

## THE ΕΦ' ΗΜΙΝ IN ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY

In ordinary ancient Greek there is a construction of the preposition ἐπί with a personal pronoun in the first, second, or third person, singular or plural, in the dative or in the case of the third person, a name or noun in the dative, plus the appropriate form of εἶναι or an equivalent, like κείσθαι, for instance ἐπ' ἐμοί ἐστι. It means something like «it depends on me» or «it is in my power». Usually it is constructed impersonally with an infinitive to indicate what it is in one's power to do or to bring about. Thus the Thessalians in Herodotus VIII, 29 send a messenger to the Phocaeans who tell them: «We now have so much power (τοσσαῦτον δυνάμεθα) with the barbarians (that is the Persians) that it is in our power (ἐφ' ἡμῖν ἐστι) to have you deprived of your land and to be sent into slavery». There also, though, is a personal construction of phrases of the form «ἐπ' ἐμοί ἐστι» with a pronoun or a noun as a subject to refer to something which can be attained or obtained by what one is doing. Pindar, for instance, in *Pythian Ode VIII*, 76 says: «But these things are not in the power of men. Rather a god grants them» (τά δ' οὐκ ἐπ' ἀνδράσι κείται, δαίμων δὲ παρίσχει). He is referring to goods of fortune (ἐσολά, line 73), like Aristomenes of Aegina's Pythian Victory in wrestling for whom the ode is written. This passage also reveals a certain possible nuance in the use of phrases of the form «ἐπ' ἐμοί» which is highly relevant to the way such expressions are sometimes used in late antiquity. Pindar does not deny that Aristomenes gained the victory by wrestling down his opponents and that hence, a fortiori, he was able to win the prize in the wrestling competition. What he is denying is that it was in his power to do so, that it depended on him whether he would obtain the prize.

Now this use of ἐπί with the dative enters philosophy with Aristotle mainly in the form of «ἐφ' ἡμῖν» to characterize something as being in our power, the power of some human being or others. We find it in particular in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In Aristotle it becomes something like a technical philosophical term. It will remain in philosophical use throughout antiquity and beyond. But in the course of this history the term comes to be used and to be understood as meaning or at least as implying something about the psychological make-up of human beings about the way they act in the way they do, an understanding which means far beyond what had been meant or implied in ordinary language or, I think, in Aristotle. It came to be thought that it meant or implied some kind of freedom of choice or even a free will.

It would be worthwhile in its own right to try to trace this development in the use of the term «ἐφ' ἡμῖν» but what I am particularly concerned with is that

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position ἐπί with a singular or plural, in the dative, plus the preposition ἐπ' ἐμοί. It is in my power». This indicates what it is in the power of. Herodotus VIII, 29 now have so much (the Persians) that it is in the power of the Spartans and to be sent in the power of the Spartans. Pindar, for instance, is not in the power of the Spartans (καίτοι, δαίμων δέ ἐστιν), like Aristomenes, as is written. This phrase of the form ἐπ' ἐμοί is sometimes used to indicate that one has gained the victory. Pindar, for instance, he was able to win the prize. Aristotle mainly uses ἐπ' ἐμοί in our power, the phrase in the *Nicomachean* philosophical context and beyond. But it is to be understood as a logical make-up of the phrase, an understanding of ordinary language which implied some kind

development in the context which is that

there was a tradition already in antiquity which persists to the present day to project one's later understanding of the term or its use by earlier authors all the way back to Aristotle. It is difficult enough to get clear about how the ancients came to think about human freedom or the freedom of action, or, what is another matter, the freedom of choice, or, what seems to me to be yet another matter, the freedom of the will. But this task becomes impossible to accomplish, if not rather indiscriminately to project later conceptions of what it is for something to be ἐφ' ἡμῶν on any claim that something is in our power.

Let us begin with Aristotle. Aristotle makes systematical use of phrases of the form «ἐπ' ἐμοί» mainly of the phrase «ἐφ' ἡμῶν» in particular in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, book III, chapters 1-7, and to a lesser extent in the *Eudemian Ethics* in the corresponding chapters, book II, 6-10. I will focus on the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The reason why Aristotle mainly talks about what is ἐφ' ἡμῶν, what is in our power, clearly is not that he thinks that what is in the power of some human being is in the power of any human being, or that he only is interested in those things which are in the power of all of us, that is of all human beings. For in III, 5, 1112a, 18ff., he discusses the question what it is that we deliberate about. Having excluded several classes of things we do not deliberate about, he continues in 1112a 28ff., to say that we do not even deliberate about all human affairs.

For instance, no Spartan deliberates about how the Scyths should best arrange their political system. The point obviously is that this is not a business the Spartans have a say in, which is up to the Spartans to decide. It is in the power of the Scyths. Aristotle concludes from this discussion as to what we do not deliberate about that we deliberate about what is in our power and what can be done by us (προακτῶν, 1112a 30-31) thus he must assume that in the sense in which he uses the term, it is not in the power of the Spartans to arrange the Scyths' political constitution. By parity of reasoning it is not in our person's power how somebody else's children are raised. Hence Aristotle must understand the «ἡμῶν» in «ἐφ' ἡμῶν» distributive in the sense that what he has to say about what is in our power applies to human beings in general in so far as things are in their power, but it's being understood that what is in their power may differ from group to group and from person to person.

Now Aristotle's remarks about what is in one's power or in our power come in two contexts in *E.N.* III. The first remark comes in III, 1 1110a 17-18 in the context of a discussion of the voluntary and the involuntary. The discussion arises because having discussed moral virtue, which according to Aristotle involves the appropriate emotional response and doing the right thing rather than doing wrong, Aristotle thinks that discussing the voluntary and the involuntary will shed some light on virtue but will also, perhaps, be helpful to legislators. But virtue, according to Aristotle, is not just a matter of doing the right thing accompanied or even motivated, by the appropriate emotional

1105/20 ff

response but crucially, a matter of doing something for the right reason, because one understands that this is the right thing to do. And this is why in chapter 4 following he will turn to choice and deliberation, and will be obvious that Aristotle has more to say about what is in our power.

But for the moment we should stay with this distinction of the voluntary and the involuntary. Aristotle thinks that it is only voluntary actions which deserve praise and blame. He thinks that a discussion of this distinction will be useful to lawgivers. We do know rather little about Greek, if alone Athenian law at the time, but at least the written law in this regard seems to have been rather undeveloped. It is the case of killing just distinguished between premeditated murder and homicide out of affect. He himself regards those actions as involuntary which are forced upon one from the outside or in whose case one acted out of ignorance, that is in virtue of the fact that one did not know relevant details of the case without any fault of one's own. By contrast, those actions are voluntary which have their source in ourselves, even if we act in ignorance, if we ourselves are to blame for this ignorance, for instance because it was brought about by intoxication. But Aristotle also considers more complex cases, like the case of a captain of a ship who in a storm throws the cargo off board to save his life and the life of the other persons on the ship. In some way he says this is involuntary, since in general nobody tosses the cargo off board voluntarily, but in another way it is voluntary, namely in that everybody who has good sense would do the same under these circumstances. It is voluntary, because the action has its source in the agent. It is in this context that Aristotle says that if what one does has its origin in the agent himself, it is in his power (ἐν αὐτῷ) both to act and not to act in this way.

Now it perhaps is natural to understand this as meaning that the captain had a choice either to toss the cargo off board or not to toss the cargo off board, but, being a sensible man he decided to toss the cargo off board. But I take it that this is not what Aristotle means. I take him to say that if we do something which has its origin in us, that is to say is due to the fact that we are the sort of human being we are, there always are two possibilities, either we do it or we do not do it. Moreover, it is in our power, or depends on us, whether we do it or not do it. This is what makes it voluntary if we do it. But whether we do it or do not do it does not depend on whether we choose or decide to do it.

For the captain of the ship may have made no choice or decision at all. He might have acted not by choice but out of fear for his life and the life of the other persons on board. Still, this source for his action would be in himself, and hence, the action would be voluntary. But he would not be blamed for what he did, because everybody with good sense would act in this way. Of course, he also would not be a virtuous person, since a virtuous person does not act out of fear, but for the right reason.

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terms «voluntary» and «involuntary» can also be applied to the behaviour of children and even to the behaviour of those animals which can be taught or trained to behave in a custom way.

We also praise and blame, reward and punish children and animals accordingly. But Aristotle at least does not believe that we can talk of choice in their case since they lack reason. But we can talk of choice in the case of grown up human beings. Who act acrationally i.e. on non rational impulse against their better judgment. Aristotle does think that, though their action is voluntary, it is not by choice, but rather against their choice. They act following their desire or out of anger against their considered view as to how they should behave.

Why then does Aristotle say that if somebody does something which has its origin in the agent, it is in his power to do or not to do it? Now this clearly has something to do with the notions of an agent out of agency. One already may have objected to my talking as if at least some animals and children according to Aristotle are agents of some kind. But, as we can see from our text, not to mention other Aristotelian writings, Aristotle has no hesitation to talk of voluntary action in the case of children and at least of some animals (III,3,IIIa 25-26 ἐκουσίως πράξει). But, if we turn to lower animals or plants, they do something, behave in a certain way, and Aristotle's view will be that the origin of what they do is in them, namely in their soul. But he will not say that they act (πράττειν) let alone that they act voluntarily or that it is in their power to do or not to do whatever they do. And this is because what they do is settled by nature. There is not anything else they could do, just as we might not be able to help sneezing under certain conditions. Hence we do not call what they do an action, just as we do not call sneezing an action. But a dog which has been taught to sit down when told, can when told either sit or not sit down.

It thus is a condition of something's being an action even in the wider sense that if something acts in a certain way there also was the possibility for it not to act in this way.

This, I hope will become clearer, if we now turn to Aristotle's remarks about deliberation (βούλευσις) in III, 5. We want virtuous action to be action by choice. (Choice presupposes deliberation at least in the sense that the agent knows why he is doing what he is doing.) Aristotle considers what we deliberate about. He proceeds negatively by ruling out various classes of things that we do not deliberate about. He prefaces this, though, with the remark that we should only consider things which a person of sound sense (ὁ νοῦν ἔχων) would deliberate or not deliberate about, and not what a person who is stupid or out of mind (μαϊνόμενος) might deliberate about. This restriction seems justified, since we think about a person who lacks a minimal level of intelligence, or temporarily or chronically is out of mind, seriously mentally ill, can act out of choice, can make decisions which we have to respect or recognize as his decisions. With this proviso, then, we first exclude those things which are the

way they are eternally, out of necessity. We do not deliberate about the world (*κόσμος*), whether for instance there should be a world and what its order should be.

This is settled independently of us, and there is nothing we can do about it. Similarly with the incommensurability of the side of a square with its diameter. There is no point in our deliberating how one might produce a square whose diameter is commensurable with its side. Next Aristotle considers things which do change or are in motion but always eternally move or change in the same way. Aristotle is clearly thinking of the stars, in particular the planets like the sun. For he is talking about solstices (*τροπαί*) and risings (*ἀνατολαί*). These things happen out of necessity, Aristotle says, or by nature, or for some other reason. He actually believes, I think, that they happen for some other reason, namely because the planets are perfectly rational beings, which we, though have no power over. But whether it is for this reason or by necessity or by nature that the stars move the way they do, there is nothing, he thinks, we can do about this. It would be useless to deliberate how one could make them move the other way round the celestial pole. For this is settled independently of us, either by necessity or by nature or by their perfect rationality. Next Aristotle considers things which move or change but in an irregular way, he thinks, namely heat-waves and rainstorms. There is nothing we can do about them. Finally there are things which happen by chance. For instance, one can find a treasure by chance. But there is no action, either voluntary or by choice which consists in finding a treasure by chance. One can dig a hole to plant a tree, and by chance one finds a treasure.

One can deliberate about planting a tree and by digging a hole to plant a tree, but not about finding a treasure by chance. One can also deliberate about finding a treasure but if one were to find a treasure as a result of deliberation, this no longer would be a case of finding a treasure by chance. Finally, not even all human affairs are in our power. As we already noted, according to Aristotle, it is for the Scyths, and not the Spartans or us, to deliberate as to how they should best run their affairs. For what happens in the land of Scyths they cannot come about through us (*δι' ἡμῶν*).

Now what all these cases have in common is that something is the case or something happens quite independently of us, is settled one way or the other independently of us, either by necessity, or by nature, or by some non human or human agent or agents we have no control over, or in such an irregular way that there is nothing we can do about it, or, finally by chance. What we are left with, then, are things which are not settled one way or another by something else or somebody else. It is at this point (1112a 30-31) that Aristotle says «We deliberate about what is in our power (*ἐφ' ἡμῶν*) and the things that can be done (sc. by us). For this also is what is left». And he himself goes on to explain: «For causes seem to be nature and necessity and chance, but further an intellect and

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<what causes> all that happens through man. But among human beings each group deliberates about the things which can be done through them» (1112a, 31-34).

So what is in our power or depends on us and hence is something which we can deliberate about, is defined mainly negatively by the fact that it is not already settled, one way or the other, by the other causes mentioned and positively only by the fact that it is something which can be done or brought about through ourselves (δὲ αὐτῶν πρακτά, 1112a 34).

To now return to the claim of III, 1, 1110a 17-18 namely that, if one does something whose origin is in oneself, then it is in one's power to do it and not to do it, it seems to me to be clear, especially in the light of the discussion in III, 5 that this does mean no more than the following: if your neighbour owns a plot of land, it is not in your power to sell it. But it is in your neighbour's power both to sell it and not to sell it.

This is just like the case of the Spartans and the Scyths. it is not in the Spartans' power to arrange the political system of the Scyths, and hence they also cannot deliberate about it, since this is not their business. But the Scyths can deliberate about this and decide to adopt a certain constitution or not to adopt it. This is something which they can do through themselves, as long as they are independent, for instance, not in the power of the Spartans. But when it comes to matters of necessity, neither you nor your neighbour, nor the Scyths or the Spartans can do anything about there being a world with a certain order, or about the fact that  $2+3=5$ . For that is already settled by necessity. Nor can they do anything about the motion of the stars. They have no power over them. The way they move is settled by something else. Nor can they do anything about the fact that decides that trees shed their leaves at the time of the year at which they are lit by the sun at a certain angle. This already is settled by nature. And so on and so forth. So there is a narrow sphere of things within which what happens or what things are like is not already determined by factors outside our control. By this very fact what is in our power is not yet settled by factors outside our control. And this is why, for instance, our neighbour can sell, but also not sell his piece of land. But for the same reason, and in the same sense, we also, because it is in our power, it depends on us, can do what it is right to do, but also not do it. This, I suggest, is what is meant by saying that something is in our power to do and not to do. It is a condition on any action, and hence also on action by choice, that if you act in a certain way there also must be the possibility of your not acting in this way.

What is not meant, or taken to be implied, is that we are responsible for what we are doing, because it is in our power to do it, but also not to do it. That it is in our power is merely what makes it possible for us to be autonomous agents and to be responsible for what we do. But what makes us responsible is something else, namely that we can do voluntarily (*ἔκων*) what it is right or wrong for us to

do. But that it is in our power to do something and that we do it voluntarily are two different things which are distinguished in III, 1, but also in III, 5 ff. For the fact that it is in our power to do something, but also not to do it, also makes it possible that we involuntarily do what is wrong. And it is conspicuous that Aristotle in III, 5, having turned to a discussion of doing things by choice and hence upon deliberation, (that is form of voluntary action characteristic of the virtuous person), terminologically distinguishes between things we do because it is in our power to do them, and things we do voluntarily, by speaking in the former case of «ἐφ' ἡμῖν» and in the latter of «δι' ἡμῶν» or «δι' αὐτῶν» (1112a 34; 1112b 3; 27; 28; cf. 1112a 33).

Hence, if something is done by somebody which is in his power to do, but also not to do, this is not the same as his doing it voluntarily, and that in turn, is not the same as his doing it by choice. And there certainly is no indication in Aristotle, either here or anywhere, that, if something is done by somebody which is in his power to do, but also not do, his doing it is the result of his exercise of a free will, understood in the sense that by his free will a person who chooses to do something at the same time also could choose not to do it. In fact, this seems to me to be ruled out by Aristotle's conception of virtue. A virtuous person unfailingly will do the right thing for the right reason with the appropriate affective attitude. What makes him virtuous is precisely this, that unlike in the case of the acratist person, there is no trace of motivation left in the virtuous person which could explain why he would do anything but the right thing in the circumstances. He psychologically cannot but do what is right. But this, of course, does not mean that he is forced to do what he does. He gladly does what he does, because he has come to understand that this is the right thing to do, and there is no emotional resistance left in him to follow what he has come to understand to be the right thing. To be forced and to follow one's own insight and inclination clearly are two quite different things. To deny this is little saying that people who say that  $2+2=4$  do this, because this is what they want to say because they understand that it is true.

The use of the term «ἐφ' ἡμῖν» and of understanding it, significantly changes when we come to the Stoics, who in turn, as in so many other matters have had a lasting impact on latin philosophy. The Stoics focused on voluntary action. But, they in effect diminished the distinction between voluntary action and choice. The reason for this was that they had a vision of the human soul which is rather different from Plato's and Aristotle's. They thought that the soul in the sense of what guides us in our behaviour, is what we do or do not do, is reason (λόγος) and nothing but reason. This reason, though, may or may not be misguided, and in this sense be rational or irrational, irrational by having false beliefs and thus not functioning properly. And this malfunctioning of the soul in virtue of its being guided by false, irrational beliefs is supposed to explain why we, at least sometimes, do things which we ought not to do. Now, Plato and Aristotle

thought that apart from desires which are not in our power, but which may make us act against our reason, the Stoics denied that fear, is based on a concern for the good or bad, a belief that one did something good or bad, a belief that a good thing to do is to believe, they regard them as voluntary actions.

For they also have to somehow come to be responsible for their actions. They have to have a perception, have to form impulses (ὁρμηαί) which distinguish them from what is once our sense and rational impulses from the way animals act.

Animals are creatures of impression without reason. This impulse the animal cannot avoid something, in the presence of rational content, as such will lead to an impression to lead to an action, whether it is good or bad (συγκατατίθεται) by. But reason also can be a certain kind of impression which would be a good impression, which amounts to having an impulse which impression also can lead to an action will ensue. In the case of things we do entirely voluntarily.

It is against this that the Stoics claim that it is in our power, or that we do not do, and that hence we do depends on our thought and on not doing.

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thought that apart from our belief formed by reason, we also have fears and desires which are independent of our beliefs, may be in conflict with them and may make us act against our better beliefs, or better knowledge, as we say. The Stoics denied this. They claimed that any pleasure or displeasure, any desire or fear, is based on or even, identical with a corresponding belief that something is good or bad, a belief that may be true or false. Hence, they thought that even if one did something which was wrong, it was because one believed that it was a good thing to do. What we might regard as a conflict between passion and belief, they regarded as a conflict between belief. This, in effect, meant that for them any voluntary action was an action by choice.

For they also had a certain view about beliefs, not as something which we just somehow come to have, but as something we actively espouse, and hence are responsible for having. For they thought that, we, like animals, on the basis of perception, have the ability to form impressions (φαντασίαι) and the ability to form impulses (ὄρμηαι). These two abilities are constitutive of any soul. But what distinguishes us from animals is that we, once we have become rational, that is once our soul has become reason, have rational impressions, or thought and rational impulses. And this has the result that we function quite differently from the way animals function.

Animals are created by God in such a way that the presence of a certain kind of impression with soul, immediately produces an impulse. And impelled by this impulse the animal will move to get something, for instance food, or to avoid something, for instance, an enemy. In the case of human beings, though, the presence of rational impression, that is an impression with a propositional content, as such will produce no impulse and hence no action. For a rational impression to lead to action, it first has to be scrutinized by reason, to see for instance whether it is true or false. When reason accepts or assents to (συγκατατίθεται) the impression or thought, it becomes a belief we are guided by. But reason also can refuse to assent to the impression or thought. Moreover, there is a certain kind of impressions or thoughts, such as the thought that it would be a good thing to have this piece of cake, assent to which not only amounts to having a belief, but the kind of belief which constitutes a rational impulse which impels us to act, for instance to eat this piece of cake. But again, reason also can refuse to assent to this thought, and no impulse and hence no action will ensue. It is clear that on such a view all the belief we have and all the things we do entirely depend on whether we give assent to a thought or not.

It is against this background that we have to understand the Stoic claim that it is in our power, or depends on us (is ἐφ' ἡμῖν), to do or not to do what we do, and that hence we are responsible for what we are doing. For that we do what we do depends on our giving or not giving assent to the relevant impression or thought and on nothing else. If we did not give assent, we would not do what we do.



Now, what decides in a particular case whether one's reason gives assent to a thought or not? It cannot be reason as such which decides this. For otherwise all human beings would come to the same decision and give assent to the same thoughts. But the fact is that in the same circumstances some persons give assent to a thought and other persons do not give assent to the same thought. So it must be a matter of how reason has developed in different persons. Some have come to think about things in one way, and as a result have developed certain attitudes towards things, such as to give assent to a thought whereas others have come to think differently and hence to have a different attitude towards things, and because of that do not give assent to the very same thought. But it is not just that people are responsible for what they do or do not do, by giving assent or not giving assent, they also are responsible for having the sort of reason they have which determines what they give assent to or not. For that one thinks about things in the way one does, and has the attitude towards things one does have, is itself the result of having given or not given assent to impressions or thoughts, and hence is the result of one's own doing, and cannot be blamed on anybody or anything else. It is for no other reason than this that we by our own doing have become the sort of person we are, and that hence we do what we do. Nothing, nobody forced us to become like that.

It should be clear from what I have said that when the Stoics claim that it is in our power, or depends on us, whether we act in a certain way or not, they do not mean that at the time when we act in a certain way, at that time also we could have acted otherwise. For otherwise there would be no explanation for why we act the way we do, and in particular no explanation in terms of us, of who we are, of what we are like. But what is true is that, when we act in a certain way, another person in the same circumstances would or could have acted otherwise. And more importantly, we ourselves could have acted otherwise, if we had not become the sort of person we did become. In fact, we perhaps within limits, still could become the sort of person who would not act in this way in this sort of situation.

This is the classical view of Stoics like Chrisippus. To see how this view further evolved, we have to look more closely at one fine detail of this view. When you have done something, you are responsible for it, because it was in your power to do it, it depended on you for its getting done. But if we have a closer look at it, we see that the matter is more complex in one regard. The classical Stoic account is that you have a thought induced by the circumstances you find yourself in (a very attractive piece of cake in front of you, and perhaps get another piece); you give assent to the thought and this produces an impulse—the impulse impels you to move to eat the cake. Now, that you have this impulse and actually move to eat the cake entirely depends on you, is in your power. And, if you manage, you will be responsible for having eaten the cake. But it does not entirely depend on you, is not entirely in your power

whether you manage or not. It is not in your power to give assent to a thought or not, but it is in your power to give assent to a thought and to act accordingly. You decide whether you give assent to a thought or not, and runs you over with Stoics, since down to the smallest detail (εἰμασμένῃ). If you give assent to a thought, God lets you do that.

Now in Epictetus tells us that the one who is responsible for whether we give assent to a thought or not is the one who gives assent to a thought.

What then happens should not be our thoughts and to receive the thought that you actually manage in your power. Your power really matters.

It is in this context that the Stoics speak of a disposition to choose. He means by this disposition to give or not to give assent to a thought that we give assent to a thought. But as long as we have a certain attitude towards a physical attractive object, we give assent to the thought, and hence the thought makes it in our power to give assent to it and to assent to it in a certain way of thinking about it.

This comes at least in part from what is right and language by Justus Lipsius. Human beings are responsible for their actions (προαιρέσει εἰς ἐλευθερίαν). This is compatible with the thought of Tatian (*Ad Graecos*) (προαιρέσεως, so is thought which is taken up by Origen).

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whether you manage to get and to eat the cake. For, as you are reaching for it, somebody else grabs it. And so it is with everything you do out in the world. You decide to cross the street, but as you step on the road, a car comes and runs you over or you have a heart attack. This consideration weighs heavily with Stoics, since they believe that everything which happens out in the world, down to the smallest detail, is a matter of Divine providence, also called fate (εἰμαρμένη). If you manage to eat the cake or to cross the street, it is because God lets you do this, since it fits into the providential plan.

Now in Epictetus this idea takes center-stage to such an extent that Epictetus tells us that the only thing which really is in our power, depends on us, is ἐφ' ἡμῶν, is what we do with our impressions or thoughts, in particular of course, whether we give assent to them or not.

What then happens as a result of our assent, is not really in our control and should not be our main concern. Our main concern should be to have the right thoughts and to reject the wrong thoughts. If a child is drowning, you should have the thought to save it, that is to say to move so as to save it. But whether you actually manage to do so is not in your hands. Yet you have done what was in your power. You had the right thought and assent to do it, and this is what really matters.

It is in this context that Epictetus says that it is in his main concern that his disposition to choose, his προαίρεσις be free (ἐλευθέρα, Diss. III, 5, 7). What he means by this is the following: He assumes that it is in our power (ἐφ' ἡμῶν) to give or not to give assent to our thoughts or impressions. But what matters is that we give assent to the right thoughts and refuse to give assent to the wrong ones. But as long as we have the wrong beliefs, and hence the wrong affective attitude towards things, for instance because we believe that money, health, physical attractiveness, a good reputation are genuine goods, we are not free to give assent to the right thoughts. For the way we have come to think about things, and hence the way we have come to be enslaved by worldly external things, makes it impossible for us to refuse to give assent to the wrong thoughts and to assent to the right thoughts. So, to become free, we have to change our way of thinking about things by scrutinizing our thoughts.

This comes at least very close to the idea of a free will, a will free to choose what is right and to reject what is wrong. It is a thought that is taken up in this language by Justin the Martyr and by Tatian. Justin (Apol. I, 43) says that human beings are responsible for what they are doing in virtue of their προαίρεσις ἐλευθέρα. He, though, also points out that this view is incompatible with the belief that it is fated who is good and who is bad. Similarly, Tatian (*Ad Graecos*, 7) says that God endorsed him with τῆ ἐλευθερίᾳ τῆς προαίρεσεως, so that they will be justly judged by God for what they do. It also is thought which, using the same language of an ἐλευθέρα προαίρεσις, is taken up by Origen, and elaborated on in considerable detail in *De principiis* III,

1. But a crucial part of the detail in Origen's account in *De principiis* is that, if we succeed in doing what we try to do, for instance to safely bring back a ship in a storm to harbour, that is due to God, like in Epictetus.

I next, almost finally, will turn to Alexander of Aphrodisias, a Peripatetic at the end of the second century A.D. who taught in Athens. In late antiquity and beyond he was regarded as the commentator on Aristotle, and many let themselves be guided by him in what they took to be Aristotle's views. But Alexander looked back on a long tradition of discussing Aristotle and the question of what is in our power, a discussion which also had involved the Stoics and Academics like Carneades. As a result his view on what is in our power, as expressed in his *De fato* is not quite Aristotle's anymore, but heavily reflects this later discussion.

As a Peripatetic he does not like the Stoics believe in all-encompassing Divine providence, and hence also not in fate. In fact, he believes that in assuming fate the Stoics no longer can seriously maintain that there is anything which is in our power or depends on us. And his work sets out to show this. As an Aristotelian he distinguishes between what we do voluntarily and what we do by choice. But he draws the distinction in what seems to me a rather un-Aristotelian way. He characterizes the voluntary action as due to giving our unforced assent (*ἀβίαστος συγκατάθεσις*) to the appropriate impression (183, 26-28). But Aristotle did not talk at all about assent. He had talked about something you do which is not forced upon you, though you know all the relevant details you can be expected to know. What is more, Alexander seems to identify something we do by choice with something which is in our power in that we have deliberated about it and given it our assent on the basis of a critical scrutiny by reason. Hence, Alexander seems to disregard the remark in *E.N.* III, 1 about what is in our power in the context of the voluntary, but to focus entirely on Aristotle's remarks in *E.N.* III, 5 ff. about deliberation and choice, and to understand them in such a way as if Aristotle assumed, not that only what is *ἐφ' ἡμῶν* can be done by choice, but that what is in our power is something which actually is done after deliberation by choice. As he wants to argue that what is *ἐφ' ἡμῶν* is not fated, we might think that what he is going to argue is that subjecting an impression or a thought as to what to do to rational scrutiny one may end up either by assenting or by refusing assent. This might be a promising line to take and think differently about them than one did when one began to scrutinize this thought. And as a result of this, within the same circumstances, eliciting the same thought one might come to judge the thought differently from how one would have judged it earlier when one got the thought. So, one's further critical scrutiny might make the difference in that, if we had judged earlier we might have assented, when in the end we did not assent, or the other way round. And so with the same circumstances giving rise to the same thought in the person, the person can still respond either by assenting or by not assenting.

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But this does not seem to be Alexander's line of argument. He very much focuses on the Stoic assumption that, if you do something, you do it, because you give assent to an impression. The impression is called by the Stoics an antecedent cause, but not a complete cause. You would not do what you do, if something had not produced this thought or impression in you. But this impression does not suffice to account for your action. You have to give assent to it, which you will only do, if you are the sort of person to give assent to this impression. So Alexander thinks, not unreasonably, that it is the impression together with your inner mental state which leads to the action.

So Alexander subsumes the case in which something in the external world produces a thought in you which in turn, given the sort of person you are, makes you give assent to it, to the general Stoic principle that if something, given certain external circumstances, produces an effect on something, given its internal condition of the thing affected, ineluctably produce the same effect in the thing affected, as a result of natural necessity. Hence if it's true that if in certain external circumstances something in the external world produces a certain thought in you which, ineluctably must produce this effect in you as a matter of natural necessity. But, instead of questioning whether one's giving assent to a thought, Alexander sets out to attach the general principle. He wants to attach the result that under the same circumstances the person even with the same mental state in which the person now gives assent also could result to give assent. In this way we seem to get what is called a libertarian view of freedom. But in any case to argue for his view Alexander has to deny natural necessity at least in the subhuman world. He goes about doing this, though, in a less than convincing way in Chap. 6. He identifies the realm of nature with that of fate. He relies on Aristotle's view that what happens by nature happens not invariably, but only for the most part. By nature, for instance, human beings come to have five fingers or toes. But that happens for the most part. For some have six fingers or toes. Hence he infers that some things which happen, happen against human nature and thus also against fate. He also believes not only in human nature in general, but also in a particular nature of particular human beings; due to their physical constitution they congenitally have a certain character. Alexander tells the well-known story of Zopyrus who discovers that Socrates, as the latter himself admits, by nature is a womanizer. But notoriously in actual life Socrates was not a womanizer, but, according to Alexander, came to act against his nature; and thus his fate, in philosophical *ἀσκησις*. Now, given a charitable interpretation of this, what Alexander might mean is that Socrates learned to follow reason rather than his own nature and that this was made possible in the fact that nature does not always get its way. But in this case Alexander's claim that in the same external and internal circumstances in which one gives assent one also could refuse to give assent and the other way round, seems to be unsatisfactory, at least on Aristotelian terms. For on Aristo-

teleian terms the only case in which this could possibly happen is the case of ἀκρασία in which somebody in Alexander's terms, follows his natural inclination rather than reason, but might equally follow reason against his natural inclination. Even in Alexander's own terms, though this would seem to involve an equivocation in the sense of «assent». But more importantly, Socrates is supposed to have learned to follow reason. So he at the very least is eucratic, which means that he can be relied upon to follow reason against his desires or fears.

Indeed presumably he is supposed to be virtuous. But this on Aristotle's view means that there is no possibility that he would act differently from the way he chooses to act, let alone that he could just follow his natural inclinations. Alexander, though may not have shared Aristotle's view on virtue. People in late antiquity seem to have come to think that even human virtue was no guarantee for consistently virtuous behaviour, that virtue was something always challenged and threatened. In any case the author of the *Mantissa* ascribed to Alexander, but hardly by him, though perhaps a student of his, trying to save the idea that something is in our power and that not everything happens of necessity, introduces the idea that, apart from nature and from habituation there something also is a motion in us which has no antecedent cause and makes us act and choose in a way different from the way we act in otherwise the same situations. He attributes this to the debility and weakness of mortal things with their portion of not being. So perhaps it is also Alexander's view that even virtue is no guarantee that we subhuman beings are consistent in the way we give assent or choose. In any case, Alexander's account of what it is for things to be in our power seems to be neither Aristotelean, nor in itself satisfactory, since it does not manage to explain how in the same circumstances we could act otherwise than we do. Perhaps this is just the weakness of any libertarian conception of freedom.

This brings me to my last point. All ancient philosophical conceptions of human freedom I am aware of, apart from Alexander's, have in common that it is assumed that freedom is freedom for the good. Freedom of action is not freedom for you to do whatever comes to your mind, whatever you might feel like doing, but freedom to do what it is good for you to do. Otherwise freedom could not be something which we value in itself. For it might do you more harm than good. Similarly, freedom of choice is not the freedom to choose whatever you like, but the ability to choose what it is best for you to choose. Freedom of the will is the ability to will those things for which it is good for you to will. The only thing which stands in the way of your being free is you, yourself. For, by doing the wrong things, by choosing the wrong things, by willing the wrong things, you increasingly deprive yourself of your own freedom. You become less and less able to see and to understand what you should do, what you should choose, what you should want or will for your own good and to act accordingly.

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Instead you become more and more dependent on, or addicted to, things which do not really matter since they do not do you any good. This, in a nutshell, seems to me to be a promising way to think about the freedom of the will and the lack of it.

† M. FREDE  
 (Athens)

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