Desire: The Proper Home of Aristotle's Voluntary

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I. Introduction: Aristotle's 'the Voluntary'

Aristotle's ethics have been studied for thousands of years—a period after which one might expect his teachings to have been comprehensively understood. But there remains at least one area of his ethics that has not. This is an area which I have found to be intimately connected not only with the rest of his ethics, but with Aristotle's convictions about the human soul itself. It is Aristotle's discussion of the voluntary (*hekousion*). In contemporary conversation, we may commonly associate voluntariness with action, but, for Aristotle, action is not the only thing that can be voluntary; states, motions, and even the reception of actions can all be voluntary. For this reason, interpreters of Aristotle often use the phrasing 'the voluntary' in a substantive way.

Much of the difficulty that one encounters when trying to interpret Aristotle's accounts of the voluntary, which are given separately in his *Eudemian Ethics* (*EE*) and *Nicomachean Ethics* (*EN*), as well as in passages shared by both of those works, finds it origin in two sources. First, the *Nicomachean Ethics* has long been treated as the standard and more refined version of Aristotle's ethics. But as my reader will learn, the account of voluntariness given there is significantly less robust (even if the language is ostensibly clearer), so anyone attempting to build an understanding based primarily on the *EN* account will struggle. In fact, it has become clear that the account Aristotle gives in *EN* largely presupposes the work he does in *EE*[1]. Second, the *EE* account, while being comparatively more robust, presupposes without making explicit a great deal of work that Aristotle does elsewhere, such as in *De Anima* and *Metaphysics*. If one does not trace these lines of thought—lines which run deep in Aristotle's astoundingly unified system—one will never understand what he means when he says 'voluntary'.

Aristotle's *EE* account seems to conclude with by defining voluntary action according to two negative criteria: that it is neither forced (*bia*) nor due to ignorance. The *EN* account begins by reiterating that definition and then examines what follows from it in relation to some commonly held views. Certain statements that Aristotle draws in *EE* seem to be contradicted in *EN*. For example, in the former treatise he states that actions performed under necessity (*ananke*; often translated in this context as compulsion) are involuntary, while in the latter he concludes that they are, while similar to involuntary actions, ultimately voluntary.

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[1] For this insight, the world is indebted to Susan Sauvé Meyer, who, in her work, *Aristotle on Moral Responsibility* (2011), comes strikingly close to seeing the relationship between action and desire which grounds my interpretation.

Beyond this logical progression exhibited from *EE* to *EN*[2], there seems to be a different audience to both texts. *EE* seems more oriented toward a student of Aristotle's philosophy in general, while *EN* is explicitly directed toward students of ethics and law (which, for Aristotle, amount to pretty much the same thing). Now, some interpreters take this shift in audience to have been the source of the change in certain positions between each treatise. I cannot see why Aristotle would think different things were true based on who he was addressing. What seems like a far more plausible explanation is that Aristotle developed his theory more in the period between the writing of *EE* and *EN*. I do, though, believe that the audience for which he was writing influenced the style in which he presented information. This would seem to account for the clearer and more straightforward style of the *EN*.

On the assumption that Aristotle maintained any degree of consistency in his work, a comprehensive understanding must be able to unify and explain not only the unproblematic conclusions which Aristotle articulates, but also the problematic ones, such as those about necessity, the voluntariness of suffering, what non-voluntary means, if not involuntary, and how states like ignorance or even characteristics can be voluntary.

Some interpreters have thrown their hands up in defeat, claiming that Aristotle was himself confused by his own terminological choices, others have chosen to ignore the existence of the aforementioned problematic conclusions, and still others have acknowledged that those conclusions appear problematic, while expressing faith that Aristotle merely failed to articulate clearly the connections he was making. From this final set of commentators come many attempts to replicate Aristotle's process of reasoning in certain cases, none of which, in my opinion, have done so satisfactorily.

I contend that I have found a single defining principle (which Aristotle was likely reliant on) which unifies and underlies each claim Aristotle makes about voluntariness: <u>F is voluntary if and only if it depends on agent A's desire whether F or not-F comes to be</u>. What is most significant about this principle is that, when applied to action, it can cleanly ground for conclusions which others have struggled to understand. Not only can this principle unify and found the two distinct negative criteria by which Aristotle appears to define the voluntary, it can unproblematically account for each of the troubling conclusions which nobody has yet succeeded

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[2] Which I do take to be a progression. On my understanding, when Aristotle's claims conflict between the two works, his conclusions in *EN* are more consistent with his defining principle.

in interpreting on Aristotle's terms. Further, the definition, which I propose not as an interpretational principle but as Aristotle's own, elucidates the reasons Aristotle gave contradictory claims about necessity. Armed with this definition, one can see the realization Aristotle had between *EE* and *EN* which changed his conclusion.

First, I must point out that much of the work in formulating this definition was done by Sarah Broadie in chapter 3, "The Voluntary," of her book, *Ethics with Aristotle* (1993). My contribution comes in the specific connection of Aristotle's voluntary to desire.
This work is dedicated to exploring how this principle applies in the case of action, and the way I approach establishing my proposed definition reflects that. I will start by contextualizing the voluntary within Aristotle's Ethics by clarifying its link to character. Next, I give an overview of Broadie's derivation of the version of the principle which focuses simply on causal responsibility from *EE* II.6, pointing out important features of II.6 which Broadie's principle does not make explicit. After the principle of causal responsibility is firmly grounded, I will examine specific features of what Aristotle identifies as action (*praxis*) and how an agent might be causally responsible for action, that is, through desire (*orexis*). Having done this, I give my proposed definition of voluntary *action*, which adapts my modification of Broadie's principle explicitly to Aristotelian action: <u>an action is voluntary if and only if the action's responsible cause is the agent's desire for that action's real end.</u>[3]

Finally, I briefly analyze how this definition applies in cases of actions which Aristotle classifies as not voluntary because of having been performed due to ignorance, his introduction of the class of non-voluntary (*oukh hekousion*) actions in addition to straightforwardly involuntary (*akousion*) actions, and his inconsistent conclusions about actions performed due to necessity.[4]

II. Texts and Terms

My argument in this paper relies heavily on textual interpretation of Aristotle's original works. Because of the nature of the process of translating a 2500-year-old philosophical text into

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[3] As I have stated before, I am as yet unsure whether this revision of the defining principle as it applies to action also underlies the voluntariness of states. If it does underly the voluntariness of states, it must be through actions which cause those states to come to be.

[4] While I am convinced that the defining principle needn't be applied to non-actions such as states of character and culpable ignorance through the mediation of voluntary action, but can be applied without mediation, I will but briefly dwell on this claim. I do not believe anyone has yet made such a claim; Broadie, for example, concludes that the above count as voluntary when they have been brought about as a result of voluntary action. Since I am not yet well-enough equipped to defend my position, I will not yet attempt to do so.

contemporary English, there does not exist a translation that fully captures the intricacies of Aristotle's meaning. Compounding the problem is the fact that each reader brings to the table her own understanding of the meaning of commonly used English words. I do not mean to say that translators have not successfully made Aristotle's thought accessible to contemporary readers, but that any investigation and exposition must eventually turn to the language in which Aristotle wrote. With this in mind, I would like to leave a brief note about the texts and terms I will be using.

1. Texts

There are three ethical treatises attributed in some way to Aristotle. Two of them are generally accepted to reflect Aristotle's own work, and the other, *Magna Moralia* (*MM*), is understood to follow Aristotle's thought, but not be the result of his own work. Because I am concerned in this essay with uncovering a not-yet-recognized definition according to which Aristotle wrote, I have chosen not to include *Magna Moralia* in my investigation.

The other two, *Eudemian Ethics* (*EE*) and *Nicomachean Ethics* (*EN*), come to us sharing similar structures to each other, and they even feature three identical books. Books IV, V, and VI of *EE* are the same in form and content as V-VII of *EN*. When I am citing from these books, I will refer to them as Aristotle's Common Ethics, or *CE*, and I will give the both book designations, first the *EE* then the *EN*. For example, when I refer to *EE* IV which is also *EN* V, I will do so as *CE* IV/V.

The translations from which I quote are listed in the table below:

Nicomachean Ethics (*EN*; incl. common books)	Martin Ostwald, 1962
Eudemian Ethics (*EE*)	Anthony Kenny, 2011
De Anima (*DA*)	Hippocrates G. Apostle, 1981
De Motu Animalium (*MA*)	Martha Craven Nussbaum, 1978
Metaphysics (*Met.*)	William David Ross

2. Terms

Among the many reasons that nobody has yet arrived at a satisfactory understanding of Aristotle's account of the voluntary is that most readers conflate Aristotle's terminological choices with the meanings of the words that translators have chosen to render Aristotle's terms. From this mistake, such issues arise as the utterly ridiculous argument that Aristotle confused

himself by choosing to define a structurally ambiguous term which sometimes means 'voluntary' and sometimes means 'willing'.

This is such an insidious problem because, for most of the important terms Aristotle uses, he precisely defines them in one or two places in his entire body of work and then presupposes those definitions everywhere else. Anyone who is unprepared to go on a for Aristotle's definition of a certain term is bound to fall short of comprehension. To make clear the significance of certain terms, I have decided to often include reminders of their Greek forms alongside their English renderings. I have also selected only one or two renderings of each important term, and I will make clear when appropriate what those are, and always and only use those to render Aristotle's corresponding term. Sometimes I have had to alter translated quotations in order to maintain consistency, but I judge my reader's ability to track Aristotle's terms throughout the arguments absolutely necessary.

III. Situating the Voluntary: Character

It should go without saying that Aristotle's focus in each of his discussions of the voluntary is a person's character. One question often argued over by commentators is whether Aristotle is concerned in his Ethics with how to positively shape one's own character, how to positively shape another's character, or simply what good character looks like. Personally, I find it less than obvious that the first two do not presuppose the last. If we are concerned with how to positively shape anyone's character, we must first know what good character looks like. Further, I think Aristotle is thoroughly convinced that one's own character must be already good before one may try to improve the character of another. But that last remark is beside the point of this essay. I am convinced that Aristotle's goal when discussing the voluntary in his ethical works is to establish a way to identify someone of good character.[5]

1. Character, Characteristics, and Pleasure

Perhaps a good question to answer at this point is this: What does Aristotle mean by 'character'? He defines both character and characteristics (sometimes also referred to as dispositions) slightly differently, and the differentiae will later take on particular significance. Character is specifically linked by Aristotle (and the Greek language) to habits[6]:

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[5] See the conclusion of Aristotle's *EE* account of the voluntary at II.11.1228a

[6] In fact, the word 'moral' comes from the Latin 'mos/moris' for habit or custom. According to etymonline, Cicero coined the form 'moralis' to translate the Greek *ethikos*, which Aristotle references in this quotation. (etymonline.com 2020)

> Now, character (*ēthos*), as the word itself indicates, is developed from habit (*ethos*), and an agent acquires a habit when it eventually becomes operative in a particular fashion as the result of the repetition of a certain motion under some non-innate impulse. (This is something we do not see in inanimate agents: a stone, even if you throw it upwards ten thousand ties, will never do that except by force.) So let character be defined as a quality governed by the prescriptions of reason, which inheres in that part of the soul which, although non-rational, is capable of obedience to reason. (*EE* II.2.1220b1-7)

We learn from this that character is something developed over time in the non-rational part of the soul as a result of governance by the rational part of the soul—the non-rational part of the soul "becomes operative in a particular fashion as the result of the repetition of a certain motion under some [impulse which is not innate to the non-rational]."

Later, he specifies what he means to indicate by as the part of the soul in which character inheres. He says "the [non-intellectual characteristics] belong to the part of the soul that is non-rational but capable of desire (for not every part of the soul, supposing it to be divisible, has desire). It follows that a character is vicious or virtuous by pursuing or avoiding certain pleasures or pains" (II.4.1221b31-34). Below I will show that Aristotle takes the rational part of the soul to influence desire by presenting as pleasant or painful certain ends in view of the future. On Aristotle's view expressed here, it is in the pursuit as pleasant those of things which the rational part of the soul has correctly presented as proper ends that virtuous character exists. To recognize these as pleasant, the non-rational part of the soul must be properly disposed to find pleasurable a certain type of end (the right one, that is). The state of being disposed toward a certain emotion in a certain way is a characteristic.

Character, therefore, is composed of characteristics. Of characteristics, he gives functionally identical definitions in both *EE* and *EN* which first consider and then rule out emotions (*pathe*) and possession of capacities (*dunamis*) before determining that characteristics are states or dispositions (*hexis*):

> The capacities are the faculties in virtue of which we can be said to be liable to the emotions, for example, capable of feeling anger or pain or pity. The dispositions are the formed states of character in virtue of which we are well or ill disposed in respect of the emotions; for instance, we have a bad disposition in regard to anger if we are disposed to get angry too violently or not violently enough, a good disposition if we habitually feel a moderate amount of anger; and similarly in respect of the other emotions. (*EN* 1105b24-29)[7]

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[7] I quote from Rackham's translation here rather than Ostwald's. I find Ostwald's language in this passage to be disjointed.

In other words, while a characteristic is not simply the ability to feel emotions, it is the disposition to feel a certain emotion in a certain way toward a certain object.

2. Character and the Voluntary

In both *EE* and *EN*, Aristotle opens his discussions of the voluntary immediately after his definitions of character and characteristics. And, in both works, he makes clear that he takes it to be the case that "both virtue and vice must concern things that are voluntary" (*EE* II.6.1223a20). In other words, we want to know what is voluntary because we want to know what comes from character. Take the beginning of *EN* III.1:

> Virtue or excellence is, as we have seen, concerned with emotions and actions. When these are voluntary, we receive praise and blame; when involuntary, we are pardoned and sometimes even pitied. Therefore, it is, I dare say, indispensable for a student of virtue to differentiate between voluntary and involuntary actions, and useful also for lawgivers, to help them in meting out honors and punishments. (1109b30-35)

Here, though he takes an unconventional approach, it seems fairly clear that Aristotle means to contextualize his account of the voluntary as a way to determine what is representative of an agent's character.[8]

I urge my reader to hold in mind the close connection that Aristotle has drawn between pleasure and pain, desire, character, and the voluntary.

3. What Aristotle is *not* doing

Some commentators have taken two specific portions of Aristotle's opening to *EN* III.1 to lay out his particular concerns with and methodological approaches to defining the voluntary. One position reads "also useful for lawgivers" to indicate that Aristotle's intended purpose of this section was not to give a philosophical exposition of the voluntary but to simply bring a discussion of voluntariness into a legal context. Another takes Aristotle to be trying to build an account of the voluntary from what is commonly praised or blamed.

I do not think that the first position is essentially far from the truth, but I do believe that some commentators have taken it too far. Some, for example, takes Aristotle's focus on a legal definition of voluntariness in *EN* to have resulted in a clearer and more robust exposition than *EE*, with different conclusions arrived at for different reasons. I think that the claim that Aristotle would conclude that different things are true of one topic depending on to whom he writes is ridiculous.

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[8] The unconventional approach he takes here might be explained, as Sauvé Meyer has proposed, to come from Aristotle's presupposition of many of the moves he makes in *EE* II.

Rosalind Hursthouse has a more incendiary response, with which I do not wholeheartedly disagree: "At least part of the reason why people produce and accept such nonsense is that they think about moral or legal responsibility and what Aristotle might be construed as saying about that instead of thinking carefully about what is actually in the text. This presents its own interesting problems which are generally overlooked" (1984a). I do, though, agree that Aristotle seems to have tailored the style of his exposition in *EN* to suit a different sort of audience than *EE*.

In regard to the second claim—that Aristotle is trying to build a definition of the voluntary from what is commonly praised or blamed—I hope it will become clear to my reader not long after the beginning of my next section why this view is untenable. As F.A. Siegler puts it, "when Aristotle talks of praising and blaming, he clearly seems concerned with the phenomenon of blameworthiness (desert of blame) and not merely with the phenomenon of bestowing (expressing) blame" (1968, 269-70).

Now that we have clarified what it is Aristotle is trying to accomplish by defining what is voluntary and what is not at this point in his Ethics, we are prepared for our attempt to make sense of what has not yet been understood: what, exactly, Aristotle means when he say 'voluntary'.

IV. *EE* II.6: The Principle of Responsibility

The first problem faced by those who would understand Aristotle's account of the voluntary (*hekousion*) is that of determining where to start. Aristotle speaks explicitly of the voluntary in several different places: Book III of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II of the *Eudemian Ethics*, briefly in *De Motu Animalium*[9], and also in one of the three books that is shared in common between *EE* and *EN* (Book IV and V of the respective volumes). I think that Sarah Broadie is right to look for Aristotle's defining principle of voluntary action in his exposition on the basis of causal responsibility in *EE* II.6 (1991, 149-159). In fact, I think that Aristotle takes *EE* II.6 to completely define the voluntary. And once Aristotle's theories on animal motion as given in *De Anima* and *De Motu Animalium* are presupposed, then one has a complete definition of Aristotle's voluntary as it applies to motion and action, as well. [10]

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[9] *DM* 11.703b2-10

[10] Perhaps desire, which I will show to define voluntary motion and action, is also necessary for an understanding of voluntary states and sufferings. If this is the case, then *DA* and *MA* must be presupposed in *EE* II.6 to complete Aristotle's definition of the voluntary in general as well as in its application to action and motion.

Only once this defining principle is in place and fully understood can we appropriately move forward in our investigation to an exploration of how Aristotle derives the conclusions he gives through the rest of the ethics (and in *MA*). When we have reached that point in our inquiry, I will begin with the remainder of the *EE* account, relying on Sauvé Meyer's understanding of its dialectic structure and observation that *EN* presupposes the conclusions of *EE* (especially, I argue, *EE* II.6) (2011, 59-87), then I will move to the shared chapters before examining the *EN* account.[11]

I think that several interpreters have successfully clarified Aristotle's main points in this section. Given that, I do not feel the need to expound these conclusions in great detail. However, since I contend that this chapter contains *all* of his definition, I feel compelled to examine certain portions in greater detail. Hence, I will first offer a summary of Broadie's conclusions, and then highlight those parts of the chapter which will become important later.

1. Sarah Broadie: 'It depends on him'

In searching for some principle on which to ground Aristotle's oft-repeated characterization of voluntary actions as those which are neither forced nor due to ignorance, Broadie turns to a phrase which "makes a quiet first appearance" in *EN* III.1, but which "is carefully grounded from the start" of the *EE* account. She articulates this phrase as "it depends on the agent whether or not he ø's," where ø stands for the particular action[12] (149).

She gives two expansions of this in order to highlight what Aristotle would take to be salient features in the case of a sentient creature originating motion or action: a) "Aristotle assumes, I think, that the 'Yes' is 'Yes-instead-of-No', and the 'No' a 'No-instead-of-Yes'" (153); and b) "F depends on him if and only if it is the case that (1) if F occurs it will be because he says 'Yes', and if F does not occur it will be because he says 'No'; and (2) he is aware of this and able to envisage F and not-F as possible options for him" (154)[13].

When referring to agents and effects of these natures—where the agent is the controlling (*kurios*) source of the effect—Aristotle uses the terms *archê* and *aitios* interchangeably, to say that the agent is the origin ultimately responsible for the effect. Thus, in any relation that fits the

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[11] While I disagree with the reasoning Charles (2012) gives to justify his conclusion that this is the order in which the texts must have developed, I agree with his conclusion that the shared chapters (*EE* IV/*EN* V.8-11) must have been written after *EE* II and before *EN* III.

[12] As Broadie notes, this phrase appears in some translations as "it is within the agent's power," rather than "it depends on the agent."

[13] It is essential to understand that Broadie (and Aristotle) does not mean that the agent must be actively aware that F and not-F are possible options, but that it is/was available to the agent to become aware of F and not-F as options.

condition, "it depends on A whether F or not-F comes to be," A is appropriately said to be the responsible cause.

2. Action, motion, and production

One of the first things that Aristotle specifies in II.6 is that "a human being, alone among animals, is a source of [action] (*praxis*)[14], for we would not ascribe [action] to any of the others." One might be led to understand, based on the primacy of this statement, that Aristotle intends the rest of the chapter to discuss human action only[15]. However, Aristotle proceeds to discuss sources of mathematical truth, sources of motion (*kinesis*), and any sort of production (*poiew*). While he is primarily concerned with human action, since this exposition interrupts an ethical treatise, he ultimately lays out a definition of causal responsibility which he then applies specifically to action.

3. Virtue and vice: the connection to action

Only at 1223a10 does Aristotle return the focus of the discussion to action. It is here that he begins to situate this metaphysical exposition within his ethical treatise:

> Since virtue and vice and the works (*ergon*) that are their expressions are praised or blamed as the case may be (for blame and praise are not given on account of things that come about by necessity (*ananke*) or chance (*tuche*) or nature (*phusis*), but on account of things that we ourselves are responsible for, since if someone else is responsible for something, it is he who gets the blame and praise), it is clear that virtue and vice have to do with matters where the man himself is the responsible source of his actions (*aitios kai archê praxewn*). (1223a10-15)

For clarity, I have mapped out the moves Aristotle makes in this section of argument:

(a) For someone to be praised or blamed for something, the one receiving the praise or blame must be responsible for that thing.
(b) We are praised and blamed for virtue and vice and their works (*ergon*)
(c) Therefore, we must be responsible for our own virtue, vice, and whatever comes from those.

Notice that Aristotle says we are praised and blamed not only for the works that express virtue and vice (which he may be taken to classify as actions), but also for the states (*hexis*) of virtue and vice themselves[16]. We can add states to the list of non-actions for which one might be causally responsible.

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[14] For concerns I will address later, Kenny renders *praxis* as 'conduct' in this chapter alone. For clarity and consistency, and because I do not take Aristotle to be using the term equivocally, I use the usual translation 'action.'
[15] One might also expect some explanation from Aristotle as to why no other living beings are sources of action. Later, I attempt to give Aristotle's missing explanation.
[16] See 1227b5-10, where Aristotle defines virtue as "moral state expressed in choice of the mean (*ethiken hexin prohairetiken mesotetos*)."

Aristotle also offers three other things that might be said to be responsible causes: necessity (*ananke*), chance (*tuche*), and nature (*phusis*). All three of these will come up later as I work through some of the more confusing conclusions that Aristotle draws. In fact, it is *ananke* which appears in one puzzle which shows up in multiple places throughout Aristotle's discussions of voluntary action under the name 'compulsion'.

4. Responsibility and the voluntary

Finally, we learn that Aristotle takes a human's status as the responsible cause to be biconditional with status as voluntary[17]:

> We must then ascertain just what are the actions of which he is the responsible source. Now, we all agree that each man is responsible for things that are voluntary **and** in accordance with his own choice (*prohairesis*), but that if they are non-voluntary then he is not responsible. It is evident that whatever he does by choice, he does voluntarily. It is clear, then, that both virtue and vice must concern things that are voluntary. (1223a15-20)

I have bolded a certain 'and' in order to point out an attempt to clarify what might seem like a terminological ambiguity. The portion in question might mean one of two things: i) 'a person is responsible only for those things which are done voluntarily *and* through choice'; or ii) 'a person is responsible for something done voluntarily and a person is responsible for something done through choice'. But we see in the next sentence that Aristotle only connects voluntariness to choice in the following sentence. I take this to indicate that (ii) is the proper reading: that either voluntary or choice would indicate responsibility. Choice is then said to be a subset of the voluntary, so that voluntary on its own becomes biconditional with responsible in the case of human causes.

The final sentence recalls the connection Aristotle draws between choice and virtue or vice; namely that virtue and vice are states of (or dispositions toward) choosing well and poorly, respectively. Since everything chosen is voluntary, and virtue and vice are dispositions toward choosing in a certain way, then virtue and vice must concern only what is within the scope of the voluntary.

One crucial move that many interpreters overlook is exactly how Aristotle introduces the voluntary. He concludes first that virtue and vice have only to do with those things for which a person is causally responsible. Then, he says "we must then ascertain just what are the actions of

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[17] It would be inappropriate to call voluntary some responsible causes, like the gods. But animals would seem to all be voluntary whenever they are responsible causes. I will not repeat this specification every time I reference the relationship between voluntariness and causal responsibility.

which he is the responsible source." To answer that question, he states that "each man is responsible for things that are voluntary." He seems already to have in mind some definition of the voluntary, on which he bases the biconditional relation of voluntariness and responsibility as well as the following claim that all chosen things are voluntary.[18]

It seems to me that Aristotle's move here is to say, 'since we have a better grasp on what is voluntary than on what the scope of causal responsibility is, but we know that the two are coextensive, let us define the scope of causal responsibility by reference to the voluntary.'

The next chapter thus begins with Aristotle saying "So we must ascertain what the voluntary is…" Again, I contend that Aristotle already has some defining principle in mind and, following Meyer (2011), *EE* II.7-11 is Aristotle's dialectical attempt to establish that conclusion (though, while he succeeds in refuting some views, he does not seem to articulate one positive principle). I think that we already have enough information, based on Aristotle's connection of the voluntary to causal responsibility and his examination of how humans and animals might cause action and motion in *DA* and *MA*, to articulate this conclusion. We will move forward under the provisional definition: <u>F is voluntary if and only if it depends on the agent whether F or not-F comes to be.</u>

V. *Praxis* Defined

To fully comprehend Aristotle's conclusions in *EE* II.6, two questions must be answered: (i) What is action (*praxis*)? and (ii) What is the source of action such that a human may be a responsible cause of action(and therefore act voluntarily)? As I will go on to demonstrate in this section, Aristotle answers the first question by defining an action as something in accordance with an end. In other words, action is essentially teleological. His answer to the second question is simpler than many would put it: action begins with desire for an end conceived in imagination which is connected by practical intellect to an immediate motion—the performance of this motion and actualization of the end, considered together, is action. Since an inanimate object cannot move itself, it can certainly not be the source of action, and since non-human animals have neither a rational imagination nor practical intellect, but do have desire, they can move themselves, but do not begin actions.

1. Telos and hou heneka:

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[18] In the following sections, I contend that may be found in *De Anima* and *De Motu Animalium* and make explicit what Aristotle takes 'voluntary' to mean.

Much of the arguments that follow rely on a sophisticated grasp of the two terms by which Aristotle names the final cause: the noun *telos* and the preposition *heneka*. Each emphasizes those aspects of the nature of a final cause that the other fails to capture. The phrase '*hou heneka*,' often translated 'that for the sake of which,' describes the final cause of something according to its role as the reason for the existence for that thing and that toward which the thing's being aims.

Were Aristotle's final cause referred to only as *hou heneka*, one might be tempted to think of the final cause of something as separate from the thing itself. But, as the meaning introduced by the inclusion of the word *telos* indicates, that would be inappropriate. *Telos* is often translated as 'end,' but, while technically correct, this fails to capture the term's full specificity of meaning. A thing's *telos* is the thing's fully complete or consummate state—it is not something separate from the thing, but instead the thing, fully actualized.

For Aristotle, *hou heneka* and *telos* are one. That is to say, fulfillment of that for the sake of which a thing exists is the complete actualization of itself, and the complete actualization of itself is the aim of the thing and that for the sake of which the thing exists. I will render *hou heneka* alternately as 'that for the sake of which *x* exists' or 'the aim of *x*,' using whichever English syntax dictates. Since I find no common translation of *telos* to satisfactorily capture this sense of completion, I will leave it untranslated, reserving 'end' for when I would like to refer to both aspects of the final cause together.

2. *Metaphysics* IX.6: The teleological taxonomy of action

A significant portion of the scholarship focused on this section of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (IX.6.1048b18-35) focuses on Aristotle's distinction between motion (*kinesis*) and activity (*energeia*). My primary concern in analyzing this section, though, is to make absolutely clear the fact that Aristotle defines action (*praxis*), of which both motion and activity are species, in teleological terms. Any conception of an action which excludes the actions end is therefore not a coherent conception of that action.

Aristotle opens the passage by dividing the genus of action into two species and exemplifying the first:

> Since of the actions which have a limit none is a *telos* but all are relative to the *telos*, e.g. the process of making thin is of this sort, and the things themselves when one is making them thin are in movement in this way (i.e. without being already that at which the

> movement aims (*hou heneka*)), this is not an action or at least not a complete one (for it is not a *telos*); but that in which the *telos* is present is an action. (1048b18-23)

We see here the initial specification of one species of action: actions which have a limit, and which have ends but are not themselves ends. This leaves as the second species all actions which, being themselves ends, have no limit. The first, as we will see, Aristotle identifies as complete motion, the second as activity.

Aristotle follows this division by clarifying in what ways a motion might qualify as an action. He gives an example of an incomplete motion, naming a process (making things thin) which involves objects in motion and specifying that the process has not yet reached its aim. Because the aim has not been fulfilled and the objects are still in motion, Aristotle excludes the exemplified process from the genus of action. For an action is "that in which the *telos* is present." Only once the process has been completed—once the motion has achieved the aim, only then is it an action. We see even that the whole process was defined in the first place by reference to its end: "the process of making thin." When the motion is taken independently of its end, there is no action.

An action of this first species—a complete motion—is the unified whole of a motion with the state of completion it has realized as its end. Why, if this species is characterized as complete motion, does Aristotle first identify this species as "the actions which have a limit," before making any reference to ends? Simply put, a motion (and not, as we will see, an activity), ceases when it achieves completion. Its completed state does not undergo change—there is no longer any motion. Unless the incomplete portions of the process are being specifically identified separately from the completion, there is no longer any motion, but action.

Aristotle leaves it to his reader to infer the properties of the remaining species of action before moving on to the series of examples that has become known as Aristotle's 'tense test,' where he names the opposing species 'activities.' What exactly is the distinction Aristotle means to draw in the tense test is not immediately clear due to struggles with translating Greek grammar and syntax[19], and ostensible contradictions of certain elements of the distinction in other works[20]. But, if one begins by examining the other side of the distinction with which Aristotle opens the passage, it becomes clear that the goal of the tense test is not to define the other species of action

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[19] "States and Performances: Aristotle's Test" (Graham 1980)
[20] "The Energeia-Kinesis Distinction and Aristotle's Conception of Praxis" (Hagen 1984), 264; "Aristotle's Distinction Between *Energeia* and *Kinesis*" (Ackrill 1965)

but to exemplify a definition which has already, in a way, been given. Since we have already an understanding of one side of the following: "of the actions which have a limit none is a *telos*," we ought derive from that an understanding of the other. If the species of action known as complete motion includes all those actions which have limits and are not ends, the other species must be themselves ends and not have limits.

These are activities: they are always complete and contain no motion whatsoever. In every instant of an activity's performance, it has already fulfilled its aim, for the aim of the performance of an activity is, simply speaking, the performance of the activity. Neither is there some motion to cease when the activity is completed, nor is there any stopping-point inherent in the activity itself. Thus, Aristotle defines each of the two species of action in teleological terms. An instance of each must be described according to its end, for an activity is an end and, if one were to describe an action from the first species by excluding its end, he would be describing the motion, *not* the action[21]. It ought be clear from this how Aristotle would deal with the subject of action individuation.

With the understanding in place that Aristotelian action essentially includes the action's end, we are prepared to move on either to an analysis of the tense test on that foundation or to what is more relevant to my thesis: an exploration of the source of action. Since I am concerned here only with establishing the teleology of action in general, I will say no more about the tense test other than that the reading which follows on this foundation closely resembles the one endorsed by Charles Hagen: "it is fitting that the basis [of distinction] has turned out to be teleological in that most teleological of philosophers" (1984, 280).

3. The *Ethics* on action

Those who are already familiar with Aristotle must already feel assured that he tends not to go to such lengths to define a term in one work and then ignore that definition in others. That this is true in the case of *praxis* is made explicitly clear in *EN*, when Aristotle discusses the relation between pleasure, motion, and activity (X.4). First, he determines that pleasure cannot be motion, for it is like the activity of seeing, and seeing "lacks nothing which has to develop later in order to make complete the specific form" (1174a17) But "all motion—take building, for

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[21] This is the foundation on which Broadie (1991, 137) and Coope (2007) base their positions on how Aristotle might cope with the question popular in contemporary philosophy of action: "What is the difference between 'my arm rising' and 'me raising my arm'?" Importantly, Coope observes that, for Aristotle, an action is the causing of a state (the state of completion).

example—takes place in time and is directed at an end; it is complete only when it has accomplished that at which it aims […] the parts and individual moments of any action are incomplete" (a19-22).[22]

He claims that pleasure is not *an* activity, like seeing, but something that completes an activity when it "superimposes itself upon it, like the bloom of youth in those who are in their prime" (b33) Somewhat tangentially, but interestingly, this leads to the conclusion that "there is no pleasure without activity, and every activity is completed by pleasure" (1175a20). Pleasure is included in the actualization of whatever is being exercised in the activity. This would seem sufficient to support the use of Aristotle's technical, teleological definition of action in an explanation of *EE* and *EN*.

VI. *Orexis* and *Telos*: the Causes

The next item for investigation is the question, "what is the source of action?"[23] Fortunately Aristotle has answered this question in at least three places: *DA* III, *MA*, and *CE* V/VI.2. Most truly, Aristotle says in each place, desire for ends (*orexis*), operating through choice (*prohairesis*), is the starting point of action.

I contend that it is this answer, taken with the definition of action given above, which unlocks the understanding of *why Aristotle* draws each conclusion he does about the voluntary as it instantiates in actions, and not simply *why one might*[24]. Two recent commentators have stopped just short of realizing the full force of what follows from these two accounts. Sauvé Meyer seems on the brink of this insight in the final chapter of her book, *Aristotle on Moral Responsibility* (2011), but answers one crucial question wrong and thus fails to have an essential insight.

David Charles even identifies Aristotle's focus on choice (*prohairesis*; the connection between desire and action) in his *EE* II and *EN* III accounts of the voluntary in "The *Eudemian Ethics* on the Voluntary" (2012), gives a thorough examination of the faculty of desire in

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[22] 1174a19-30 gives the example of building a temple, where the complete motion (action) is the construction of the temple, while the individual tasks, like fitting the stones together, fluting the column, laying the foundation, and making the triglyph.

[23] *Contra* Broadie (1991), who claims that such a turn would be considered by Aristotle to be inappropriate on the basis that Aristotle does not bring it up himself, and presumably with reference to Aristotle's note about precision in *EN* I.5. As I have mentioned, I take Aristotle to omit specific reference to the discussion of *orexis* as the source of action because he feels it has been sufficiently covered.

[24] As noted in my introduction, I am not yet sure whether this can be appropriately expanded to serve as the Aristotelian principle for the voluntary in general, or if the inclusion of a discussion of desire is only appropriate when considering voluntary *action*.

"Aristotle's Desire" (2006), but stops short before following the implications, instead favoring an examination of the differences between the two accounts from a legal standpoint.[25]

Over the course of this section, a new definition of Aristotelian voluntary action will emerge which underlies his position on force and ignorance, as well as his otherwise-confusing conclusions about necessity (*ananke*) and non-voluntary actions (*oukh hekousion*): <u>an action is voluntary if and only if the action's responsible cause is the agent's desire for that action's real end.</u> The sections which follow this one will be devoted to establishing this definition's consistency with Aristotle's accounts in *EE* II, *EN* III, and *CE* IV/V. Once that has been established, I will move on to an examination of necessity and Aristotle's non-voluntary distinction in light of this definition.

1. Terms

Translations of Aristotle's ethical and psychological works have not adopted consistent ways of rendering four terms which will be encountered in this section: *orexis*, *epithumia*, *logismos*, and *bouleuw*. In fact, some translations use one word to translate the first two, and another single word to translate the second two; some adopt multiple renderings but use them interchangeably. If, though, one does not keep straight which word has been used by Aristotle, his work becomes unintelligible. To accomplish this, I will adopt the following renderings: desire (*orexis*), appetite (*epithumia*), calculation (*logismos*), and deliberation (*bouleuw*). I will replace alternate renderings in translations where necessary to maintain absolute consistency.

2. De Anima III.7-11[26]

Aristotle characterizes the faculty of desire (*orektikon*) as the faculty by which the soul pursues or avoids some object which is presented in imagination (*phantasia*). This object of desire is always an end. This might happen a) without the input of reason whatsoever, b) with the input of reason in the calculating stage when the object of desire is connected to some motion[27], or c) when the object presented to desire is determined by reason and then connected to motion through calculation.

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[25] Charles concludes that the *EE* II account confusingly tries to mediate between a focus on choice and "a unifying, but problematic and underspecified, idea of nature as the basis" (2012, 26). As we shall see, this is not, ultimately, what Aristotle's *EE* account does.

[26] My project in this section is to provide an sketch of Aristotle's conclusions about desire (*orexis*) in *De Anima*. For an exploration of the whole account, see Charles (2006)

[27] In some places, Aristotle seems committed to this view, while in others he seems to think that calculation can only proceed when the end is determined by reason.

In (a) and (b), the object is given through sensation to imagination, which receives the form of the thing sensed, while in (c) the object is conjured in imagination by intellect (*nous*), possibly in reaction to something sensed, though not always. When calculation is involved, desire pursues the object through action (431b5-11).

> Every desire, too, is for the sake of something (*hou heneka*), for it is for the object of desire which is the starting-point (*archê*) of the practical intellect, and the last <step reached by the practical intellect> is the beginning (*archê*) of action. So it is with good reason that these two—desire and practical thought (*dianoia praktike*)—appear to be the moving[28] causes (*archê*); for what causes motion is the [faculty of desire], and it is through this that thought causes motion. (433a16-20)

When the object is not given to desire by intellect, it is given by desire itself. When the object is given by intellect, the desire is wish (*boulesis*), while the other desires are appetite (*epithumia*) and spirit (*thumos*).[29] Because both desire and intellect can determine desire's ends, Aristotle sometimes refers to both as sources of action. We will see this tendency come up again when calculation and deliberation are brought up in the *Ethics*. But he notes that desire is most truly said to be the source of action because desire can impart movement contrary to intellect (as in the case of incontinence), while intellect must impart movement *through* desire. Desire is, therefore, present in all cases and is the efficient cause of action.

We have also now seen that Aristotle considers the object of desire to be the final cause of the action—the *telos* and *hou heneka*. Through the faculty of desire, this object "causes motion by being thought or imagined and is not <itself> in motion" (433b11). Here we have the key which Sauvé Meyer seemed to be searching for when she asked the question "since the moved mover's (desire) causal activity is itself a movement, we must ask, what mover moved it" (2011, 152). It is from an understanding of Aristotle's answer to Meyer's question—that the final cause of an action, which is its ultimate origin, is the object of desire that is held in the agent's imagination[30]—that Aristotle's various accounts of voluntariness will all be shown to derive.

3. The principle of responsibility in action

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[28] The moving cause is also known as the efficient cause. I use the latter, but will not change alternate translations.
[29] This is not as clear as one might wish in *DA*, where *thumos* is mentioned only in passing, but made explicit in *MA* 6.700b15-29.
[30] This model of desire is consistently given by Aristotle throughout his body of work. See *Met* I.3, XII.7; *MA* 6; *Phys* II.3; as well as *EN* VI.2

Having now established Aristotle's understanding of the structure of human action, we can revise our provisional definition from *EE* II.6. There, Aristotle said: <u>F is voluntary if and only if it depends on the agent whether F or not-F comes to be.</u> Now, we can understand the way that this principal applies to motion and action: motion F is voluntary if and only if it depends on the agent's desire whether F or not-F comes to be. A stronger articulation of its application to action, which places stronger emphasis on what will later become salient, is as follows: <u>an action is voluntary if and only if the action's responsible cause is the agent's desire for that action's real end.</u>[31]

4. Character in action

Earlier, we saw that Aristotle considers character to be a habituated "quality governed by the prescriptions of reason, which inheres in that part of the soul which, although non-rational, is capable of obedience to reason;" the part of the soul which is the seat of character is also the seat of desire, and one's character is made up of one's dispositions toward finding certain types of objects pleasant or painful (*EE* II.2.1220b1-7; 4.1221b31).
Meyer attempted to answer her question about the unmoved mover in human action on the basis of the agent's character. But, as we have saw, Aristotle explicitly named the final cause of the action (the object of desire) as the unmoved mover. However, Meyer does not make an inference that is any way inappropriate, Aristotle takes character to be a disposition toward desiring certain objects. Character does not cause the agent to select a certain end, it simply *is* the agent's repeated selection of a certain type of end—that is, toward a certain type of thing as the unmoved mover of the agent's action.

After consulting *De Anima*, we now understand two further things about desire's relationship to character: i) desire simply is the pursuit of an object that happens when that object is seen as pleasant, and ii) reason cannot 'influence' desire as such but may present ends to it as pleasant. To review: one's character determines what sorts of objects one sees as pleasant; what one sees as pleasant is the object of desire, and desire is simply the pursuit of its object (motion or action, in other words); the object of desire is the first cause of motion.   Therefore, the motions and actions toward which one is disposed are determined by the objects which one is disposed to find pleasant or painful—i.e. one's character. One's motions and actions, if one is

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[31] As I have stated before, I am as yet unsure whether this revision of the defining principle as it applies to action also underlies the voluntariness of states. If it does underly the voluntariness of states, it must be through actions which cause those states to come to be.

causally responsible for them, which is equivalent in this context to their being voluntary, are quite literally the works (*ergon*) of one's character.

We now have a much deeper and clearer understanding of what Aristotle means by 'voluntary', and we have learned something about the development of character along the way: The disposition that is a characteristic develops over time through repetition of certain types of motion, and can therefore be governed in its development by reason, if reason often succeeds in its presentation of ends to desire. This would imply that, through the process of habituation, the non-rational parts of one's soul become themselves disposed towards what is good. That is to say, the perfectly virtuous person finds the virtuous course of action pleasant in itself without even requiring the input of reason.

VII. Application

What is most compelling about the principle I am proposing is that it grants us the ability to understand just why Aristotle has come to the following conclusions about voluntary action: 1) that actions performed due to ignorance are not voluntary, 2) that we should consider there to be a third classification between voluntary and involuntary called non-voluntary, and 3) that actions performed under necessity (*ananke*) are ultimately voluntary. In this section I will briefly consider these conclusions in light of Aristotle's definition of voluntary action: <u>an action is voluntary if and only if the action's responsible cause is the agent's desire for that action's real end.</u>

1. Due to ignorance

At first this definition might seem to obscure rather than clarify Aristotle's claim that actions performed due to ignorance are involuntary. For if the agent initiates the movement, which the agent certainly does even when ignorant, the agent is surely causally responsible, right? But Aristotle does seem at some points to take this, too, to derive from his claims about causal responsibility. And, if the ignorant agent is not causally responsible, then what is?

Recall the structure of action; specifically, the structure of actions which are composed of motion (*kinesis*) and end, for these seem to be the only actions which can come from an ignorant agent. Aristotle's paradigmatic examples of activity (*energeia*), like seeing and thinking, certainly cannot be done unknowingly.[32] It will be useful here to consider separately the action as desired and the action as realized. An action of the relevant species is composed of a set of

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[32] Though it is certainly worth investigating whether these are voluntary or not.

incomplete motions and a state of completion which is their end (*telos* and *hou heneka*). This end is the final cause of the action. When we consider the end of the action that has been performed, we are considering what we shall call final cause R. When we consider the end of the action that is desired, we are considering the first origin of the action, which is what must belong to the agent for the agent to be causally responsible. Let us call this final cause D. If and only if D and R match—if and only if the state of affairs that is the object of the agent's desire which is the first origin of the action *is* the state of affairs that is realized—can the agent be said to be causally responsible for R.

But Aristotle cites six particular items from which unawareness of any qualifies as the proper type of ignorance:

> (1) Who the agent is, (2) what he is doing, (3) what thing or person is affected, and sometimes also (4) the means he is using, e.g., some tool, (5) the result (*heneka tinos*), e.g. saving a life, and (6) the manner in which he acts, e.g., gently or violently. (1111a3-6)

For the action to be voluntary, the agent must not be ignorant of any of these. Aristotle emphasizes two of the items listed as being most central to the action: (3) the thing or person affected and (5) the result of the action (*heneka tinos*). Clearly, though, any item on the list would alter the result which the action will lead to.

So, in all cases of action performed due to ignorance, the agent is not aware of the result (*hou heneka*) toward which the real action aims—that is, the real final cause, R. It follows necessarily that the real final cause of the real action cannot be the same as the object of the agent's desire, D. Since action must be defined by reference to its end, the action that has been performed and the action that the agent desired by definition cannot even be referred to as the same action. D and R do not match: the agent cannot be the responsible cause of the action that has come to be realized.

But the agent's desire is still the responsible cause of the agent's *motion*. Even if the end as desired and the end that is realized do not match, the agent's motion which she produced as a result of her desire does still come from her desire.

If pressed to give an account of the cause responsible for the action that has come to be realized, Aristotle might turn to *tuche*, which is sometimes called luck, sometimes chance, and sometimes fortune. Indeed, in *CE* IV/V.8 Aristotle refers to these as *atuchēma*, or 'misfortunes'. In *Physics* II.5, Aristotle gives an account of how an action might come to be out of chance

(*tuche*). His example looks particularly likely to fit under the criteria for an action performed due to ignorance given in *EN* III.

2. Non-voluntary

One development that Aristotle introduces in *EN* III which was not obviously present in EE[33] is the introduction of a third classification of actions as regards the voluntary: non-voluntary (*oukh hekousion*; literally 'not voluntary'). Some interpreters seem to struggle to come to terms with this new distinction that Aristotle has made and wantonly criticize it. What seems to be the problem is that these interpreters failure to let go of the conviction that the Greek *hekousion* and *akousion* must be contradictories (one must be true while the other must be false) rather than contraries (the two cannot be true at the same time). This seems silly, since what Aristotle is doing is providing his own definition of the words and defining them clearly as contraries. Aristotle is, in fact, coining a term to describe an agent whose desire did not *cause* a certain action, but was not in any way *in conflict with* that action.

If we, in the words of Hursthouse, "reject the explanation that his invoking it at all was a stupid blunder," then we might make some progress into discovering how Aristotle lays out this definition (1984b, 256). He introduces this new classification when treating actions which are performed due to ignorance:

> Turning now to acts due to ignorance, we may say that all of them are non-voluntary (*oukh hekousion*), but they are involuntary (*akousion*) only when they bring sorrow and regret in their train: a man who has acted due to ignorance and feels no compunction whatsoever for what he has done was not a voluntary agent, since he did not know what he was doing, nor yet was he involuntary, inasmuch as he feels no sorrow. There are, therefore, two distinct types of acts due to ignorance: a man who regrets what he has done is considered an involuntary agent, and a man who does not may be called a non-voluntary agent. (*EN* III.1.1110b17-24)

Aristotle appears to rely entirely on the ignorant agent's emotional reaction when made aware of the real end of the action to differentiate between non- and in-voluntariness. It does not seem to me that Aristotle is so lazy of a philosopher as to have not used the agent's emotional reaction simply as an indication of an underlying characteristic—a disposition towards desiring certain objects.

When an agent feels regret after learning of the consequence of her action, this is because that action was contrary to her desire. Since Aristotle seems to be addressing a comparatively

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[33] This is actually not the case. I will bring up later where non-voluntary appears in *EE*.

non-philosophical audience in *EN*, it is not surprising that he would restrict his explanation to the outward indicators of the underlying principle—the underlying principle of the non-voluntary being this: an action is non-voluntary if and only if the agent is not causally responsible for the action. This is the contradictory of the voluntary; it must be true every time an action is not voluntary.

Now, Aristotle might be doing one of two things here. He might be classifying the involuntary as a subset of the non-voluntary, or he might be separating the two, so that there are three classifications on equal footing: the voluntary, the non-voluntary, and the involuntary. I am of the view that Aristotle is doing the former: setting the voluntary and the non-voluntary against each other while the involuntary is a subset of the non-voluntary. This is supported by an oft-overlooked sentence in an oft-overlooked chapter, *EE* II.6: "if they are non-voluntary then he is not responsible" (1223a17). Non-voluntary does, in fact, appear in *EE*, and it does so as the contradictory of the voluntary.

If the principle of the non-voluntary is that the agent is not causally responsible for the action, the principle for the involuntary (indicated by the agents regret for the action) is this: an action is involuntary if and only if the agent is not causally responsible for the action and the action is against the agent's desire. Sarah Broadie refers to this as the 'counter-voluntary'.

Questions have arisen concerning why Aristotle does not speak of forced actions as non-voluntary. There are two ways Aristotle might address these. The first is by saying, as he does in *EE* II.7, that all forced actions are structurally against the agent's desire (1223a30). I am not absolutely sure that Aristotle holds this view, but it is not unlikely. He claims this in a dialectical premise that is partially refuted, though the relevant portion does go unrefuted, which might be taken as an indication of his agreement. The other way is one proposed by Hursthouse (1984a): Aristotle might simply have felt it less important to note the very few cases in which forced actions might turn out to be wholly consistent with the agent's desire.

Nevertheless, it is clear that Aristotle's conception of the difference between and definitions of non- and in-voluntary actions is better understood on the basis of my proposed defining principle of voluntary action.

3. Necessity

Finally we arrive at the locus of the most significant disagreement between Aristotle's *EE* and *EN* accounts: whether actions performed in cases of necessity (*ananke*) are voluntary or

whether they are ultimately forced actions (*bianon*) and therefore not voluntary. Aristotle characterizes such actions in *EE* as follows:

> When the situation is not under his control, then in a fashion he is acting under force, but not without qualification. For even if he does not choose what he actually does, he does choose the thing that is the purpose of his doing it (*hou heneka*). Even here, cases differ. If a man were to kill in order to avoid being caught at blind man's buff, it would be ridiculous to claim that he acted under force and [necessity][34]: it has to be a greater and more painful evil that he will suffer if he does not do the deed. Thus, he will act under [necessity]—though [this is not a forced action or against nature]—when he does something evil for the sake of (*heneka agathon*) a good, or in order to escape from a greater evil, and does so involuntarily (*akwn*), these matters not being under his control. (II.8.1225a12-19)

Aristotle gives three criteria which an action must fit if it is be considered in this discussion: a) the agent must not have put herself into the situation, b) the end must be properly worthy of pursuit or avoidance (pursuit of a good or avoidance of a 'greater evil') and c) the means must not themselves be worthy of pursuit, but they must be not be more worthy of avoidance than the end (otherwise it would be like a man killing in order to avoid losing a game).

The conclusion Aristotle has often been interpreted as drawing here is that *actions* in cases of necessity are involuntary. In fact, what he says is that the agent is involuntary (*akwn* not *akousion*), and he says this in reference to the evil that the agent does for the sake of something else. So we should read this not as Aristotle concluding that the whole action is involuntary, but that the agent is not voluntary in relation to the *means*—this leaves open the possibility that the agent is voluntary in relation to the *end*, by which the action is defined, in which case the action would be voluntary.

Aristotle all but immediately addresses the issue of actions of necessity in his *EN* account. As soon as he has briefly contextualized the discussion of the voluntary and given his two criteria for identifying actions as not voluntary, he turns to a lengthy discussion of necessity. Here, he offers a clear example of an action which meets the criteria set out in *EE*, but for which the agent clearly deserves praise (which would indicate an underlying belief that it is voluntary). Consider a sailor who is stuck in a storm on a ship loaded down with passengers and cargo. In order to save his own life and the life of his fellow passengers, the sailor throws the cargo

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[34] *Ananke* is often rendered 'coercion' rather than its typical meaning, 'necessity', by translators of Aristotle's Ethics, but only in sections dealing with the voluntary. This obscures the connections which Aristotle means to draw by using the term *ananke*. I hope that I have already made clear the significance of Aristotle's word choice.

overboard. We are given to understand that he would never have thrown the cargo overboard otherwise.

"Actions of this kind," Aristotle says, "are, then, of a mixed nature, although they come closer to being voluntary than to being involuntary actions. For they are desirable at the moment of action; and the end for which an action is performed depends on the time at which it is done." He refers to the fact that the source (*archê*) of the motion is within the agent. We now understand this as the desire for the end of the action. In both texts, Aristotle explicitly identifies the agent's rational desire as what determines the end, making it firmly her own. Thus, when Aristotle concludes that these actions "are voluntary, although in themselves they are perhaps involuntary, since nobody would choose to do any one of them for its own sake," we are better prepared to interpret this.

Aristotle seems to be saying in *EN* that not only is the action as a whole voluntary, but so is the motion. If this is so, it is here that we would see disagreement with his position in *EE*, rather than disagreement over the status of the action as a whole. This seems like progress for three reasons: first, it seems strange to say that the whole action (means and end together) is voluntary while part (the means to the end) is involuntary; second, as Aristotle points out in *EN*, it is hard to calculate well in such situations, and how well one does is a worthwhile indicator of the quality of one's character[35]; and third, if the *EE* position is granted, one might assert that any set of means to an end is determined by necessity[36].

While the means, when considered 'in themselves' are, for the situation to qualify as necessity, not specifically pursuit-worthy, they become so in the situation because they are so tightly linked to the end that the agent does desire. In any situation there may be a range of possible motions available to an agent's choice. Whether the agent chooses the best end *and* the best motions as means to that end is telling in regard to the quality of that agent's character—put in Aristotle's *EN* terms, whether and how much blame or praise the agent deserves for that action is determined by the agent's means and end. In fact, because it is so clear that the motions which the agent performs in such situations must have been chosen on the basis of some further end (for no normal person would throw cargo overboard without having deliberated on whether that was worthwhile considering the consequences), Aristotle says these actions "have a greater

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[35] 1110a20-b17
[36] 1110b8-15

resemblance to voluntary actions," as long as one considers the action in its full context (1110b6). To be sure, anyone who would accuse the sailor of wrongdoing for jettisoning the cargo would be grossly mischaracterizing the action and its agent.

Further, if one were to absolve the agent of responsibility for the means on the grounds that necessity is an external source (thus being force in an unqualified sense), then this would equate to claiming that "pleasant and noble acts are performed under [force] because the pleasant and noble are external to us and have a [necessitating] power. But on this view, all actions would be done under force: for every man is motivated by what is pleasant and noble in everything he does" (1110b10-13).

What, then, are we to do with Aristotle's note in *EE* II.6 that we are not causally responsible for (and therefore not voluntary in relation to) "things that come about by necessity (*ananke*) or chance or nature" (1223a12)? I have already referenced chance and nature in support of my position, am I to throw out necessity? On the contrary, it seems that the actions of which Aristotle has been speaking of as performed out of necessity are not even taken by him (in the more developed *EN* position) to be necessitated in an unqualified way. For one certainly has the option to avoid rather than pursue them. In *EE* II.6, Aristotle positions necessity, chance, and nature against the scope of the agent's causal responsibility. But these actions are clearly within that scope—It is up to the agent to do F rather than not-F or not-F rather than F. I would contend that Aristotle means to refer in *EE* II.6 to cases of unqualified necessity, in which it is (aptly) *not* up to the agent to do F rather than not-F or not-F rather than F: For reasons not within the scope of the agent's responsibility, she *must* do F.

VIII. Conclusion; What Remains to be Done

I believe that I have shown my proposed interpretation of Aristotle's underlying definition of the voluntary not only to be accurate, but to be useful. Considering the agent's desire seems to be exactly what Aristotle means to do. I think that I have also effectively supported translators' repeated affirmation of 'voluntary' as the appropriate way to render *hekwn/hekousion*. For 'voluntary' comes from the Latin for 'will', which, while it is of contested meaning, seems an appropriate name by which to refer to Aristotle's theory of desire. I hope that, I have also succeeded in illustrating what is lost when one makes the mistakes that have cost many interpreters before me the prize of comprehension.

At the beginning of this essay, I brought up three more items that Aristotle specifically names as voluntary: culpable ignorance, states of character, and receipt of certain actions. As I have mentioned, interpreters generally take the first two of these to be considered voluntary by Aristotle because they come about as a result of voluntary action. I have not yet found any published literature which attempts to deal with Aristotle's baffling assertion of the third: that we can receive action voluntarily. I am convinced that none of these need be accounted for by reference to voluntary action, but that the first two can be proven voluntary simply on Broadie's unmodified definition of voluntary as what is causally dependent on the agent.

I suspect that the full extent of the interpretational power one gains from introducing desire into the voluntariness equation will only become apparent when I show it to reveal how in the world Aristotle might take one to receive action voluntarily. But this is all work that must another day.[37]

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[37] I am conscious of the position articulated in *EE* II that "the voluntary is not to be defined by desire or choice" (1225a39). I understand this as having emerged as part of Aristotle's dialectical examination of whether the voluntary can be defined by reference to either desire, or choice, or thought alone or whether it must be defined by all three together. The defining principle which I propose is not inconsistent with Aristotle's conclusions here.

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