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Aristotle's Rational Powers and the Explanation of Action

In this paper, I discuss Aristotle's notion of rational powers as presented in his *Metaphysics* Θ.2 and Θ.5. I argue, first, that his account cannot serve as the model for explaining human rational actions in general. The role of rational powers is restricted to the explanation of arts and their exercises, including the exercises of knowledge through teaching. The exercises of character virtues do not follow the same pattern that is discernible in the exercises of rational powers. Second, I try to show that the similarities between Aristotle's rational powers and powers as they are commonly understood in contemporary accounts of agency, especially regarding their two-sidedness and up-to-usness, are only superficial. Aristotle's rational powers are not genuinely two-sided, and their being up to the agent has nothing to do with the availability of alternative courses of action.

1. Introduction

According to some philosophers, human actions are best described as exercises of two-sided powers.[1] A two-sided, or two-way, power is a single power to act or not to act, or to act this way or that way. As opposed to human powers, which are two-sided, the powers of non-living things are necessarily one-sided. While I have the power both to raise my hand and not to raise it or to do something else instead, fire has the power only to heat but not to cool. According to this view, a further important difference between human and other powers is that one-sided non-human powers are self-manifesting or self-actualizing. A one-sided power is self-actualizing because in appropriate conditions, it will be necessarily actualized just by itself: in appropriate conditions, fire will necessarily manifest its power to heat. By contrast, two-sided human powers are not self-actualizing. They are such that they will not be necessarily actualized just by themselves when the conditions for their actualization obtain.

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[1] See Alvarez 2013; Steward 2009, esp. 307–310; Steward 2012, esp. Ch. 3, Ch. 6; Pink 2016, esp. Ch. 7. For some history of the idea, see Alvarez 2013, 102 n. 2; Steward 2012, 155–156, n. 36.

Whether they will be actualized is up to the agent: it is up to me whether I will raise my hand or not. On this view, my actions are free because they are exercises of two-sided powers and because it is up to me whether they will be actualized or not.

The proponents of such a view do not agree on its details. For instance, they do not agree on whether two-sided powers belong only to humans or to some non-human animals as well; on whether their exercise is a causal matter or not; on the implications of such a view for the explanation of freedom of the will; etc. What they do agree on is that the roots of this view can be found in Aristotle, so that it can be called Aristotelian. They customarily refer to some passages in Aristotle where he allegedly endorses it.[2]

If we look at the most pertinent passages in Aristotle (above all, *Metaphysics* Θ.2 and Θ.5; *Nicomachean Ethics* 3.3 and 3.5; *Eudemian Ethics* 2.6 and 2.10), we can easily see why one might be inclined to call such a view Aristotelian. Indeed, one might go even further and say that Aristotle has more or less the same view on human actions as his contemporary colleagues. For, Aristotle also thinks that human beings and other things have capacities or powers (*dunameis*). There are three features that distinguish powers that belong only to human beings from powers of other things. First, human powers are rational, while powers of other things are non-rational. Second, human powers are powers for opposites, that is, they are two-sided powers. For instance, medical knowledge, as a typical Aristotelian rational power, is the power to produce both health and disease. By contrast, non-human powers are powers to produce only one member of the pair of opposites, as heat is the power to make things hot only, not cold. Third, while non-rational powers are self-actualizing, human rational powers are not self-actualizing. Their actualization depends on the agent's decision (*prohairesis*) or desire (*orexis*) formed as the result of deliberation. Since we deliberate only about things that are up to us, it follows that it is up to us whether we will exercise our rational powers or not, or whether we will exercise them in one direction or in another. Moreover, every human rational action is ultimately based on deliberation, or can at least be construed as based on deliberation, and

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[2] See Alvarez 2013, 102, 108–111; Steward 2012, 155–156, n. 36; Pink 2006, 30. Frost 2013 discusses the differences between Steward's and Aristotle's views on two-sided powers and argues that Aristotle's position, as opposed to Steward's, is compatible with determinism.

it is up to the agent whether it will be performed or not. From this one might conclude either that all human rational actions can be described as the agent's exercises of her two-sided rational powers or that their explanation follows the same pattern that is discernible in the actualization of rational powers. Hence, it may seem that Aristotle and his contemporary colleagues share basically the same view on the role of powers in explaining human actions. It may seem that if Aristotle's account of rational powers from the *Metaphysics* is merged with his views on deliberation and up-to-usness from the *Ethics*, then he might be rightly seen as the progenitor of the view that actions are best explained as exercises of two-sided powers.

While contemporary advocates of such an explanation content themselves with occasional references to disparate passages from Aristotle's works, some early Aristotelian commentators, most notably Alexander of Aphrodisias in the early third century CE, tried to provide the unified Aristotelian account of human action based on the combination of Aristotle's ideas on two-sidedness of rational powers and up-to-usness of actions based on *prohairesis* and deliberation.[3] While developing the Aristotelian doctrine of fate, Alexander argues (*On Fate* 168.11–12) that there are two kinds of things that come about in accordance with reason: things that come about in accordance with skill or art (*technê*) and those that come about in accordance with *prohairesis*. Then he argues that the main feature of both kinds of things is the fact that the agent is able both to bring them about and not to bring them about:

But the things that come to be in accordance with reason seem to come to be in accordance with reason in virtue of the agent's having the power (*exousia*) also not to bring them about; for the things that are made to come to be by craftsmen in accordance with art do not seem to be made to come to be by them of necessity – at any rate, they bring each of them about in the manner of those who have equal power not to bring them about; besides, how is it not absurd to say that a house or a bed came to be in accordance with fate? And the things over which *prohairesis* has control, too (that is, all actions that are in conformity with virtue or vice) are also thought to be up to us (*eph' hêmin*). (169.6–13, transl. Sharples 1983, modified)

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[3] Another example is Ammonius in his commentary on *De Interpretatione*. For a comprehensive discussion, see Bobzien 1998, esp. 145–152.

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Later on, he expands this into a theory on which human rationality is grounded in one's having in himself the principle of both choosing something or not (184.16–21).

In this paper, I will argue, first, that Aristotle's account of rational powers as developed in his *Metaphysics* Θ.2 and Θ.5 cannot serve as the model for explaining human rational actions in general, so that rational powers cannot, *contra* Alexander, be the basis of a unified Aristotelian account of human action. Second, I will try to show that the similarities between Aristotle's rational powers and powers as they are commonly understood in contemporary accounts of agency, especially with regard to their two-sidedness and up-to-usness, are only superficial. The structure of the paper is the following. I will first (Section 2) give an account of what rational powers are and why Aristotle calls them the origins of change. Then (Section 3) I will argue that their role is restricted to the explanation of arts and their exercises, including the exercises of knowledge through teaching, and that the exercises of character virtues do not follow the same pattern that is discernible in the exercises of rational powers. In addition, I will show that rational powers are not genuinely two-sided (Section 4). What is more, a rational power is two-sided only when the agent possesses it *simpliciter*, but when it is a power to act here and now, it is not two-sided, which becomes clear if we consider the role of *prohairesis* and desire in its actualization (Section 5). Finally, rational powers are up to us in a sense that is incompatible with what is intended by Alexander or by contemporary Aristotelians (Section 6). Consequently, even though Aristotle's account of rational powers is potentially applicable to the explanation of various aspects of agency, it basically remains restricted to the demands of the comprehensive theory of *dunamis* as developed in *Metaphysics* Θ. Yet it offers us some important insights into arts as bodies of knowledge and the way in which they are exercised.

2. Rational Powers as Origins of Change

Aristotle introduces the notion of rational powers as follows:

Since some origins (*archai*) like this <i. e. origins of change discussed in Θ.1> are present in what is soul-less, while others are in what has a soul, and are in the soul, and are in that part of the soul which is rational (*en tôi logon echonti*), it is

clear that of powers too some will be non-rational (*alogoi*), while others will be rational (*meta logou*). This is why all arts and all productive sciences (*pasai hai technai kai hai poiêtikai epistêmai*) are powers. For they are origins of change (*archai metablêtikai*) in something else, or in the thing itself *qua* something else. (*Metaph.* Θ.2.1046a36–b4)[4]

For something to be a rational power, it must meet two basic criteria: (1) it must be the origin of change; and (2) it must involve *logos*.[5]

(1) Like other powers, a rational power is the origin of change in something else, or in the thing itself *qua* something else. Thus, medical knowledge – the only example of a rational power mentioned in *Metaph.* Θ.2 – possessed by a doctor is a rational power insofar as it is, first, *the origin of change*, namely, the origin of someone's becoming healthy. Second, it is the origin of change *in something else*, or in some external object, namely, in a patient. Third, it can also be the origin of change in the thing that possesses a rational power *itself qua something else*. For instance, when a doctor heals himself, then his medical knowledge is the origin of change in the doctor himself but *qua* something else, namely, in the doctor *qua* patient and not *qua* doctor.

In what sense exactly is medical knowledge the origin of change? The end result of the change, the state of being healthy, is brought about by certain movements in the patient's body which are in turn brought about by movements of the doctor's body, and the origin of latter movements is the doctor's desire to heal the patient. A rational power cannot be the origin of change in the way that desire is the origin of change, namely, by being a mover of its possessor's body. Yet, however odd it may sound to say that something as abstract as body of knowledge can be the origin of change, Aristotle also maintains that a rational power is "where the origin of movement comes from" (*hothen hê archê tês kinêseôs*), i. e., the efficient cause of the result of a change. Thus, strictly speaking, it is the art of housebuilding – another of his examples of rational power[6] – that is the efficient cause of a house, not a person, and not even a person *qua*

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[4] All translations from *Metaph.* Θ are by Makin 2006, with modifications.

[5] Aristotle discusses *dunameis meta logou*, as opposed to *alogoi*, in *De Interpretatione* 13.22b36–23a6 as well. However, since they are not the origins of change in something else, these *dunameis* are not powers, but rather, as Freeland (1986, 80) describes them, contingencies, e. g., someone's capacity to see. Consequently, it is misleading to understand them as rational and non-rational *dunameis*.

[6] For other examples of rational powers as arts, see *EN* 1.1.1094a9–12.

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housebuilder (*Phys.* 2.3.195b22–24; see also *GC* 1.7.324a35–b1).[7] In *Metaph.* Z.7.1032b21–23 Aristotle argues that "the thing that produces" (*to poioun*) and the efficient cause is the form (*eidos*) in the soul, which is a little earlier (1032b13–14) identified with art, that is, with rational power. Finally, in *Metaph.* Λ.4.1070b28–29 the art is identified as the mover (*to kinoun*).

In what sense, then, can rational powers be the origins of change or efficient causes? In *Metaph.* Θ.2.1046b16–17 Aristotle says that knowledge is a rational power because it contains *logos* (*tôi logon echein*). Hence, presumably, this is also the reason why it is the origin of change.

(2) Rational powers have to do with *logos* in two senses. First, they are powers of the part of the soul that contains *logos*. Second, a rational power itself is a *logos* (1046b7) or contains *logos* (b17). To see in what sense a rational power is or contains *logos*, consider *Metaph.* Z.7.1032b6–10, b15–17 and b18–23:

Health is produced when one thinks thus: since health is of such a kind, if the subject is to be healthy he must have so-and-so (e.g. an equable state of body), and if he is to have that he must have warmth, and so on. One continues to think (*noei*) in this way until the case is finally reduced to something which one can oneself produce (*poiein*), and then from this point on the process (*kinêsis*) towards health is called production (*poiêsis*). […] Of the processes of generation, then, the one <part> is called thinking (*noêsis*), namely that which proceeds from the origin and the form, and the other is called production, namely that which follows upon the completion of the thinking. […] For example, one thinks: if the subject is to be healthy, he must be made equable. But what is being equable? It is such-and-such; and that will come about if he is warmed. But what is being warmed? It is such-and-such; and this he is capable of becoming. That is already up to <the doctor> (*touto de êdê ep' autôi*). Thus the thing that produces health, and is what the process towards health begins from, is the form in the soul – that is, if it is brought about by skill. (Transl. Bostock 1994, modified.)

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7   The phrase "strictly speaking" is due to Frede (1992, 95), who also argues, rightly in my opinion, that "[t]o refer to the art here is not to refer to the thoughts, beliefs, and intentions of the builder," but to an abstract item such as the body of knowledge. Against this, see Everson (1997, 49), who argues that the origin of change is the possessor of the art rather than the art itself (see also Tuozzo 2014, 31–34 and n. 23). See, however, *Metaph.* Z.7. 1032b13–14 and b21–23 (above).

Thinking and production may be taken as two stages of the exercise of a rational power. In the stage of thinking – which I believe amounts to what Aristotle elsewhere calls deliberation[8] – a possessor of a rational power begins with an account of what the object or state to be produced is, for instance, with the account of what it is to be a house or what it is to be healthy. Proceeding through the intermediary steps as the means that are necessary to satisfy the account, she is looking for an action that is up to her to perform to begin the second stage of the exercise of her power, i.e., actual production. The production proceeds through the same steps as thinking, but in reverse order, until the initial account is instantiated in a particular outcome. Thus, rational power includes *logos* in two senses: it includes the account of the end result of the change, and it includes *logos* in the sense of reasoning, i.e., the account of the steps or of the procedure that is necessary to bring about the intended result (see also Makin 2000, 148–149).

Now it should be clear why rational powers can be seen as the origins of change and efficient causes. In *Metaph.* Δ.1.1013a17–19 Aristotle says that the term "origin" in its various uses refers to a first thing from which something either is or comes to be or is known. A rational power is the origin in all these senses, precisely because it involves *logos*. Since it includes the account of its object, it provides the ultimate explanation why the end result of the change is what it is rather than something else. A change has a house as its result because the process that gave rise to this result began, in the first stage of the exercise of the art of housebuilding, with the *logos* or form that are embodied in it or identical with it. As Aristotle says in the same context (*Metaph.* Z.7.1032b11–12), in a way health is produced from health, and a house from a house. If a house were not the result of the process that began with its *logos* or form, it would either not be a house or it would be a matter of pure luck that it is a house. Thus, the art of housebuilding is the first thing from which a house is and

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[8]   Although Aristotle in this passage does not mention deliberation, the structure of the reasoning he is describing here is the same as the structure of deliberation as is described in the *Ethics* (this is confirmed by *EE* 2.11.1227b25–33; see also *EE* 2.10.1226b10–20; 1227a6–18; *EN* 3.3.1112b11–27): the agent begins with the end (in the *Metaphysics* passage it is its form, for obvious reasons) and reasons back to find the action that he can perform to attain (or produce) it (*Metaph.* 1032b8–9, "until the case is finally reduced to something which one can oneself produce," compare with *EE* 2.10.1226b13 and 1227a16–17). This view has been challenged by Müller 2018, 152, esp. n. 9.

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is known as a house. Furthermore, since it includes the account of the procedure, a rational power provides the ultimate explanation why the movements of which the change consists are instances of a change called "housebuilding" rather than of something else. Moreover, the possessor of a rational power concludes her reasoning or deliberation by forming a judgment stating the action that she is able to perform, which is the beginning of the movement that ensues thereupon. Thus, a housebuilder can conclude his reasoning by forming the judgment that he should first build the foundations of the house, and this is the first thing that he is capable to do. Hence, his rational power is where the origin of movement comes from, in two senses. First, his possession of *logos* of the procedure of housebuilding explains why he takes this particular step – i. e., building the foundations – first, rather than, say, framing the roof. Second, it explains why the movements of his body can be described as building the foundations or housebuilding. The presence of desire or of any other mover does not provide the answers to the question *what* it is that he is doing or why, at a particular moment, he is doing this and not something else.

3. The Scope of Rational Powers

Let me now consider what kinds of states count as rational powers. Rational powers are origins of change in external objects, and these external objects in turn possess corresponding passive powers to become instances of the kinds of things that are specified in the account included in a rational power. These external objects include bricks, stones and timbers that are capable of becoming a house, pieces of clay capable of becoming a statue, human bodies capable of becoming healthy, etc. Hence, the main candidates for rational powers are skills or arts as bodies of knowledge intended to be applied on external objects with corresponding passive powers. Indeed, having said that some origins of change are in the part of the soul that contains *logos* and that powers are therefore divisible into non-rational and rational, Aristotle says that "this is why all arts and productive sciences (*poiêtikai epistêmai*) are powers" (1046b2–3). He singles out, as it were, arts and productive sciences as the most salient kind of rational powers, which serve as clear instances of rational powers, leaving open the possibility that there are some other states in the part of the soul containing *logos* that meet the criteria for being rational pow-

ers. Indeed, the phrase *poiêtikai epistêmai* can be taken as referring not merely to the group of sciences standardly distinguished from theoretical and practical sciences (*Metaph.* E.1.1025b25; 1026a18–19; K.7.1064a16–19, b1–3; *EN* 6.2.1139a26–28), but in a somewhat broader sense, which includes every kind of knowledge that can be the origin of change in the sense explained. For instance, while geometry is a theoretical science, it can also be taken as the origin of change in another thing. For, due to the possession of geometrical knowledge a teacher of geometry can change an external object, a student, into the state of being a geometrician or at least of having a piece of geometrical knowledge.[9] A teacher of geometry exercises his knowledge just as a housebuilder or a doctor do, so that geometry also, just as anything that can be rationally taught, can count among rational powers.

Following this line of thought, we might be inclined to assume that the scope of what can count as rational power can be taken as broad as possible, and that for every *logos* (in the sense explained) there can be a corresponding rational power. Take, for instance, the philosophers' favorite example, that of raising one's arm. There is certainly no Aristotelian rational power to raise one's arm. To be sure, it wouldn't be unaristotelian to say that raising one's arm is the exercise of a power, but it cannot be the exercise of a power that belongs to what Aristotle would take as the rational part of the soul. But one might argue that while there is no rational power to raise one's arm, there is a rational power to raise one's arm under certain description, say, to greet someone. One might then argue that there is no relevant difference between this case and the case of a geometrician who teaches a student. Due to the geometrician's knowledge an external object, a student, is changed into the state of being a geometrician or at least of having a piece of geometrical knowledge. Likewise, due to my knowledge of what it is to greet someone, or to engage in a socially acceptable form of communication – or, simply, due to my possession of a social skill – an external object, an acquaintance of mine, is changed into the state of noticing my welcome. Moreover, geometrical knowledge is the origin of change because it provides the ultimate explanation why the movements of geometrician's body can be described as teaching geometry, and why the end result, the student's transformation, can be described as becoming a geometrician or acquiring a piece of geometrical knowledge. Likewise, one might insist that my

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[9]   For a change involved in learning, see *De Anima* 2.5.417a21–b17.

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knowledge of how to interact socially is the origin of change because it provides the ultimate explanation why the movement of my arm is greeting, and why the end result is my acquaintance's acquiring a property of being in the state of noticing my welcome. If we broaden the scope of rational powers in this way, then perhaps we can say that every human rational action, or an action done with a reason, is at bottom the exercise of a rational power, and that every piece of knowledge that can be put in use to make some change in the world is an instance of a rational power.

Such a proposal, however, would not be acceptable to Aristotle. Following Alexander, one way to classify human rational actions is to divide them into, on the one hand, exercises of arts (including cases such as teaching geometry) and, on the other hand, exercises of character dispositions.[10] The action of raising one's arm to greet someone can be the exercise of the character disposition insofar as it can be the manifestation of one's virtue, namely, the virtue of friendliness. Hence, to show that all human rational actions are exercises of rational powers, one would need to argue either that character dispositions – in particular, character virtues – are rational powers or that the exercise of character dispositions follows the same pattern that is discernible in the exercise of rational powers. None of this is attributable to Aristotle, for the four reasons which I am about to specify. Some of them are more convincing than the others, the last one being, in my opinion, the decisive. Taken together, they strongly suggest that it is best to take Aristotle's account of rational powers as restricted to the domain of arts and productive sciences, including transmission of knowledge through teaching.

(1) Aristotle, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* at least, does not describe character virtues as *dunameis*, but as *hexeis* (dispositions). This, however, need not be taken as the conclusive evidence against classifying virtues among powers, since in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 2, when discussing the genus of virtue, he uses the term *dunamis* in a very narrow sense, as "what we have when we are said to be capable of these feelings",[11] e. g., of being angry or of being afraid (2.5.1105b23–24). On the other hand, one of the senses of *dunamis* listed in *Metaphysics* Δ.12 is a *dunamis* "to perform something well (*kalôs*) or according to *prohairesis*" (1019a23–24),

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[10] The division is not exhaustive. It omits a large class of actions that are manifestations of not yet fully developed character. However, the explanation of these actions would be modelled on the same pattern as the exercises of developed character dispositions.
[11] All translations from the *Nicomachean Ethics* are by Irwin 1999, with modifications.

which is close to a general characterization of virtue in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (see, e. g., 2.6.1106a17–18: "every virtue causes its possessors to be in a good state and to perform their functions well"). In addition, in the *Eudemian Ethics* (2.1.1218b35) virtue is explicitly described as *dunamis* (which is taken synonymously with *diathesis* and *hexis*).[12]

(2) A further reason why it seems that virtues cannot be classified among rational powers is also not conclusive. Aristotle suggests it in *EN* 5.1.1129a13–17:

For what is true of sciences and powers is not true of dispositions. For while one and the same power or science seems to have opposite activities, a disposition that is opposite has no opposite activities. Health, e. g., only makes us do healthy actions, not their opposites; for we say we are walking in a healthy way if we are walking in the way a healthy person would. (*EN* 5.1.1129a13–17)

Thus, while rational powers are powers for opposites, or two-sided, virtues are dispositions that are not two-sided. A just person is not capable to act both justly and unjustly, but is always disposed to act in one, just, way (see Donini 2010, 88–94).

This, of course, is true. However, it is also true that since the virtuous person is the only one who possesses the right conception of the good, he is the only one who is able to discriminate between virtuous and vicious actions (*EN* 3.4.1113a31–33; 6.6.1140b4–21). Hence, even though he is not capable to perform actions contrary to his virtue, he is the only one who is able to provide the explanation why some actions are bad. Thus, it seems that even though virtue cannot be exercised two-sidedly, it somehow includes the explanation of both itself and its opposite. Note that the similar is true of rational powers. As I said, a rational power is the origin of change insofar as it includes the explanation why some movements are instances of a particular kind of change. Since it is a power for opposites, it includes the explanation of both of opposite changes that can issue from it: medical knowledge includes both the explanation why some movements are properly called "healing the patient" and the explanation why some movements are properly called "harming the patient." Furthermore, even though medical knowledge is power for both health and disease, this does not mean that a doctor *qua* doctor can produce

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[12] See also Garver 2006, 50–51 (with further references). For a thorough discussion of the relationship between rational powers and virtues, see Freeland 1982.

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disease. For, if he could, this would imply that he could *qua* doctor deliberate about whether he would heal the patient and decide that he would not. However, as Aristotle insists, one cannot deliberate about one's ends, so that a doctor cannot deliberate about whether he will heal or not.[13] He can deliberate about this only *qua* something else. Yet he possesses a power both for health and for disease *qua* doctor, since he possesses the relevant knowledge, which is about opposites. Hence, *qua* possessor of a rational power, an agent cannot exercise her power two-sidedly.

(3) A further reason why it seems that exercises of character dispositions cannot be explained in terms of rational powers concerns the fact that while exercises of rational powers are mostly what Aristotle calls productions (*poiêseis*), exercises of character dispositions like virtues are actions in the narrow sense of the term, i. e. *praxeis*. One of the main features of productions is that they have external ends. As opposed to this, exercises of virtues don't have external ends (*EN* 6.4.1140b6–7).

There are at least two difficulties with such a discrimination between exercises of character dispositions and exercises of rational powers. First, not all exercises of rational powers must be productions, since teaching someone geometry is not production. This, however, need not be seen as a serious problem. We can safely postulate that rational powers bring about changes in external objects, regardless of whether these changes are productions or not.[14] (Alternatively, we can take teaching as the production of knowledge in the learner.) Another difficulty is somewhat more serious. It is not clear how we should understand Aristotle's insistence that *praxeis* don't have external ends, but I will not discuss this difficulty here (see Whiting 2002; Hirji 2018). The problem is rather that it does not seem quite true to say that a rational power and its exercise have an external end. The end of housebuilding is a house. As we have seen, the art of housebuilding includes the account of what it is to be a house, which Aristotle calls its *logos* or form. We have also seen that the exercise of a rational power consists of deliberation and production, and that the *logos* or form included in rational power governs both processes:

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[13] See *EN* 3.3.1112b12–20; 1112b32; *EE* 2.10.1226b10–13; 1227a7–12; 1227b28; 2.11.1227b25–28. This is a controversial claim, which I cannot discuss here. For a comprehensive recent account, see Moss 2011.

[14] Hence, Kenny (1975, 53) is wrong when he says that "Aristotle was surely wrong to identify rational powers and two-way powers. If someone speaks a language I know in my hearing it isn't in my power not to understand it," since understanding a language is not the adequate example of a rational power: it is not the origin of change.

the possessor of a rational power begins her deliberation with the account of the object or of the state that she wishes to bring about, and then looks for the action that she can perform to begin the process of production, which ends by instantiating the account, or actualizing the form, in that particular case. Hence, insofar as production is the actualization of the power, it is not quite true to say that the end of production is external to it. For, if the form of the house is included in *dunamis*, it is also included in *dunamis qua* actualized. (Recall that in a way a house is produced from a house, *Metaph.* Z.7.1032b11–12.) It is only the particular house that is external to the process.

(4) Rational powers are in the part of the soul that contains *logos*. By contrast, character virtues are in the non-rational part of the soul, which nevertheless shares in reason by listening to it and obeying it (*EN* 1.13.1102b13–1103a1). Taken by itself, however, this is not the decisive reason to argue that virtues cannot be rational powers. First, the psychology underlying the introduction of rational powers in *Metaph.* Θ.2 need not be the same as the psychology underlying the distinction between virtues in *EN* 1.13. Aristotle himself claims that the psychology in *EN* 1.13 is provisional, adjusted to the subject being discussed (1102a23–32), and the same is presumably true of the underlying psychology in *Metaph.* Θ.2. Second, and more important, Aristotle argues that character virtues are not only *kata (ton orthon) logon*, i. e., in accordance with (correct) *logos*, but also *meta (tou orthou) logou*, i. e., that they include (correct) *logos* (*EN* 6.13.1144b26–27; see also 1.7.1098a14; 6.5.1140a4), and rational powers are also described as being *meta logou* (*Metaph.* Θ.2.1046b2, b4–5; Θ.5.1048a3; see also *EN* 6.6.1140b33). *Orthos logos* required by character virtues is provided by practical knowledge (*phronêsis*) (*EN* 6.13.1144b26–27), which is the virtue of the rational part of the soul. Furthermore, the exercises of virtues involve previous deliberation, which is reasoning (*logismos*) about what to do to achieve a certain end, and Aristotle, notoriously, is not clear about the difference, if there is any, between technical and practical deliberation. All this can suggest that even though character virtues are the dispositions of the non-rational part of the soul, their dependence on an intellectual virtue and the fact that their exercise requires rational deliberation provide them with such a degree of rationality that they can be broadly classified among rational powers.[15]

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[15] To this one might add Ross's argument, based on *Metaph.* Θ.5.1047b31–35, where Aristotle distinguishes between (a) innate powers (e. g., senses), (b) powers that come

Such a conclusion, however, is not supported by what Aristotle suggests about the actualization of rational powers. The exercise of a rational power consists of two components. One component is purely epistemic: it is the rational power itself, which is nothing but a body of knowledge. Another component is practical or executive: it is desire (or decision, or whatever else that may serve as the mover) that acts on the epistemic component.

Things are different with the actualization of character virtues. Here, the epistemic and the executive component are inseparable: there is no independently identifiable epistemic component that is put into action by desire or some other psychological state that serves as the mover and that can be separated from virtue itself. The agent's raising her arm to greet someone, and thus exercising her virtue of friendliness, does not come down to putting her social skill into action by means of an independently present desire. Rather, both her end, e.g., social interaction, and her means, greeting, are governed by a single disposition – the virtue that is inseparable from practical knowledge. Moreover, both the agent's decision and desire are also controlled by virtue (*EN* 6.2.1139a22–34; 6.12.1144a22; 1145a4). Hence, as opposed to rational powers, virtues are self-actualizing in that their actualization does not include a mover that is not already governed by them. As has been rightly put by Eugene Garver, character virtues, as opposed to rational powers, "incorporate decision into themselves, integrating rationality and goodness. … [s]ince the virtues are already governed by deliberative desire and desiring reason … they don't need an external desire or decision" (2006, 50).

This is the main reason why Aristotle's rational powers cannot be used to explain human rational actions in general. Their role is rather restricted to the explanation of arts and their exercises, including the exercises of knowledge through teaching.[16] Since this domain is very large,

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about by habit (e. g., power for playing the flute), and (c) powers that come about by learning (e. g., the arts), and then couples (b) and (c) together and opposes them to (a). Since Aristotle immediately after that (1048a2–4) returns to the distinction between rational and non-rational powers, Ross argues that (b) and (c) are instances of the former and (a) of the latter. "This implies that *ethos* includes a certain amount of *logos*, or the possession of a plan of action, as indeed it does, whether it be a comparatively manual dexterity such as that of [flute playing] … or a moral character … that is being acquired by habituation" (Ross 1924, II, 248–249).

[16] King 1998 has come to a somewhat similar conclusion, although by a very different route.

their role is nevertheless very important. In addition, even though rational powers do not play any role in explanation of exercises of character dispositions, this does not mean that there are no important similarities between human *praxeis* and exercises of rational powers. One similarity, though somewhat controversial, is that both include deliberation. Another similarity – which is particularly stressed by Alexander, as we have seen – concerns two-sidedness and up-to-usness. Let me first turn to two-sidedness.

4. Two-sidedness

Rational powers are two-sided in that they are powers for opposites: medical knowledge is a power to produce both health and disease. Aristotle explains this as follows:

As regards those powers which are rational, the very same power is a power for opposites, but as regards the non-rational powers a single power is for one thing: for example, heat only for heating, while the medical art for both disease and health. The explanation of this is that knowledge is an account (*logos*), and the same account clarifies both the thing and the privation, though not in the same way, and in one way it concerns both, while in another way it concerns rather the positive. So it is also necessary that such sciences should be of opposites, but concerning the one *per se* while concerning the other not *per se*. For indeed the account concerns one opposite *per se*, but concerns the other opposite in a way accidentally: for it is through denial and negation (*apophasei kai apophorai*) that it clarifies the opposite – for the primary privation (*sterêsis*) is the opposite, and this is the negation of the other. (*Metaph.* Θ.2.1046b4–15)

At first glance, Aristotle's argument seems straightforward. Rational power is a kind of knowledge or science, and it is a general principle that if a science is about A, then it is also about not-A (*Metaph.* Γ.2.1004a9–10). Consequently, sciences *qua* rational powers (see 1046b9–10) are also about opposites. The reason is that knowledge or science includes *logos*, and the same *logos* clarifies both a thing and its opposite, "through denial and negation."[17] Thus, even when it discusses not-A, a science actually

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[17] See also *Metaph.* Z.7.1032b2–6: "For in fact opposites have in a way the same form, since the essence of a privation is the opposite essence. Thus health is the essence of

discusses A, since the former is only a denial and negation of the latter (see also *Metaph.* Γ.2.1004a11–12). Medical knowledge includes only *logos* of health, and not the separate *logos* of disease, since disease is just a privation or absence of health, and if we want to explain or produce disease, this we can do only from the *logos* of health.

Three important consequences follow from this. First, this is the reason why medical knowledge is a single power for opposites, rather than the conjunction of two powers, one for health and one for disease. Second, this is the reason why a rational power is not related equally to both members of a pair of opposites, but is rather, as Aristotle says, related to one, positive, member *per se*, and to another, negative, member accidentally. Medical knowledge is *per se* about health and only accidentally about disease. There are two senses in which it is only accidentally about disease. First, it is about disease *because* it is about health: due to his medical knowledge, a doctor can produce disease *because* he can produce health (see also Makin 2000, 159). Second, if we put aside unintentional harming the patient, which is not a manifestation of any power, the doctor can produce disease (or death) in two ways: (1) by intentionally prescribing the wrong drug or treatment or (2) by doing nothing, knowing that refraining from acting will produce harm. In both cases, the doctor does not act or refrain from acting *qua* doctor, since *qua* doctor, he cannot decide not to heal. Hence, a rational power is accidentally about the negative member of the pair of opposites because when exercising its negative arm its possessor does not act *qua* its possessor but *qua* something else.

It also follows, third, that it is not quite true to say that rational powers are two-sided powers. Or perhaps we should say that they are two-sided in a broad and loose sense, but that they are not genuinely two-sided.[18] Let's say that a power is genuinely two-sided if it is, first, a single power to produce opposite effects (rather than a conjunction of two one-sided powers), and, second, if it is not the case that it can produce one member of the pair of opposite effects because it can produce the other member. So, if there is a single power to raise one's arm and to lower it, then it is a genuine two-sided power because it is not the case that an agent can raise

disease, since disease is the absence of health, and health is the *logos* in the soul and the knowledge of it." (Transl. Bostock 1994, modified.)

18   The qualification "genuinely" is used differently than in Makin 2000, 147, and 2006, 45–47.

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her arm because she can lower it or *vice versa*. Obviously, Aristotelian rational powers are not genuinely two-sided in this sense, since a doctor (*qua* doctor, at any rate) is capable to produce disease only because he is capable to produce health.[19]

What can count as the relevant opposite? If medical knowledge is the power for health and disease, what is the art of housebuilding power for? Aristotle does not want to say that in the case of housebuilding, the relevant opposites are *building a house* and *demolishing a house* (as is implied in Makin 2000, 158; 2006, 45, 54; Beere 2009, 85). Perhaps it is not unconditionally true that you need to possess a knowledge of housebuilding to demolish a house (you certainly need such a knowledge to demolish a complex building, but think of small ancient Greek houses made of clay bricks). To be sure, Aristotle does say (*Metaph*. Θ.9.1051a9–10) that the same power is for housebuilding and for demolishing, and building a house and demolishing it are opposites. However, his idea is more general and is intended to cover both opposed actions and opposed effects. Some clue about what should be taken as the relevant opposite is provided by *Metaph*. Θ.5.1047b31–35, where Aristotle addresses the following objection to the idea that rational powers are two-sided: if rational powers, like the non-rational ones, were both two-sided and self-actualizing, then, given the appropriate matter with a corresponding passive power and given the right circumstances, both arms of a single rational power should be actualized at the same time. That is to say, the objection goes, if he is given the appropriate bricks, stones and timbers which are capable of becoming a house, and circumstances and timing are right, the housebuilder should at the same time "produce opposites" (1048a10). This objection would be pointless if rational powers were understood as powers for bringing about and destroying the same object or state. For, in the situation described, in which bricks, stones and timbers do not yet make a house, there is nothing for the housebuilder to destroy, and, consequently, there is no opportunity for him to produce opposites at the same time. On the other hand, if the bricks etc. available to the housebuilder are already parts of the house, then, of course, he can use his knowledge to demolish this house and build a new one out of the same matter. But this would also make the objection pointless, since there is again no op-

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[19] Even one-sided powers can be taken as accidentally two-sided, for what is cold can heat "when it has turned away and is departing" from the object which it previously cooled (*Phys*. 8.1.251a31–32).

portunity for him to produce opposites at the same time. The objection is stated on the assumption that if a rational power is both two-sided and self-actualizing, then its possessor should have such an opportunity.

The housebuilder has a power to produce both a house and its opposite because he possesses the *logos* of the house, which applies to its opposite as well. The *logos* of the house states the function of the house, i. e., that it is a receptacle to shelter people and property (see *Metaph*. H.2.1043a16–17). A simple negation or denial of this is something that cannot serve to shelter people and property. Or, more precisely, it is something that has the same matter as ordinary houses, but lacks the form of the house, and it is this that is the opposite of the house, or a non-house, in the relevant sense.[20] Hence, due to his power to produce houses, a housebuilder is capable to produce unusable houses, bad houses, or poorly built houses. One might object to this by saying that anyone can build an unusable house, just as anyone can harm a patient by giving her wrong drugs: you don't have to possess a relevant knowledge to produce non-houses and non-health. You cannot answer to this objection by saying that only housebuilders and doctors can *decide* to produce bad results, since this would misplace the origin of the rational power's two-sidedness. A rational power is about opposites because it includes *logos* or form, which clarifies both a thing and its opposite. Yet according to this answer, a rational power is about opposites because its possessor can choose to actualize it this way or that way. This is definitely not Aristotle's position, or so I am arguing in this paper. The housebuilder's decision (but not *qua* housebuilder) can be the explanation why his power is actualized this way and not that way, but it cannot be the explanation of the fact

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[20] In *Metaph*. Λ.4 Aristotle argues that there are four principles – form, matter, privation, and a mover – which are instantiated, in the case of health, as health, body, disease, and medicine, or, in the case of house, as structure (*eidos*), a particular kind of disorder (*ataxia toiadi*), bricks, and the art of housebuilding (1070b28–29). Thus, a particular kind of disorder would be the relevant privation or the opposite. On my interpretation, the disorder in question is relative to the form of the house – not just any heap of bricks (or of any other kind of material, for that matter) would do, but such a heap of bricks that is organized so that it *undermines* the protective function of a house, e. g., by making the roof so badly that it is prone to falling and thus harming, instead of sheltering, the residents. (Hence, I don't agree completely with Beere's (2009, 84) account, since it leaves open the question what is the right kind of disorder.) See also *Metaph*. Γ.2.1004a15–16, where Aristotle says that the difference between denial and privation is in that the former is the mere absence of something, while privation is the absence of a certain nature.

that it can be actualized this way or that way. The only explanation of the fact that it can be actualized this way or that way is the housebuilder's possession of *logos* or form. Since he knows what it is to be a house and how to build one, he is capable to build both a house and an unusable house. He can decide to build an unusable house because he knows what it is whose negation or privation he decides to build. Likewise, he can decide *not* to build the house, knowing that refraining from building will have as its result the matter's inability to fulfil the form of the house, also because he knows what it is that he decides not to build. I, on the other hand, who am not a housebuilder, cannot decide to build an unusable house: if I set out to build a house, both the success and the failure would be a matter of pure luck, since I don't possess the relevant *logos*. Thus, the proposed account provides the required generality of the idea that rational powers are powers for opposites: due to her possession of a rational power, an agent is (1) capable to produce both A and not-A; and she is (2) capable both to act according to her rational power and not to act according to it, if refraining from acting according to it amounts to producing not-A.

Now we can see a further difference between the two-sidedness of Aristotle's rational powers and of powers as they are commonly understood in contemporary discussions. To say that a single power to act is two-sided can mean at least three things. (a) It can mean that due to the possession of a two-sided power the agent is capable both to do A and to do absolutely nothing. (b) It can mean that the agent is capable both to do A and to do something else instead (for instance, that she is capable both to raise her arm and to scratch it). (c) It can mean that she is capable to do both A and something that can appropriately be characterized as the opposite of A (for instance, that she is capable both to raise her arm and lower it). It is not always clear what sense of two-sidedness is intended by those who argue that actions are exercises of two-sided powers. As we have seen, Aristotle' rational powers are two-sided (but not genuinely two-sided) in senses (a) and (c): due to the possession of a rational power, the Aristotelian agent is capable both to do A and to do absolutely nothing, if doing nothing amounts to producing not-A (a); and she is also capable to do both A and something that can appropriately be characterized as the opposite of A (c). Yet Aristotle's account does not cover sense (b). The possessor of a rational power is capable to do both A and B only if the form or *logos* of B is the denial of the form or *logos* of A, and the rational power in question is the power for A. But this amounts to the case

(c). If form or *logos* of B is not the denial of the form or *logos* of A, then, to be capable to do both A and B, the agent must possess two rational powers and two forms or *logoi*. This is true, of course, if a rational power is individuated by the form or *logos* of the corresponding object or state. If the agent is capable to build a house, a stall, and a garage out of the given matter, then, if house, stall, and garage do not have the same form or *logos*, she actually possesses three rational powers. On the other hand, if they have the same form or *logos* – e. g., that of a building – then she is not capable to build three things, but just one.[21]

5. The Role of Desire

Aristotle introduces the idea that rational powers are not self-actualizing as the response to the problem that arises about his claim that every rational power is the single power for opposites:

Since what is capable is capable of something and at some time and in some way and with however many other factors it is necessary to add to the specification, and some things can produce changes in accordance with reason and their powers are rational ones, while other things are non-rational and their powers are non-rational ones, and the former must be in what has a soul while the latter are in both, with the latter it is necessary, whenever agent and patient approach each other so as to be capable, that the one act and the other be affected; but with the former this is not necessary. For all these latter are productive of one thing, and those former are productive of opposites, so that they would produce opposites at the same time; but this is impossible. (Θ.5.1047b35–1048a10)

Every power, both rational and non-rational, can be actualized only in the presence of an external object that possesses the corresponding passive power, in appropriate circumstances and at some time. The housebuilder's power, to be actualized, requires the presence of particular bricks, stones, timbers, etc., that are capable to become a house, in appropriate circumstances and at some time. This does not mean, as we

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[21] Freeland (1982, 8) gives the following example of two-sidedness: due to his skill as a painter, Polygnotus can paint both an idealized portrait and a caricature. This example is adequate only if there is no separate form of a caricature, but its form is the negation and denial of the form of a portrait.

know from Aristotle's dispute with the Megarians in *Metaph*. Θ.3, that the housebuilder does not possess his power when these particulars are not present. It means only that when they are present, then his power to build a house is the power to build a particular house in these particular circumstances. Therefore, we can distinguish two ways in which an agent can possess a rational power. First, she can possess it *simpliciter*, just in virtue of the fact that she has learned it. Second, she can possess it determinately, or in a particular way, as is specified in the quotation above. In the latter case, the agent has the power to bring about a particular instance of something that is the proper object of her power *simpliciter* and to do this out of the particular matter, in specified circumstances and at a specified time. Determinate power is the power to act (see 1048a17–18), while by merely possessing a power *simpliciter*, an agent is not yet capable to act.[22] A corresponding distinction applies to non-rational powers as well: fire has the power to heat *simpliciter*, while in the presence of the appropriate object, in right circumstances and at a specified time it has this power determinately.

Non-rational powers are self-actualizing: if an object possesses a power determinately, it will be actualized by itself due to the presence of an object with relevant passive powers and in appropriate circumstances. This cannot be true of rational powers, for if they were both two-sided and self-actualizing, then both arms of a single rational power should be actualized at the same time. Aristotle cannot answer to this by inserting a clause into the specification of the determinate power that prevents its two arms to be actualized at the same time. For, this would mean that each of the arms should be temporally indexed, i. e., it should be stipulated that the agent has a determinate power to bring about a particular object or state out of the particular matter in particular circumstances at t_1 and to bring about the relevant opposite out of the same matter in the same circumstances at t_2. However, this would make such a power a conjunction of two simpler powers, rather than a single power for opposites. Instead, Aristotle denies that rational powers are self-actualizing. As I want to argue, he also denies that determinate rational powers are two-sided.

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[22] What I am calling power *simpliciter* corresponds to the second stage of *dunamis* as is distinguished in, e. g., *De anima* 2.5.417a20–29: in this sense, someone is a knower if she possesses grammatical knowledge and is able to apply it whenever she wishes, so long as nothing external hinders her.

Then there must be something else which is decisive (*to kurion*): I mean by this desire or *prohairesis* (*orexin ê proairesin*). For whichever it desires decisively (*oregêtai kuriôs*), in this way it will act when it is in the condition to be capable, and approaches the patient. And so it is necessary that everything which is capable in accordance with reason, whenever it desires that for which it has the power, and in the manner wherein it has the power, should act in this way. And it has [the power] when the patient is present and has [its power] in this way; and if not, it will not be capable of acting. (Θ.5.1047b35–1048a16)

The decisive factor in actualization of a rational power is not the power itself, but desire or *prohairesis*. It is not quite clear what Aristotle means by referring to desire or *prohairesis*. *Prohairesis* is also a kind of desire: it is the deliberative desire, i. e., desire formed as the result of the process of deliberation, which is aimed at performing the action that has been decided upon by that process (*EN* 3.3.1113a9–12; *EE* 2.10.1226b13–17). Deliberation is the efficient cause of *prohairesis*, and *prohairesis* is the efficient cause of action (*EN* 6.2.1139a31–33). It is safest to assume simply that Aristotle wants to identify some relevant psychological state that can move the agent and activate her rational power. We should consider in what sense this psychological state is the decisive factor, when it is formed and how its introduction provides the solution to the problem Aristotle is discussing.[23]

As I said, the actualization of a rational power proceeds through two stages of deliberation. In the first, the action according to the rational power is decided upon as the best and the most appropriate means that is available to the possessor of the power to achieve some end. In this stage, her power is power *simpliciter*, since the appropriate matter and circumstances are not yet present. Once the action according to the rational power has been decided upon, desire is formed that moves the agent. Both desire and rational power are efficient causes of the action, but not in the same sense: desire is the efficient cause because it is the origin of the actual bodily movements of which the action consists, while rational

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[23] Donini (2010, 92) argues that "desire or *prohairesis*" is not meant as an alternative but as an explanation, and that it refers to "that strong and consolidated form of desire that is *proairesis*." In his opinion, this is suggested by the fact that Aristotle says that it desires *kuriôs*, i. e., "decisively" (Makin), or "in a determined way," "in an effectively decisive way" (Donini). However, even an episodic desire, that is not (yet) part of a fully developed disposition, can decisively and determinately move the agent.

power, as is explained in ~~Chapter~~ 2, is efficient cause because it provides the account of why these movements are such-and-such an action.[24] Desire is the decisive factor in the actualization of power not because it tips the scale toward one arm of the power, but because it moves the agent's body in the direction that has been independently decided upon by reasoning. For instance, once the housebuilder *qua* e. g. investor has concluded that the best means to achieve his end, e. g., profit, is to apply his knowledge of housebuilding, a desire is formed to act accordingly.

At this moment, he can begin the next stage of deliberation, described in the quoted passage from *Metaph.* Z.7, in which he is looking for the best and the most appropriate means to apply his knowledge. In this stage, his power *simpliciter* is transformed into determinate power when he reaches the conclusion of deliberation, that is, when he forms the judgment about the first thing that he can do to achieve the end, e. g., the judgment that foundations should be built first. It is only then that he has the power to act, since it is only then that all the necessary conditions for action are met: appropriate matter for building the foundations, circumstances, and timing. Just as in the first stage, desire – the same desire as the one formed in the first stage – is the decisive factor, not because it dictates what should be done first – as before, this has been the business of reasoning – but, again, because it moves the agent's body and thus put the power into action. Hence, when the agent has the power determinately, then he already has the desire that his power *simpliciter* be actualized in a particular way. His determinate power already includes desire.

Consequently, a rational power, when possessed determinately, as a power to act here and now, cannot be two-sided. Near the end of Θ.5 Aristotle says:

That is why even if someone at the same time wished or wanted (*boulêtai ê epithumei*) to do two things or opposites, he will not do them. For it is not in this way that he has the power for them, nor is it a power to do them at the same time, since it will do things for which it is the power in the way in which it is the power (*hôn estin houtôs poiêsei*). (1048a22–24)

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[24] See *De motu animalium* 7.701a33–36: "This, then is the way that animals are impelled to move and act: the proximate reason for movement is desire, and this comes to be either through sense-perception or through *phantasia* and thought (*noêsis*)." (Transl. Nussbaum 1986.) See also 6.701a14–6; 8.701b17–21.

Wish (*boulêsis*) and want or appetite (*epithumia*) are two different species
of desire: the former is rational desire, and the latter non-rational desire.
Aristotle can mean either (a) that an agent has at the same time wish for
A and appetite for not-A; or (b) that an agent has at the same time wish
for A and for not-A, or that he has at the same time appetite for A and
for not-A. His wording slightly suggests (b), but regardless of the correct
reading, his point is obvious: if desire is the decisive factor in the actu-
alization of a power, what if the agent has conflicting desires? Aristotle's
answer has two parts. (1) "It is not in this way that he has the power for
them." Determinate power cannot include conflicting desires. The way
in which the agent has a determinate power is the way in which he will
act, and it includes the desire formed by deliberation. That is to say, if the
agent has a determinate power to Φ, then he will Φ exactly as is described
in the specification of the power: he will use a particular matter, in par-
ticular circumstances and at a specified time, *and* he will have a desire to
Φ. If he has conflicting desires, then he does not have determinate power,
and he is not capable to act. (2) "Nor is it a power to do them at the same
time." If the agent has a determinate power to Φ, then he is not capable to
not-Φ, for this is precluded by the specification of her determinate power.
Thus, determinate rational power is not two-sided. Rational powers are
two-sided only when they are possessed *simpliciter*, before the agent has
decided to act in a particular way and before the relevant circumstances
have occurred that provide the opportunity for acting.

6. Up-to-usness

Aristotle does not use the phrase "up to us" when discussing rational
powers (with one exception, *Metaph*. Z.7.-1032b21, discussed below). To
be sure, when a rational power is possessed *simpliciter*, then it can be said
that is up to the agent how and whether it will be actualized. However,
this is true only in a very general sense, namely, because it is *his* power
and *he* is the origin of its actualization. It is not true if the phrase "up to
us" is taken as two-sided, in the sense that it is up to us whether the ra-
tional power will be actualized or not. For, this would mean that at some
point in the process of the actualization of the power the agent chooses in
which direction it will be actualized, or that choosing whether it will be
actualized or not must figure in reasoning that precedes its actualization.
But this is not the case. In the process of deliberation, the agent works

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back from some posited end, through various things that lead to the end, looking for an action that is up to him to do to achieve the end. If he concludes that a rational power, or, rather, one of its arms, is the best and the most appropriate means to achieve the end, he engages in a further process of deliberation to find an action that is the best and the most appropriate way to begin to actualize the power. The fact that the power in question is two-sided and that he can freely choose and thereby determine which arm he will actualize need not play any role in the process. If the agent concludes that the best means to revenge someone is to apply his medical knowledge and kill her, the fact that medical knowledge is two-sided plays no role in deliberation. That is to say, the agent can decide that prescribing the lethal drugs is the best means to achieve his end without considering, at any point during the deliberation, that his power is two-sided. He can choose this power just as any other means, which need not be two-sided.

Furthermore, when the agent reaches the end of deliberation, it is up to him to perform the relevant action. Again, this does not mean that he is able to choose and determine whether he will actualize his (determinate) power and in what direction. It means only that his action – say, building the foundations – is what he *can* do at *this* moment. None of the previous steps in reasoning – say, a judgment that he should frame the roof, or that he should build the walls – is up to him at this moment: these steps will become up to him later in the process of production. This is how the phrase "up to the agent" is used in *Metaph*. Z.7.1032b21 (quoted at length above, p. 8): "That is already up to <the doctor>" – at that moment, it is up to the doctor to warm his patient, and *because* it is up to him to warm his patient it is up to him to make him equable. Ultimately, it is up to the housebuilder to build the house only because it is first up to him to build the foundations. Likewise, the given matter is capable to become a house because it is first capable to become foundations (just as the patient is capable to become equable because he is first capable to become warmed: *Metaph*. Z.7.1032b20–21, "this <i.e. being warmed> <the patient> is capable of becoming"). Hence, to say that it is up to the agent to perform an action that is the actualization of her rational power is nothing more than to say that she can, at this moment, perform this action. Taken in this sense, the up-to-usness of our actions done in accordance with rational powers has nothing to do with the availability of alternative courses of action. Moreover, there is no connection between their up-to-usness and their two-sidedness, which

is the basis of Alexander's and similar attempts to provide a unified Aristotelian theory of action.[25]

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[25] Differences between Aristotle and Alexander are thoroughly discussed in Meyer 1998, 227–38; see also Meyer 1994, 71–2. See also Coope 2010, 441–42.

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