up this paperwork, whereas we may not suppose this of a dog. Even the behaviour of a psychologically ill animal will be explicable in the preceding way, if it is genuinely inten-

tional, rather than better explained as due to the malfunctioning of the animal's body and/or external causes; contrast the pacing of a caged animal with the running round in circles of an animal suffering iodine-deficiency.

So much Aristotle would agree with, but he would make a crucial addition. While Anscombe's account privileges no particular kinds, Aristotle would privilege natural kinds. (This is what it means to say that intentional actions are functionings of the animal.) If it helps to think of some animal whose intentional action we are explaining as belonging to a non-natural kind, we may do so. Nevertheless we have only identified a thing that is really wanted if achieving it is ultimately conducive to achieving an end proper to a natural kind to which our subject belongs. Otherwise, we do not have a properly scientific intentional explanation. E.g. suppose for the sake of argument that dog is a natural kind, but pet dog is not. And suppose we are explaining my pet dog's pawing a ball, scratching at the door and looking at me pleadingly. We might suggest that my pet dog wants to go to the park. Aristotle would say that to go to the park cannot be what my pet dog really wants, unless going to the park ultimately conduces to achieving some kind of thing that it makes sense for any *dog* to want simply in virtue of its being a dog, e.g., say, to play. Otherwise, 'my pet dog wants to go to the park' is not a properly scientific intentional explanation, whatever else it may be. Maybe it is just a way of saying what I should do—take the dog to the park—in order to stop it scratching at the door and looking at me pleadingly. (I do not think that the Anscombe of *Intention* would rule out the preceding; she would say 'that's as may be, but this is not part of the *logic* of intention', cf. SS39, 41. With this, in turn, I do not think Aristotle would disagree, cf. *MA* 6 – 7).[19]

Now it is difficult to say what in general counts as a natural kind (according to Aristotle or in fact). But, as we are only concerned with human intentional action, it is enough for us to note the following. For Aristotle, when it comes to human intentional action, 'human being' is the relevant natural kind. So achieving a thing some human being really wants must ultimately conduce to achieving something it makes sense for any human being to want, simply in virtue of his being a human being. And to have a proper scientific intentional explanation of some

---

[19]   Cf. Whiting (1988, SSII-IV).

human being's action, we must identify a wanted thing of this sort. But in SS(1.1)-(1.3) we saw that the only thing it makes sense for *any* human being to want, simply in virtue of his being a human being, is to exercise his rational-and-social function, the one he shares with some society or community to which he belongs. Now this means that a proper scientific intentional explanation of a human being's action turns out to be in terms of what is proper to a *sub*-kind of the human kind, viz. the 'we' to which he belongs. But there is no inconsistency in this; here is an analogy.

Particular skills are needed to play well for a given football team; what you need to play well for Arsenal is not the same as what you need to play well for Manchester Utd. We can make sense of the play of an Arsenal team-member now in terms of the particular skills needed to play well for Arsenal. What particular skills are needed to play well for Arsenal is not fully determined by what it is to play football well, but it does intrinsically depend upon this. E.g. suppose what particular skills are needed depends upon how many good strikers there are and how tall the midfielders are, among other things. There is an indefinite number of possible ways these factors may affect what skills one needs to play well for one team rather than another. But all of these must respect what a midfielder or a striker is and what these can and should do, given what it is to play football well. Now suppose we want to say what it is to be a good football player simply, and thereby how to explain the play of any given football player now without any further qualification. We will say something like this: 'A good player plays well *for his team*. To play well for one's team is…' There would follow a formula stating how in general the skills one needs to play football well for a given team depends upon what it is to play football well simply. And this last is still the ultimate point of reference and arbiter with respect to which we are to evaluate and explain the play of football players as such.

Similarly, according to Aristotle, we make sense of the action of any given human being now in terms of the virtues proper to members of *his* society or community. But this is because what it makes sense for any human being to want, simply in virtue of his being a human being is to have emotion and thereby act with reason—and what it is to do this depends upon virtues recognised by some 'we' to which he belongs, as defined in SS(2.1)-(2.2). Could this really be the *only* thing that it makes sense for any human being to want simply in virtue of his being a human being? What about things all humans need, e.g. food? Consider the

hunger-striker. We should not rule out in advance the possibility that it does *not* make sense for him to want food, although he is a human being. So then, to have a proper scientific intentional explanation of some human being's action, according to Aristotle, we must identify a wanted thing that conduces to having emotion and thereby acting with reason, where what it is to do this depends upon virtues recognised by some 'we' to which he belongs, as defined in SS(2.1)-(2.2). That is, human intentional action is with reason and (because) structured by virtues.[20]

Or at least, this is as far as we get by applying Aristotle's general account of intention to human beings; there is a complication. The only kind of error of functioning of a non-human animal is disease and even the diseased functioning of a non-human animal is explicable as ultimately in pursuit of an end proper to the natural kind to which the animal belongs. If some non-human animal behaviour is not so explicable, then it is not intentional action at all; it is due instead to bodily functioning and/or external causes. (Consider again the difference between the pacing of a caged animal and the running round in circles of an animal suffering iodine-deficiency.) But human functioning is prone to another kind of error nowhere paralleled in non-human nature. Human beings can act intentionally without pursuing an end proper to a human being. This happens when a human being acts in pursuit of an aim without reason and in a manner not structured by virtues, as when the delirious hunger-striker instinctively grabs at the food in front of him after forty days starvation; it is known as 'weakness of will'.

The reason for this extra level of error is that there are two sorts of human action-enformers besides thought, whereas there is only one sort of non-human action-enformer besides thought. Non-human animals have only instinctive desire, while humans have desire for ends *and* action-enforming emotions, which further shape these ends into objects of reasoned wanting. This means that there can still be wanting (raw desire) even when action-enforming emotions fail to be present or fail to be effective in enforming action. However, weakness of will is an error and dependent on the basis case of intentional action with reason in respect of its account. To see how to identify cases of weakness of will and give intentional explanations of weak-willed action, we must first understand

---

[20] Irwin (1980) provides a careful exploration of the details and possible justifications of this move.

intentional action with reason. So even if we were going to construct a full statement of Aristotle's functional definition of desire, emotion and virtue, we would have *first* to explain how human intentional action is with reason when it is, and *then* use this to construct an account of weakness of will.[21] This means that the gist of the approach I am recommending will be clear even without the account of weakness of will. I will simplify my task by omitting it.

(3.2) Action with reason and reasons for action

The findings of SS(3.1) can also be used to explain Aristotle's view of what it is to think and talk about reasons for action. This is necessarily a reconstruction, since there is no term in Aristotle's Greek corresponding to our 'reasons for action'. (There are terms for rational explanations,[22] rational prescriptions,[23] practical syllogisms,[24] what is in accordance with reason, what is with reason,[25] and reason the faculty,[26] but no term for 'reasons'.) However, the exercise is worth undertaking for two reasons: first, in order to bring out what is distinctive in Aristotle's approach, and second, to preempt a possible misunderstanding that might otherwise dog our attempt to follow Aristotle's account of what it is to explain action as with reason.

First, then, what is distinctive in Aristotle's approach. For Aristotle to think or talk about an agent's reasons is not just to think or talk about intentional explanations of the sort that will do for non-human animals as well (*EN* III.2.1111b4-19, 1112a15-17, cf. *EE* II.8.1224a13-30). When we think or talk about an agent's reasons, we are taking it that the agent is expressing his rational-and-social function in pursuing something he wants. That is, we are taking it that the agent's desire for some end is further shaped by emotions (in conjunction with rational thought), and that the way he has and thinks in terms of these emotions is structured by virtues recognised in his society or community (cf.*EN* II.6.1106b36-

[21] Cf. Lewis (1983).

[22] *logoi* as at *EN* X.9.1179b23

[23] *logoi* as at *EN* VI.1.1138b34

[24] *sullogismoi tōn praktōn* as at *EN* VI.12.1144a31-32

[25] *kata logon*, *meta logou* as at *EN* VI.13.1144b26-27

[26] *logos* as at *EN* I.7.1098a3

1107a8 & see again SS(2.1)). (Here and henceforth 'desire' translates Aristotle's *epithumia* as at *EN* III.1.1111a30-31; cf. III.11.1119a16-18, VII.4 and VII.13.153b33-1154a1, noting that for Aristotle desire is for the pleasant, see e.g. *de An* III.10.433b8). In this way, we take it that the subject does not merely think so as to have and act upon a desire in the way non-human animals do. Rather, in a way unique to humans in the animal world, he thinks up something to want in the light of desire, that will be wanted with reason (*EN* III.1113a2-5, 10-12). In Aristotle's terms, he has a thought-through want (*boulēsis*) that is deliberate (*ek bouleusis*) and this means that his action is chosen (*prohaireton*) and with reason (*meta logou*) (*EN* III.5.1113b3-5, cf. *EN* III.2.1111b19-30, 1112a15-17). (Contrast *Intention* SS34, 46 – 47.)

Not only is this how we are seeking to understand action if ever we think or talk about an agent's reasons for action, further, we take it that ordinarily human action can and should be understood in this way (cf. *Intention* SS39 n1). (Hence why Aristotle deals with weakness of will only after having completed his basic account of virtues and virtuous action: when an agent's action is weak-willed, he either has not deliberated about it or else, under pressure of desire, he fails to implement his chosen course of action, *EN* VII.7.1150b19-22, but this is a puzzling failure of reason, *EN* VII.10.1152a19-23, cf. *EN* VII.2). This means that, ordinarily, intentional explanations make sense because we are assuming, whether tacitly or explicitly, some background understanding of the reasons for action that are in play. (Compare and contrast *Intention* SS41-43.) Where this is unclear, we will have the impression that we do not understand what the agent is up to, even if we have been told or have guessed his intention. If, on the other hand, the agent does not have reasons for action—if his wanting is not thought-through and deliberate, and his action is not chosen, in the way human wanting and action should be—then we require a special explanation referring to pathology or weakness of will. This sort of explanation still presupposes that human action has not been made sense of if we just have an intentional explanation of the sort that will do for a non-human animal; it provides an explanation for the absence of reasons to take the place of the usual background of reasons (*EN* VII.3 esp.1147a35-b17).

Now for the possible misunderstanding: Aristotle is not claiming that ordinary reasoned human action is always virtuous nor that all reasons for action are good reasons. (Hence the two terms *meta logou* as at *EN*

I.7.1098a14 and *meta tou orthou logou* as at *EN* VI.13.1144b27, cf. II.6.1197a1-2.) This is not what I meant when I said that action with reason is 'structured by virtues'. Aristotle's account of what it is to explain action as with reason, as we will see in the sections following, is subtler. The best way to illustrate this in advance of giving the account is to consider an adaptation of Anscombe's famous Nazi example (*Intention* SS38-39). Consider a Nazi conducting a house-to-house search across a certain district, rounding up a bunch of people, stuffing them into a van etc. We have given an intentional explanation of the sort that will do for a non-human animal if we say something like that the Nazi wants to exterminate all Jews in the district. (The Nazi thinks of what he does as a way of doing this and this is something of a kind that it befits a Nazi to do.) Aristotle would say that we have not thus far spoken about the Nazi's reasons for action and that, if the Nazi's action makes sense to us, it is because we are presupposing some background of reasons for action, against which the Nazi's wanting to exterminate all Jews in the district is comprehensible as a human sort of thing to do.

This background will look something like this: The Nazi thinks up exterminating all Jews in the district as a way to achieve success at his job, diligently serve his country and redress the Jewish conspiracy against his people. Aristotle would further clarify the structure of such a background in the following way: achieving success at one's job is a comprehensible object of desire in the circumstances (cf. *EN* VII.4.1148a26), diligently serving one's country and redressing conspiracies against one's people are sorts of things emotions might comprehensibly lead one to seek to do in pursuing one's aims in the circumstances (cf. *EN* VIII.9 esp. 1160a7-8, *EN* IV.5). These latter two things our Nazi is seeking to do, *qua* things emotions lead him to seek to do, need to be understood in terms of virtues recognised in his society (see again *EN* VIII.9). But if we have some explanation of the preceding sort of how the Nazi thinks up something to want, we will not necessarily have justified the Nazi's action or shown that it is with good reason (see again *EN* IV.5). We will merely have made sense of his action as reasoned and a human sort of thing to do. (Cf. *Intention* SS39.) Since this example is particularly apt for dispelling the misunderstanding I want to avoid, I will repeatedly return to it throughout the following sections.

(4.1) Explaining action as with reason outlined

I am now in a position to complete the functional definition of desire, emotion and virtue begun in SS(2.1)-(2.2) by setting out Aristotle's account of what it is to explain action as with reason. This account refers to kinds of desire, particular desires, kinds of emotion, particular emotions and virtues. I begin, in this section, by outlining the interrelated roles of these in explanation of action as with reason. I then further clarify the outline, dealing by turns with kinds of desire and particular desires (SS(4.2)), kinds of emotion and virtues (SS(4.3)), and particular emotions and virtues (SS(4.4)). No part of the outline has been fully clarified until all parts of the outline have been clarified. At the end of SS(4.4), the sketch I promised in SS(1.1) will be complete; we will have seen how Aristotle's account of what kind of thing a virtue is provides a functional theory of the emotions.

To explain a subject's action as with reason we must do the following. First, we must identify something the subject wants in doing what he does that satisfies a variation on the second condition of SS(3.1) on things wanted by animals in general: The thing wanted must be something such that the subject could think of what he does as a way of pursuing the thing wanted in the circumstances, given his capacities for apprehending the situation and what can be effected in it. This first condition says that the thing the subject wants must be something he can be pursuing in the doing to be explained given his capacities for calculative or technical reasoning (*logismos* as at *de An* III.11.434a8, *technē* as in *EN* VI.4). (These capacities are sometimes treated under the title of 'means-end rationality' in modern literature.) This first condition is a variation on the earlier condition for the following reason. Since some human beings are significantly more intelligent, experienced, educated etc. than others in this or that respect, the kind to which the subject belongs that we refer to in judging his capacities for apprehending the situation and what can be effected in it may be a narrower one than 'human being' (*EN* VI.12.1144a21-26).

If the first condition is satisfied, the subject's doing has not yet been shown to be with reason. To explain the subject's action as with reason, we must identify a wanted thing that, further, meets the following complex condition, which will be the subject of the remaining sections (4.2)-(4.5).

We must be able to explain how the subject thinks of pursuing the thing wanted as a way of satisfying a **particular desire** of his of a deter-

minate **common kind of desire**. Further, this way of pursuing the thing desired must conform to the demands of **particular emotions** the subject has, each of which belongs to a determinate **common kind of emotion**. Further, these kinds of emotion must be kinds of emotion one should have in the situation, given the **commonly recognised virtues** relevant in the situation.

In the preceding, 'common' means shared by members of the subject's society or community, that 'we', whatever it is, with which the subject shares a rational-and-social function. All of the following will depend upon the capacities the subject has relevant to interpreting the situation and what can be effected in it: which particular desires he can have; which particular emotions he can have; which things he can want for the sake of satisfying his particular desires which also conform to the demands of his particular emotions. That is, particular desires, particular emotions and things wanted in the light of these must be attributed with reference to what the subject knows about the situation and how he is affecting it by his action (see again SS(2.2)). All terms in bold above are terms receiving a functional definition from the account of what it is to explain action as with reason currently being explicated plus the account of virtue-concepts of SS(2.1)-(2.2).

(4.2) Kinds of desire and particular desires

A common kind of desire is for a kind of good every healthy member of the relevant society or community wants (cf. *EN* X.5.1176a3-29). E.g. perhaps everyone healthy wants friendship; in that case, desire for friendship will be a common kind of desire (cf. *EE* VII.1.1234b31-1235a2 cf. 2.1236a25-b26). Other possible examples of common kinds of desire are: desire for recreation, desire to exercise artistic and physical capacities, desire to learn and understand, desire to achieve and have one's achievement recognised (ambition as at *EN* VII.4.1148a26), desire for aesthetic response and reflection. (The preceding list is based upon Aristotle's classification of pleasant activities in *Rhet* I.11; my kinds appear in the order in which instances of the kinds appear in *Rhet* I.11.) Many feelings will turn out to be species of kinds of desire, rather than kinds of emotion. E.g. loneliness could be a species of desire for frendship and envy could be a species of ambition.

A particular desire an agent acting with reason wants to satisfy must be of a determinate common kind in the following sense. We must be able to explain how satisfying the particular desire conduces to having a kind of good that a common kind of desire is for (cf. *EN* III.11.1118b8-15). E.g. our Nazi had an particular desire to achieve success in his job, his having which was part of the explanation of his wanting to exterminate all Jews in a certain district. In the circumstances, achieving success in his job would conduce to achieving and having his achievement recognised, i.e. to satisfying ambition, a common kind of desire.

A person can have a very odd sort of particular desire which is nevertheless of a determinate common kind. E.g. it might be considered quite odd to desire to stand on one leg for as long as possible, but this might be, for someone, a sort of desire for recreation or for exercise of physical capacities, or even of ambition (he wants to get into the Guinness book of records). (Cf. *Intention* SS37.) Such a person can be acting with reason, even though his behaviour is unusual. This means that persons in special states, e.g. pregnant women with cravings, eccentric persons and even persons suffering some diseases, e.g. eye disorders or diseases of the palate, can act with reason, even if we wouldn't ordinarily call pleasant or desirable what they find pleasant and desire (cf. *EE* VII.2.1235b25-1236a1, *EN* VII.14.1154b4). However, there are some diseases, notably those we will tend to classify as psychological disorders, such that persons having them have particular desires that are not of determinate common kinds. These persons do not act with reason when they seek to satisfy such particular desires (cf. *EN* V.8.1136a7-9, VII.14.1154b5).[27]

In addition to being of a determinate common kind, any particular desire we cite in explaining a subject's action as with reason, whether odd or ordinary, must be one it makes sense for that subject to have in the prevailing circumstances (cf. *EN* X.5.1175b3-20). An attempt to say more about what it makes sense for some subject to want will refer to what I earlier called roles, relationships and standing interests. (These were the personal features with respect to or in the light of which virtues prescribe how emotions should be had and thereby how kinds of doing should be engaged in, see SS(2.1)). E.g. (recall) the behaviour of a young scholar with the standing aim of progressing in his academic career who is at a cocktail party talking to eminent professors may be explained (in

---

[27] Cf. Kingma (2007) on the difference between the healthy and the statistically normal.

part) by his desire to make an impression, a desire that it makes sense to attribute to him just because he is an ambitious young scholar at a cocktail party talking to eminent professors. However, more generally, 'standing interests' may include or be explained by tastes, talents and other features of personality, as well as projects currently in train like 'to progress in my academic career'.

(4.3) Virtues and kinds of emotion

As explained in SS(2.1)-(2.2), the virtues commonly recognised in a society or community prescribe how members of the community should have certain kinds of emotion and thereby how they should do certain kinds of thing in pursuing their aims in situations where they are relevant. That is, the virtues prescribe how members should have certain kinds of emotion and thereby voluntarily conform their doings to certain constraints in seeking to satisfy their particular desires, in situations where they are relevant. The society or community makes rational evaluations of emotion and action and engages in practices of ethical imputation by reference to such commonly recognised virtues. If we have identified and understood some such commonly recognised virtues, then we will have identified some common kinds of emotion which these virtues regulate. E.g. we saw that Aristotle's virtue of wise liberality regulates the kinds of emotion friendly feeling, sympathy, sense of responsibility, daring and fear, thereby regulating giving, spending and investing.

Now, as we saw, not every such kind of emotion that is (timelessly) regulated by a certain virtue is called for in every situation where that virtue is relevant. E.g. sympathy may not be relevant when out for a meal with one's friends, although friendly feeling and a sense of responsibility are. However, in every situation where a certain virtue is relevant, there will be some combination of the relevant kinds of emotion which one should have in that situation according to that virtue. In explaining a subject's action as with reason, we may attribute to the subject any combination of kinds of emotion that one should have according to a virtue relevant in the situation. E.g. in the above example, we might attribute just friendly feeling or friendly feeling and a sense of responsibility (but not sympathy). We may do so for each and every relevant virtue, or for each of some subset of the relevant virtues. E.g. in the above example, if social grace is a relevant virtue as well as wise liberali-

ty, we may attribute some further kinds of emotion regulated by social grace in the situation (if any). Or we may stop at wise liberality, finding that social grace does not, as it turns out, enform our subject's behaviour (although it should). However, we must attribute at least one kind of emotion regulated by at least one relevant virtue. If we cannot do this, the subject's action is not with reason (even if he intelligently seeks to satisfy a particular desire of a determinate common kind).

To return to our Nazi, one relevant Aristotelian virtue is civic spirit (*EN* VIII.9.1160a7-8) and another is righteousness or justice-concerned-with-tort-and-restitution (*EN* IV.5 cf. V.10). In seeking to satisfy his particular desire to achieve success in his job, our Nazi also acted out of the kinds of emotion sense of responsibility, required in the circumstances by civic spirit, and indignation, required in the circumstances by righteousness. The Nazi's way of seeking to achieve success in his job conforms to some demands of some particular instance of a sense of responsibility, leading to his doing so in a manner that aims at diligently serving his country, and some demands of some particular instance of indignation, leading to his doing so in a manner that aims at redressing the Jewish conspiracy. For doing one's job is a kind of thing that civic spirit prescribes about in the circumstances, through prescribing how one should have a sense of responsibility in the circumstances, and responding to non-natural injury (to oneself or those with whom one has affinity) is something righteousness prescribes about in the circumstances, through prescribing how one should have indignation in the circumstances.

(4.4) Virtues and particular emotions

In explaining a subject's action as with reason, then, we may attribute to the subject any combination of kinds of emotion that one should have according to a virtue relevant in the situation. But further, for any such kind of emotion, we must attribute to the subject a particular emotion of this kind. This particular emotion will be directed at: doing something of a kind about doing which the related virtue prescribes — e.g. spending (which wise liberality prescribes about); conversing (which social grace prescribes about); doing one's job (which civic spirit prescribes about) etc. — in a manner structured by that virtue's prescriptions about that doing. If we cannot attribute such a particular emotion, then we may not

refer to that kind of emotion in our explanation of the subject's doings as with reason. By 'the particular emotion is directed at …', I mean that '…' is the content of the particular emotion in the way that a particular desire for so-and-such is one whose content is so-and-such. The best way to see what I mean by 'in a manner structured by that virtue's prescriptions about that doing' is to return again to our Nazi.

In seeking to satisfy his particular desire to achieve success in his job, our Nazi acts out of the kind of emotion sense of responsibility, required in the circumstances by civic spirit. Our Nazi (let us suppose) thinks of implementing the plan of his superiors intelligently, promptly and zealously as a way of achieving success in his job that conforms to civic spirit, on account of his sense of responsibility. That is, our Nazi wants to exterminate all Jews in this district instead of doing something else for the sake of achieving job success (in part) because this is a way of achieving job success that conforms to the demands of a particular instance of sense of responsibility, which is directed at implementing the plan of his superiors intelligently, promptly and zealously.

The fact that our Nazi has a particular instance of sense of responsibility directed at this is explained by the virtue of civic spirit—how it prescribes about doing one's job in this situation. Our Nazi's behaviour is structured by the virtue of civic spirit, since he is a member of a society which recognises this virtue and therefore experiences emotions in a manner structured by it. This is not magic: Emotions are had in shared ways because they are habituated in shared ways. They are habituated in shared ways through practices of chastisement and honouring. Practices of chastisement and honouring are structured by… virtues; see again SS(2.1). Thus (say), our Nazi performs his allotted tasks for the sake of what he should, viz. implementing the plan of his superiors intelligently, and in the way he should, viz. promptly and zealously, according to civic spirit. (Performing his allotted tasks is the particular thing civic spirit prescribes about when we apply it to this person in this particular situation.) In this way, our Nazi's wanting to exterminate and setting about exterminating all the Jews in the district is with reason.

Now if the preceding accurately represents that part of an assessor's grasp of how our Nazi's action is with reason that is concerned with civic spirit, then that assessor will be in a position to add the following. He will be in a position to add that and explain how our Nazi's sense of responsibility was nevertheless misdirected; he did not go about his job

(say) when one should or so as to uphold the kinds of things one should ('in response to the features one should') or in relation to whom one should according to civic spirit. (As a civil servant, say, he should only have performed tasks that were themselves just, so as to uphold justice in the state, and in obedience to those superiors who had the interests of the whole state at heart.) For in making a judgment about just how our Nazi gets things right according to civic spirit, the assessor at the same time makes a judgment about how he gets things wrong according to civic spirit. (See again SS(2.1).) So the assessor sees that, and his explanation entails that, our Nazi's action, while *structured by* civic spirit, is nevertheless not *in accordance with* civic spirit. In this way, although our Nazi's action is with reason, it is not with *good* reason (at least in respect of civic spirit). Many feelings will turn out to be species of misdirected kinds of emotion. E.g. malice could be a form of mis-directed indignation and infatuation could be a form of misdirected friendly feeling (cf. *EN* II.6.1107a8-12).

It should be clear how, for Aristotle, every explanation of action as with reason is tacitly an ethical evaluation. On the one hand, our shared ethical evaluative practice consists in praising, honouring and rewarding people for action with good reason and blaming, chastising and penalising people for action with bad reason or with no reason at all. On the other hand, *consequently*, all thought and discussion about reasons is ethical (cf. *Pol* I.2.1253a9-15, *EN* X.9.1179b26-28).

Conclusion: A promising theory of natural human functioning

The account of what it is to make rational evaluations of action, impute action for the purposes of chastising and honouring and explain action as with reason provided by SS(2.1)-(2.2) and (4.1)-(4.4) taken together tells us what it is to specify an Aristotelian rational-and-social function. This is to specify a type of programme of research or meta-theory for social scientific investigation into desires and emotions based upon the following methodological presupposition. To function naturally as a human being is to exercise a rational-and-social function shared with a society or community or some other appropriate 'we' of which one is a member. From another angle, the methodological presupposition says that desires and emotions are intrinsically social intentional states

that together make action reasonable. While I have tried to present the theory in such manner as to make it seem as plausible as possible, of course the proof of the pudding is in the eating. It remains for those engaged in social science and philosophy of social science to pronounce upon the fruitfulness or otherwise of our programme or meta-theory. However, the proposal at least has the merit of flexibility: It is up to the social scientists in collaboration with the philosophers of social science to discover how many rational-and-social functions there are and how they are related to each other.

It may be that it turns out to be possible to specify some rational-and-social function that structures the sociable living of *all* human beings, i.e. such that our 'we' is all of us human beings. In that case, there will be a unique set of virtues (or maybe meta-virtues) by having and exercising which every human being flourishes, if he flourishes at all; as well, of course, as shared natural human kinds of emotion and natural human kinds of healthy desire. If this is so, it is also possible that human sociability exhibits a sort of fractal-like structure; there may be various further lower level rational-and-social functions (referring to sub-species of the meta-virtues, natural human kinds of emotion and natural human kinds of healthy desire) which govern the shared lives of proper sub-kinds of the meta-kind human being. We can regard the more recent work of Martha Nussbaum, among others, as speaking to this possibility.[28] (In theory it may also turn out to be possible to specify several alternative rational-and-social functions each for all human beings; but there does not seem to be much interest at present in this sort of possibility.)

Equally, someone might manage to show that it is impossible to specify a rational-and-social function that structures the sociable living of all human beings. In that case, we should have to look for different rational-and-social functions for different societies or communities, at the same time counting natural 'wes' (a natural 'we' will be one for which we can specify a rational-and-social function). There will then be at least as many rational-and-social functions as there are such natural 'wes', but there may be more, if it is possible to find various alternative theories for a given 'we'. We can regard Alisdair MacIntyre's famous history-writing projects as speaking to this possibility.[29]

---

[28] E.g. Nussbaumm (1990), (1995) and (2000).

[29] E.g. MacIntyre (1981), (1988).

At any rate, Aristotle's functional theory manages to skirt round a major debate of traditional metaphysics. Maybe there are some deep metaphysical reasons for demanding that accounts of attributions of desires and emotions must allow that there may be different equally good explanatory theories entailing different attributions. If so, Aristotle's theory can make room for this. But it also isn't ruled out of court if it turns out that we need to be more 'realist'.

Murray Edwards College,
Cambridge, UK
caamc2@cam.ac.uk

References

ACKRILL, J. L. (1973): *Aristotle's Ethics.* London: Faber & Faber.

ANSCOMBE, G.E.M. (1957): *Intention.* Oxford: Blackwell.

ANSCOMBE, G.E.M. (1963): Two Kinds of Error in Action. *Journal of Philosophy* 60, reprinted in her *Collected Philosophical Papers,* Vol.III*: Ethics, Religion and Politics.* Oxford: Blackwell, 1981.

BROADIE, S. (1991): *Ethics with Aristotle.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

BROWN, L. (1997): What is the "mean relative to us" in Aristotle's Ethics? *Phronēsis* 42.

FURLEY, D.J. (1977): Aristotle on the Voluntary. In BARNES, J. – SCHOFIELD, M. – SORABJI, R. (eds.): *Articles on Aristotle,* Vol 2.: *Ethics and Politics.* London: Duckworth, (reprinted from parts of *Two Studies in Greek Atomists*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967).

GAUTHIER, R.A. – JOLIF, J.Y. (1959): *Aristote: l'Ethique à Nicomaque.* Paris: PU Louvain, (2nd ed. 1970).

IRWIN, T.H. (1980): The Metaphysical and Psychological Basis of Aristotle's Ethics. In RORTY, A.O. (ed.): *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics.* Berkeley: California University Press.

IRWIN, T.H. (1985): Permanent Happiness: Aristotle and Solon. *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* III.

IRWIN, T.H. (1986): Aristotelian actions. *Phronēsis* 31.

KENNY, A. (1979): *Aristotle's Theory of the Will.* London: Duckworth.

KINGMA, E. (2007): What is it to be healthy? *Analysis* 67 (2).

LEIGHTON, S. (1995): The mean relative to us. In BOSLEY, R. – SHINER, R.A. – SISSON, J.D. (eds.): *Aristotle, Virtue and the Mean.* Edmonton: Academic printing.

LEWIS, D. (1972): Psychophysical and Theoretical Identifications. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 50.

LEWIS, D. (1983): Mad Pain and Martian Pain. In his *Philosophical Papers Vol.1.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

MACINTYRE, A. (1981): *After Virtue.* Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press.

MACINTYRE, A. (1988): *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press.

NUSSBAUM, M. (1978): *Aristotle's de Motu Animalium: Text with Translation, Commentary and Interpretative Essays.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

NUSSBAUM, M. (1983): The "Common Explanation" of animal motion. In MORAUX, P. – WIESNER, J. (eds.): *Symposium Aristotelicum.* Berlin: Gruyter.

NUSSBAUM, M. (1990): Aristotelian Social Democracy. In DOUGLASS, B.R. – MARA, G.M. – RICHARDSON, H.S. (eds.): *Liberalism and the Good.* New York: Routledge.

NUSSBAUM, M. (1995): Aristotle on human nature and the foundations of ethics. In ALTHAM, J.E.J. – HARRISON, R. (eds.) *World, Mind and Ethics.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

NUSSBAUM, M. (2000): *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

ROWE, C. (2002): *Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics* (translation and historical introduction; philosophical introduction and commentary by Sarah Broadie). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

WHITING, J. (1988): Aristotle's Function Argument: A Defense. *Ancient Philosophy* 8.