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Reason in Action in Aristotle: A Reading of *EE* 5.12/*NE* 6.12

Abstract: I present a reading of *EE* 5.12/*NE* 6.12 according to which Aristotle argues for an executive account of φρόνησις (practical wisdom) to show why it is useful to possess this virtue. On this account, the practically wise person's actions are expressive of his knowledge of the fine, a knowledge that only the practically wise person has. This is why he must not only be a good deliberator, but also cunning (δεινότης), able to execute his actions well. An important consequence of this reading is that the debate about whether Aristotle holds a Humean account of practical reason presupposes assumptions about the scope of rationality that Aristotle rejects.

Keywords: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Eudemian Ethics*, practical wisdom (φρόνησις), virtuous action, cunning (δεινότης), Humeanism, practical reason, knowledge.

0. Introduction

Aristotle closes the second common book of his ethical treatises (*EE*5/*NE*6; 1143b18-1146a11) by considering a number of puzzles about wisdom and phronēsis, devoting the bulk of his attention to a puzzle about the usefulness of the latter. Briefly, the puzzle is that if phronēsis is useful insofar as it enables us to act virtuously, it will be useless both to the virtuous person who naturally acts well without possessing it, and to the non-virtuous person, so long as someone else tells her how to act. Either way, it would seem, possessing phronēsis is useless. There is agreement among scholars that Aristotle's reply depends on the following biconditional claim:

Virtue-Phronēsis Biconditional (VPB): A person has phronēsis iff she has virtue (of character).

The left-to-right direction of the biconditional is stated in chapter 12 at 1144a35-6, and the right-to-left in chapter 13 at 1144b30-2. VPB dissolves the puzzle because if acting well requires virtue (as assumed in the puzzle), and if virtue requires phronēsis (as VPB states), then possession of phronēsis will be useful inasmuch as it is necessary to act well. This response, however, depends on only the truth of the right-to-left direction of VPB, but since the grounds for this claim are all given in chapter 13, this raises an interpretative puzzle: what role does chapter 12 and the other direction of VPB play in Aristotle's reply? This question has not received much attention by scholars:¹ when it comes to chapter 12, interpreters tend to focus on one or another passage taken out of context, and without explaining its role as part of the solution to the puzzle.² Although this methodology has produced valuable interpretations, it is unfortunate that chapter 12 has not been studied as a whole, as it contains some of Aristotle's most interesting views on the nature of phronēsis and its characteristic manifestation, virtuous action, views whose significance is easy to miss when we study the passages in isolation.

Aiming to elucidate these views, I propose to adopt instead a holistic methodology, offering a self-standing interpretation of chapter 12 that shows how each part contributes towards answering the puzzle with which it opens.³ There are several advantages to such a procedure for studying aporetic chapters. I'll briefly mention three that will guide my inquiry. First, it imposes tighter interpretative constraints: we can filter out interpretations if we cannot find a role for them in the solution to the puzzle. Second, it raises standards of opposition: alternative readings of particular passages will constitute challenges only if they can be interpreted as having a role in providing such a solution. Finally, we are thus positioned to better interpret the chapter in terms of the concerns explicitly given in the text, rather than our own.⁴

This holistic reading reveals that Aristotle's response to the puzzle about phronēsis centrally depends on expanding our understanding of this virtue from earlier parts of the book, and

that the strategy that appeals to the truth of the right-to-left direction of VPB in chapter 13 is only part of Aristotle's response to the puzzle. In particular, by paying careful attention to the discussion of cunning and its relation to *phronēsis* (1144a22-1144b1), I argue that whereas in the initial chapters of the book *phronēsis* is treated mainly as a *deliberative* virtue whose central function is to make the process leading up to a *prohairesis* correct, in chapter 12 *phronēsis* emerges as also an *executive* virtue, whose function is to execute in the right way the decision reached as a result of deliberation. Such correct execution must express the agent's knowledge of the fine, a knowledge that is only available to the *phronimos*. Aristotle's response to the puzzle thus centrally depends on the contention that just as correct deliberation requires one to choose an action as fine, correct execution requires one to *do* the action as fine (in a sense explained below). Hence, only the practically wise person is able to act well.

Although other scholars have noted reason's executive function, no one, as far as I know, has explained how appeal to this function helps to resolve the puzzle about the usefulness of *phronēsis*.⁵ As a result, its importance in Aristotle's theory of action has not been fully appreciated. For I will argue that his account of execution is not only key to resolving the puzzle in the chapter, but is one of the features that sets apart Aristotle's account of practical reason from treatments of action familiar since the early modern period. In addition to deepening our understanding of the relation between virtuous action and knowledge, an important consequence of the reading I offer is that, contrary to what has been thought, chapter 12 does not support the 'Humean' interpretation of Aristotle, on which reason's practical role is restricted to finding means to one's ends. In fact, the reading I offer suggests that the interpretative debate about Humeanism is ill-founded, since it depends on presuppositions about practical reason that Aristotle rejects.

To structure the discussion, I have divided the chapter in five parts, which I have labelled [P1]-[P5]. The organization of the paper is straightforward: in the first five sections I discuss each of these passages in order, and in the sixth and final section I consider some exegetical and philosophical implications of my reading.

1. The Setup of the Puzzle and Criteria for a Solution

Our chapter begins with a puzzle about theoretical wisdom (σοφία) and phronēsis. The puzzle is that they seem, in an important sense, useless: the man who possesses them appears to be no better off than the one who lacks them. It is helpful to consider in some detail how the puzzle is set up before looking at Aristotle's solution to it (1143b18-33):⁶

[P1] (a) One might be puzzled about whether these things [*viz.* theoretical wisdom and phronēsis] are useful, given that theoretical wisdom does not give any thought to the things from which a man becomes happy (since it is concerned with no bringing about whatsoever).

Διαπορήσειε δ' ἄν τις περὶ αὐτῶν τί χρήσιμοί εἰσιν. ἢ μὲν γὰρ σοφία οὐδὲν θεωρήσει ἐξ ὧν ἔσται εὐδαίμων ἄνθρωπος (οὐδεμιᾶς γὰρ ἔστι γενέσεως).

(b) And phronēsis has knowledge of these things. But why do we need *it*,⁷ if indeed phronēsis concerns the things that are just, fine, and good for a man, and these are the sorts of things that a good man does, but we are no more practical by knowing these things, if indeed the virtues are states, just as [we are no more practical by knowing] things that are healthy or related to fitness [τὰ ὑγιεινὰ οὐδὲ τὰ εὐεκτικά], and as many things as are so-called not from the fact that they *produce*, but *come to be from* the state? For we are no more practical [with respect to these things] by having the craft of medicine or gymnastics.

ἢ δὲ φρόνησις τοῦτο μὲν ἔχει, ἀλλὰ τίνος ἕνεκα δεῖ αὐτῆς, εἴπερ ἢ μὲν φρόνησις ἐστὶν ἢ περὶ τὰ δίκαια καὶ καλὰ καὶ ἀγαθὰ ἄνθρωπον, ταῦτα δ' ἐστὶν ἃ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἐστὶν ἀνδρὸς πράττειν, οὐδὲν δὲ πρακτικώτεροι τῷ εἰδέναι αὐτά ἐσμεν, εἴπερ ἕξεις αἱ ἀρεταὶ εἰσιν, ὥσπερ οὐδὲ τὰ ὑγιεινὰ οὐδὲ τὰ εὐεκτικά, ὅσα μὴ τῷ ποιεῖν ἀλλὰ τῷ ἀπὸ τῆς ἕξεως εἶναι λέγεται· οὐθὲν γὰρ πρακτικώτεροι τῷ ἔχειν τὴν ἰατρικὴν καὶ γυμναστικὴν ἐσμεν.

(c) If, on the other hand, one should say that [being a] phronimos is not for the sake of these things [*i.e.* knowing just, fine, and good things], but for the sake of bringing about [a virtuous state], it will be of no use for excellent men. Nor, for that matter, for those who does not possess it [*viz.* phronēsis], since it will make no difference whether they themselves have it, or if they obey others who have it, and it would suffice for it to hold as in health: although we want to be healthy, nevertheless we do not [all] learn medicine.

εἰ δὲ μὴ τούτων χάριν φρόνιμον ῥητέον ἀλλὰ τοῦ γίνεσθαι, τοῖς οὔσι σπουδαίοις οὐθὲν ἂν εἴη χρήσιμος· ἔτι δ' οὐδὲ τοῖς μὴ ἔχουσιν· οὐδὲν γὰρ διοίσει αὐτοὺς ἔχειν ἢ ἄλλοις ἔχουσι πείθεσθαι, ἰκανῶς τ' ἔχει ἂν ἡμῖν ὥσπερ καὶ περὶ τὴν ὑγίειαν· βουλόμενοι γὰρ ὑγιαίνειν ὁμῶς οὐ μανθάνομεν ἰατρικὴν.

My concern in this paper is with the puzzle about *phronēsis* in particular. As we learn in the transition from (a) to (b), we seem to be in a better position to defend the usefulness of *phronēsis* because this virtue, unlike theoretical wisdom, concerns the things that make a person happy.⁸ Nevertheless, as Aristotle argues starting at (b), this is not sufficient to show that *phronēsis* is actually useful, if, as the passage assumes, *phronēsis* is analogous to craft. Given that assumption, *phronēsis* would be concerned with just, fine, and good actions (henceforth simply ‘fine actions’), in the same way that medicine is concerned with healthy things [τὰ ὑγιεινὰ], and gymnastics with things relating to fitness [τὰ εὐεκτικά]. However, this parsing of the assumed analogy is still imprecise, since terms like ‘τὰ ὑγιεινὰ’ are among Aristotle’s favourite examples to illustrate the ambiguity of terms with closely connected referents:

The term [‘being’] seems to be used in the way we have mentioned, like ‘medical’ and ‘healthy’ [ιατρικὸν καὶ ὑγιεινόν]. For each of these also we use in many senses . . . For a prescription and a knife are called medical because the former proceeds from medical science, and the latter is useful to it. And a thing is called healthy in the same way; one thing because it is indicative of health, another because it is productive of it. (*Met.* 1060b37-61a7)⁹

Aristotle’s claims in [P1] could thus be understood in terms of either of the two senses referred to at the end in this passage: by ‘healthy things’ he could mean either (i) the sorts of characteristic expressions of health (e.g. a healthy complexion, lack of headaches, etc.), or (ii) the sorts of things that are productive of health (e.g. eating an apple a day, staying active, etc.). Call instances of (i) healthy ‘manifestations’, and instances of (ii) ‘producers’ of health. With which of these is medicine assumed to be concerned in this passage?

In my view, Aristotle is actually concerned with both, and he takes advantage of the ambiguity to set up the puzzle about *phronēsis*. Keeping the ambiguity in mind, we can formulate the puzzle as a dilemma with the first horn given in (b) and the second in (c). *First horn*: Suppose *phronēsis* is concerned with fine manifestations (i.e. the kinds of things that it is characteristic of virtuous people to do). In that case, “we are no more practical by knowing these things”, just as we are no more practical for knowing healthy manifestations.¹⁰ It is not useful to know that a

certain state gives rise to such manifestations, or to know what actions or feelings are characteristic of the healthy/virtuous person; what is useful is to have the state from which these manifestations arise: virtue in the case of fine actions, and health in the case of healthy things. *Second horn:* Suppose phronēsis is concerned with producers of fineness (i.e. the sorts of things that lead to being in a fine state). In that case phronēsis will not be useful to the person who is virtuous already, the “excellent man” (σπουδαῖος), since he already possesses the thing that phronēsis could help him achieve. Nor will it be useful for the man who is not yet virtuous to have phronēsis; for he could just ask another person who possesses phronēsis how he should act so as to become virtuous, just as we ask doctors what we should do to become healthy. *Conclusion:* Whether phronēsis concerns fine manifestations or producers of fineness, it will be useless to possess it both for the person who has it and for the one who does not.

Aristotle presents two responses to the puzzle. The first is given rather swiftly: since theoretical wisdom and phronēsis are both virtues of the soul, they are worth choosing for themselves (1144a1-3). By contrast, Aristotle devotes two entire chapters to his second reply, the one that concerns us here. This reply relies on the denial that theoretical wisdom and phronēsis produce happiness *in the same* way that the crafts produce their characteristic products, for instance, the way that medicine produces health.¹¹ Theoretical wisdom, he says, produces happiness “as health produces health, for being a part of virtue as a whole, a person is made happy through having it and exercising it” (44a5-6).¹² Though this passage needs to be interpreted in light of what’s to come, it shows that our interpretation of the response must explain how the relation of phronēsis to virtuous actions differs in kind from the relation of craft to product. What the difference is and how the point helps to answer the puzzle will emerge as we continue.

2. A Controversial Passage in Context

The response on behalf of *phronēsis* that I shall be considering begins with a much-discussed passage (1144a6-9):¹³

[P2] Further, the function is achieved both in accordance with *phronēsis* and virtue of character. For virtue makes the aim right and *phronēsis* the things towards it [*viz.* the aim].
ἔτι τὸ ἔργον ἀποτελεῖται κατὰ τὴν φρόνησιν καὶ τὴν ἠθικὴν ἀρετήν• ἢ μὲν γὰρ ἀρετὴ τὸν σκοπὸν ποιεῖ ὀρθόν, ἢ δὲ φρόνησις τὰ πρὸς τοῦτον.

The passage has generated considerable controversy because it bears on an ongoing dispute about the role of reason in practical affairs. For [P2] seems to commit Aristotle to a so-called “Humean view” of practical reason, a view that most interpreters think Aristotle should or does reject.¹⁴ On a Humean view, the role of practical reason is restricted to *finding* ways to achieve the goals one already has; it plays no role, therefore, in determining the goals themselves. Thus, assuming both that the scope of operation of *phronēsis* corresponds to the scope of operation of reason, and that making the aim right consists in finding the right goal (and, correspondingly, making the things towards it right consists in finding the right means), this passage is taken to present strong evidence for thinking that Aristotle was a Humean. For the contrastive syntactic structure (ἢ μὲν . . . ἢ δὲ) suggests that the operation of *phronēsis* is restricted to the finding of means, playing no role in determining the goal, a task reserved for virtue.¹⁵ This, at any rate, has been traditionally taken to be the most straightforward interpretation of the passage, both by Humean and anti-Humean interpreters.

Unfortunately, this interpretation has been assumed by reading the passage in isolation, without paying attention to its role in the chapter as a whole.¹⁶ However, there are several reasons to think that this methodology is particularly problematic to adopt for interpreting [P2]. First of all, the meaning of the construction ‘x makes Ps right’ (ποιεῖ . . . ὀρθόν) is far from clear, leaving much room for interpretation.¹⁷ The epistemic meaning assumed in the traditional interpretation is

certainly possible, since finding the right Ps (at the deliberative stage) is one way of making (or ensuring that one makes) Ps right. But there are other possibilities that are at least as good. For instance, the claim might mean that having found which Ps are right, x makes them correct by *settling* on them as the thing to do—that is, by committing to them. Or it could be that having settled on which Ps are right, x makes Ps correct by carrying them out in a correct way. Another possibility is that x gives one an *appropriate* grasp or appreciation of Ps such that one acts guided by such an understanding. Or it might be some combination of these or any number of other possible interpretations. The passage by itself does not settle which one is correct and it would be premature to adopt one at this point.

Second, is Aristotle suggesting that the task of making the aim right (whatever this means) is *exclusive* to virtue and the task of making the things towards it right is *exclusive* to phronēsis? As noted, the syntactic structure of [P2] could suggest this, since it draws a *contrast* between the function of each state in making distinct things correct. However, one can contrast the functional tasks of two factors without assuming that these factors are exclusively involved in those tasks. Thus, to use a contemporary neurological example, consider the phrase: ‘The amygdala regulates complex emotions like fear, while the hypothalamus regulates more primal emotions like hunger’. The contrastive syntax of this English phrase is the same as that Greek one in [P2], and the two phrases are plausibly read as making analogous points. The point of the English one is that the amygdala and the hypothalamus have distinctive neurological tasks, which is fully compatible with the well-known fact that brain activity is holistic in nature, and the activities of both systems are co-dependent on each other in complex ways.¹⁸ Likewise, [P2] is compatible with the view that virtue and phronēsis are co-dependent in accomplishing their distinctive tasks.

Evidence for taking this non-exclusive reading comes from a passage a few lines below (to be examined in more detail shortly), where Aristotle writes that “virtue makes the prohairesis correct, but to make us do as many things as are for the sake of it [*viz.* the prohairesis] is the task not of virtue, but of another faculty” (1144a20-22). This passage is not only similarly phrased as [P2], but shares its syntactic structure.¹⁹ Hence, if we take this structure as sufficient to establish

that virtue is exclusively responsible for making the aim correct, by parallel reasoning we should conclude that virtue is also exclusively responsible for making the prohairesis correct. However, we know Aristotle rejects this view. After all, a prohairesis is the result of deliberation, and deliberation will not have the right result unless *both* the aim and the things towards it are correct, as Aristotle reminds us a few lines below when he writes that “there will be no correct prohairesis without phronēsis or without virtue” (1145a4-5).²⁰ Indeed, it is plausible to think that a prohairesis *is* among the things towards the aim, in which case the exclusive reading would have Aristotle adhering to inconsistent claims. Instead, I suggest we simply hold that the syntactic structure of [P2] does not entail all by itself that only virtue is relevant to having a correct goal.²¹

The central reason to be dissatisfied with the traditional reading of [P2], though, is that it is not clear how it helps to answer the puzzle about phronēsis. If the task of this virtue is to find out what are the best means to attain virtuous goals, do we not fall straight into the second horn of the dilemma? If the contribution of phronēsis is simply that of finding right means, could not someone who wanted to reap the goods of this virtue simply rely on others to tell him how to achieve his aims in the correct way?

In light of these considerations, it is surprising that the traditional interpretation of [P2] has gone largely unchallenged, and that so little attention has been paid to what else Aristotle says afterwards in the chapter.²² I shall thus proceed instead on the assumption that in [P2] Aristotle is highlighting the distinctive contributions of virtue and phronēsis, a claim compatible with the view that they are co-dependent in the performance of their tasks. Whether this hypothesis proves correct, though, is to be determined in terms of the interpretation that will emerge on its basis.

3. Virtuous Actions and Actions Done Virtuously

After a tangential remark about the virtues of the vegetative part of the soul (1144a9-11), Aristotle immediately notes that more work is needed to answer the objection about the usefulness of *phronēsis* (1144a11-20):

[P3] (a) But concerning [the worry that] a man is no more practical on account of *phronēsis* with respect to fine and just things, we must begin a little further back, taking the following as our starting point.

περὶ δὲ τοῦ μηθὲν εἶναι πρακτικωτέρους διὰ τὴν φρόνησιν τῶν καλῶν καὶ δικαίων, μικρὸν ἄνωθεν ἀρκτέον, λαβόντας ἀρχὴν ταύτην.

(b) You see, just as we call certain [actions] ‘just’, though the persons doing them are not yet just, e.g. either those who do what the laws command, or act unwillingly, or through ignorance, or for some other reason and not because of the actions themselves (though they actually do what should be done, and as many things as the excellent man does), thus, it seems, it is possible to do each thing while being in a state so as to be good. I mean, for instance, because of *prohairesis* and for the sake of the actions themselves.

ὥσπερ γὰρ καὶ τὰ δίκαια λέγομεν πράττοντάς τινας οὐπω δίκαιους εἶναι, οἷον τοὺς τὰ ὑπὸ τῶν νόμων τεταγμένα ποιῶντας ἢ ἄκοντας ἢ δι’ ἀγνοίαν ἢ δι’ ἕτερόν τι καὶ μὴ δι’ αὐτὰ (καίτοι πράττουσί γε ἃ δεῖ καὶ ὅσα χρή τὸν σπουδαῖον), οὕτως, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἔστι τὸ πῶς ἔχοντα πράττειν ἕκαστα ὥστ’ εἶναι ἀγαθόν, λέγω δ’ οἷον διὰ προαίρεσιν καὶ αὐτῶν ἕνεκα τῶν πραττομένων.

Some of the remarks in the previous section show why Aristotle needs to begin anew to answer the puzzle, since there is not an obvious understanding of [P2] that solves the dilemma in [P1]. For instance, it is possible to formulate both horns of the dilemma, even if we think *phronēsis* is concerned with determining which means one should take towards a virtuous aim: *Horn 1*: If the means are just the manifestations of having a certain virtuous disposition, then having virtue is enough to enact them, and we do not need *phronēsis*. *Horn 2*: Suppose the means are understood as the actions that might make a man happy (by turning one into a virtuous person). Then knowing what they are will not help the one who is already virtuous since he has already attained their goal,

and the non-virtuous person can simply ask another phronētic agent how he should act.
Conclusion: Possession of phronēsis is useless to everyone, both virtuous and non-virtuous alike.

The new “starting point” (ἀρχή) from which Aristotle will try to resolve the puzzle, given in (b), is a distinction between doing things that happen to be just (i.e. doing the sorts of things that just persons do), and doing those things *as* the just person does them.²³ Following Aristotle, I will use the expression ‘doing a virtuous (just/courageous/fine/etc.) action’ for the former, and ‘doing the action virtuously (justly/courageously/finely/etc.)’ for the latter.²⁴ Now, there are two ways of thinking of this distinction, depending on whether the manner of acting is itself constitutive of successful action, so that the nature of the action alters depending on the manner, or non-constitutive of it, so that the action is the same regardless of the manner of acting. To see the distinction, consider the difference between shooting a hole-in-one and speaking a language. There is, let us suppose, a right way to shoot a golf-ball so that it might land in the hole (e.g. having the right posture, using the right club, etc.). Now suppose A and B are playing golf. A does everything in the right way and hits a hole-in-one; B has never played golf, but tries to imitate A, and although he fails miserably (his posture is wrong, he picks the wrong club, he moves his head as he shoots), his ball also lands in the hole. In this example, both A and B shoot a hole in one, so their shots are as successful as can be by golf-standards. In contrast, consider the situation of a person, C, who is speaking Spanish at a bar, and someone at the next table, D, who, finding the sounds of the language amusing, imitates C. Let us suppose that D imitates C perfectly: if a Spanish speaker heard D, she would understand her as well as she would understand C. Though there is a sense in which D does everything C does, she does not *speak* the language, precisely because the sounds do not express her knowledge of it (she is, in an important sense, like a parrot). Thus, insofar as C’s aim in making certain sounds is *to speak* Spanish, D fails to accomplish this goal, which she could only do if her actions were expressive of knowledge of the language. Moreover, insofar as the aim here is precisely to act in a certain way, this is a case where C and D do a different thing. To introduce some terminology, let us say this is a case where C’s and D’s actions are only *superficially* the same.

Going back to our puzzle, we are seeking a feature that distinguishes the crafts from *phronēsis*. Aristotle's contention must be that whereas the condition of the agent is non-constitutive of producing health, it is constitutive of acting justly. Otherwise, it is hard to see how the distinction between virtuous actions and actions done virtuously could help: if the manner in which the action is done does not alter the nature of the actions, then it will always be possible for a non-*phronimos* to do the same things as the *phronimos*. Hence, the difference Aristotle has in mind between the person who does the right things in the right way and, say, the one who does these things following the law, corresponds to the difference between the person who speaks the language and the one who merely makes the same sounds without actually speaking, actions that are only superficially the same.

What Aristotle needs to show is that someone lacking *phronēsis* can at most act superficially like the virtuous person. But this is where the difficulty lies. Why should we think that *phronēsis* relates to virtuous action in this way? So far in Book VI, *phronēsis* has been characterized as the knowledge that enables an agent *to find*, by deliberating, the things that she should do to accomplish the aims that virtue supplies. The *phronimos*, Aristotle says, “seems to be the one capable of deliberating well about things that are good and useful for himself . . . with respect to such things relating to life as a whole” (1140a25-8).²⁵ Later, Aristotle says that the function of the *phronimos* is “most of all to deliberate well” (1141b9-10). But apart from the question of scope, how is this any different from the case of medicine and health? The good doctor, presumably, is the one who can deliberate well with respect to health. Of course, Aristotle could just say that *phronēsis* differs from medicine precisely in this respect, that whereas an action counts as a successful production of health regardless of the manner of production, it will not count as virtuous unless it is done with the knowledge that *phronēsis* provides; but this seems like an *ad hoc* stipulation that should not satisfy anyone puzzled by the initial dilemma. In order to make the claim credible Aristotle needs to show *how* the relationship between knowledge and action differs in these two cases. This, I believe, is why Aristotle presents the point about superficial sameness

as only a starting point: that *phronēsis* is more like knowledge of a language than golfing or medicine is not to be assumed but to be *shown*.

At the end of [P3] Aristotle identifies two features that distinguish acting virtuously from doing virtuous actions. These are (1) doing the actions “because of *prohairesis*”, and (2) doing them for the sake of themselves. The two features are presented as examples, so it is unclear at this point whether Aristotle’s response is meant to depend on them, or whether he is simply illustrating the kinds of conditions of the agent that might be taken to bear on his actions. Condition (1) is presumably meant to rule out cases where one acts by coercion or ignorance, but its positive meaning remains unclear at this point.²⁶ Condition (2) is more illuminating because it recalls Aristotle’s discussion of the difference between action and production earlier in the book, where he says that productions are done for the sake of something else, whereas the goal of actions is precisely to act well (1129b1-4). Focusing on this point seems like a promising avenue to resolve the dilemma, potentially yielding a disanalogy between medicine and *phronesis* and their relation to their constitutive aims; but to take advantage of the contention, Aristotle would need to establish a connection between *phronēsis* and the ability to do virtuous actions for themselves. Why cannot the non-virtuous agent meet this condition simply by asking the *phronimos* what he should do, if he really wants to act virtuously but simply does not know what virtue requires at the time? After all, it seems possible to pursue health for its own sake, even if we need to ask the doctor how exactly to attain it.

4. For the Sake of the Prohairesis

These difficulties show that to answer the puzzle about the usefulness of *phronēsis* we need to enrich our conception of it in a way that makes it clear why acting virtuously (as opposed to merely doing a virtuous action) requires its possession. Aristotle begins to enrich the notion in the passage immediately following [P3] (1144a20-1):

[P4] Hence, virtue makes the prohairesis correct, but to do as many things as are naturally for the sake of it [viz. the prohairesis] is the task of another power.

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

We have already seen that we need not take the claim that virtue makes the prohairesis correct to mean that virtue is *solely responsible* for having a correct prohairesis; it might just highlight the distinctive contribution that different powers make in the life of a virtuous person. To understand the nature of this distinctive contribution we need to ask: what could it mean to act “for the sake of the prohairesis”?

The question is difficult because, like other psychological terms, ‘prohairesis’ is ambiguous: it can refer to either (a) a state or (b) the content of that state.²⁷ Thus, if I decide to throw the cargo overboard in order to survive a storm, my prohairesis might be (a) my *decision* to throw out the cargo for the sake of survival, or (b) throwing out the cargo for the sake of survival (understood as the content of the decision (perhaps a potential action) with its characteristic success-conditions).²⁸ In either sense, it is easy to make sense of how a prohairesis itself might be for the sake of a certain goal: the decision (or at least the forming of it) and the throwing out of the cargo are for the sake of survival. To my knowledge, though, [P4] is unique in taking the prohairesis itself as something *for the sake of which other things are done*.²⁹ But what could this mean? If a prohairesis is simply a decision to do something in the agent’s power, like throwing out the cargo, all that is seemingly left to do is to carry *it* out—in the example, to actually throw out the cargo—rather than to do something else for the sake of *it*. Indeed, Aristotle explicitly says that prohairesis is *not* the final cause of action (1139a31-2). In light of this, some scholars propose a non-literal reading where ‘prohairesis’ serves as proxy for *the goal* of the prohairesis; thus interpreted, the claim is that virtue makes *the goal* of the prohairesis right.³⁰ If that’s Aristotle’s point, however, he could have made it more clearly by avoiding the term ‘prohairesis’ altogether—in fact, he *does* make this point more clearly earlier on, for on this reading [P4] would be essentially

a restatement of [P2]. On this non-literal proposal, then, rather than pursuing the inquiry “from a new starting point” (1144a12-13), Aristotle is going in circles!³¹

Against this, I want to suggest an alternative interpretation that makes literal sense of the passage, and makes it play a crucial role in the advancement of the argument. To do so, it will help to have a particular case in mind, one falling under the scope of Aristotle’s virtue of generosity that also highlights the dependency of this virtue upon others, like tactfulness. Thus, suppose a woman knows that her brother’s family is going through financial difficulties after both he and his wife have been out of jobs for several months: interests on their loans are starting to accrue, and it is becoming harder and harder for them to meet ends and support their kids, who are still in school. The woman’s brother is stubborn and proud, and she therefore knows he will likely refuse help. But she is in a position to help and knows that things are likely to get worse, so after deliberating over several weeks, she decides to offer him financial assistance. At this point, I take it, the woman has formed an Aristotelian prohairesis: she has brought the matter up to a point where she can begin acting (by heading over to her brother’s house, say), and has thus brought the “origin” of action back to herself (*NE* 1113a4-6).

In taking the decision to offer help as her prohairesis, I am assuming that what is in the agent’s power is relative to knowledge and ability, allowing that it might have a certain form of generality and indeterminacy. Thus, in this case, the woman might not have worked out in much detail how she will make the offer: she has not worked out, for instance, whether she will make the offer without preamble, or whether she will first ‘feel her brother out’, or what particular words she will use to make the offer. In fact, it is hard to see how she could have reached such determinacy while acting well, since presumably how she should approach the situation will depend on her brother’s reactions to how she acts. As Aristotle is well aware, we cannot always reach maximal specificity in our decisions, and must often rely on our skills and abilities to carry us through.³²

Taking ‘prohairesis’ in its content sense, an example like this one makes clear the otherwise puzzling phrase, ‘the things for the sake of the prohairesis’. This phrase refers to the things that

the person needs to do *in order to execute her decision*. It is true that once the decision is made, the agent simply needs to act; but the ‘simply’ is misleading, as there are innumerable ways to carry out a decision. How should the sister make her offer? Are there particular words that she should avoid? Should she ask her brother directly at home, or would it be better to ask him out for lunch first? The correct answer to these questions presumably depends on the particularities of the case, such as his reaction when she brings up the topic, or the forcefulness of his initial refusal. Suppose, then, that in addition to being generous, the woman is practically wise and sensible about these matters, and that after briefly talking to her brother at home, she realizes it would be better to take him out to lunch to soften him to the idea of accepting assistance. This description fits the structure we are seeking to elucidate: the woman invites her brother out to lunch in order to (ἐνεκα) offer financial assistance (her prohairesis).

Suppose this interpretation is correct: How does it help to show that having phronēsis is useful? In my view, it helps because it shows that the picture about the relationship between the deliberative stage and the executive stage that leads to the puzzle is overly simplistic. It is overly simplistic in two ways. The first has to do with *the content* of practical deliverances: whereas we have been assuming that these are like easy-to-follow instructions in a manual, the example of the generous sister shows that they are often indeterminate and general in nature, and a particular sort of situational awareness is needed to carry them out properly.³³ The second difference has to do with the delimitation of reason’s involvement in the process: whereas we have been assuming that reason is involved only at the deliberative stage (at the stage of *finding out* what to do), the example of the sister shows that reason might also have a role to play at the executive stage (the stage of *carrying out* what one decides to do). As we shall see, Aristotle will exploit these points to present a solution.

5. Cunning and the Executive Aspect of Phronēsis

[P4] closes with the contention that a different power from virtue is responsible for *doing* things toward the prohairesis. If the interpretation presented so far is correct, this means that the power whose characteristic task is to execute the decision is not virtue, but something else. To make it “clearer” (σαφέστερον) what this power is, Aristotle immediately turns his attention to cunning [δεινότης] (1144a23-1144b1):³⁴

[P5] (a) There is, then, a power that people call ‘cunning’. And this is the sort of thing that enables us to carry out and hit upon the things directed towards an assumed aim.
ἔστι δὴ δύναμις ἣν καλοῦσι δεινότητα· αὕτη δ’ ἐστὶ τοιαύτη ὥστε τὰ πρὸς τὸν ὑποτεθέντα σκοπὸν συντείνοντα δύνασθαι ταῦτα πράττειν καὶ τυγχάνειν αὐτῶν.³⁵

(b) Hence, if the aim is of a fine sort, it [cunning] will be praiseworthy, but if it is of a vicious sort, it will be mere knavery. This is why we call practically wise men ‘shrewd’ and ‘knaves’. But phronēsis is not [this] power, but it is not without this power.

ἂν μὲν οὖν ὁ σκοπὸς ἦ καλός, ἐπαινετὴ ἐστίν, ἐὰν δὲ φαῦλος, πανουργία· διὸ καὶ τοὺς φρονίμους δεινοὺς καὶ πανούργους φαμὲν εἶναι. ἔστι δ’ ἡ φρόνησις οὐχ ἡ δύναμις, ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἄνευ τῆς δυνάμεως ταύτης.

(c) And the state [of phronēsis] does not arise in this eye of the soul without virtue, as was said, and is also clear. For the inferences that contain a principle of actions are:³⁶ ‘Since this is the end and the good’—whatever that might be (let it be what you want for the sake of argument)—and *this*³⁷ is not apparent except to the good person. You see, evil perverts and makes us be deceived about the origins of action. Clearly, therefore, it is impossible to be a phronimos without being good.

ἡ δ’ ἕξις τῷ ὄμματι τούτῳ γίνεται τῆς ψυχῆς οὐκ ἄνευ ἀρετῆς, ὡς εἴρηται τε καὶ ἔστι δῆλον· οἱ γὰρ συλλογισμοὶ τῶν πρακτῶν ἀρχὴν ἔχοντές εἰσιν, ἐπειδὴ τοιόνδε τὸ τέλος καὶ τὸ ἄριστον, ὁτιδήποτε ὄν (ἔστω γὰρ λόγου χάριν τὸ τυχόν)· τοῦτο δ’ εἰ μὴ τῷ ἀγαθῷ, οὐ φαίνεται· διαστρέφει γὰρ ἡ μοχθηρία καὶ διαψεύδεται ποιεῖ περὶ τὰς πρακτικὰς ἀρχάς· ὥστε φανερόν ὅτι ἀδύνατον φρόνιμον εἶναι μὴ ὄντα ἀγαθόν.

At the time of Aristotle’s writing, ‘δεινότης’ was not a flattering term, commonly used to describe people who achieve their ends through deceptive means.³⁸ ‘Cunning’ can have similar connotations in English, which is why I prefer it to Ross’s ‘cleverness’. Nevertheless, it is clear

from (a) and (b) that Aristotle either does not think the negative connotations are essential to the concept, or else wants to get rid of them for philosophical purposes. Cunning for him is the power that enables us to do (πράττειν) what we have set ourselves as an aim (by forming a prohairesis, presumably). As such, the term's meaning is value-neutral. Whether cunning is good or bad on his usage depends on the nature of the goal, and Aristotle reserves 'πανουργία' to refer to the negative form of δεινότης.

Aristotle's focus on cunning supports the hypothesis that his response to the objection is to be found in the way in which phronēsis relates to the executive stage of agency (as opposed to just the deliberative stage), since cunning is introduced from the very start as an executive power (ἐστὶ τοιαύτη ὥστε . . . ταῦτα πράττειν). Now, in this passage Aristotle also says that cunning enables us to "hit upon" (τυγχάνειν) the means to our aim. The order of presentation makes it clear that this is not to be understood epistemically (as *finding* the means to our end); instead, the τυγχάνειν implies success: cunning allows us to actually achieve what we set to achieve by our actions. The focus on acting and success in [P5] further supports the view that at this point Aristotle's strategy for answering the puzzle depends on features about the executive, rather than the deliberative stage of agency.

How, then, does the focus on cunning and this executive stage help to answer the puzzle about the usefulness of phronēsis? It might be suggested that the puzzle about the usefulness of phronēsis depends on the view that the decisions we reach as a result of deliberation are like a set of instructions that the agent must simply follow in order to act well, where following them is a straightforward matter. For instance, the doctor might decide that to get better I need to take a certain pill, an instruction that basically anyone (including me) can follow, even while lacking any relevant medical knowledge. The example of the generous sister, however, shows the inadequacy of this as a general model for advice about how to act, since carrying out a decision is not always easy, and often requires the agent to possess skills that many lack. For instance, imagine that she instructed someone in a similar situation to offer financial assistance (this instruction has the same content as her stipulated decision). Such an instruction would be of little help to someone who

cannot determine *how she should execute that instruction*. If this is right, however, it seems we can disarm the dilemma, since the instructions of the phronimos require a situational awareness that only a phronimos possesses, and we can thus deny that we could reap the rewards of phronēsis simply by relying on others as we do in the medical sphere.

At first sight, this seems like a strong response to the objection, one that relies on Aristotle's well-known view that the practically wise person has a distinctive kind of situational awareness.³⁹ However, I believe this is not the feature that Aristotle's solution hinges on, and that there are good reasons for this. First of all, this does not seem to differentiate phronēsis from crafts like medicine. Just consider the case where the doctor judges that an appendectomy is needed: here, medical knowledge is also needed *to carry out* the decision. More importantly, we saw how a successful solution to the problem should show a way in which the doing of just actions is different from the production of health in a particular way, namely by the way in which the state of the agent and the manner of the performance relates to the performance. Suppose that by luck the advisee consistently carried out correctly the instructions given to him by the practically wise sister: nothing in the current response tells us why this should not count as acting virtuously. We should therefore reject the notion that Aristotle's reply depends solely on the circumstantial awareness characteristic of phronēsis.

To develop an alternative response, we need to delve deeper into some of the details of [P5]. We can start with the language Aristotle uses in (a) to describe what the cunning person does and hits upon. He calls these "the things directed towards an assumed aim" (τὰ πρὸς τὸν ὑποτεθέντα σκοπὸν συντείνοντα), a phrase that is clearly meant to remind us of the descriptions he uses to refer to the subject matter of deliberation.⁴⁰ Now, the person who deliberates does not simply find things that *happen to be such* as to lead to the aim he assumes. Rather, he deliberates about and chooses them precisely *as* the kinds of things that might bring about this aim. Indeed, this grasp of means *as means* is definitive of the activity of deliberation. By using the same language to describe not the activity of deliberation but of execution, I take Aristotle to be

suggesting that corresponding to this notion of seeing and choosing *as*, there is the notion of *doing as*. This contention, I shall argue, holds the key to Aristotle's solution to the puzzle.⁴¹

On the present suggestion, the cunning person does not simply do what happens to lead to his aim, but rather *does this as* what will accomplish it. We can elucidate what this means by first considering what it is to desire something as a means to something. Consider these four cases:

- (i) A sick person wants to take a pill for some reason or other, and this pill will, as it happens, cure her disease, but the fact that it will do so is accidental to her desire.
- (ii) A sick person wants to take the pill that will cure her disease because the doctor told her to take it, but this is only because she is afraid of the doctor (the patient does not even want to get better).
- (iii) A sick person wants to take a pill that will cure her disease given that the doctor told her this will make her better, and she wants to do so.
- (iv) A doctor wants to take the pill that will cure her disease because she recognizes what it is about the pill that will cure her disease.

Evidently, the person in case (i) does not want to take the pill as a means to attaining health since she does not even know it will make her healthy. And though the person in case (ii) might have such an understanding, she desires the pill for the sake of something other than health. On the other hand, the person in case (iii) clearly knows that the drug will cure her (since the doctor has told her so) and can thus be correctly described as wanting to take the pill *in order to get healthy*. Yet, her knowledge does not match the doctor's in case (iv), since the doctor is someone who knows *what it is* about taking the pill that will result in health, so that her desires are, as we might put it, the expressions of her knowledge. To distinguish the two cases, let us say that the person in case (iii) desires what she desires "according to" health, whereas the person's desires in case (iv) are "guided by" health. By focusing on cunning and using the 'τὰ πρὸς . . .' construction to describe the actions of the cunning person, Aristotle encourages us to think that the distinctions we have drawn at the level of desires can also be drawn directly at the level of action: actions too, can lead to a desired result out of luck (as in (i)), as a result of sensitivity to features other than the ones that

make them choiceworthy (as in (ii) or (iii)), or can, like desires, themselves be expressions of knowledge (as in (iv)).⁴² As one can desire to take a pill for the sake of health, one can take the pill for the sake of health, in a way that is either guided by health or merely done according to it. The cunning person, on this view, is the one who is generally able to act *guided by her assumed aims*, and in a way that generally leads to success in action.

It is with this in mind that we should understand passage (b): cunning is praiseworthy when the person's actions are *guided by* a good aim, but where the aim guiding action is evil, cunning becomes mere knavery. Thus, when Aristotle says that *phronēsis* is not without cunning, he means that *phronēsis* requires the ability to act *guided by* a good aim. Aristotle is quick to remind us, though, that *phronēsis* is not identical to cunning. The most obvious reason is that cunning is value-neutral (having an extension that encompasses both *phronēsis* and *πανουργία*) whereas *phronēsis* is a virtue. Moreover, cunning is restricted to the executive stage of action, whereas the scope of *phronēsis* includes the deliberative stage as well. *Phronēsis*, on this view, is the virtue that enables our reason-involving activities to be guided by a good aim, whether at the level of deliberation, where the *phronimos grasps and chooses* guided by a good aim, or at the level of execution, where he *carries out* his *prohairesis* guided by such an aim.⁴³

In fact, (c) makes it clear that there are deeper differences between *phronēsis* and cunning, throwing light on the nature of the former. As noted, being guided by a good aim in one's actions requires one to grasp the aim with the same understanding as a deliberator who sees what is valuable in such an aim, and for one's action to be dependent on such a grasp in the way that the deliberator's deliverances are. Aristotle goes on to note that the aim is *apparent* (*φαίνεται*) only to the virtuous person (and, so, only to the *phronimos*), and not to the vicious. Now, the way in which the aim is so apparent must be a special one, for Aristotle holds that even in the weak agent (so presumably also in the self-controlled one) the first principle of action is preserved (1125a25-6).⁴⁴ Therefore, though agents who lack *phronēsis* can have a good aim, the *phronimos* has it in a distinctive way not available to others, one that would result in a similarly distinctive form of execution.

This point helps to address a potential problem for the understanding of cunning as executive excellence that I have been defending. The problem is that this understanding of cunning seems to be in tension with Aristotle's claim that, unlike *phronēsis*, cunning is compatible with *akrasia* (1152a10).⁴⁵ For suppose S forms a correct *prohairesis*, P, and that S is cunning. Given the present understanding of cunning as executive excellence, it seems as though S would have to successfully execute P. If *akrasia* consists in failure to execute one's decision, then the cunning person could not be *akratic*, contrary to what Aristotle explicitly says.

My response is that, though cunning does rule out certain forms of irrationality (irrationality *in* execution of a decision), it is compatible with *akrasia*, understood as above, because there are other reasons that may account for a failure *to* execute one's decision. In fact, there are two alternative ways of explaining how this might happen. One alternative appeals to the feature just noted, that the virtuous/*phronimos* person relates to the goal in a different way than the person who is merely cunning. This special relation plausibly includes steadfastness with respect to that end: the *phronimos* is one who doesn't give up on his virtuous goals easily. Hence, the *phronimos* not only (i) executes his decisions well, but also (ii) holds them well, steadfastly, ensuring that he executes the decisions he forms. The non-*phronimos*, on the other hand, might act *akratically* because he forms decisions that he gives up too easily. Yet, he could still be cunning because he could have the ability to execute his decisions excellently, in a properly guided way, *provided he sticks to them*.

Another, compatible, way of explaining how a cunning person can be *akratic* appeals to a distinction between the aims set by the *akratic's* decisions (e.g. *to not sleep with another's wife*), and the aims set by his arational inclinations (e.g. *to sleep with her*). Such a distinction might be implicit in the language of τὸν ὑποτεθέντα σκοπὸν in (b), which calls to mind the language that Aristotle uses to describe the aims of the weak person in his discussion of deliberation: προτίθεται ἰδεῖν ἐκ τοῦ λογισμοῦ τεύξεται (1142b18-9).⁴⁶ Aristotle might through this language wish to indicate that cunning does not require an aim set specifically by a decision. On this view, the kind of execution that cunning makes excellent is a broader category than the kind of execution that

phronēsis makes excellent, because the former, but not the latter includes execution of aims set by states other than decisions. Thus, the cunning person can be akratic by failing to execute his decision (*not sleep with another's wife*), but manifest cunning in executing his contrary aim (*sleep with her*), which the phronimos, of course, wouldn't do.⁴⁷

Returning to (c), the passage includes a description of the structure of practical thought, which goes: *this—some particular action—is a good thing to do*.⁴⁸ This structure, where a particular action is identified as the thing to do in light of more general considerations, highlights the importance of distinguishing between what Sarah Broadie calls a “guiding end”—an end specified in such a way as to guide action (e.g., *offer financial help to my brother; take x dose of penicillin*)—and what she calls a “defining end”—an end definitive of a kind of activity, but too general to serve an action-guiding role (e.g., *one should act generously; promote health*).⁴⁹ Correspondingly, there are two importantly different ways in which an agent might be said to have a good aim, and, so, two ways one might be guided by a good aim. The two ways are:

(A) The agent has the right guiding end (e.g. *help my brother*), but has this on the basis of the wrong defining end (e.g. *avoid public censure*).

(B) The agent has the right guiding end (e.g. *help my brother*), held in light of the right defining end (e.g. reasons of generosity: *he really needs it*).

A cunning person who lacks phronēsis can act guided by a good aim in sense (A), since she can have the correct defining end. For instance, she can offer help in a way that is correctly sensitive to features that allow her to avoid public censure. However, only the person who arrives at the right decision in light of the correct defining end can act guided by the features that make that end a *fine* one, one worth choosing for itself. Since this kind of grasp is available only to the virtuous person, it will be impossible to have phronēsis without having virtue. This is the left-to-right direction of VPB that Aristotle states in (c), the point of which we are now in a position to appreciate: it shows why even cunning of a general sort plus a correct guiding end does not amount to phronēsis, since one can have the correct guiding end but act guided by features that are not virtuous, as in (A).⁵⁰

The crucial point, then, is that the power to be guided in this way by a given goal is the same for both deliberation and execution, so that it would be impossible for someone to act guided by an aim without being able to deliberate guided by that aim. It is because the generous sister in our example acts guided by the right aim in sense (B) (having both the correct guiding and defining end), that she not only performs a virtuous action in offering help, but does so virtuously. Such guidance is possible only given her special grasp of the defining end, not attainable even to one who has general cunning but lacks *phronēsis*.

I have also characterized the notion of being guided by an aim in terms of its being expressive of knowledge, so that acting virtuously turns out to be an *epistemic* achievement. This is central to my interpretation of the chapter, so let me explain what this claim amounts to in more detail.

Begin with the familiar Aristotelian contention that to have theoretical knowledge (*episteme*) of a certain phenomenon is to grasp its explanation (*aitia*), where it is not enough for grasping an explanation of *x* to know that *y* explains *x* (even if it does). Rather, one must grasp *x* and *y* in the right way so that the explanatory connection between them is clear, a connection that becomes most apparent when the knowledge is expressed in a demonstrative syllogism that shows how the occurrence of *x* simply follows from the definition of *y*. Aristotle, I am assuming, introduces the syllogistic language in [P5] precisely to highlight that the same structure is present in the practical case, since an episode of successful reasoning about what to do is also characterizable in a way that shows how what is done is explained by the features that guide the agent's deliberation.⁵¹

On the other hand, there is a crucial difference between the practical knowledge expressed by virtuous action and the theoretical knowledge expressed by grasp of a demonstration: whereas in the theoretical case the explanatory connection exists independently of what the agent thinks or does (so that all the person needs to do is *grasp* it), in the practical case the connection is secured by the agent's *acting* on the relevant considerations. The present suggestion is that just as in the theoretical case the person must do more than grasp the terms of the syllogism to acquire

knowledge (she must properly connect them), in the practical case the agent must link her action to the goal in the right way, acting in a way that is guided by that goal. Only then will the action be explained by the appropriate features of her virtuous aims. On this way of thinking, the agent's knowledge guides her actions in a parallel way as the teacher's knowledge guides the learning activity of her student.⁵² The teacher knows a phenomenon (the ὅτι) in terms of its causes (διότι), and uses this knowledge to guide the student's learning so that the latter also goes from merely knowing the phenomenon to grasping it in terms of its causes. Just so, at the stage of deliberation, the virtuous agent knows what she should do by grasping her possible courses of action in terms of its fine features, and expresses this knowledge by guiding her actions so that they are expressive of (and graspable in terms of) the fine. This is what being guided by the fine consists in.

Evidently, whether it is valuable to have the power to act in a way that is expressive of one's knowledge of the fine depends on whether acting in this way is itself valuable. In the case of medicine, where the goal is the production of health, *how* one acts is irrelevant: everyone in cases (i)-(iv) above produces health, so they all achieve equally well the goal of medicine (producing health). By contrast, Aristotle has already drawn attention to the fact that we do not just want to do what's virtuous, but rather to act virtuously. His strategy in the chapter is to show that acting virtuously requires *phronēsis*, because to act thus, one must be guided by a virtuous aim, in the sense I've endeavoured to explain. Indeed, recall that in [P3] Aristotle identifies two conditions for an action to be done virtuously, namely (a) that the person does it on account of *prohairesis* (διὰ προαίρεσιν) and (b) that she does it for its own sake (αὐτῶν ἕνεκα τῶν πραττομένων). In our initial discussion of the passage, it was unclear how these two conditions could help to show that having *phronēsis* was necessary to act in the proper way (or whether they were intended to do so). But now, armed with our understanding of what *phronēsis* contributes to the executive stage of agency, it is easy to see why Aristotle calls attention to these conditions in particular. For Aristotle might hold that an agent must act in a way guided by a good aim (as opposed to e.g. out of fear) to count as acting "on account of *prohairesis*", as in (a): only then will the aim of her *prohairesis* be truly explanatory of her actions. Moreover, Aristotle may have

thought that in order to do an action for its own sake one needs to do it *as* a virtuous action, which, on the present interpretation, would require her to do it guided by her virtuous aim.⁵³ Although this interpretation of the two conditions is not crucial to my reading, I take it as a further point in its favor that it can show how they might have a role to play in the argument.

We now have all the pieces needed to solve the puzzle about the usefulness of *phronēsis*. This puzzle took the shape of a dilemma: either *phronēsis* gives us knowledge of what actions the virtuous person performs, in which case we should be seeking ethical virtue rather than *phronēsis*, or it gives us knowledge of the things that might make one virtuous, in which case we might do equally well by simply asking someone else for instruction. Both horns rely on the assumption that one can reap the rewards of ethical virtue while lacking *phronēsis*. This would be the case if acting virtuously was like producing health, where one can produce the good product (health) without possessing the craft, which is why we can rely on doctors to tell us what to do to get better. Aristotle's central contention is that acting virtuously *is not* like producing health: If someone performs virtuous actions without having *phronēsis*, or if they do so out of fear for the laws, then, insofar as neither of them acts in a way that expresses grasp of the fine, neither one does these actions *as* virtuous, so neither of them acts virtuously. Such a person would be like the one who utters sounds that happen to have some meaning, without speaking the language. This interpretation is in line with our initial hypothesis that Aristotle's reply would depend on identifying a feature that would distinguish *phronēsis* from crafts like medicine by showing how acting *phronētic*ally is more like speaking a language than shooting a hole-in-one. For this reason, this reading meets the interpretative constraint from section 1, since it shows that the relation between *phronēsis* and virtuous actions is qualitatively different from the way medicine relates to health: whereas *phronēsis* is a precondition to acting virtuously, it is possible to obtain health with no knowledge of medicine whatsoever.

6. The Mental and the Biological

This concludes my reading of chapter 12. I have tried to show that in it Aristotle presents a unified response to the puzzle with which the chapter starts, one deserving of as much attention as the one he offers in chapter 13. This is a good place to briefly summarize the interpretation I have provided. I began with the claim that the set-up of the puzzle in [P1] suggests that Aristotle's solution will depend on elucidating the special way in which virtuous actions are dependent on the way in which the actions are carried out, a claim that was corroborated by [P3]. Aristotle begins to explain this difference in [P4] by switching his focus to the executive stage of agency. In [P5], Aristotle therefore focuses on cunning, which is the ability to successfully execute one's decisions, though in a way that is not necessarily guided by a virtuous aim in the way required for virtuous action. To be guided in this latter way, Aristotle suggests, we need to have the grasp of the fine that the *phronimos* displays in deliberation: *phronēsis* is required both to choose an action as fine, and to execute it as such. Since choosing and executing of this sort are expressive of the agent's knowledge of the fine, the execution of action is itself characterized as (at least partly) an epistemic accomplishment; and since only the practically wise have such knowledge, this view makes it clear why it is useful to possess *phronēsis*.

I now want to return to the issues raised by [P2], the controversial passage that has traditionally been taken to support a Humean interpretation. On the reading I have been defending, *phronēsis* is the virtue, or perfection, of deliberation *and* execution: the practically wise person both deliberates well about how to act, and executes her actions well, guided by her grasp of the fine. Yet, these are not tasks that *phronēsis* carries out on its own, since grasp of the fine requires virtue of character. Hence, *phronēsis* is dependent on virtue to deliberate and execute actions well. In chapter 13, Aristotle suggests that virtue proper (*κωρίως*), understood as the perfection of natural virtue (1144b1-4), is analogously dependent on *phronēsis*: as mere strength requires environmental awareness to produce intelligent movement, so does virtue require *phronēsis* to manifest in virtuous activity (1444b9-14). This is why virtue proper cannot exist without *phronēsis* (1144b16;

1144b30-32), and why virtue proper is a logos-involving state (1144b30). Thus, the natural orientations towards certain goods that (at least some) humans have from infancy, needs to be properly *specified* by the grasp of what should be done in the given circumstances. Only then will the person have a virtuous aim to act on. To make such specifications one must properly grasp (in a way suitable for deliberation in the sense outlined in the paper) all the relevant factors at play in a given situation. Hence, the specification of aims for action is in the virtuous person the joint task of virtue and reason, though virtue has a special task here, insofar as it constitutes the perfection of what otherwise would be just natural virtue (just as execution and deliberation are the task of phronēsis, since this is the perfection of what would otherwise be mere cunning).

In light of virtue's dependency on phronēsis for the specification of goals, it should be evident that interpreting Aristotle as holding a Humean view about practical reason is overly simplistic. For the core claim of a Humean view is that reason's role in practical matters is limited to the activity of discovering means. What has emerged, though, is that inasmuch as it is virtue proper that sets the aims of the virtuous person, reason is also involved in setting aims (since setting virtuous aims for action is the joint task of virtue and phronēsis).

There is, however, an even more fundamental reason to resist a Humean interpretation of Aristotle's views; indeed, reason to think that trying to place him on one or another side of the debate about Humeanism is fundamentally misguided. To see this, it will be helpful to turn our attention to the passage at the end of chapter 13 that reiterates, with new language, the claim in [P2] (1145a5-6):

You see, [virtue] makes the goal [correct], whereas [phronēsis] makes us do the things towards the aim [in a correct way].⁵⁴ [ἡ μὲν γὰρ τὸ τέλος ἡ δὲ τὰ πρὸς τὸ τέλος ποιῆι πράττειν.]

The most salient difference between this passage and [P2] is the characterization of the role of phronēsis. Whereas [P2] states simply that phronēsis makes the things towards the aim correct, the present passage is more precise about how phronēsis accomplishes this task: it does so by actually *carrying out* [πράττειν] the appropriate means.⁵⁵ This contention is not surprising given my

interpretation of chapter 12, where *phronēsis* is involved not just in deliberation but also in execution.

I want to close by highlighting just how different this view is from Hume's, and, indeed, any philosopher working under a Cartesian picture of the mind.⁵⁶ On such a picture, there is a fundamental distinction between the mental, understood as what occurs in our minds (or our brains in the contemporary internalist incarnations of the view), and the worldly, understood as everything else that is publicly and objectively available. To the first category belong things like perceptions, memories, desires, emotions, and such; to the second category belong, above all, empirically observable occurrences, events like the fall of the Berlin Wall, and 'external' objects like the wax I am holding. Crucially, the operation of reason is restricted to the sphere of the mental: whatever effect reason has on the world must therefore be indirect. Hence, given that actions are paradigmatic examples of things that are publicly available, it would seem obvious that we should place them among the worldly, in which case reason operates on our actions only indirectly, as with everything else in that category. The other option would be to place them in the category of the mental, either by identifying actions with some sort of mental occurrence like acts of will or tryings (as in Jennifer Hornsby, *Actions*, 1980), or by expanding the notion of the mental to include events that occur not just in our brains, but everywhere in our bodies. However we choose to draw the line—and the limits of our bodies will be the outermost limit—our actions will stop there: as Donald Davidson famously put it, "the rest is up to nature" ("Agency", 59).

The debate between Hume and his opponents about the role of reason in practical matters occurs wholly within the confines of this picture. Reason, it is assumed, can directly affect only 'mental occurrences'. All are agreed that reason can identify means, but it is disputed whether it can also identify ends: the Humean contests that all ultimate desires are arational, whereas the anti-Humean claims that reason can identify certain goals and motivate us on such basis alone. What I am now suggesting is that the enterprise of trying to place Aristotle's view within the confines of this debate is misguided, since he rejects the picture underlying it. In place of a mental vs. worldly division, Aristotle has a living vs. non-living division. To the latter belong things like the falling

of rocks or the risings of fire, and generally any process that does not have an origin in soul (ψυχή); to the former belong all organic operations, from nutrition and respiration to memory and complex cognition.⁵⁷ On this picture, actions fall squarely into the category of living activities (which is why the topic receives extensive attention in the *De Anima*). Aristotle would therefore think that *both* the Humean and the anti-Humean fall short of properly grasping reason's practical role: on both views the role of reason is indirect, mediated through beliefs and desires, whereas on Aristotle's view action itself is as an exercise of reason *alongside* such states. The skillful repair of a watch by a clockmaker, or a generous offer to help, belong for Aristotle to the same categories as complex mathematical reasoning, perception, and deliberation.⁵⁸

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¹ Anthony Kenny, *Aristotle's Will*, 103, divides Aristotle's response to the puzzle in two parts, each arguing for one direction of VPB: "the first half of the proof [that *phronēsis* is useful] . . . is the proof that wisdom is impossible without virtue . . . The second half of the proof establishes that real virtue is impossible without wisdom". But Kenny does not explain how the first "proof" helps with the puzzle.

² Apart from the commentators on the text, there are two notable exceptions to this. The first is Jean-Louis Poirier, "Socrate", which showcases Aristotle's engagement with Platonic themes in chapter 12, though without going into details about the argumentative structure. The second is the illuminating discussion in Gabriel Richardson Lear, *Happy Lives*, 113-22. Unfortunately, from the very start Lear explicitly sets out "to avoid the thorny issues surrounding what role in particular Aristotle intends *phronēsis* to play in practical virtue and what its connection to cleverness (*deinotēta*) and discovering the means to an end is meant to be" (116). As we shall see, though, Aristotle's response to the puzzle depends on precisely these issues. Like other interpreters, Lear argues that the solution to the puzzle depends on the claim expressed by the right-to-left direction of VPB (119) without explaining the role of chapter 12.

³ My methodology is modelled after Martin Pickavé and Jennifer Whiting, "Akratic Ignorance".

⁴ An additional advantage of this methodology to study chapters in the common books is that it avoids the thorny question of which treatise these books belong to. For the classic treatment of this issue, see Kenny, *Aristotelian Ethics*.

⁵ For instance, Sarah Broadie, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 382, devotes only a line of commentary to the point, noting that Aristotle’s focus has shifted from the deliberative to the executive stage of action. David Charles, *Aristotle Action*, 140-1, offers a more helpful and extensive treatment of the topic in the context of showing that cunning is not involved in further deliberation about the means after a prohairesis has been reached, but he does not explain how this shift helps with the puzzle in 5.12/6.12.

⁶ Translations of the *NE* are my own and based on Bywater’s OCT edition (with noted divergences). All other translations are from Jonathan Barnes, *Complete Works*.

Some terms I shall often leave untranslated, since the nature of their referents will be part of the investigation. They are: ‘phronēsis’ (φρόνησις): ‘prudence’ (Irwin), or, as I prefer, ‘practical wisdom’ (Ross); and ‘prohairesis’ (προαίρεσις): ‘choice’ (Ross), ‘preferential choice’ (Irwin), or, as I prefer, ‘decision’; finally, I follow Jessica Moss’s literal ‘things toward . . .’ for ‘τὰ πρὸς . . .’ constructions that are usually translated as ‘means’. See Moss, *Apparent Good*; “Virtue, Goal Right” . Subsequent references will be to the chapter in the book.

⁷ Reading a comma with Susemihl and Rowe instead of Bywater’s semicolon.

⁸ Reading the τοῦτο at line 20 as picking up ἐξ ὧν ἔσται εὐδαίμων ἄνθρωπος.

⁹ *Top.* 106b29-107a2 makes a similar point.

¹⁰ I take ‘practical’ here and elsewhere to mean the same as ‘useful’ above.

¹¹ The verb at 1144a5 is plural, so the response starting with ἔπειτα must apply to both phronēsis and theoretical wisdom.

¹² Reading Bywater’s text, which makes best sense of the argument.

¹³ My thinking about this passage owes a great debt to comments and discussion with Verity Harte and Jessica Moss.

¹⁴ The Humean interpretation goes back to Walter, *Praktischen Vernunft*, and was defended by Zeller. Moss, *Apparent Good*, ch.7, ch.7 recently presents an impressive case for the Humean reading, and [P2] is central to her case. As she notes (p.205), most Anti-Humean interpreters concede that [P2] is problematic for their reading: See e.g. L. H. G. Greenwood, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 51; Joachim, *Commentary*, 218; John Cooper, *Reason, Human Good*, 64; Terence Irwin, “Aristotle, Reason”, 578; John McDowell, “Some Issues”, 30, David Bostock, *Aristotle’s Ethics*; Broadie and Rowe, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 49. Other Anti-Humean interpreters include Gauthier and Jolif, *L’Éthique*, 548ff.; Richard Sorabji, “Rôle of Intellect”; David Wiggins, “Deliberation”; C. C. W. Taylor, “Practical Intellect”; Daniel Russell, ‘Phronesis’, 203-4; and C. D. C. Reeve, *Practical Wisdom*, 245ff..

¹⁵ Of course, a defense of the Humean interpretation requires the further premise that virtue is not a reasoning capacity (in the relevant sense), an assumption that has been questioned. See e.g. Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Moral Insight*; Irwin, “Aristotle, Reason”; Hendrik Lorenz, “Virtue of Character”.

¹⁶ This is true of both defenders and opponents of the Humean reading (including most of the authors cited in fn.15).

¹⁷ To my knowledge, the only other place in the corpus where ποιῆ . . . ὀρθόν constructions make an appearance is *EE* 2.11 (1227b12ff.). In fact, I was unable to find even a close parallel in authors writing before or at the time of Aristotle. However, as Allison Piñeros Glasscock pointed out to me, the phrasing is likely intended to remind us of the discussion about correct use [ὀρθῶς χρῆσθαι] in Plato’s *Euthydemus* (278e3-282e6, esp.280e3-81c3). And as Brad Inwood pointed out to me, we could see the concept thus expressed as a precursor of the notion of κατορθοῦν, central to Stoic ethics.

While I think the connection with *EE* 2.11 is clear, I doubt that we can use this chapter as guide to our reading of [P2] since it raises equally hard interpretative questions. Moreover, it is possible that chapter 12 expands and modifies the role of virtue and phronēsis in practical matters. In light

of this, a holistic and independent reading of each chapter is needed, and only *then* can the chapters be responsibly compared. This task is obviously beyond the scope of this paper.

¹⁸ All of these are well-documented facts. For a helpful review of the amygdala's involvement in fear regulation (with extensive discussion of the particular involvement of the hypothalamic systems in this process) see Michael Davis, "Amygdala".

¹⁹ As Verity Harte pointed out, one could resist this claim by taken the τὴν μὲν οὖν as a syntactic unit, different from τὴν μὲν. However, the οὖν is easily read as resumptive, and in view of the other strong semantic and syntactic similarities between the passages, it should be read so.

²⁰ In fact, in other contexts, Aristotle emphasizes the connection between proharesis and things towards the end rather than with the end itself. At 1113a13-14, for instance, he writes that proharesis is "of the things towards the end". See also 1145a5-6, discussed below.

²¹ Further evidence for thinking that the ἢ μὲν . . . ἢ δὲ structure does not imply exclusivity in Aristotle comes from the fact that he at times modifies it with μάλιστα in very similar contexts (e.g. *EE* 1226a16-17). This would make little sense if the structure implied exclusivity, since the claim that A is especially (μάλιστα) X strongly implies that there are other things that are X.

²² Usually, interpreters who defend an anti-Humean reading accept the traditional interpretation of [P2] but defend the view that virtue, properly understood, is a reasoning state, or that Aristotle is here speaking loosely and misleadingly. See Moss, *Apparent Good*, ch.7 on this issue.

²³ This passage has evident similarities with *NE* 2.4, and I hope in future work to explore the relationship between these two chapters, as there, too, the analogy between virtue and craft plays a crucial role in the set-up and dissolution of an *aporia*. However, the relationship between these two chapters is complex, so my views here are much the same as with *EE* 2.11: we need a careful study of these chapters on their own terms before we can properly compare them (see fn.18 above).

²⁴ This is the terminology used in *NE* 2.4 and in *EE* 4.8/*NE* 5.8.

²⁵ This is the closest Aristotle comes to giving a direct account of what *phronēsis* is in this book. Some scholars take this it as a definition (e.g. Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle*, 179), but the non-committal δοκεῖ δὴ indicates that we should not take this passage as definitive.

²⁶ As Reier Helle pointed out, Aristotle likely intends this passage to remind his audience of the discussion in *EE* 4.8/ *NE* 5.8 about how only actions done “out of prohairesis” (ἐκ προαιρέσεως) are expressive of the character of the person (1135b25; 1135a1). However, those passages are equally unhelpful for the question at hand, and, moreover, I think the prepositional change from ἐκ in 4.8/5.8 to διὰ in 5.12/6.12 is significant: Aristotle thereby calls attention to the fact that a prohairesis is not only the thing from which an action arises, but is also explanatory of it (in the sense that my reading will make clear).

²⁷ I mean ‘state’ in a fairly neutral sense. Perhaps the reader would prefer ‘event’, ‘process-stage’, ‘occurrence’, or ‘attitude’. The choice of ontological category makes no difference to my argument.

²⁸ The state-reading seems more prevalent, though many occurrences are ambiguous. The clearest occurrence of the content-reading is in *EE* 1241a31, where Aristotle says that compromise requires two parties to have “the same prohairesis [ἢ αὐτὴ προαίρεσις] about ruling and obedience”. Since it is two different parties, the claim must be that their decisions must be the same *in content*.

²⁹ All the major translations correctly take ἐκείνης to refer to προαίρεσιν (see Lorenz, “Virtue of Character”, p.203, fn.33 for a list of translations that take it thus), but my conclusion could be resisted by taking the ἐκείνης to refer to ἀρετή instead of προαίρεσιν. Kenny *Aristotle's Will*, p.103, fn.1 argues for this reading only briefly, noting that otherwise this passage and 1225a conflict (which, as I argue below, is false). Lorenz, “Virtue of Character”, 203ff., motivated by some of the problems I go on to note, also defends this strategy. Although, as he notes, ἐκεῖνος *can*, in special circumstances, take a proximate referent, it is *far* more common for it to take a remote referent (see Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, §1257), so this is a rather desperate strategy. Lorenz does not give examples of ἐκεῖνος taking a proximate referent in Aristotle, and I have been unable to find one in a context where there is another possible syntactic referent, as in [P4].

³⁰ This strategy is noted in Irwin’s commentary, and is defended by Kenny, *Aristotle's Will*, 103 and Susan Sauvé Meyer, “Moral Motivation, 48, fn.8. Thanks to Jessica Moss for helpful discussion of this issue.

³¹ An additional problem with this strategy is that it makes it difficult to explain why the faculty in the second clause is introduced so mysteriously as “another faculty” (ἑτέρας δυνάμεως), since we already know it to be phronēsis from [P2].

³² I think this understanding corresponds to Aristotle’s usage both throughout the second common book, and throughout his most extensive discussions of prohairesis in both ethical treatises, but defending it would take us too far afield. I refer the reader to G. E. M. Anscombe, “Thought and Action”; Cooper, *Reason, Human Good*; and Heda Segvic, “Deliberation” for compelling defences of this reading.

The best case for the opposing view, on which the decision needs to be fully determinate, is by Charles, *Aristotle Action*, 139-42. On this reading, the woman’s decision will have to be completely determinate in content: e.g. instead of deciding to help, she will have to decide e.g. to call him and talk to him *in some fully specified way*. I find this unnatural as a description of the outcome of deliberation, and unnecessary as a reading of Aristotle, but ultimately the general interpretative strategy I present is consistent with this more restrictive way of thinking about the content of the prohairesis. This is because there is always a possible gap between how one decides to act, and how one executes even a fully specific decision: e.g. one can decide to smile kindly in *this particular way* and fail to do so.

Thanks to both David Charles and Jessica Moss for discussion of these issues.

³³ Though even on the instructions-conception, things might be harder than supposed, as a passage in a *New Yorker* article makes clear: “For the most part, recipes are useful only when you already have a pretty good idea of how to cook. Sweating an onion, browning ground beef, adding wine and cooking off the alcohol, seasoning with salt—all things you need to do in making even a basic spag bol—are all simple once you know how” (Lanchester, “Shut Up”, 36).

³⁴ My understanding of this passage owes a great debt to the discussion in Charles, *Aristotle Action*, 140-43.

³⁵ Keeping the received αὐτῶν, instead of Bywater’s proposed emendation, αὐτοῦ, which is unsupported by the manuscripts. Reeve, *Practical Wisdom*, 249, defends αὐτῶν by appeal to *EE* 1227b39-28a2, but the latter passage can be read along the lines I suggest for [P5].

³⁶ Segvic, “Deliberation”, 151, convincingly argues that this translation is preferable to the more standard one that takes τῶν πρακτῶν as modifying συλλογισμοί.

³⁷ Unfortunately, the reference of this term is grammatically indeterminate: it might be either (i) the end, (ii) the good, or (iii) the premise that this is the end and good. I prefer (i) in light of the connection with a later passage as noted in fn.47.

³⁸ Witness the following representative quote on the LSJ entry for δεινότης (see also (Dem. 18.242)):

<ext>

If, on the one hand, I make any mistake in speaking, pardon me and treat it as due to inexperience rather than dishonesty; and if, on the other hand, I express a point well, treat it as due to truthfulness rather than cunning [ἀληθεία μᾶλλον ἢ δεινότητι]. (Antiph. 5.5.)

</ext>

³⁹ A view we are reminded of a few lines later where phronēsis is referred to as an “eye of the soul” (1144a12). This situational awareness and its role in determining the goal is a feature that many authors have emphasized as central to Aristotle’s ethical psychology (e.g. D. J. Allan, “Moral Principles”; “The Practical Syllogism”; Wiggins, “Deliberation”; Sorabji, “Rôle of Intellect”; Michael Woods, “Intuition and Perception”; McDowell, “Some Issues”; Taylor, “Practical Intellect”; and Russell, “Phronesis”).

⁴⁰ Most immediately, the ‘τὰ πρὸς . . .’ construction recalls [P2]. See also *NE* 111b27, 1112b12, 1112b33, *EE* 1227b35 *et passim*.

⁴¹ My views here are influenced by Martha Nussbaum, *De Motu*, 230-47, who appeals to the notion of *seeing as* to throw light on Aristotle's understanding of imagination (φαντασία) and its ties to action.

⁴² The examples make it clear that the notion of *doing as* is a stronger than that of doing something under a certain description, and for that reason stronger than the notion of guidance that Frankfurt, "The Problem of Action", famously introduced into contemporary philosophy of action. For (iii) seems to be a clear case of a person doing something under the description 'healing herself', even though she does not count as doing it *as* healing herself (because she does not even grasp what it is about the pill that contributes to her healing).

⁴³ It is still a single and unified virtue, insofar as the virtuous goals guide the activities of deliberation and execution of the phronimos, and this guiding function is what is definitive of phronēsis. An advantage of the present interpretation is that it yields an attractive way of distinguishing phronēsis from good deliberation (εὐβουλία) insofar as the latter is not executive. See Moss, *Apparent Good*, 182, fn.65, for an alternative way to draw the distinction.

⁴⁴ The connection between these passages is made evident by the fact that at 1151a15-16, Aristotle says that "virtue and vice preserve and destroy the principle" [ἡ γὰρ ἀρετὴ καὶ μοχθηρία τὴν ἀρχὴν ἢ μὲν φθείρει ἢ δὲ σώζει], using the same language as in (c). Thanks to David Charles for encouraging me to address the connection between these passages.

⁴⁵ I thank an anonymous referee for raising this objection.

⁴⁶ See Greenwood, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 201, for a convincing case that we should preserve this, the dominant reading.

⁴⁷ I think one or both of the alternatives explored here correctly captures Aristotle's understanding of akrasia. Interpretations on offer might differ with respect to the question of *how* a decision can fail to be executed in these ways, for instance, whether this is due to a cognitive failure (as in e.g. Gauthier and Jolif, *L'Éthique*, 605; Alfred Mele, "Akrasia"; Filip Grgić, "Akratic's Knowledge"; Pickavé and Whiting, "Akratic Knowledge") or a motivational one (as in e.g. Charles, *Aristotle Action*, 109-160; "Varieties of Akrasia"; Norman Dahl, *Practical Reason*). However, a proper

investigation of these issues would require a more extensive examination of Aristotle's treatment of akrasia than I am able to give in this paper.

⁴⁸ Thanks to an anonymous referee for helpful comments on this section of the paper.

⁴⁹ *Ethics with Aristotle*, 195. A distinction along these lines seems to correspond to Aristotle's seemingly deliberate use of "aim" (σκοπὸς) as distinct from "end" (τέλος) in this chapter.

⁵⁰ Further support for my interpretation comes from the passage where Aristotle explains why phronēsis is incompatible with akrasia (1152a6-15). It is not compatible, he says, both because the phronimos is also a person of excellence [σπουδαῖος], but also because "one is phronimos not only in virtue of one's knowledge, but by being practical" [οὐ τῷ εἰδέναι μόνον φρόνιμος ἀλλὰ καὶ τῷ πρακτικός].

⁵¹ These theoretical-practical parallels have received detailed study in the literature, but my central contention is that, as far as epistemology goes, we have here more than a parallel: both theoretical accomplishments, like learning, and practical accomplishments, like virtuous action, are epistemic accomplishments.

Moss, "Right Reason", who provides a helpful discussion of the issue, recognizes that Aristotle's discussion in *EE* 5.12/ *NE* 6.12 "strongly implies that phronēsis does after all make a practical difference", but she ends up concluding that "Aristotle's direct response to VI.12's query makes no mention of phronēsis' practical value at all" (224-225). I think Moss goes wrong here by assuming a purely deliberative notion of phronēsis. For further discussion of this question, see also the papers by Allen, Charles, and Gill in Henry and Nielsen, *Bridging the Gap*.

⁵² Thanks to David Charles for suggesting this parallel.

⁵³ What it takes to do fine actions for their own sake is a disputed question among interpreters. The difficulties that set the contemporary debate were first raised by John Ackrill, "Aristotle on Action". Differing attempts to provide such an interpretation can be found in Charles "Ontology"; Korsgaard, "From Duty"; McDowell, "Eudaimonism"; Whiting, "Eudaimonia"; and Williams, "Virtuous Person".

⁵⁴ This seems to me the most natural translation of the passage. An alternative is to assume an εστί for the first clause, reading ‘virtue *is* the end’. But this seems to me less natural, and there’s little in the text that would point towards such a conclusion. Still, since my interest is with the point as it applies to phronēsis, this reading is consistent with my main contentions.

⁵⁵ The significance of this is also noted by Kenny, *Aristotle's Will*, 104-5 and Lorenz, “Virtue of Character”, 202, fn.30.

⁵⁶ I leave it open whether Descartes himself held such a view.

⁵⁷ This is so even on the Averrosian view that νοῦς is a divine activity (defended also by Michael Frede, “L'Intellect Agent”); for even the intellectual activity of God is, on Aristotle’s view, a living activity (*Met.* 1072b14-15).

⁵⁸ I have benefited from discussions about this paper with many people, including Reier Helle, Brad Inwood, Daniel Moerner, Jessica Moss, Allison Piñeros Glasscock, all of whom provided comments on earlier drafts. I also received insightful comments by two anonymous referees from the *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. Thanks to all of them, and especially to David Charles and Verity Harte for comments and discussion, and for their seminar where these ideas first took shape.