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VIRTUE OF CHARACTER IN ARISTOTLE'S *NICOMACHEAN ETHICS*

HENDRIK LORENZ

1. Introduction

IN the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle presents in considerable detail a conception of the virtues of character, such as justice, courage, and generosity, that I think is extremely attractive. It may well be the case, it seems to me, that he succeeds in articulating, in a fairly specific and detailed way, what at least many of the qualities are in whose possession having an outstandingly good character consists. But it also seems to me that before we are in a position to appreciate Aristotle's mature theory of character-virtue fully and properly, a certain common, but mistaken, view about it needs to be cleared away. According to that view, the theory identifies the virtues of character with appropriately habituated conditions of the person's capacities for experiencing feelings such as pleasure, distress, anger, and shame.¹

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I delivered earlier versions of this paper to audiences at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Oxford University, and the University of São Paulo. I am grateful to the members of my audiences on those occasions who asked questions or made comments, especially to Jonathan Beere. I am also grateful to Brad Inwood for providing me with detailed written comments that have helped me greatly in preparing the present version.

¹ Some examples from recent literature include the following. 'To possess virtue of character', writes Christopher Taylor, 'is to have one's desiderative soul in good order; and that order is the responsiveness of one's desires (in the form of one's feelings) to the multiple demands of appropriateness which it is the task of the practical intellect to identify' (C. C. W. Taylor, *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics Books II–IV, Translated with an Introduction and Commentary [Books II–IV]* (Oxford, 2006), 106). That the first claim quoted is meant to be a statement of identity is clear from *ibid.*, 'Introduction', xv (cf. my n. 2). Doug Hutchinson: 'The moral virtues are settled habits of character which express themselves in the correct emotional response' (D. S. Hutchinson, 'Ethics', in J. Barnes (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle* (Cambridge, 1995), 195–232 at 213; similarly C. Rapp, *Aristoteles zur Einführung* (Hamburg, 2001), 27–31).

I think that justice, for instance, is in important part constituted by the just person's disposition to grasp suitable reasons for acting in certain ways. The just person will recognize as a strong reason in favour of, say, promoting a given fair distribution of goods the fact that it is a fair distribution, and his or her grasp of this reason will be based on understanding what the relevant goods are worth, what the individuals in question have legitimate claims to, the extent to which differences in merit among those individuals make a difference to how the goods at issue should be distributed, and so on.

Moreover, it seems to me repellent for a theory of virtue to deny that having an outstandingly good character in important part actually consists in being disposed to grasp such reasons in a way that rests on a suitable understanding of human affairs, and instead to insist that character-virtue consists exclusively in dispositions to experience certain feelings on appropriate occasions, allowing only that establishing and maintaining character-virtue for some reason or other requires also establishing and maintaining, as a distinct condition of the mind, an understanding of relevant matters of values and a corresponding openness to suitable reasons for acting in certain ways. In ascribing to someone the outstandingly good state of character that is justice, we mean, I take it, to single them out and commend them just as much for their alertness to good reasons for acting in certain ways as for their reliable and wholehearted readiness to act in accord with such reasons.

My main purpose in the present paper is to show that Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* conceives of the virtues of character as rational states, states partly constituted by a well-informed, thoughtful quickness to grasp suitable reasons for acting in certain ways if and when such reasons arise. In attempting to show this, I mean to oppose the widely held view that the virtues of character, as Aristotle conceives of them in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, are excellent conditions specifically of a non-rational part of the soul. The view I mean to oppose takes Aristotle to hold that the virtues of character are wholly constituted by excellent conditions of a part or aspect of the human soul that is not itself capable of reasoning, deliberating, or thinking, but that is responsible for the person's dispositions or tendencies to desire pleasures and to be averse to pains and to feel emotions such as anger and shame.²

The paper has three main sections. In Section 2 I argue that

² Taylor, for instance, holds that Aristotle identifies virtue of character with 'the

Aristotle's division of the soul into two parts or aspects, on which he bases his distinction between the virtues of thought and the virtues of character, is best understood as a division between reason, which for Aristotle includes reason's own distinctive capacity for desire, and a non-rational part or aspect that is constituted by the capacities for appetitive and spirited desire. If so, the view about virtue of character that I am opposing in this paper turns out to be that the virtues of character, as Aristotle conceives of them in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, are wholly constituted by excellent conditions of the capacities for two forms of non-rational desire, namely appetitive and spirited desire. So conceived of, virtue of character can account neither for the disposition of virtuous people to wish for correct goals nor for their disposition to deliberate well about how to implement those correct goals in the particular situations in which they find themselves. This is because both the capacity for wish, which is reason's own desire for the good, and the capacity for deliberation are parts or aspects of reason, not of the non-rational part or aspect of the soul in whose various excellent conditions, on the view I oppose, Aristotle takes the character-virtues to consist.

In Section 3 I discuss Aristotle's conception of decision, highlighting the way in which forming any given decision, on that conception, crucially involves grasping a reason in favour of performing the course of action one is deciding on. I do this in order to provide background required for seeing the significance of Aristotle's conception of the virtues of character as certain states that issue in decision, and of his claim that virtue of character makes decision correct. It is in Section 4 that I turn directly to Aristotle's conception of character-virtue, arguing both that he has strong reasons for conceiving of the character-virtues as rational states, and that book 6 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* contains decisive textual evidence that he does in fact conceive of character-virtue in this way.

That Aristotle conceives of the virtues of character as rational states is, I take it, a matter of considerable philosophical interest. That he so conceives of them in book 6 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* turns out to be relevant to the question of whether that book, which has also come down to us as book 5 of the *Eudemian Ethics*, should or should not be read as a part of the treatise that is the *Nicomachean*

excellence of rationally responsive appetite', the part or aspect of the soul that is distinguished from the intellect in *NE* 1. 13 (Taylor, *Books II-IV*, 'Introduction', xv).

Ethics. That is because there is good reason to think that it is specifically in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that Aristotle conceives of the virtues of character as rational states, departing from a rather different conception with which he operates in the *Eudemian Ethics*. If book 6 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* adopts the Nicomachean rather than the Eudemian conception, as I think it does, this does not rule out the possibility that the book, together with books 5 and 7 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, originated in the *Eudemian Ethics*, as was suggested by several scholars.³ Nothing prevents us from thinking that Aristotle revised certain originally Eudemian texts for (or after) inclusion in a later ethical treatise, the *Nicomachean Ethics*.⁴

In the present paper I focus almost exclusively on the conception of character-virtue that Aristotle's expounds in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, including book 6. I trust that such limitation is warranted by the intricacy and philosophical interest of that conception. I leave for another occasion discussion of Aristotle's earlier ideas about virtue of character, and also a systematic defence of taking book 6 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* to be a legitimate part of that work. The latter issue, in any case, should be dealt with as part of a larger discussion, concerning all three of the so-called common books: books 5–7 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which have also been transmitted as books 4–6 of the *Eudemian Ethics*.⁵

³ A. Mansion, 'La genèse de l'œuvre d'Aristote d'après les travaux récents', *Revue néoscholastique de philosophie*, 29 (1927), 307–41. A detailed historical account of scholarship on the origin and proper place of books 5–7 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is offered in C. J. Rowe, *The Eudemian and Nicomachean Ethics: A Study in the Development of Aristotle's Thought* (Cambridge, 1971), 79–89. Rowe himself argues that books 5 and 7 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* are based on lost original versions from the *Eudemian Ethics* (ibid. 90–114). A. Kenny, in *The Aristotelian Ethics: A Study of the Relationship between the Eudemian and Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle* (Oxford, 1978), shows that by numerous stylistic criteria books 5–7 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* resemble the (non-'common' books of the) *Eudemian Ethics* much more than the remaining books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

⁴ In 'Nicomachean Ethics 7. 4: Plain and Qualified *akrasia*', in C. Natali (ed.), *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, Book VII* (Oxford, 2009), 72–102, I argue that *Nicomachean Ethics* 7. 4 shows signs both of having originated in the *Eudemian Ethics* and of having been revised in the light of theoretical developments characteristic of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

⁵ O. Primavesi's paper 'Ein Blick in den Stollen von Skepsis: Vier Kapitel zur frühen Überlieferung des *Corpus Aristotelicum*', *Philologus*, 151 (2007), 51–77 at 70–3, adds a fresh and important consideration concerning the proper place of those books, by showing that the *Eudemian Ethics*, in both families of medieval manuscripts, is marked using a different, and later, book-labelling scheme from the scheme used for all other authentic Aristotelian works, including, of course, the ten-book version of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. This suggests strongly that the 'common

2. Two aspects of reason, and two kinds of virtue

At the end of book 1 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle turns to the topic of virtue. This flows naturally from the discussion of happiness and the human good in *NE* 1, since Aristotle has provided an account of happiness according to which it is activity of virtue (or of the best and most final one, if there are more than one), over a complete lifetime (1. 7, 1098^a16–18), and adequately supplied with external goods (1. 8, 1101^a14–16). Since human virtue, the kind of excellence that the political expert is concerned with, is virtue of the human soul, an account of human virtue, Aristotle indicates, requires at least some understanding of the nature of the human soul. This is why he provides, in *NE* 1. 13, an outline of the nature of the human soul.

Aristotle conceives of the human soul, as of any kind of soul, as a system of capacities for the performance of vital functions, such as perception, thought, desire, locomotion, etc. He takes the various capacities that constitute human souls to be distinguishable into three parts or subsystems, which he calls nutritive, perceptual, and intellectual. For present purposes, for the purposes of political philosophy, the nutritive part of the soul can be set aside as irrelevant. This is because that part 'has no share in human virtue' (1102^b12). The reason for this, I take it, is that the nutritive part is not responsible for the generation of voluntary behaviour, behaviour that flows from the operations of cognition and desire. (Cf. 6. 12, 1144^a9–11.)

The next order of business for Aristotle is then to make clear that in so far as the human soul is responsible for the generation of voluntary behaviour, it has a part or aspect that is non-rational, though in a way this part does have a share in reason. The remainder of the chapter falls into two parts: he first argues for the existence of a non-rational subpart of the soul's action-producing part, and then he argues that this subpart is rational in an extended sense, since it is capable of listening to, and of obeying, reason. So as to establish the existence of a non-rational part of the soul that has a share in human virtue, he appeals to the conflicting impulses of controlled and uncontrolled people: people who tend to experience

books' were included in the *Nicomachean Ethics* before an eight-book version of the *Eudemian Ethics* was put together.

psychological conflicts, being impelled both to pursue some pleasure and to abstain from such pursuit, because they realize that, in the circumstances, to indulge would be seriously objectionable. Controlled character-types tend to control the objectionable impulse and abstain, uncontrolled ones tend to be mastered by such impulses and to act as they realize they should not.

Aristotle takes the presence of such impulses that are contrary to reason to indicate the existence of a part or aspect of the soul's action-producing part that is non-rational. This part of the soul is mentioned in *NE* 1. 7, in the so-called human function argument, where Aristotle says that one part of the soul that has reason 'has reason as obeying reason, the other has it as itself having reason and [as itself] thinking' (1098^a3-5).⁶ The idea is, among other things, that this non-rational part is capable of giving rise to impulses to act in certain ways, independently of and even contrary to reason strictly speaking, without being capable of performing activities that Aristotle counts as reasoning or thinking.

Having argued for the existence of a non-rational part of the soul's action-producing part, Aristotle next argues for the claim that that part is rational in an extended sense, in that it is capable of listening to, or obeying, the commands or prescriptions of reason. He then introduces the distinction between the virtues of thought and the virtues of character, saying that virtue is distinguished on the basis of, or in accord with, the difference between the two parts of the action-producing part of the human soul (1103^a3-4).⁷

I shall shortly discuss the question what exactly Aristotle has in mind in saying this. For now I want to address a question of interpretation that Aristotle's discussion in 1. 13 raises. At 1102^b30 he seems to refer to the non-rational, but potentially obedient, part of the soul as 'the part responsible for appetite and in general desire'.⁸ This may seem to indicate that he means to assign all the forms of desire (wish, spirit, and appetite) to that part of the soul, leaving reason strictly speaking without the ability to generate its own desires. It is worth noting that this need not be what Aristotle has in mind. In fact there is good reason not to interpret him as

⁶ Translations from the *Nicomachean Ethics* are as in T. Irwin, *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics, Translated, with Introduction, Notes, and Glossary*, 2nd edn. (Indianapolis, 1999), with occasional changes.

⁷ διορίζεται δὲ καὶ ἡ ἀρετὴ κατὰ τὴν διαφορὰν ταύτην.

⁸ τὸ δ' ἐπιθυμητικὸν καὶ ὄλωσ ὀρεκτικόν.

assigning all desires of all the three kinds to the non-rational, but potentially obedient part of the soul.

In our passage, Aristotle picks out the relevant non-rational part of the soul by reference to its responsibility for appetite and, in general, *orexis*. Now, it is often appropriate to translate the word *orexis* as 'desire'. However, there is evidence that Aristotle recognizes and employs a use of that word in which it does not mean 'desire' but specifically 'mere desire' or 'non-rational desire'. At *MA* 7, 701^a36–^b1, he says that 'among beings that desire to act, some produce or act on account of appetite or spirit, others on account of mere desire [*orexis*] or wish'.⁹ The flow of the sentence suggests strongly that *orexis* and wish are meant to be different kinds of desire, just as appetite and spirit are meant to be different kinds of desire. The two classes of agents that the passage distinguishes from one another seem to be the non-human animals on the one hand, which are capable only of appetite and spirit, and humans on the other hand, capable not only of non-rational desire but also of wish.¹⁰

Given the evidence of this passage and of others like it, it is open to us to understand Aristotle as saying that the part of the soul that is responsible for appetite and in general for non-rational desire in a way has a share in reason, namely in so far as it can listen to reason and obey it. On this interpretation, Aristotle is not assigning all the kinds of desire to the part of the soul that is non-rational but capable of obeying reason; he is leaving wish to reason itself. In the context of the discussion in 1. 13, this is clearly preferable to an alternative interpretation according to which Aristotle means to assign all desire to the part of the soul that he is here distinguishing from reason itself.¹¹

⁹ τῶν δ' ὀρεγομένων πράττειν τὰ μὲν δι' ἐπιθυμίαν ἢ θυμὸν τὰ δὲ δι' ὄρεξιν ἢ βούλησιν τὰ μὲν ποιῶσι τὰ δὲ πράττουσιν. This is the text of all the authoritative manuscripts. M. C. Nussbaum, in her edition of the *De motu animalium* (Princeton, 1978), brackets ὄρεξιν ἢ, but only because she finds a narrow use of the word *orexis* 'unparalleled, and inexplicable here' (346). For parallels, see my next footnote. An explication of Aristotle's thought follows in my main text.

¹⁰ Note also *EE* 2. 8, 1224^a23–5: the principle (of motion) is twofold in ensouled beings (more specifically, in adult humans): οὐ γὰρ αἰεὶ ἡ ὄρεξις καὶ ὁ λόγος συμφωνεῖ ('for *orexis* and reason are not always in harmony'); *DA* 3. 9, 433^a6–8: ἀλλὰ μὴν οὐδ' ἡ ὄρεξις ταύτης κυρία τῆς κινήσεως· οἱ γὰρ ἐγκρατεῖς ὀρεγόμενοι καὶ ἐπιθυμοῦντες οὐ πράττουσιν ὧν ἔχουσι τὴν ὄρεξιν, ἀλλ' ἀκολουθοῦσι τῷ νῷ ('nor does *orexis* have control over this kind of motion: for although encratics feel *orexis*, i.e. appetite, they do not do the things for which they feel *orexis*, but follow their intellect').

¹¹ That alternative interpretation is adopted by, for instance, A. W. Price, *Mental Conflict* (London, 1995), 110. It is presupposed by S. Broadie, in S. Broadie and C.

This is because the argument for distinguishing between these two parts or aspects of the human soul appeals to the psychological conflicts characteristic of controlled and uncontrolled people, noting that ‘the impulses of the uncontrolled person go in opposite directions’ (1102^b21). These are meant to be psychological conflicts between reason itself, or reason strictly speaking, and another part or aspect of the soul, about which Aristotle wants to say that it is non-rational, but capable of obeying reason. But for reason to be capable of issuing its own impulses (*ὀρμῶν*), impulses that another part or aspect of the soul can oppose and do battle with, it must be able to give rise to desires of its own. It can do this if the capacity for one kind of desire, wish, is assigned to it, but not if all the kinds of desire, including wish, are assigned to the non-rational, potentially obedient part.

I take it, then, that Aristotle, in *NE* 1. 13, means to distinguish between reason, which he conceives of as having its own form of desire, wish, and a non-rational but potentially obedient part or aspect of the soul, which is constituted by the capacities for appetite and spirit.

3. Decision (*προαίρεσις*)

At the beginning of *NE* 3. 2 Aristotle turns to the topic of decision, saying that ‘the next task is to discuss decision: for decision seems to be most proper to virtue, and to distinguish characters from one another better than actions do’ (1111^b5–6). In a way it is easy to see why Aristotle holds decision to be most proper to virtue (by which I take it he here means character-virtue): after all, he defines virtue of character as a certain kind of *hexis prohairetikē* (2. 6, 1106^b36–1107^a2), a Greek expression that I shall argue should be translated as ‘state that issues in decision’. By ‘decision’ Aristotle means something rather more specific than the English word suggests, and in order to understand his definition of character-virtue, we shall need to be clear about what he means by it. Once we have an adequately detailed view of what an Aristotelian decision is, we should revisit the claim that decisions distinguish characters from one another better than actions do, to see whether we can make satisfactory sense of it.

On the view that I want to present, Aristotle means by *prohairesis* a decision, based on deliberation about how to achieve a wished-for objective, to do something or other that is sufficiently determinate for one to think that one can do this (given the right circumstances) without needing to engage in further deliberation about how to do it. I shall also suggest that Aristotle thinks that although what is decided on when someone makes a decision is specifically something that is taken to be a means to (or constituent of) some goal, what kind of decision a given decision is, and whether or not it is a good decision, depends not only on the means that one has decided on, but also on the goal for the sake of which one decides on that means.

As a result, one does not know fully what the decision is that someone is acting on unless one knows both what the means is that he is trying to obtain or implement, and what the goal is for the sake of which he is trying to obtain or implement that means. If someone gives a homeless person two dollars in order to impress his friend with whom he is walking in the park, you do not fully know what the decision is on which he is acting unless you know both that the means decided on is to give two dollars to the homeless person and that the goal for the sake of which he implements the means is to impress his friend.

The main evidence for ascribing this view to Aristotle is in the *Eudemian Ethics* (*EE* 2. 11). But, as I shall show, assuming that he operates with this view also in the *Nicomachean Ethics* enables us to make better sense of what he says about decision in the *Nicomachean Ethics* than we otherwise would be able to.

The overall structure of Aristotle's discussion of decision in *NE* 3. 2–3 is fairly straightforward. Having announced the topic of decision, Aristotle first distinguishes between action on decision and voluntary action. He then mentions a number of things that, he reports, people identify decision with (appetite, spirit, wish, and belief or judgement of a certain kind). He spends most of the remainder of chapter 2 eliminating every one of those candidates.

At the end of chapter 2 he makes an important move, indicating the connection between decision and having deliberated 'before', presumably before both making the decision in question and acting on it. Chapter 3 then turns to deliberation, explaining what that is. Towards the end of that chapter, he identifies what is decided on with the means grasped as the result of deliberation—I take it, as the result of a process of deliberation that has reached its last

stage, which is the identification of a means that one thinks one can implement without deliberating how to go about implementing it: for instance, to eat some bread, when bread is or seems to be readily available. In many cases, the only further cognition required to implement the decision will be perception of *this* as bread. In any case, in the absence of unexpected obstacles or complications no further deliberation will be required to implement the decision to eat some bread.

That what is decided on is the final result of deliberation, rather than some more general, preliminary result, is made rather clear by the following passage:

What we deliberate about is the same as what we decide to do, except that by the time we decide to do it, it is definite; for what we decide to do is what we have judged [to be right] as a result of deliberation. For each of us stops enquiring how to act as soon as he traces the starting-point of action to himself. (*NE* 3. 3, 1113^a2–6)

Against the background of the immediately preceding remark, at 1112^b34–1113^a2, to the effect that at some stage deliberation stops and perception takes over,¹² that later text makes it clear that Aristotle's idea is this: what is decided on is the means identified as the final result of deliberation. This will be a means that the person in question thinks he or she can implement without further deliberation. A person may decide to eat some bread, when they take bread to be readily available, or to cook some stew to the right degree.¹³

Before discussing deliberation, Aristotle makes an obscure remark about the etymology of the word *prohairesis*, to the effect that a *prohairesis* ('a thing decided on') is something that is taken or chosen (*αἰρετόν*) before (*πρό*) other things. Now, this is ambiguous, in Greek as in English, between a temporal (or spatial) construal of 'before', according to which the thing chosen in or by a decision

¹² 'Nor do we deliberate about particulars, about whether this is a loaf of bread, for instance, or is cooked the right amount; for these are questions of perception, and if we keep on deliberating at each stage we shall go on without end.'

¹³ As John Cooper noted in *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle* (Cambridge, 1975), 22–46, just when a person will think that they have identified such an ultimate means, and hence when it is that their deliberation is complete, will depend on what in their circumstances they take themselves to know how to do. Eating some bread is a suitable ultimate means when one thinks one knows where the bread is and how to get there, but may not be if one does not. While one person can tell just by looking whether some stew is properly cooked, someone else may need to deliberate about how best to make sure that they do not overcook their stew.

is temporally (or spatially) before some relevant other things, or alternatively the taking or choosing of the chosen thing takes place before some other things; and an alternative construal, according to which 'before other things' means 'in preference to other things'. So there seem to be at least three possible construals, and it seems impossible to get clear which of them (if any) Aristotle intended.

The parallel in *EE* 2. 10, at 1226^b5–9, is somewhat less ambiguous: the context there is that decision is something that arises from belief and wish together. The etymology of the word, Aristotle suggests, indicates in a way how decision arises from those two things: 'for deciding', he says, 'is taking or choosing [*αἴρεσις*], not without qualification, but of one thing before [*πρό*] another': and that is impossible without thought and planning. This indicates that the thing chosen or taken, rather than the act of choosing or taking, is meant to be 'before' something else, ruling out one of the three construals that the *Nicomachean Ethics* passage allows. But there is still ambiguity between the idea of taking one thing that is in some way temporally (or spatially) before another, and the idea of taking one thing in preference to another.

The latter interpretation has enjoyed much support from commentators, leading even to a translation of *prohairesis* as 'preferential choice'.¹⁴ The idea is that in deliberating we compare alternatives, and prefer one alternative to others. But it is worth noting that deliberating does not always involve comparing alternatives. Sometimes one adopts a means to an end without envisaging any alternatives, perhaps because there is no alternative, or because there is no alternative that merits envisaging or considering. But if what it is to be an unqualified choice is to be understood by contrast with a choice of one thing in preference to another, then a choice simply of one thing (not in preference to anything else) would be an unqualified choice and hence not a decision. This seems an unattractive result.

On that basis my own preference is to accept a suggestion made by Joachim in his commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

When we deliberate, we start with the conception of the end as something

¹⁴ The Greek word is so translated, for instance, in G. Lawrence, 'Human Good and Human Function', in R. Kraut (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford, 2006), 37–75 at 42; and by D. Charles, 'Aristotle's Weak *akrates*', in C. Bobonich and P. Destrée (eds.), *Akrasia in Greek Philosophy* (Leiden, 2007), 193–214 at 200.

to be realized: and we work back by analysis, unravelling the series of steps (means) presupposed in the end qua accomplished. We carry this process of reflective analysis back until we reach a means here and now practicable for us. That is the last step reached by deliberation, and it is the first step to be taken in act. It is what we προαιρούμεθα: and, in deciding to do it, we are deciding to do something which comes first in the series of means, which is πρὸ τῶν ἐτέρων αἰρετόν: to be adopted before the other steps leading to the end. It is on the way to the end.¹⁵

It is worth pointing out that a relevant use of the preposition *pro* occurs at *Phaedrus* 268 E ff., where Socrates speaks of certain objects of learning as being ‘necessary things that are before’ something else (268 E 5–6, 269 B 7–8), or just as being ‘before’ something else (269 A 1–3): for example, being able to produce the highest and the lowest notes on the strings of some instrument is something that is necessary before an expert understanding of harmony (268 D 6–E 6). Likewise, he speaks of certain things (say, how to perform certain cuts) as being ‘things before medicine’ (τὰ πρὸ ἰατρικῆς), appropriately translated by Nehamas and Woodruff as ‘preliminaries of medicine’.¹⁶

On this proposal, then, Aristotle is noting that forming a decision is always a matter of opting for something or other as a preliminary to something else. I shall want to suggest in a bit that this chimes in well with what Aristotle takes to be the nature of decision, so that we can readily see why he thinks that the etymology of the word sheds light on the nature of decision. In *EE* 2. 11 he says that ‘every decision is of something and for the sake of something’ (1227^b36–7). I shall suggest that in saying this, he means to indicate the elements or constituents that distinguish decisions from one another, the two elements that make a given decision the kind of decision that it is.

Returning for a moment to *NE* 3. 3, we should note a textual issue: the main manuscripts give us two different variants at 1113^a12.¹⁷ Depending on which of these one adopts, Aristotle says one of the following two things: (1) ‘decision will be deliberative desire to do an action that is up to us; for when we have judged [that it is right] as a result of deliberation, we desire to do it in accord with [or with respect to] our wish’, or (2) ‘decision will be

¹⁵ H. H. Joachim, *Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics. A Commentary*, ed. D. A. Rees (Oxford, 1951), 100–1.

¹⁶ In *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. J. M. Cooper (Indianapolis, 1997).

¹⁷ ἐκ τοῦ βουλευσασθαι γὰρ κρίναντες ὀρεγόμεθα κατὰ τὴν βούλευσιν. Instead of βούλευσιν, one manuscript (Bywater’s M^b) has βούλησιν.

deliberative desire to do an action that is up to us; for when we have judged [that it is right] as a result of deliberation, we desire to act in accord with our deliberation'. The first of these readings suggests that the desiderative element included in a decision is contributed by the form of desire that is wish, rather than by appetite or spirited desire. The second reading gives no such indication. The parallel discussion in *EE* 2. 10 does commit Aristotle to the view that decision depends on wish, since he there claims that decision arises from belief and wish together.

But the *Nicomachean Ethics* discussion, too, in context suggests rather strongly that decision depends on the specific kind of desire that is wish, since it depends on deliberation about how to promote some end, and in 3. 4 Aristotle tells us that it is wish that is of the end. We should also recall the remark in *NE* 3. 2 that although decision is not identical with wish, 'it appears to be close to it' (1111^b19–20). In addition, Aristotle says at the beginning of *NE* 3. 5 that 'we wish for the end, and deliberate and decide about things that promote it'.

What seems to emerge, then, is a fairly clear conception, according to which a *prohairesis* is a decision, based on deliberation about how to achieve a wished-for objective, to do something or other that is sufficiently determinate for one to think that one can do this without needing to engage in further deliberation about how to do it.

I now want to raise a question about *prohairesis*, and then I want to bring in *EE* 2. 11, since that will enable us to answer that question in a rather satisfactory way. This will also have the result that my statement of what a *prohairesis* is is not quite adequate yet: a *prohairesis*, it will turn out, is not just a decision (based on deliberation about how to achieve a wished-for end) to do something determinate. It is essentially a decision to do one thing for the sake of another. A decision to do A for the sake of B, on this view, is a different kind of decision from a decision to do A for the sake of something other than B.

My question is this: why does Aristotle think that decisions distinguish states of character better than actions do (said at the beginning of *NE* 3. 2, also in *EE* 2. 11, 1228^a2–3)? He says that things decided on are means rather than ends, ends being the objects of wish. This view emerges in *NE* 3. 3 and is stated clearly and firmly at the beginning of *NE* 3. 5. So one might think that decision con-

cerns specifically means rather than ends—more precisely, that it concerns fully determinate means that can be implemented without further deliberation. But now it is not clear why decision is supposed to be more indicative of character than action is. If we are interested in someone's state of character, it does not seem all that much more helpful to know that he decided to help the old lady across the street, than to know that he did in fact help the old lady across the street. True, if we know that he acted on a decision to help the lady across the street, we thereby know that he acted voluntarily in helping the lady across the street. In helping the lady across the street, he was not acting due to ignorance of relevant specifics, nor did he act from compulsion. But we still have no idea whether the person in question is good or bad. Helping the lady across the street might have been an act of kindness, but it might just as well have been part of an evil stratagem.

Now, in *EE* 2. 11 Aristotle explains, among other things, why we are in a better position to judge what sort of person someone is when we know their decision, rather than only the action performed on the decision. Let us turn to *EE* 2. 11, then. The chapter begins with a question: 'whether virtue makes decision free from error and the end correct, in such a way that one decides with a view to the thing that one should, or whether, as some people think, it makes reason correct'.

I agree with Michael Woods (in his comments on the chapter)¹⁸ that this amounts to the question whether virtue, when it is present in someone, by being present, makes their decisions correct in a certain way, or whether by being present it makes the person's reason correct. On the first view, virtue consists in a certain good state of the capacity for decision, on the second view it consists in a good state of reason. Soon after this passage, Aristotle distinguishes between two kinds of correctness and mistake in the domain of action: with regard to goals and with regard to 'what lies on the way to the goal'. He then asks whether virtue makes 'the goal correct, or what lies on the way to it'. The answer is that virtue makes the goal correct, 'because there is no inference or reasoning of this'.¹⁹

This suggests that Aristotle means to answer the initial question

¹⁸ M. Woods, *Aristotle: Eudemian Ethics Books I, II, and VIII, Translated with a Commentary* (Oxford, 1982), 151–7.

¹⁹ τίθεμεθα δὲ ὅτι τὸν σκοπὸν, διότι τούτου οὐκ ἔστι συλλογισμὸς οὐδὲ λόγος (1227^b 23–5).

by adopting the first view: that virtue makes the person's decision and end correct, so that he or she decides with a view to things that one should decide with a view to, rather than that it makes reason correct. If so, the idea is that virtue makes decision correct by making correct the end for the sake of which one decides on something or other. This in turn requires that a correct decision is correct (at least in large part) in virtue of the fact that it has been made with a view to a correct goal. That this is Aristotle's view is made clear a bit later in the chapter, when he says that

every decision is of something and for the sake of something. The mean is the thing for the sake of which. Decision is not of that [i.e. the goal, which is the mean] but of things with a view to it. It belongs to another capacity to hit upon all that must be done for the sake of the goal; but that the goal of the decision is correct—of this virtue is the cause. And for this reason it is from his decision that we judge what sort of person someone is; that is, what that for whose sake he does something is, not what he does. (*EE* 2. 11, 1227^b36–1228^a4)

Towards the end of the chapter Aristotle adds that 'it is because it is not easy to discern what sort of decision it is that we are forced to judge from the actions what sort of person someone is' (1228^a15–17).

What the passage makes clear is that if we know what decision it is that someone is acting on, we thereby know both what goal he is pursuing, and what means he has decided on. We know both what the decision is of (the means in question), and what it is for the sake of (the goal in question). In this way, decisions are individuated as the kinds of decision they are by both what is decided on and the goal with a view to which the decision is made. This accounts for why it is difficult to discern what sort of decision someone is acting on, so that we are sometimes forced to judge people by their actions rather than by their decisions. This also makes it clear that Aristotle thinks that a correct decision is correct at least in large part in virtue of the fact that the goal it aims at is correct. In fact he seems to want to go so far as to say that virtue, in making the goal correct, makes the decision correct. This is the way he puts things in framing the opening question of the chapter.

Presumably the idea is that the correctness of any given correct decision is in very large part due to the correctness of the goal it aims at. Aristotle thinks this, I suspect, because he is here, in *EE*

2. 11, taking the view that the task of identifying suitable means is a relatively minor one, much less challenging than identifying the correct goal in the circumstances in question. Given a reasonably specific goal (say, to share some of one's resources with someone who is in need, and deserving), people tend to be pretty good at means–end reasoning. So once they have managed to latch on to a correct and reasonably specific goal for action, they can pretty much be relied on to succeed in identifying a suitable way of achieving the goal and in this way to complete the business of forming a full-fledged decision.

It is clear, in the context of *EE* 2. 11, that in speaking about a correct goal Aristotle has in mind a reasonably specific goal, rather than, for example, some very general goal, such as happiness or human flourishing. The goal in question, he says at 1227^b37–8, is a mean, or an intermediacy—by which I take him to mean an action intermediate between excess and deficiency, the sort of thing that virtue of character is a disposition to aim at.

4. Virtue of character as a rational state

According to a view that is common among scholars of Aristotle's ethics, Aristotle conceives of virtue of character as being fully constituted by a certain good, properly habituated state of the part of human reason that is rational only in an extended sense, in that it is capable of obeying the prescriptions of reason. Now there is conclusive textual support for the claim that in the *Eudemian Ethics* Aristotle holds that virtue of character is to be identified with a certain state of a non-rational part of the human soul.²⁰ However, there certainly is no decisive textual support for the claim that in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle holds that virtue of character is to be identified with a certain state of the obedient part of the soul.²¹

As we have seen, it is true that he says, in *NE* 1. 13, that virtue

²⁰ *EE* 2. 1, 1220^a10–11; 2. 4, 1221^b27–34.

²¹ At the beginning of *NE* 3. 10 Aristotle, having just discussed courage, proposes to discuss temperance, 'for courage and temperance seem to be the virtues of the non-rational parts'. (Cf. *Top.* 5. 6, 136^b10–14; 5. 7, 138^b1–4.) First, he says only that they seem, or are held, to be that. Secondly, the claim is obviously limited to courage and temperance. The implicit suggestion is that the other virtues of character (generosity, magnificence, justice, etc.) do not seem to be virtues of non-rational parts of the soul.

is distinguished on the basis of, or in accord with (*kata* plus accusative), the distinction, which has just been introduced and explained, between reason strictly speaking on the one hand and the obedient part of the soul on the other. He continues: 'for some of the virtues we call virtues of thought and others we call virtues of character' (1103^a3–5). But in saying this he may only have in mind that the distinction between the virtues of thought and the virtues of character depends importantly on the distinction between reason strictly speaking and the obedient part of the soul, in that the virtues of thought simply are states of reason strictly speaking, whereas the virtues of character crucially involve, and in fact are at least in part constituted by, certain good, properly habituated states of the obedient part of the soul. It is worth noting not only what Aristotle is saying here, but also what he is not saying: he is not saying, not here and not anywhere in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, what he says repeatedly in the *Eudemian Ethics*, including in the passage that is the counterpart or precursor in the *Eudemian Ethics* of our text, namely that the virtues of thought belong to reason, whereas the virtues of character belong to a non-rational part of the soul.²²

It seems to me that Aristotle has good philosophical reason to think that the virtues of character are partly constituted by a certain good state of reason strictly speaking. I also think that there is considerable textual support, among other places in book 6 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, for ascribing to Aristotle the view that virtue of character is in part constituted by a certain good state of reason strictly speaking, so that it turns out that virtue of character, according to Aristotle's conception of it, straddles the divide between reason and the obedient part of the soul. I begin by putting together a number of Aristotelian ideas so as to articulate a philosophical reason for conceiving of virtue of character in this way, and then turn to the textual evidence in *NE* 6.

Aristotle takes the virtues of character to be acquired states that people exercise or express in suitable activities or performances, namely actions that express the relevant virtue of character. He holds that one acquires the virtue of character that is, for instance, temperance, by doing temperate acts. This obviously requires that

²² J. Cooper, 'Some Remarks on Aristotle's Moral Psychology', in id., *Reason and Emotion: Essays on Ancient Moral Psychology and Ethical Theory* (Princeton, 1999), 237–52 at 251, is mistaken in adducing *NE* 1. 13, 1102^b13, alongside *EE* 2. 1, 1220^a10, as a basis for claiming that 'virtues of character belong to what Aristotle calls the nonrational part of the soul'.

one must be able to do temperate acts without yet having acquired the virtue of temperance, and Aristotle acknowledges this, and famously distinguishes between doing a temperate act and doing a temperate act in the way that the temperate person does. This distinction is made in *NE* 2. 4, and it is restated in *NE* 6. 12 (1144^a13–20). Doing a temperate act in the way that is characteristic of the temperate person involves doing it with knowledge (presumably of the relevant situation-specific details), acting on decision, having decided on the act in question for its own sake, and acting from a firm and unchanging state. I take it that it is only once those conditions are fulfilled that a given temperate act counts as an exercise of temperance. More generally, for an act to count as an exercise of virtue of character, it must meet those conditions.

But it seems reasonable to assume that if an activity of a certain kind counts as an exercise of a certain dispositional state, then having that state, or being in that state, equips its bearer to engage in that kind of activity, given suitable circumstances. Virtues of character, for Aristotle, are states of preparedness for activities of certain kinds; in this regard they seem to be like states that he refers to as first actualities, such as the capacity for perception and states of knowledge.²³

Combining these two thoughts, we get the result that virtues of character are states of preparedness for activities that involve not only a desire to act in a certain way, but also, among other things, a decision to act in this way. So it seems reasonable to think that the state of preparedness that any given virtue of character is equips its bearer to respond to suitable circumstances not only by forming desires to act in suitable ways, but also by forming suitable decisions. But forming any decision, according to Aristotle, requires engaging in deliberation, practical thought that presupposes a goal for action and reasons about how to further that goal, until one

²³ Cf. *NE* 8. 5, 1157^b5–7: ‘Just as in the case of the virtues, some people are said to be good in state and others good in activity, so it is with friendship, too’ (ὥσπερ δ’ ἐπὶ τῶν ἀρετῶν οἱ μὲν καθ’ ἑξῆς οἱ δ’ κατ’ ἐνέργειαν ἀγαθοὶ λέγονται, οὕτω καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς φιλίας); *NE* 4. 2, 1122^a35–^b2: where Aristotle says in connection with magnificence that ‘the state is defined by reference to the activities and to the objects it belongs to’ (ἡ ἑξῆς ταῖς ἐνεργείαις ὀρίζεται καὶ ὧν ἐστίν). Compare the programmatic remark in *De anima* 2. 4 that before saying what the faculties of thought and perception are, one must first say what the activities of thinking and perceiving are, as they are prior in account; and if the corresponding objects are prior to the activities, one must first of all discuss them (415^a16–22).

thinks one has arrived at a specification of a course of action that one can implement without further deliberation.

Moreover, the decisions that flow from, and partly express, the virtues of character are consistently and reliably correct decisions, decisions to pursue courses of action that conduce to accomplishing the correct goal, the goal that the person in question should pursue in the circumstances. If virtue of character is to dispose its bearer to form decisions that are consistently and reliably correct, it must dispose its bearer both to identify the correct goals and to work out correctly, by what Aristotle calls deliberation, how to promote the goals in question.

Goodness at deliberation (*εὐβουλία*) is a state of reason strictly speaking that Aristotle discusses in *NE* 6. 9, ending his discussion by stating that goodness at deliberation is correctness about what is advantageous in relation to the goal of which *phronēsis* is true supposition. As he makes clear in the chapter, exhibiting goodness at deliberation is not just a matter of latching on to what is in fact the correct thing to do in the circumstances, it also requires grasping the reason why this is the thing to do in the circumstances, namely that doing this conduces to achieving the correct goal. For example, if the thing to do is to prepare a chicken dish for one's friend, because that is a healthy meal and one's friend is recovering from illness, the virtuous person would decide to prepare a chicken dish because that is the healthy meal that is needed, grasping not only what the thing to do is but also the reason why that is the thing to do. (Someone else might prepare a chicken dish, reasoning that what is needed is a delicious meal, and the chicken dish in question is delicious.)

In so far as virtue of character disposes one to form correct decisions by deliberating well about how to achieve the correct goals, it seems to make good sense to conceive of virtue of character as a state that is partly constituted by goodness at deliberation. If one conceives of virtue of character in this way, one will take it that in deliberating well about how to achieve what is the correct goal to pursue in the circumstances, the virtuous person is at once expressing goodness at deliberation and virtue of character. Of course one does not have to conceive of virtue of character—generosity, for instance—as being such a cognitively high-powered state. But it seems to me that, first, the conception I have sketched is coherent, philosophically defensible, and not unattractive, and that, secondly, it is a conception that Aristotle has reason to adopt. That

is because he conceives of virtue of character as a state of preparedness for performing a kind of activity that is crucially characterized by the virtuous person's recognition of how properly to promote the achievement of what is the correct goal to pursue in the circumstances.

I now turn to arguing that there is decisive textual support in book 6 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* for thinking that, at any rate in that book, Aristotle operates with a conception of virtue of character along the lines of the sketch I have offered.

In *NE* 6 and of course elsewhere, Aristotle refers to virtue of character as a 'prohairesis' state, a *hexis prohairetikē*. It is not clear right away what he means to say by referring to virtue of character as such a state. In general, Greek adjectives derived from verbs and ending in *-ikos* or *-tikos* indicate that someone or something is capable of doing something or suited to doing something.²⁴ This suggests that a *hexis prohairetikē* is a state that makes one capable of or suited to making decisions, or rather capable of and suited to making decisions of one kind or quality or another. Irwin translates 'a state that decides'; Rowe has 'a disposition issuing in decision'.²⁵ Aristotle uses a number of parallel expressions that suggest rather strongly that this kind of construal is correct. In four of the definitional statements concerning states of reason that are presented in *NE* 6, he characterizes the state in question by using an adjective derived from a verb and ending in *-ikos*, and in all four cases the idea seems to be that the state in question renders one capable of, and suited to, doing something or other, in such a way that in doing that thing one is exercising or expressing the state.

Knowledge is characterized, in *NE* 6. 3, as a 'demonstrative' state (*ἐξίς ἀποδεικτική*, 1139^b31–2), the idea being that knowledge enables one to provide demonstrations, which is to say valid deductive arguments from appropriate principles that one grasps better than the conclusions of those arguments. Art or craft is characterized, in *NE* 6. 4, as a 'productive' state (*ἐξίς ποιητική*), as is artlessness or lack of craft. The difference between them is that art is a productive

²⁴ R. Kühner and F. Blass, *Ausführliche Grammatik der griechischen Sprache*, pt. 1. *Elementar- und Formenlehre* (2 vols.; Hanover, 1892), ii. 287: 'die von Verben abgeleiteten Adj. mit diesem Suffix bezeichnen meistens eine Fähigkeit und Tauglichkeit in transitiver Bedeutung, als: *γραφικός*, zum Malen geschickt' ('adjectives with this suffix derived from verbs denote for the most part a capacity or suitability in transitive meaning, such as *γραφικός*, suited for painting').

²⁵ In Broadie and Rowe, *Ethics*.

state that involves true reason or a true account (*μετὰ λόγου ἀληθοῦς*, 1140^a20–1), whereas artlessness is a productive state that involves false reason or a false account (1140^a21–2). I shall suggest shortly that in speaking of states that involve true or correct reason, Aristotle means to denote states that enable one to grasp and provide proper reasons or explanations in the domain in question. In the case of an art, that grasp will guide the artisan's activity as he or she exercises the art in question. Artlessness enables its bearer to produce some things, but artless production will be erratic since it proceeds on the basis of a mistaken view of the subject-matter. In the case of medicine, for instance, artlessness might be a matter of not having a proper conception of what health consists in, or of having mistaken views about how to go about promoting health, or both. So here, too, the idea seems to be that both art and artlessness enable, and dispose, one to produce things in certain ways.

Lastly, *phronēsis* is characterized, in *NE* 6. 5, as a 'practical' state of a certain kind (*ἐξίς πρακτική*, 1140^b4–6, 20–1), where the idea seems to be that it is a state that enables, and disposes, one to act in a certain way, namely informed by correct reason concerning what is good for humans.

The general picture that emerges is that these are states that concern doing certain things (e.g. demonstrating the truth of a scientific conclusion, making an artefact, performing an action), and that being in one of these states renders one capable of, and suited to, activities of certain types. In engaging in those activities, one is exercising or expressing the state. The various expressions that Aristotle uses are conspicuously parallel, and it seems desirable to reflect that parallelism in translation. As a uniform translation, I propose, following Rowe, 'a state that issues in this or that':²⁶ knowledge is a state that issues in demonstration, art and artlessness are states that issue in production, *phronēsis* is a state that issues in action. Applied to virtue of character, the result is that Aristotle conceives of the virtues of character, as presumably of other states of character, as states that render one capable of, and suited to, making decisions. Given that the virtues of character are excellent states of character, they render their bearers capable of, and suited to, making excellent decisions.

²⁶ 'Disposition issuing in decision' is Rowe's translation of *ἐξίς προαιρετική*. However, Rowe does not use the same form of expression in translating the parallel expressions in *NE* 6. 3–5.

One upshot of this is the following. Both on general linguistic grounds and on grounds provided by Aristotle's usage in *NE* 6, we have reason to interpret his characterization of virtue of character as a 'prohairesis' state as meaning that virtue of character is a state that issues in decision. On this interpretation, he ties virtue of character to the activity of making decisions, in such a way that in making excellent decisions, virtuous people exercise or express their virtue of character. But making a decision about what to do is in part an exercise of practical thought, since it crucially involves trying to identify a suitable way of promoting the goal in question. There is then some reason to think that Aristotle conceives of virtue of character as a state that, among other things, disposes a person to deliberate well about how to promote his or her goals.

There are two texts in *NE* 6. 12–13 that may seem obstacles to ascribing to Aristotle, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and in particular in *NE* 6, a conception of virtue of character on which virtue of character is in part a state that accounts for good deliberation. The first of these texts is the claim apparently made in 6. 12 that virtue of character makes decision correct, whereas 'the actions that are naturally done to fulfil the decision are the concern not of virtue, but of another capacity' (1144^a20–2).²⁷ In what follows I shall refer to that text as Passage 1. A second text that may seem problematic for the view I have been presenting is in 6. 13, where Aristotle revisits the relations that obtain among virtue, decision, and action. He says there that it is clear that 'decision is not going to be correct without *phronēsis* or without virtue of character: for the latter makes one do [or achieve] the goal, the former makes one do those things that promote the goal' (1145^a4–6).²⁸ I shall call that text Passage 2. I should make it clear right away that it seems to me that the interpretation of Passage 1 presupposed by modern translators is wrong. Once the passage is properly interpreted, I shall argue, it actually lends support to the view that character-virtue, according to Aristotle, is in part a state that itself accounts for good deliberation. After some preliminary discussion, I turn to Passage 2 first, and only then to Passage 1, since it will turn out that Passage 1, once it is understood properly, does not present even the

²⁷ τὴν μὲν οὖν προαίρεσιν ὀρθὴν ποιεῖ ἡ ἀρετὴ, τὸ δ' ὅσα ἐκείνης ἕνεκα πέφυκε πράττεσθαι οὐκ ἔστι τῆς ἀρετῆς ἀλλ' ἐτέρας δυνάμεως.

²⁸ οὐκ ἔσται ἡ προαίρεσις ὀρθὴ ἄνευ φρονήσεως οὐδ' ἄνευ ἀρετῆς· ἡ μὲν γὰρ τὸ τέλος ἢ δὲ τὰ πρὸς τὸ τέλος ποιεῖ πράττειν.

slightest appearance of a problem for the overall interpretation I mean to advocate.

Before discussing the passages themselves, it will be helpful to call attention to their context. Having completed his main task in *NE* 6, which is to identify and discuss the virtues of reason, namely wisdom and *phronēsis*, Aristotle completes his discussion of the virtues of reason by articulating and resolving a number of difficulties. The difficulty that is relevant to our purposes is that it may seem as if *phronēsis* is of no use to us, in that it may seem that it does not make us better able to act than we would be without it, provided that we have the virtues of character. This difficulty is articulated, along with two others that need not detain us, at the beginning of 6. 12 (1143^b18–36). For purposes of articulating the difficulty, Aristotle chooses to operate with a conception of virtue of character that plainly is not the one he himself favours, namely a conception according to which virtue of character is a disposition to do virtuous acts, which one can have and exercise without knowing anything about what is good for people. On such a conception, then, *phronēsis*, which is now presented as expertise concerning things that are just, fine, and good for people, would not make one better able to act than one would be without it, provided that one has the virtues of character. Having virtue of character, one can be relied on to act well, whether or not one has *phronēsis*.

In responding to this difficulty, Aristotle argues that acting well, i.e. acting well in a consistent and reliable way, requires *phronēsis*. In doing so, he naturally focuses on *phronēsis*'s role of identifying and implementing suitable ways of promoting the virtuous person's goals. One thing he does in responding to the difficulty is to reject any conception of virtue of character according to which virtue of character guarantees virtuous conduct whether or not the person in question has *phronēsis*. This raises the following two questions about the relationship between virtue of character and *phronēsis*.

First, do the disposition to adopt good goals and *phronēsis* together constitute a unified dispositional state? If the answer is no, virtue of character, which on that view will consist in the disposition to adopt good goals, and *phronēsis* are two distinct states that do not together constitute a unified state that includes them both as constituents. On that view, virtue of character is expressed specifically and exclusively in the identification and adoption of appropriate goals, whereas it is *phronēsis* that ensures that the virtuous person

identifies and implements a suitable way of promoting the goal in question. One thing to note is that on such a conception, the generous person's thoughtful and intelligent way of acting generously by implementing a suitable decision is not strictly speaking an exercise of generosity at all. Rather, it is an exercise of *phronēsis*. Given the close connection in the *Nicomachean Ethics* between the virtues of character and acting virtuously, in a way that involves among other things a suitable decision, this implication makes this conception implausible as an interpretation of Aristotle's ethical theory in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

This gives us reason to favour a positive answer to the question I raised: yes, the virtuous person's disposition to adopt good goals and *phronēsis* do combine to constitute a unified dispositional state, such that acting (say) generously, on the correct decision and from a stable state, counts as an exercise of that unified state. The crucial question that arises at this point is whether that unified state is virtue of character, as Aristotle conceives of it, at any rate in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. If so, virtue of character, so conceived of, is partly, but not wholly, constituted by the disposition to adopt good goals. It is also partly constituted by *phronēsis*. I have presented reasons for thinking that Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, including *NE* 6, does conceive of virtue of character in this way, as being partly constituted by *phronēsis*. On this conception, virtue of character includes as a constituent a state that ensures that the virtuous person properly identifies and implements suitable ways of promoting his or her goals. That state is *phronēsis*. More precisely, it is one aspect of *phronēsis*, namely *phronēsis* about particulars, rather than the architectonic aspect of *phronēsis*, mentioned in *NE* 6. 7, which deals in general terms with good human living overall.

Passage 2 (*NE* 6. 13, 1145^a4–6) is no adequate basis for thinking that Aristotle means to reject a conception of virtue of character along those lines. He is saying that one cannot be reliable in making correct decisions without *phronēsis* or, for that matter, without virtue of character. The emphasis is on the need for *phronēsis*, since it is the usefulness for action of *phronēsis* that was questioned. It is worth noting that in what follows immediately, Aristotle is saying that virtue of character makes one 'do the goal', while *phronēsis* makes one do the things that promote it. An example of a suitable goal, I take it, is the goal of making a healthy meal for one's recuperating friend. An example of a thing done to promote the goal is to

cook some chicken meat. Note that virtue of character is here credited with making the virtuous person do something—for instance, preparing a healthy meal for a friend. Aristotle is saying about both virtue of character and *phronēsis* that they make the person do something. He is evidently associating virtue of character with achieving the goal that one is pursuing, while associating *phronēsis* with identifying and implementing a suitable way of achieving that goal.

Having a given character-virtue, according to Aristotle, is in important part a matter of having acquired by long-standing and deeply ingrained practice a sensitivity to the demands of one's circumstances—that is to say, a sensitivity to the goals that one should pursue in this or that situation, such as sharing one's resources with someone else who is in need and deserves help. It is in this capacity that virtue of character ensures correctness of the goals that the virtuous person pursues. Aristotle's main point in our remark in 6. 13 is that while character-virtue in this way makes the goal correct, and may do so without *phronēsis* being put to use, the exercise of *phronēsis* is needed to make sure that the virtuous person succeeds in identifying and implementing appropriate means to the achievement of their goals. It turns out, then, that one way in which *phronēsis* is of use to us is that it does make us better able to act well than we would be without it. But to say all of this is plainly not to rule out the possibility that *phronēsis* turns out to be a constituent of character-virtue, so that character-virtue ensures correctness of the virtuous person's goals by making him or her sensitive to the demands of the circumstances, and also ensures that the virtuous person identifies and implements suitable ways of promoting his or her goals, by applying *phronēsis* to the challenge of how best to reach a given goal in the particular circumstances in question. While virtue of character does have the task of making correct the goals that the virtuous person pursues, nothing in 6. 13 implies that it is meant to be limited to that particular task.

Passage 1 (6. 12, 1144^a20–2) may seem, by contrast, to limit character-virtue to the task of making correct the goals that the virtuous person pursues. That earlier passage, as it is standardly understood, says that virtue of character makes decision correct, but that 'the actions that are naturally done to fulfil the decision are the concern not of virtue, but of another capacity'. The most plausible way of making sense of this pair of claims, I take it, is to understand it, relying on the discussion in *EE* 2. 11, as expressing

the idea that character-virtue makes decision correct by making correct the goal for the sake of which the decision is made,²⁹ whereas belongs to a capacity other than character-virtue, namely cleverness or *phronēsis*, to identify and implement suitable ways of achieving the goal for the sake of which the decision is made.³⁰

One problem with the resulting picture is that it under-describes what is required for correctness of decision. Correctness of decision is plainly not just a matter of deciding for the sake of a correct goal. It also requires correctly identifying a suitable way of achieving the goal, as Aristotle clearly acknowledges when he revisits the topic of correct decision in Passage 2, saying that correctness of decision requires *phronēsis* as well as character-virtue, no doubt on the grounds that deciding correctly requires both deciding for the sake of a correct goal and deciding on a suitable way of implementing such a goal.

Another problem, noted already, is that Passage 1, as it is standardly understood, seems to present the contribution of virtue to the production of virtuous action as being limited to the adoption

²⁹ This is the first of two alternative interpretations proposed by T. Irwin in his notes on § 8 of *NE* 6. 12. It is endorsed by, for instance, A. Kenny, *Aristotle's Theory of the Will* (New Haven, 1979), 103.

³⁰ Irwin, ad loc., proposes the following alternative interpretation: character-virtue makes decision correct by making correct both the goal for the sake of which it is made and the means selected for the sake of that goal (his second of two alternative interpretations of 1144^a20); and cleverness is 'nondeliberative facility in finding ways to carry out a decision already made'. According to the resulting picture, Aristotle holds that character-virtue accounts for correctness of the goal pursued (cf. 6. 13, 1145^a4–6), *phronēsis* for correctness of the means selected, and a further state, cleverness, accounts for effective implementation of the means selected and hence of the decision made. But Aristotle holds that *phronēsis* makes sure that one puts the correct means into action (and not just that one succeeds in identifying it): note *πράττειν* at 1145^a6. The characteristic activity of *phronēsis*, 'to do the things that conduce to the goal' (*τὰ πρὸς τὸ τέλος . . . πράττειν*, 1145^a6) and that of cleverness, 'to do those things, the things that contribute to the given aim' (*τὰ πρὸς τὸν ὑποτιθέντα σκοπὸν συντείνοντα . . . ταῦτα πράττειν*, 1144^a24–6), differ only in that while *phronēsis* can be relied on to promote correct goals, and correct goals only, cleverness promotes any given goal. In consequence, *phronēsis* and cleverness alike are to do both with intelligent deliberation and with effective implementation (cf. *NE* 7. 10, 1152^a10–14, where Aristotle says, in Rowe's translation, that cleverness is close to *phronēsis* 'in terms of reasoning, but differs from it in terms of the decisions made'). Given that Aristotle runs deliberation and implementation together as a matter of enacting the means that promotes the goal in question, if he assigns to a certain capacity the task of dealing with the things that are naturally done for the sake of decision, it seems most plausible to interpret this as expressing the idea that decisions are or contain goals, and that it is the task of the capacity in question to ensure intelligent deliberation about and effective implementation of such goals.

of suitable goals. It seems to make the actions that are done in order to achieve such goals the concern not of virtue but of another capacity, *phronēsis* or cleverness. But this seems to introduce a gap between virtue and action. It seems to remove, say, courage from the courageous person's thoughtful and intelligent activity in the course of which they implement a suitable way of achieving the goal of, say, rescuing the children left behind in the burning building. That activity itself turns out to be, it seems, not an exercise of courage, but of cleverness or *phronēsis*.

These problems give us reason to look for an alternative interpretation of the passage. It turns out that an alternative is available.³¹ To see this, it will be best to begin with a literal translation:

Decision, then, is made correct by virtue. But as for those things that are naturally done for the sake of *that*, that task belongs not to virtue, but to another capacity.³²

Translators take it that the demonstrative pronoun in the clause 'for the sake of *that*' is meant to pick up 'decision', so that the concern is with actions done for the sake of decisions, or, as one might paraphrase, with actions done in order to implement decisions.³³ But it is important to note that the demonstrative pronoun might equally well be meant to pick up 'virtue'.³⁴ In that case, Aristotle's

³¹ I thank Christian Wildberg for discussing the passage with me.

³² For convenience, here is the Greek again: τὴν μὲν οὖν προαίρεσιν ὀρθὴν ποιεῖ ἡ ἀρετή, τὸ δ' ὅσα ἐκείνης ἔνεκα πέφυκε πράττεσθαι οὐκ ἐστὶ τῆς ἀρετῆς ἀλλ' ἐτέρας δυνάμεως.

³³ All the translations that I have consulted construe the Greek in this way. These include those by T. Irwin; C. Rowe; D. Ross, rev. J. L. Ackrill and J. O. Urmson (Oxford, 1980); R. A. Gauthier and J. Y. Jolif (Louvain, 1958); and F. Dirlmeier (Stuttgart, 1969). This construal goes back at least to the Byzantine writer and commentator Eustratius, 391. 24–32 Heylbut.

³⁴ The demonstrative pronoun ἐκείνης ('of that') at 1144^a21, which is standardly taken to pick up the noun phrase τὴν . . . προαίρεσιν ('the decision') in the preceding line, can equally well be taken to pick up the phrase ἡ ἀρετή ('virtue') in the same line. When the pronoun ἐκεῖνος (-η, -ο) is used by itself, rather than in juxtaposition with αὐτός or οὗτος, it is, when used in oblique cases, interchangeable with αὐτός or οὗτος, except that it tends to indicate a contrast or opposition. I am relying on R. Kühner and B. Gerth, *Ausführliche Grammatik der griechischen Sprache*, pt. 2. *Satzlehre* (2 vols.; Hanover, 1897), i. 649: "Ἐκεῖνος weist oft auf ein vorhergehendes Substantiv oder auf einen vorhergehenden obliquen Kasus des Pronomens αὐτός oder des Reflexivs ἐαυτοῦ zurück und scheint statt eines obliquen Kasus von αὐτός oder des Reflexivpronomens zu stehen. Allein ἐκεῖνος bezeichnet alsdann stets auf nachdrückliche Weise einen Gegensatz, während durch die andere Ausdrucksweise nichts weiter als die dritte Person bezeichnet wird" ('ἐκεῖνος often refers back to a

concern in our passage is actions that are done for the sake of virtue: in other words, actions people do in order to be or become virtuous.

The pronoun that Aristotle is using in the sentence (*ἐκείνης*) tends to indicate a contrast or opposition between the thing or person in question and other things or people. For example, in addressing his troops before a battle with the Athenians, the Spartan king Archidamus invites them to imagine the Athenians' response when they see the Spartans destroy *their* property: that is, the property of the Athenians, of all people (*τὰ ἐκείνων*).³⁵ He adds that the Athenians are 'more in the habit of invading and ravaging their neighbours' territory, than of seeing their own treated in this way' (Thuc. 2. 11). The idea is that the Athenians are not used to seeing the destruction of their own property, as opposed to other people's property.³⁶ Similarly, the force of the demonstrative pronoun in our passage might be to indicate that actions done for the goal of virtue itself, of all goals, are plainly not the responsibility of virtue, whatever other goals it may fall to virtue to pursue.

It is worth adding that virtue is much easier to construe as a goal for action than decision is,³⁷ and so Aristotle may have taken it for granted that his readers will see right away that the goal referred to by the demonstrative pronoun in our passage is meant to be virtue, rather than decision. In fact it is hard to see how decision, or some decision, could serve as a goal for action, especially given the statement in *NE* 6. 2 that decision is a principle of action, but as a moving cause, not as a goal or final cause (1139^a31–3). Translators try to paraphrase the difficulty away, by specifying the goal of action as fulfilling some decision, rather than as decision itself, but this is at best to translate very loosely.³⁸

preceding noun or to an oblique case of *αὐτός* or of the reflexive pronoun *ἑαυτοῦ* and seems to stand for an oblique case of *αὐτός* or of the reflexive pronoun. But in that case *ἐκεῖνος* always indicates in an emphatic way a contrast, while the other mode of expression denotes nothing other than the third person').

³⁵ . . . ὅταν ἐν τῇ γῇ ὀρώσιν ἡμᾶς δηρουντάς τε καὶ τὰ ἐκείνων φθειρόντας (Thuc. 2. 11). This is one of several examples of this use of *ἐκεῖνος* provided by Kühner–Gerth.

³⁶ Another nice example is from Plato's *Euthyphro*. 'But tell me,' Socrates asks Euthyphro at 14 D 6–7, 'what is this service to the gods? You say it is to beg from them and to give to them [*αἰτεῖν τε φῆς αὐτοῖς καὶ δίδοναι ἐκείνοις*]?' In what follows Socrates makes trouble for the idea that we are in a position to give the gods anything that might benefit them. So the force of *ἐκείνοις* seems to be to indicate the implausibility of serving the gods by giving to *them*, of all beings.

³⁷ I thank John Cooper for this point.

³⁸ For example, Irwin translates: 'Now virtue makes the decision correct; but

So, on the alternative interpretation that I am proposing, and that I think is clearly superior to the standard interpretation, Aristotle is saying that virtue of character makes decision correct, and so ensures good and noble action, but that it is the task not of virtue, but of some other capacity, to identify and perform those actions that are naturally done for the sake of virtue: those actions, that is, that naturally establish any given virtue of character. These will be actions that are virtuous, or very close to being virtuous, but that are not yet perfect expressions of fully completed virtue. As we shall learn in a bit, actions done for the sake of establishing virtue cannot be products of *phronēsis*, because a person who is not yet virtuous cannot yet have *phronēsis*, either. Having *phronēsis* requires being virtuous, and vice versa. So the task of figuring out, and implementing, suitable ways of becoming fully virtuous falls, not to virtue itself, nor to *phronēsis*, but to another capacity, cleverness, which is a capacity for identifying and implementing suitable ways for the achievement of any given goal, good, bad, or indifferent.

Aristotle devotes a chapter (*NE* 2. 9) to the great difficulty of hitting the correct intermediacy in action, e.g. giving to people one should give to, as much as one should, when one should, for the right purpose, and in the right manner. Given the great difficulty of hitting the mean, he says in 2. 9, one should sometimes settle for the less bad of the two defective extremes (1109^a34–5). He goes on to say that

we must examine what we ourselves drift into easily. For different people have different natural tendencies towards different goals, and we shall come to know our own tendencies from the pleasure or pain that arises in us. We must drag ourselves off in the contrary direction. For if we pull far away from error, as they do in straightening bent wood, we shall reach the intermediate condition. (*NE* 2. 9, 1109^b1–7)

Aristotle's advice for those seeking to become virtuous is on suitable occasions to opt for actions that are non-virtuous (say, prodigal) but contrary to their own current non-virtuous disposition of character

the actions that are naturally to be done to fulfill the decision are the concern not of virtue, but of another capacity.' Ross: 'Now virtue makes the choice right, but the question of the things which should naturally be done to carry out our choice belongs not to virtue but to another faculty.' Rowe: 'The decision, then, is made correct by excellence, but the doing of whatever by the nature of things has to be done to realize that decision is not the business of excellence but of another ability.' Gauthier–Jolif and Dirlmeier adopt the same construal.

(for instance, a tendency towards cheapness), so as best to reach the properly intermediate disposition that is the virtue in question. Such non-virtuous, but effectively remedial, actions are nice examples, I suggest, of actions that in the natural order of human character development³⁹ are done for the sake of character-virtue, and that it belongs to cleverness to identify and implement.

It is worth noting that at the beginning of 6. 12, in developing the *aporia* about the usefulness of *phronēsis*, Aristotle considers the possibility that *phronēsis* might be useful specifically for the sake of becoming virtuous, enabling people to identify and implement suitable means to the acquisition of character-virtue (1143^b28–9). On the interpretation that I am proposing, Aristotle is picking up this idea, but he is now and in what immediately follows indicating that neither virtue itself nor *phronēsis* is available for the job of figuring out how to become virtuous. The possession of *phronēsis* itself presupposes being virtuous. So the task of figuring out how best to make progress towards virtue, in the varied circumstances of life, must fall to a capacity other than virtue and also other than *phronēsis*. It turns out to be a task for cleverness, provided that the person in question adopts the goal of being virtuous.

According to the view that emerges from my interpretation of 6. 12–13, then, *phronēsis* as well as virtue of character is required to ensure correctness of decision. As we have seen, Aristotle seems to characterize virtue of character as a state that issues in decision. The idea, I take it, is that virtue of character is a state that consistently and reliably gives rise to excellent decisions. This arguably is the idea Aristotle means to express when he says, in Passage 1, that virtue makes decision correct (1144^a20). Aristotle evidently recognizes, at any rate in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, that being disposed to form excellent decisions is in part a matter of being disposed to succeed in identifying suitable ways of promoting one's goals (1145^a4–6, which is Passage 2). This combination of claims strongly suggests that he thinks virtue of character includes as a constituent *phronēsis*, or at any rate the aspect of it that is required for ensuring correctness of decision.

In fact, according to what seems to me the most plausible inter-

³⁹ Note the word *πέφυκε* at 1144^a21: the capacity in question deals with those things that are *naturally* done for the sake of virtue. Although nature does not ensure that we become virtuous, becoming virtuous, for Aristotle, is a natural process, one in which, through appropriate practice (*ēthos*), our natural suitedness to the virtues is fulfilled (*NE* 2. 1, 1103^a23–6).

pretation of an admittedly rather difficult passage in *NE* 6. 13, Aristotle commits himself to the view that virtue of character includes *phronēsis* as a constituent and is therefore in part a rational state, i.e. a state of reason strictly speaking. After saying that virtue of character in the strict sense does not come about without *phronēsis*, he notes the claim, which he associates with Socrates, that the virtues of character just are forms of *phronēsis* (*φρονήσεις*). He rejects that claim. In what follows immediately, he offers two ways of describing the relationship between virtue of character and *phronēsis*. One formulation is that it is a certain state in accord with *phronēsis* (*κατὰ τὴν φρόνησιν*) that is virtue. The kind of state in question is presumably an acquired, habituated tendency to act and display emotion in certain ways, pertaining to different kinds of domain depending on which virtue of character is at issue. So this first formulation makes virtue of character an acquired tendency to act and display emotion that is in accord with *phronēsis*.

The other formulation is that it is the state in question with *phronēsis* that is virtue. More precisely, according to the second formulation it is the state with correct reason (*ἡ μετὰ τοῦ ὀρθοῦ λόγου ἔξις*) that is virtue, and it is *phronēsis* that is correct reason about things of this kind. Aristotle seems to think that the first formulation is on the right track, but not entirely adequate. Having noted that everyone in a way intuitively believes that the state in accord with *phronēsis* is virtue, he says that one must go a bit further than this: 'for it is not merely the state in accord with the correct reason, but the state with the correct reason, that is virtue' (1144^b26–7).⁴⁰ Aristotle then sums up his disagreement with Socrates by saying that while Socrates thought the virtues are *logoi*, forms or states

⁴⁰ ἔστι γὰρ οὐ μόνον ἡ κατὰ τὸν ὀρθὸν λόγον, ἀλλ' ἡ μετὰ τοῦ ὀρθοῦ λόγου ἔξις ἀρετὴ ἐστίν. I am inclined to think that the words οὐ and μόνον at 1144^b26 are not meant to go together, so that the form of the claim Aristotle is making is not οὐ μόνον . . . , ἀλλὰ (καὶ . . .) ('not only . . . , but also . . .'), but οὐ . . . , ἀλλὰ ('not . . . , but . . .'): it is not the state that is only in accord with correct reason, but the state that is with correct reason, that is virtue. When Aristotle wants to say that not only *p*, but also *q*, he strongly tends to say οὐ μόνον *p*, ἀλλὰ καὶ *q*, rather than only οὐ μόνον *p*, ἀλλὰ *q*. (Searching the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Eudemian Ethics*, I counted 24 clear examples of 'not only *p*, but also *q*' claims. In every single case, Aristotle writes οὐ μόνον . . . , ἀλλὰ καὶ . . . Only *NE* 5. 3, 1131^a30–1, may seem to be a counter-example, but is in fact, I think, precisely parallel to 1144^b26–7. Ross seems to get this exactly right, translating 'proportion being not a property [*ἴδιον*] only of the kind of number which consists of abstract units, but of number in general'. The idea is, I take it, that proportion is a property of number in general, not of some particular kind of number.)

of reason, he himself holds that the virtues are 'with reason' (*μετὰ λόγου*). It is worth adding that in the parallel discussion of the same topic in *Magna Moralia* 1. 34, the author contrasts the virtues 'with reason' (*αἱ . . . μετὰ λόγου*) with non-rational tendencies to act in conformity with the virtues, saying that the ones 'with reason' being completely virtues, are praiseworthy (1. 34, 24).

Now there are quite a few texts, in *NE* 6 and elsewhere, in which Aristotle characterizes states as being states 'with reason' (*μετὰ λόγου*). He says this about scientific knowledge (*NE* 6. 6, 1140^b33), about crafts or arts such as that of building (*NE* 6. 4, 1140^a6–8), and about *phronēsis* (*NE* 6. 5, 1140^b20–1). In those cases it is fairly clear what he has in mind in characterizing the state in question in this way: the idea is that these are states that crucially involve being ready to grasp (and provide) suitable reasons or explanations with regard to some given domain. This is clear in a remark about knowledge in *NE* 6. 6: Aristotle there says that in every branch of knowledge there are principles of demonstration, and explains this by pointing out that knowledge is 'with reason' (cf. *Posterior Analytics* 2. 19, 100^b10). Having knowledge crucially involves being disposed to grasp suitable reasons or explanations in some domain or other, and this requires, Aristotle thinks, that there are principles of demonstration by reference to which the demonstrable facts in that domain can be adequately explained.

It is also relevant to our purposes that saying about a power or capacity that it is 'with reason' (*μετὰ λόγου*) rather than non-rational (*ἄλογος*) is Aristotle's standard way of saying that the power or capacity in question is a rational one,⁴¹ one that belongs to a rational being in virtue of their possession of some suitable state of the intellect, such as knowledge of health. In fact this seems to be the same use of the expression 'with reason' that occurs frequently in *NE* 6. Applied to a state or power, it means that the state or power in question is a rational one, in that it crucially involves a certain state of the faculty of reason.

The Eudemian distinction between virtues of thought and character-virtue is another text that provides important evidence as to what Aristotle means when he characterizes states as 'with reason':

Since the virtues of thought are with reason [*μετὰ λόγου*], virtues of this kind belong to the part of the soul that has reason, which is the part of

⁴¹ *De int.* 13, 22^b37 ff.; *Metaph.* Θ 2.

the soul that issues commands in so far as it has reason, but the virtues of character belong to the part of the soul that is non-rational but naturally follows the part that has reason. (*EE* 2. 1, 1220^a4–12)

Here the idea seems to be that the virtues of thought belong to the faculty of reason rather than to some non-rational part of the soul, because they involve being disposed to grasp suitable reasons or explanations. These will include the kinds of reason or explanation on whose basis the commanding part of the soul issues prescriptions to act in certain ways.

With this evidence in mind, let us return to *NE* 6. 13. Aristotle is distinguishing between the view that it is a certain kind of state in accord with correct reason that is virtue of character, and the view that it is a certain kind of state with correct reason, or simply a certain kind of state with reason, that is virtue of character. According to what I take to be the standard view of what distinction it is that he has in mind, he means to distinguish between holding merely that virtue of character is a state that is in conformity with correct reason, but that one can acquire and maintain without having *phronēsis*, and holding that virtue of character is a state that is always accompanied by the correct state of reason, since, as Aristotle holds, one cannot have virtue of character without having *phronēsis* (1144^b20–1).⁴² According to this interpretation, Aristotle's point is that virtue of character is not just a state that is in conformity with the requirements of *phronēsis*, it is a state that is in conformity with the requirements of the virtuous person's own *phronēsis*. If this is Aristotle's point, it can equally well be expressed by saying that it is not merely a certain kind of state in accord with correct reason that is virtue, but a certain kind of state in accord with the correct reason possessed by the person himself.⁴³

However, we have seen that when Aristotle elsewhere in *NE* 6, and in other texts as well, characterizes a psychological state as being 'with reason', he has in mind the idea that the state in question is itself a rational state, in that it crucially involves being ready to grasp reasons or explanations. In other words, the idea seems always

⁴² An interpretation along those lines is offered, for instance, in J. A. Stewart, *Notes on the Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle* (2 vols.; Oxford, 1892), ii. 111.

⁴³ Similarly, Aristotle says that doing something grammatical in a grammatical way is doing it in accord with the grammatical expertise that is in one (*κατὰ τὴν ἐν αὐτῷ γραμματικῇν*, *NE* 2. 4, 1105^a24–6).

to be that of a state that is constituted, in whole or in part, by disposition to grasp suitable reasons or explanations.

In one of the examples I have provided, Aristotle makes an inference that is reasonable only if states that are 'with reason' are always themselves rational states, rather than states that are always accompanied by rational states. At *EE* 2. 1 he infers that the virtues of thought, such as wisdom, are virtues that belong to the faculty of reason, since they are 'with reason'. If 'with reason' here meant 'accompanied by some suitable state of the faculty of reason', this would be a disastrously bad argument. After all, Aristotle in the *Eudemian Ethics* does accept that unqualified virtue of character is always accompanied by *phronēsis*,⁴⁴ which plainly is a certain state of reason. So if 'with reason' here meant 'accompanied by some suitable state of reason', the argument would prove that all the virtues of character are virtues of the faculty of reason itself. By contrast, if 'with reason' means 'rational', Aristotle is arguing that since wisdom, *phronēsis*, and the like are rational states, states that themselves crucially involve being disposed to grasp suitable reasons or explanations, they must be virtues of the faculty of reason. In the theoretical framework of the *Eudemian Ethics*, in which virtues are either non-rational or wholly constituted by suitable states of the faculty of reason, this is an acceptable argument.

In at least one of the texts I have presented, then, the expression 'with reason', when applied attributively to a psychological state, needs to be interpreted as meaning 'rational'. In all the other passages I have presented, from *NE* 6 and from other texts, the expression, when used in this way, can very plausibly be interpreted as meaning 'rational'. Knowledge is a rational state that issues in demonstration, art and artlessness are rational states that issue in production, and *phronēsis* is a rational state, concerned with what is good for people, that issues in action. In each case, the states in question are rational in that they crucially involve being disposed to grasp suitable reasons or explanations. We seem to have good reason to think, then, that in characterizing a psychological state as being a state 'with reason', he means to identify the state in question as being a rational state in the sense explained.

And so it seems to me that when Aristotle says that the virtues

⁴⁴ *EE* 3. 7, 1234^a28–30: this is a forward reference to (the Eudemian version of) 6. 13: as will be discussed in what follows, each virtue in a way exists naturally and also in another way, with *phronēsis* (μετὰ φρονήσεως).

of character are states 'with the correct reason', or simply that they are states or virtues 'with reason', he is properly understood as claiming that the virtues of character are states that are constituted, in part, by a certain correct state of reason, namely by correct reason about what is good for humans. That correct state of reason, when accompanied by the various properly habituated states of the soul's obedient part, is *phronēsis*. This conception is a departure from the conception of virtue of character that is presented and employed in the *Eudemian Ethics*. But it seems a thoroughly good idea. It allows Aristotle to defend a conception of virtue of character according to which virtue itself enables and disposes its bearer to make decisions that are consistently and reliably correct, even though making such decisions is in important part a matter of deliberating well about how to promote one's goals. Perhaps more importantly, conceiving of virtue of character in this way enables Aristotle to accommodate the idea that acting, say, generously, in a way that involves, among other things, acting on a suitable decision, is to engage in a unified activity that counts as an exercise, in fact as the exercise, of the unified dispositional state that is the virtue of generosity.

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