

**NICOMACHEAN ETHICS VI.9:
GOOD DELIBERATION AND PHRONESIS**

**[ÉTICA A NICÔMACO VI.9:
BOA DELIBERAÇÃO E PHRONESIS]**

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Resumo: Neste artigo, analiso pormenorizadamente os argumentos apresentados por Aristóteles em *Ética a Nicômaco* (EN) VI.9. O artigo é dividido em duas partes principais. Na primeira, abordo a primeira parte de EN VI.9 onde Aristóteles desenvolve a noção de boa deliberação, culminando com a apresentação da sua definição em 1142b27-28. Na segunda, abordo a conexão entre boa deliberação e *phronesis* e discuto a *vexata quaestio* de se as linhas 1142b31-33 podem ser lidas como introduzindo a tese de que a *phronesis* fornece os fins morais.

Palavras-chave: *Phronesis*; Boa deliberação; Virtude do caráter; Ética; Aristóteles.

Abstract: In this paper, I put under scrutiny the arguments put forward by Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* (NE) VI.9. The paper has two main parts. In the first, I examine the NE VI.9's first part where Aristotle develops the concept of good deliberation, offering its definition in 1142b27-28. In the second, I examine the connection between good deliberation and *phronesis*, and, then, I discuss the *vexata quaestio* about if the lines 1142b31-33 might be read as introducing the claim that *phronesis* provides moral ends.

Keywords: *Phronesis*; Good deliberation; Virtue of character; Ethics; Aristotle.

The main topic of NE VI is the intellectual virtues. In this book, *phronesis* has prominence. Nothing more natural. *Phronesis* is an intellectual practical virtue and the NE is a moral treatise. After having presented and investigated the virtues of character throughout the NE's previous books, Aristotle starts this new topic of investigation, which was already expected given his early statements that the virtues are divided into two groups (cf. 1103a3-4 and 1103a14-18) and that he has already investigated one of them (cf. 1139a1-2).

Nowhere in the NE's books prior to NE VI Aristotle comes up with the claim that reason is supposed to be responsible to select moral ends. In fact, such topic is not even slightly touched by Aristotle in the course of the inquiry into the character virtues. The situation is not better in NE VI. Along that book, Aristotle does *not* formulate *directly* the question if the ends of actions are under reason's liability; rather, the topic appears only surreptitiously and most of the time Aristotle remains aloof from it. In virtue of such discouraging overall picture, the interpreter is left with just one option if she wishes to insist on such claim: to resort to supposed implicit clues given by the philosopher in NE, most of them available in book VI. However, the task is not an encouraging one, insofar as the promising passages give rise to more questions than unravel them by allowing a wide range of competing interpretations. Furthermore, some arguments are not utterly clear, puzzling even the most clear-sighted reader. Now, I shall analyze step by step NE VI.9 with the interest of offering an account of good deliberation and its connection with *phronesis*, as well as elucidating what role, or roles, are ascribed to *phronesis* in such chapter.

NE VI.9 is undeniably the first piece of text which some interpreters call upon to corroborate their claim that Aristotle ascribed to *phronesis* the outstanding task of providing moral ends. The chapter's last three lines are repeatedly displayed as the most striking evidence for such exegetical claim. Even though this

certainly is the most natural reading of the passage *at a first glance*, if one reads it in the light of the claims previously advanced by Aristotle and in the light of Aristotle's argumentative interest in NE VI.9, one notices a passage with many quite obscure argumentative steps, which can be read either to endorse the thesis that *phronesis does* provide moral ends or to refuse it.

An inquiry into good deliberation

Aristotle's cardinal aim in NE VI.9 is to offer an account of good deliberation. A great deal of the chapter is devoted to such purpose. And Aristotle fairly accomplishes this task. The main topic of the chapter is announced in the first lines: "we must also grasp what good deliberation (εὐβουλία) is (1142a32-33)".¹ The investigation about the good deliberation takes the whole chapter to come to an end.

Aristotle starts the chapter making a case for the distinction between deliberation (βουλευέσθαι) and inquiry (ζητεῖν). The two notions hold a hierarchical relation between them: deliberation is a sort of inquiry (cf. 1142a31-32). Such allegation is in absolute agreement with what was said about deliberation in NE III.2. In this chapter, in order to classify deliberation, Aristotle employed a set of words who keeps a strong semantic association with the idea of inquiry. For instance, the verbs "σκοπέω" in 1112b16, and its derivative form "ἐπισκοπέω" in 1112b17, the verb "ἀναλύω" in 1112b20 and its related noun "ἀνάλυσις" in 1112b23-24, and the constant use of the verb "ζητέω", 1112b20, 1112b28, and 1113a5, and its related noun "ζήτησις", 1112b22 and 1112b23. All these Greek words associate deliberation to a procedure similar to inquiry. The deliberation is concerned with the discovery of the

¹ All the passages quoted in English were taken from Broadie and Rowe's translation. Most of them were slightly or significantly modified in order to standardize the use of Aristotelian vocabulary in the text. In this text, I made use of Bywater's critical edition published in the *Oxford Classical Texts* (OCT) for the Greek text.

efficient manner to attain a given goal by investigation (cf. 1112b15-17). The classification put forward by Aristotle in NE VI.9 introduces a hierarchical classification already foreseen from his early statements.

Next, Aristotle tries to determine if the good deliberation might be regarded as some sort of knowledge, as opinion, as good guessing or as some other thing (cf. 1142a33-34). All the first three candidates will be dismissed along the chapter.

As deliberation was classified by Aristotle as a sort of inquiry and good deliberation is a sort of deliberation, good deliberation cannot under any circumstance be identified with knowledge. The first argument presented by Aristotle is simple and indisputable: no man investigates what he already knows (cf. 1141a34-1142b1). Knowledge is a state of possession of true contents while deliberation is a search, an investigation, where one is still looking for something, namely the best route of action.

Good deliberation is not good guessing as well. Good guessing occurs without the attendance of reasoning and is something quick (cf. 1142b2-3); good deliberation does not share such features, for good deliberation can sometimes take a long time to come to an end (cf. 1142b5)² and never occurs without reasoning (cf. 1142b12). Furthermore, good deliberation differs from quick thinking (*ἀγχινοια*) (cf. 1142b5-6), and good guessing is a type of quick thinking (cf. 1142b5-6). Thus, if good deliberation does not share any feature with the genera, *ἀγχινοια*, it cannot be identified as a species of such genera.

Then, Aristotle claims that good deliberation is not opinion. To support this claim, he is required to introduce a new premise. So far, the basic premise was that good deliberation is a sort of deliberation. Based on a new premise, knowledge will be once more rejected as candidate to the position of good deliberation and

² Some lines below Aristotle says that good deliberation is quick, what seems to contradict the claim just made. I confront the two passages below.

opinion will finally be considered as candidate and, then, rejected. Let's consider it closely.

Who deliberates badly errs (cf. 1142b7-8); who deliberates well deliberates correctly (cf. 1142b8). The bad deliberation leads the deliberator to commit mistakes, while the good deliberation leads to the opposite direction. Good deliberation is free of mistakes and correct. Good deliberation (εὐβουλία), what is taken by Aristotle in the passage as the same thing as deliberating correctly (βούλεσθαι ὀρθῶς), appears as some sort of correctness: correctness of the deliberation (cf. 1142b8-9). The details about what kind of correctness is the good deliberation will be spelled out later. The assumption that the good deliberation is a sort of correctness will be the underpinning assumption of the next arguments.

Good deliberation cannot be understood as correctness of knowledge. There is no correctness of knowledge because knowledge does not allow mistakes or rectification (cf. 1142b10). Knowledge always implies truth and it cannot be rectified; if it could, it would not be knowledge strictly speaking. Neither might the good deliberation be classified as correctness of opinion, because the correctness of opinion is truth (cf. 1142b11). Moreover, the things which opinion is concerned about are already determined (cf. 1142b11-12) and, as Aristotle argued before, good deliberation is a sort of investigation; it is about what is still going to occur and, wherefore, is not determined. Broadie reads it as ontological indeterminacy (cf. 2002, p. 376). To judge that something is is to assume that something already exists and that it is subjected to opinion. To deliberate about something, however, is to assume that there are still open possibilities to something being in one way or other – or even not being –, and, wherefore, it is to assume its ontological indeterminacy. Furthermore, while opinion is an affirmation, good deliberation is not, because good deliberation is a search that has not come to an end yet (cf. 1142b13-15).

At the end, as it was already expected, we are left with the claim that the good deliberation is correctness of deliberation. In spite of being an important result, it is still insufficient to delimitate properly the limits of good deliberation. The reason for thinking so is that correctness is said in many ways (cf. 1142b17) so that it is still necessary to clarify what sort of correctness is at stake when one alludes to correctness of deliberation.

As correctness can refer both to means³ and to ends of the actions, it is meticulously explored by Aristotle in these two fronts.

The argument follows:

Since correctness is of more than one kind, clearly correct deliberation is not any and every kind of correctness; (i) for by calculation the acratice person, or the one with a bad character, will achieve what his project requires, thereby having ‘deliberated correctly’, although he will have got himself a great evil. (ii) But to have deliberated well is thought to be a good thing; for it is this sort of correctness of deliberation that is good deliberation, i.e. the sort that enables one to achieve what is good. (iii) But it is also possible to achieve this by means of false reasoning, and to achieve what one should have done, but not by the means by which one should, the intermediate premise being false; so neither is this enough to constitute good deliberation – i.e. the sort of deliberation by which one achieves what one should, yet not by means by which one should. (1142b17-26)

In the passage (i), Aristotle deals directly with the efficiency of the means in contrast with the badness of the ends. The outstanding examples are the acratice and the person with a bad character. Both of them are acutely skilful to obtain what they long for. They put an end before themselves and successfully achieved it by working out the effective manner of getting it (cf. 1142b18-19).

³ “Means” is a rough translation of the Greek expression “τὰ πρὸς τὰ τέλη” (cf. 1111b26, 1112b11-12, 1112b33-34, 1113a14-15, 1113b3-4, and 1145a6). Since it is not the most accurate translation, I will use it only as a label with the unique intention of making easier the reference to the Greek expression, instead of frequently using long translations such as “what conduces to the end” or “the things that forwards our ends”.

Nevertheless, even though they are efficient in calculating the means, what they obtain is a great evil for themselves (cf. 1142b20). Even so, one must inescapably admit that such deliberation is in some sense a good deliberation, for it attains what was proposed as goal, in other words, the deliberator deliberates well for the sake of the end assumed. Albeit it can be said good deliberation in one sense, I mean, in the sense of successfully achieving the end assumed, it is not good deliberation strictly speaking. The true meaning of good deliberation is not suitably apprehended by appealing to the notion of efficiency alone. Nonetheless, it is necessary to say that, although efficiency by itself does not characterize as one should the notion of good deliberation, since efficiency also includes deliberations carried out by acratia and vicious individuals, it is one of the features of the good deliberation.

In excerpt (ii), Aristotle goes ahead in the argumentation by introducing a new requirement to good deliberation: a good goal. The goal cannot be bad. So, the deliberations of the acratia and vicious characters are completely excluded as involving good deliberation. However, to put before oneself a good goal is not enough, the correctness involved in the good deliberation entails to *reach* a good goal (cf. 1142b22). A deliberation that is efficient in proposing means but is not able to attain a good goal does not have the kind of correctness demanded by good deliberation.

The two requisites above, means efficiency and good goal, are not enough to perfectly portray the good deliberation. Some important issues stem from the characterisation above: should one apply to the means just the efficiency criterion? Or should it have a moral criterion as well? As one has seen, the moral agent has to deploy efficient means able to obtain the good end if she wishes to deliberate well. Notwithstanding, the moral agent, Aristotle argues, is not allowed to deploy each and every means in the actions. If she were allowed, one would have to assume that someone can morally reach a good end by blameworthy means.

Such concerns are brought to light by Aristotle himself in the passage (iii).

The passage is tricky. Aristotle employs a quite obscure syllogistic vocabulary. In the whole NE, Aristotle does not expose in any moment the governing rules of the practical syllogism as he does with the scientific syllogism in the *Analytics*⁴. He just makes some statements using syllogistic vocabulary without any commitment to spell out how its premises should be formulated and how the conclusions are drawn. Thus, to read the passage strongly orientated by the syllogistic vocabulary can be misleading.

As it was noted by some interpreters (cf. Angioni, 2011, p. 327-329; Broadie; Rowe, 2002, p. 376), the Greek expression “δὲ οὖν” in lines 1142b23 and 1142b26 might be taken in two ways. The most obvious reading is to assume that the expression refers to the means utilized by the moral agent in order to attain the pursued end. If one reads so, the passage is rendered as arguing against the employment of censurable means in order to achieve a moral good end. Another possibility, less obvious, is to take the expression as meaning that the moral agent acts in a suitable way by choosing the correct means; however, the reasons by which she justifies her actions are not the correct ones. Angioni argues that it is a hard task to decide what interpretative option is the most suitable, abstaining from opting for one of them (cf. Angioni, 2011, p. 329). In commenting the passage, Broadie (cf. 2002, p. 376) adopts the same position as Angioni by the same reason. In his commentaries, Irwin presents only the second interpretation and endorses it (cf.

⁴ Angioni compellingly holds that Aristotle seems to make use of the syllogistic vocabulary in a metaphorical and loose sense in NE. I'm in total agreement with his view. He argues that Aristotle nowhere formulated practical syllogism rules in the NE, and, as consequence, did not explain its use. For a well-grounded notion of practical syllogism, he continues, Aristotle would have to show how the logical form of a practical syllogism assures its validity, what he didn't do (cf. Angioni 2011, p. 327-329). From the few passages available in the NE on practical syllogism, one thing is certain: it is a very hard task to reconstruct a practical syllogism theory, the evidences are rather cryptic.

Irwin, 1999, p. 248). Gauthier and Jolif (cf. 1959, p. 516) display a vivid interest in the passage. According to them, Aristotle is arguing in favour of the moral correctness of the means. Thus, not only must the moral ends be morally appropriate, as the previous passage evinces, but also the means. In their view, Aristotle so far seemed to support the claim that the means would be irrelevant to the moral value of the action and that the means would be morally dignified by the moral value of the end; the passage, then, is presented by Aristotle in order to argue against such reading of his doctrines⁵. Their interpretation represents an exegetic novel only if one has adopted an instrumentalist interpretation of Aristotle's deliberation notion. In the constituent means reading (cf. Irwin, 1975, p. 571-572; Wiggins, 1980, p. 226-228) or in the interpretation according to which deliberation should be seen as a precise delimitation in each case of the general goal adopted by character virtue (cf. Angioni, 2009, p. 185-204; Moss, 2011, p. 241-251; Moss 2012, p. 197-198), Aristotle here is just making explicit a claim implicitly assumed long before because in these interpretations the means are intrinsically associated to the ends. In the constituent reading, the means are taken as parts of the end, and the end is conceived as the set of means, which are its constituents. In the reading advanced by Angioni and Moss, the means are seen as the ways employed by the moral agent to delimit in the situations how to implement the moral end adopted still in general lines by the character virtue.

⁵ Gauthier and Jolif's comments on the issue: "On a souvent l'impression, en lisant les analyses aristotéliennes de l'action, que pour lui la fin seule a valeur morale, les 'moyens' étant de purs procédés techniques d'y parvenir, morale-ment indifférent [...]. Ici au contraire, Aristotle reconnaît expressément que la fin ne justifie pas les moyens: il y a des 'moyens' qui ne sont pas de purs moyens, mais ont, *par eux-mêmes*, une valeur morale: on ne doit pas les employer, on ne doit pas atteindre la fin *par ces moyens-là*" (Gauthier; Jolif, 1959, p. 516-517).

I espouse Gauthier and Jolif's position, but not because of the reasons they put forward. The reason is that I adopt an interpretation of the role of deliberation quite akin to the one proposed by Angioni and Moss. In virtue of this, the deliberation already has its moral value given in NE III. Unfortunately, I do not have space here to develop it properly. The remarks that Gauthier and Jolif draw in NE VI are not a novelty at all. In the next lines, I outline my defence of the first exegetic option.

The first thing that should be taken into account is that the passage under scrutiny is designed to provide a portrayal of the notion of good deliberation, notion that classifies a particular sort of deliberation. This is the guiding clue to comprehend the passage.

When it comes to the role of deliberation, one should recognize that at least three options are before us: (i) one according to which deliberation is responsible to offer moral justifications of the moral actions; (ii) another according to which deliberation is the capacity to choose the means to attain some end; (iii) and a third according to which deliberation involves the criteria (i) and (ii). The option (i) may be abandoned since the beginning, because Aristotle clearly does not conceive deliberation *only* as a capacity to offer moral justifications of the moral actions. The discussion is about whether Aristotle ascribes such task to deliberation along with the task of choosing means. I defend below that Aristotle granted deliberation *just* the latter task but not the former. Now let's go back to NE III.3.

During NE III.3, Aristotle investigates the concept of deliberation and delimits its reach. There, Aristotle twice affirms that deliberation deals with what conduces to the end ($\tau\grave{\alpha}$ πρὸς τὸ τέλος) in opposition to dealing with ends (cf. 1112b11-12 and 1112b33-34). The reading that emerges from such statements is that deliberation must be understood as a procedure involved in discovering the means of the moral actions or, in Aristotle's vocabulary, what conduces to the end. Such evidence assures that

one of the tasks of deliberation is to provide the ways by which the actions will be carried out. How about moral justification? Let's read the passage below taken from NE III.3:

For a doctor does not deliberate about whether he will make his patients healthy, nor a public speaker about whether he will persuade his audience, nor a political expert about whether he will bring about good government – and neither do any of the other deliberate about the end, but rather they take the end for granted and examine how and by what means it will come about; and if it appears as coming about by more than one means, they look to see through which of them it will happen most easily and best, whereas if it is brought to completion by one means only, *they look to see how it will come about through this, and through which means that will come about*, until they arrive at the first clause, which comes last in the process of discovery. For the person who deliberates seems to investigate and to analyse in the way we have said, as if with a diagram (and while not all investigation appears to be deliberation, as e.g. mathematical investigations are not, all deliberation is investigation); and what is last in the analysis seems to be first in the process of things' coming about. And if people encounter an impossibility, they desist, as e.g. if money is needed, and there is no possibility of providing it; while if it appears possible, they set about acting (1112b12-27; the italics are mine).

My reading seems to be corroborated by the excerpt above. The passage explicitly delineates the role of deliberation. In the examples, Aristotle displays experts (the doctor, the political expert, and the public speaker) trying to figure out, in their respective fields, the appropriate means in order to reach their ends. They put under scrutiny all possible action courses and pick up the one that will allow them to attain the pursued end easily and in the best way. At the end of the deliberative procedure, they find what should be done in action to attain some goal. The whole chapter shows deliberation as a procedure to find the appropriate ways of acting. The deliberation appears as an investigation and analyses of the routes of action. The idea of justification of moral choices is absolutely absent; this absence makes plain that Aristotle

endorses uniquely option (ii). Such exegetical upshot is highly fruitful to NE VI.9.

Back to NE VI.9. The deadlock was if the Greek expression “*δι' οὗ*” in lines 1142b23 and 1142b26 were supposed to be taken as (i) meaning the correctness of the means employed in moral action or (ii) if it were supposed to be taken as meaning the reasons offered by the moral agent to morally justify her actions, or (iii) both. The Greek expression is presented in the middle of a discussion about good deliberation, just a few lines before a substantial account of good deliberation is provided by Aristotle (cf. 1142b27-28). As I have just argued, deliberation is not a procedure linked to justification of moral action at all. Hence, it would be very odd whether Aristotle unjustifiably introduced such topic into a discussion that is strictly relative to correctness of deliberation. The text does not even make room to the idea that Aristotle is ascribing to deliberation a new role, for the purpose of the chapter is not to display the tasks of deliberation, but to offer an account on a certain kind of deliberation, which has more limits than deliberation taken in general, so that it must be regarded as a further specification of the notion of deliberation. So, the features of good deliberation should not overcome the ones of mere deliberation, but only specify them, making them stricter. Moreover, the passage is so compact that it is more exegetically sound to take it as introducing moral correctness of the means rather than risk to introduce a completely new topic: justification of moral action by deliberation, which is not supported by early passages.

The argument proceeds:

Again, one person can achieve it by deliberating for a long time, while another manages it quickly. The former case, then, still won't count as good deliberation; rather, good deliberation is correctness as to what one should achieve, and the way in which, and when, all in accordance with what is beneficial (*ὀρθότης ἢ κατὰ τὸ ὀφέλμιον, καὶ οὗ δεῖ καὶ ὡς καὶ ὅτε*) (1142b26-28).

The claim that a long deliberation is not a good deliberation in line 1142b27 seems to contradict the assumption made in line 1142b5 that deliberation takes a long time. The disagreement between the passages is superficial, however. As Angioni remarks (cf. 2011, p. 326), line 1142b5 is not saying that deliberation is bound to take a long time, instead the claim advanced is that it *might* take a long time, the existence of swift deliberation is in no moment threatened. With these allegations, the problem is only partly solved; it is still necessary to cope with the issues that stem from line 1142b27. At a first glance, it explicitly assumes swift deliberation as good deliberation inasmuch as it seems to exclude peremptorily long deliberation as being able to be classified as good deliberation. Thus, another apparent contradiction comes up. One way to disentangle it and shed some light on the issue is to resort to line 1142b28, where Aristotle established the three requirements for good deliberation. One of them is that good deliberation must happen at the right time (ὄτε). The conclusion of a long deliberation can arrive too late so that the moral action is no longer needed: action time ran out. In virtue of such situation, we can reasonably suppose that Aristotle seems to eschew such cases, excluding as good deliberations only a specific kind of long deliberation: the deliberation whose conclusion is reached in a moment where the moral action is no longer necessary. It is not reasonable to exclude each and every case of long deliberation if some of them do not affect negatively the actions. This solution avoids the apparent contradiction⁶.

Aristotle sums up good deliberation requirements in lines 1142b27-28. They are three: (i) what should be done (οὗ δεῖ) (discussed in 1142b18-22), (ii) how it should be done (ὡς) (discussed in 1142b22-26), and (iii) when (ὄτε) (discussed in 1142b3-5 and 1142b26-27). Thus, a good deliberation has as its

⁶ An interpretation in these lines is briefly suggested by Burnet (cf. 1900, p. 277) and thoroughly developed by Gauthier and Jolif (cf. 1959, p. 517).

features the goodness of the end, the morality and efficiency of the means, and the appropriateness of the time. It is quite reasonable to suppose that Aristotle could have finished the inquiry into good deliberation at this point, since we are definitely before a full characterization of it. Nonetheless, he unexpectedly proceeds and draws some relations between good deliberation and *phronesis*. In the remaining passage, it is not completely clear if Aristotle's purpose is to continue to delimit good deliberation notion or if his purpose is to establish properly how good deliberation and *phronesis* tightly hold hands. However, taking into account that all requirements of good deliberation were already presented, it seems that Aristotle is opting for the second route⁷.

***Phronesis* and moral ends**

Finally, we are in the last lines of the chapter, certainly one of the most controversial passages in the entire NE. I quote it at length:

(i) Again, it is possible to have deliberated well either without qualification (*ἀπλῶς*) or in relation to some specific end (*πρὸς τι τέλος*): good deliberation without qualification, then, will be deliberation that is successful in relation to the end without qualification, while the specific kind will be deliberation that is successful in relation to some specific end. (ii) So if it is characteristic of the *phronimos* to deliberate well, good deliberation will be that sort of correctness that corresponds to what conduces to the end, of which *phronesis* is the true supposition (*εἰ δὴ τὸν*

⁷ By interpreting the difference between deliberation *ἀπλῶς* and deliberation *πρὸς τι τέλος*, Aubenque remarks that the difference is an addition that has no important impact on the argumentation carried out so far because the official definition of good deliberation was already presented in 1142b27-28 (Aubenque, 1965, p. 47). Engberg-Pedersen appears to endorse such view as well. He defends that Aristotle advances a preliminary and a final definition of good deliberation. The preliminary appears in lines 1142b27-28, while the last definition appears in lines 1142b32-33, however the last one determines only the meaning of good deliberation *ἀπλῶς*, not of good deliberation in general (cf. Engberg-Pedersen, p. 195-196).

φρονίμων τὸ εὖ βεβουλευῆσθαι, ἢ εὐβουλία εἶη ἂν ὀρθότης ἢ κατὰ τὸ συμφέρον πρὸς τὸ τέλος, οὗ ἢ φρόνησις ἀληθῆς ὑπόληψις ἐστίν). (1142b28-33)

In passage (i), Aristotle divides the good deliberation into two kinds: good deliberation ἀπλῶς and good deliberation πρὸς τι τέλος. The passage does not bring any clue about why Aristotle drew such division. To the interpreter, the solution left is to look for passages in NE which may shed some light on the issue.

At a first glance, one might take the text as saying that there is a difference between a deliberation that regards just one end in opposition to a deliberation that regards a complex range of ends. In fact, some interpreters hold that the deliberation ἀπλῶς means a deliberation that concerns happiness (cf. Irwin, 1999, p. 249; Sherman, 1989, p. 88; Reeve, 2002, p. 82-84; Kraut, 1991, p. 38). As happiness might be taken as a compound of ends, it fits into the idea that good deliberation ἀπλῶς might be seen as referring to a deliberation that marshals well the demands of the total set of ends in opposition to a deliberation that meets the demands of just one end.

In a very compelling interpretation, Angioni (cf. 2011, p. 330) argues that the word “ἀπλῶς” sometimes signifies “with no further specification” in opposition to “in a precise and exact manner”. According to him, such sense is found, for instance, in EE 1221b7. In this passage, the word “ἀπλῶς” is used in opposition to the word “ἀκριβέστερον”. Thus, a good deliberation ἀπλῶς might be understood as a good deliberation regarding any kind of end, whichever it is, whilst a good deliberation πρὸς τι τέλος might be taken as relative to a specific end. From such framework, Angioni argues in favour of an anticipation of a conceptual distinction that will be made by Aristotle in lines 1144a26-29. As the good deliberation ἀπλῶς responds for any sort of good deliberation, no matter if it is toward a bad or good end, it should be associated to cleverness, a capacity to deliberate well whichever is the end. On the other hand, the good deliberation πρὸς τι τέλος is associated to *phronesis*

and its meaning is further delimited by Aristotle in lines 1142b32-33: such good deliberation is about one specific end, the end of which *phronesis* has a true supposition.

Two arguments can be displayed against Angioni's interpretation: one based on my reading of the first part of NE VI.9 and another based on my reading of the passage at stake now. The former argument shall be expounded now; the latter shall be developed afterwards in discussing Tuozzo's construal.

As one has seen, the lines 1142b27-28 gave a definition of good deliberation. A good deliberation necessarily involves correction of the end (οὐ δεῖ), of the means (ὡς), and of the time (ὅτε). Thus, it is excluded as instance of good deliberation any deliberation that has a morally censurable goal although the end is successfully achieved. Efficiency is a necessary condition to good deliberation, not a sufficient one. The passage on good deliberation ἀπλῶς and good deliberation πρὸς τι τέλος is just after the delimitation of good deliberation so that I think it is unlikely that Aristotle modified the meaning of the notion of good deliberation within a few lines from a narrow sense to a broad one so that it could include the deliberations carried out by cleverness as cases of good deliberation. The deliberations issued by cleverness clearly fail to fulfil the οὐ δεῖ criterion. In virtue of it, I think Angioni's attempt to associate good deliberation ἀπλῶς and cleverness is threatened. The difference between deliberation ἀπλῶς e deliberation πρὸς τι τέλος should be drawn within the limits established to good deliberation in 1142b27-28.

Another interpretive shaft is brought forward by Tuozzo. His approach construes the passage appealing to an excerpt taken from NE VI.5, where Aristotle says:

Well, it is thought characteristic of a *phronimos* to be able to deliberate well about the things that are good and advantageous to himself, not in specific contexts, e.g. what sorts of things conduce to health, or to physical strength, but what sorts of things conduce to the good life in general (δοκεῖ δὴ φρονίμου εἶναι τὸ δύνασται καλῶς βουλευέσασθαι περὶ τὰ

αὐτῷ ἀγαθὰ καὶ συμφέροντα, οὐ κατὰ μέρος, οἷον ποῖα πρὸς ὑγίαιαν, πρὸς ἰσχὺν, ἀλλὰ ποῖα πρὸς τὸ εὖ ζῆν ὅλως). An indication of this is that we also call those in a specific field *phronimos* if they succeed in calculating well towards some specific worthy end on matters where no exact technique applies. So in fact the description ‘*phronimos*’ belongs in general to the person who is good at deliberation. (1140a25-31)

The passage sets up a difference between someone who is a good deliberator in good and advantageous things to herself in one specific field and someone who is a good deliberator in good and advantageous things to herself regarding the good life in general⁸. The first type of deliberation is depicted as a deliberation κατὰ μέρος, while the second type is depicted, in contrast with the first, as a deliberation οὐ κατὰ μέρος but a deliberation about τὸ εὖ ζῆν ὅλως. Aristotle’s purpose in drawing such distinction seems to be to argue that the deliberation carried out by *phronesis* embraces all the means concerned with the well-living; *phronesis* is not restricted to just one of the areas of the well-living.

Phronesis deliberates in view of health and strength because they are part of the well-being (cf. 1098b12-14). The two cases seem to be expounded as instances of the deliberation about τὸ εὖ ζῆν ὅλως. Here, however, an important exegetical issue arises. Remarkably, Tuozzo points out that health and strength are ends of two techniques. Health is an end of medicine while strength is an end of gymnastics. By this reason, he convincingly argues that

⁸ Considering that deliberation is uniquely concerned with things that conduces to the end (cf. 1111b26, 1112b11-12, 1112b33-34, 1113a14-15, and 1113b3-4), I see no reason to read the passage above as making room for the claim that there is a deliberation of ends. I agree with Tuozzo’s claim that the expression “ποῖα πρὸς” is clearly alluding to the steps necessities to attain the end when it refers to health and strength in the passage (cf. Tuozzo, p. 199-200), so that it is reasonable to read in the same sense the expression “ποῖα πρὸς” when it refers to good living in general. It amounts to say that *phronesis* deliberates about everything that is concerned with the well living. Thus, if an end contributes to the well living, the necessary means to its attainment shall be found by *phronesis*.

the sort of reasoning involved in such ends is not the same as the one involved in the deliberation of the *phronimos*. Tuozzo assumes that the former stands for technical reasoning and the latter stands for moral deliberation (cf. Tuozzo, 1991, p. 200). According to him, the contrast displayed by Aristotle is not based on the opposition part and whole but is based on an opposition between subject matters. Aristotle is opposing technical reasoning to moral reasoning. The fact that Aristotle concisely discusses the distinctions between *phronesis* and technique in lines 1140b1-7 provides support to Tuozzo's approach. Besides, Tuozzo adduces in favour of his claim a passage from NE VI.7, where Aristotle again introduces the opposition between ὅλως and κατὰ μέρος:

As for wisdom, this we ascribe, in the case of the various kinds of technical expertise, to those experts in them who are most precise, e.g. Pheidias is an accomplished worker in stone, Polycleitus in bronze, here at any rate meaning no more by wisdom than virtue in technical expertise; but we think that there are people who are wise in a general (ὅλως), not in a specific sense (οὐ κατὰ μέρος), and not accomplished in something else [...] So it is clear that philosophical wisdom will be the most precise of the kinds of knowledge. (1141a9-14, 16-17)

Tuozzo argues that the passage clearly exemplifies a difference of subject matter by using an opposition between ὅλως and κατὰ μέρος. On one hand, there is the wisdom κατὰ μέρος, which is concerned with the techniques; on the other hand, there is the philosophical wisdom that is classified as wisdom ὅλως (Tuozzo, 1991, p. 201). The result is that there are two sorts of wise people. The first group embraces all those who mastered some technique and, because of it, are told to be wise. Such kind of people has wisdom κατὰ μέρος. The second group encompasses all those who know the principles and who know what follows from the principles, they possess wisdom ὅλως (cf. 1141a17-18). Tuozzo's aim is to show that, in the excerpt, Aristotle is ascribing a primary and a secondary meaning, which is based on a distinction of subject matter, to the word “σοφός” by using the expressions “κατὰ

μέρος” and “ὅλως”. In order to prove that Aristotle consistently makes use of such distinction of subject matter in the NE, Tuozzo adduces another passage:

We must next discuss whether there is any type that is acratia without qualification (ἀπλῶς), or whether everyone is acratia in some specified way (κατὰ μέρος); and if there is, what sorts of things make up the objects of this unqualified lack of self-control. (1147b20-21)

The passage suggests that there are at least two sorts of acrasia: the acrasia ἀπλῶς and the acrasia κατὰ μέρος. Differently from the other passages, the opposition is not between the words “ὅλως” and “κατὰ μέρος” but between the words “ἀπλῶς” and “κατὰ μέρος”. Tuozzo argues that both opposition sets can be used to refer to primary or privileged cases of predication and its derivative cases (cf. Tuozzo, 1991, p. 201). In order to justify Aristotle’s replacement of “ἀπλῶς” by “ὅλως” in the passages without change of meaning, Tuozzo invokes Bonitz’s authority. Bonitz (cf. 76b49-77a52) recognizes the use of “ἀπλῶς” in cases of primary and secondary meaning by appealing to *De Generatione et Corruptione* 317b5-7. He also recognizes that “ὅλως” might be used in cases of primary and secondary meaning instead of “ἀπλῶς” (cf. Bonitz, 506a28-29), confirming the claim advanced by Tuozzo.

After having presented all these passages, Tuozzo compellingly argues that the distinction presupposed by Aristotle in lines 1142b30-31 is a distinction of subject matter. To deliberate πρὸς τὸ τέλος τὸ ἀπλῶς is to deliberate for the sake of moral action; by the other side, to deliberate πρὸς τι τέλος is to deliberate for the sake of some product of techniques. According to him, the same opposition is found in lines 1140a27-28, the examples of health and strengthen, which involve technical deliberations, are used to contrast with the sort of deliberation in which *phronesis* is involved, practical deliberation (cf. Tuozzo, 1991, p. 200-201). Now, I shall provide some arguments to resist to Tuozzo’s approach.

When it comes to lines 1140a27-28, the most important thing that should be noticed is that the distinction traced by Aristotle between “κατὰ μέρος” and “τὸ εὔ ζῆν ὅλως” is not placed in the middle of a discussion about technique and *phronesis*. Such topic is introduced just later, in lines 1140b2-4, and receives a quite short treatment. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the purpose of the passage is not to display the differences between the different kinds of reasonings involved in the different subject matters, as Tuozzo argues, but, instead, it is not to restrict the deliberation of *phronesis* to only one area of the well-being. As first evidence, I summon upon Aristotle’s claim in NE VI.13 that *phronesis* accompanies all the character virtues in their different areas in order to ensure the dianoetic part involved in the actions.; it attends to all moral actions from courage to temperance to generosity (cf. 1145a1-2).

My proposal, however, must cope with one strong hindrance. In the passage discussed, Aristotle provides two examples that come from the crafts: health and strength. The former is the aim of medicine; the latter, the aim of gymnastics. Tuozzo points out that including these cases as cases of deliberation of *phronesis* would contradict the claim made in line 1140a30, where Aristotle says that one calls *phronimos* those who deliberate well in view of some good end of which there is *no* craft (cf. Tuozzo, 1991, p. 200). One way out of this puzzle is to argue that deliberations for the sake of health or strength can be taken in two senses, a broad and a narrow one. In the narrow sense, such deliberations refer to the deliberation involved in the technical reasoning of medicine and gymnastics. Any interpreter is completely forbidden to assume that the *phronimos* can deliberate about these affairs. The *phronimos* does not deal with the goals of crafts. In the broad sense, one can include among deliberations that produces health, in addition to the doctor’s procedures, all the procedures that keep someone healthy or that allows someone to recover her health. One might think, for instance, of someone who went to the doctor and took a

medical prescription that stipulates what she must do in order to restore her health. It is up to her to follow or not the prescription so that it is ultimately her decision to restore health. If she follows the prescription, she will do things that conduce to health without being a doctor. In the same way, if someone eats just healthy foods and does physical exercise in order to maintain overall health, wellness, and strength, she is acting for the sake of health without being a doctor. In lines 1141b18-21, Aristotle himself gives an example of deliberation about healthy eating where he links the consumption of light meats to health; the example is brought forward in a context where he is arguing in favour of the claim that *phronesis* must know both the universal and the particular. In the passage, there is no evidence that such deliberation is somehow related to the craft of medicine. The passage clearly alludes to a deliberation done by a *phronimos* in view of her health. The excerpt conspicuously accommodates the claim that Aristotle acknowledges a broad sense of deliberation for the sake of health. Tuozzo's construal that the deliberation about health and strength illustrated in NE VI.5 unavoidably represents a technical deliberation is thus challenged, making room to my construal of the passage.

The evidence put forward above makes room for my interpretation that, when Aristotle claims that it is possible to deliberate well either ὁλῶς or κατὰ μέρος in NE VI.5, the contrast drawn might be thought as being between deliberating well in only one field of the good living and deliberating well in every field of the good living. The last option is underpinned by the fact that *phronesis* goes along with all virtues. With these results, I return to the point where I had stopped in NE VI. 9 and delineates their consequences to the passage.

I have shown that, at the NE VI.9's very end, Aristotle argues that there are two types of good deliberation: the good deliberation ἀπλῶς and the good deliberation πρὸς τι τέλος. Even though one is not told how to interpret the passage, for the distinction is

not explained by Aristotle in NE VI.9, one promising way of interpreting the passage is to assume that the distinction at stake here is the same distinction expounded in NE VI.5. If one follows such proposal, Aristotle can be taken here as endeavouring to avoid the restrictive thesis that the good deliberation related to *phronesis* must preside over one domain of the well-living. The good deliberation ἀπλῶς includes all the ends related to well-living. One passage from NE VI.7 strongly suggests such approach: “the person who is without qualification the good deliberator is the one whose calculations make him good at hitting upon what is best for a human being among practicable goods” (ὁ δ' ἀπλῶς εὖβολος ὁ τοῦ ἀρίστου ἀνθρώπου τῶν πρακτῶν στοχαστικός κατὰ τὸν λογισμόν) (1141b12-14). The good deliberator ἀπλῶς is the one who deliberates well about what is best for human being, in other words, he is someone who deliberates excellently about all human goods. Although the use of ἀπλῶς here applies to the deliberator, not to good deliberation, there is room to argue in favour of a parallel between the two passages, especially because Aristotle does not explain what he understands by good deliberation ἀπλῶς. If I do so, the passage gives us the clue to unveil the true meaning of the NE VI.9's last sentences. By articulating the two passages, one has the result I have been arguing for. Aristotle's main concern in establishing the difference between deliberation ἀπλῶς and deliberation πρὸς τι τέλος was to block the claim that the deliberation ἀπλῶς is restricted to just one domain of good living. The same distinction should be applied to “τὸ τέλος τὸ ἀπλῶς” and “τι τέλος” (cf. 1142b30-31). My construal goes somehow in the same direction as the one of the interpreters who argues in favour of identifying the deliberation ἀπλῶς as a deliberation towards *eudaimonia* provided that one takes *eudaimonia* as covering all the domains of the well-living.

Finally, I shall offer an interpretation of the very controversial final statements of NE VI.9. So far, one has seen that good deliberation refers solely to what conduces to the end, to what is

under the responsibilities of *phronesis*, which is the virtue responsible for deliberation (cf. 1140a25-26, 1140a30-31, and 1141b9-10). In relation to the end, I shall argue that *phronesis* presupposes a good end, but *phronesis* does not provide it.

In the NE VI.9's last two lines, Aristotle associates good deliberation and *phronesis*. He affirms that good deliberation is characteristic of the *phronimos* (cf. 1142b31-32). Here one should be careful. The genitive of possession cannot be taken in a restrictive sense so that good deliberation belongs only to the *phronimos*. *Phronesis* presupposes good deliberation, however the other way round is not true. As one has seen, the definition of good deliberation given just a few lines above this passage did not presuppose *phronesis* but implied a good end achieved by morally appropriate means in the appropriate time. The lines 1142b31-32 are put forward by Aristotle in order to relate the deliberation of *phronesis* and good deliberation.

The NE VI.9's last two lines are the piece of evidence which the interpreters frequently resort to in the interest of upholding the claim that Aristotle attributed to *phronesis* the task of providing moral ends. The text runs like this: “deliberating well will be that sort of correctness that corresponds to what is convenient to the end about which *phronesis* is the true supposition” (ἡ εὐβουλία εἶη ἂν ὀρθότης ἢ κατὰ τὸ συμφέρον πρὸς τὸ τέλος, οὗ ἢ φρόνησις ἀληθῆς ὑπόληψις ἐστίν) (1142b32-33). In line 1142b33, Aristotle uses the word “τέλος” in a movement that seems to refer to the τέλος ἀπλῶς discussed just above. Aristotle does not employ the full expression “τέλος ἀπλῶς”; nonetheless, taking into account the context, it appears as the most reasonable reading of the passage. The controversy of the passage concentrates in which way to interpret the relative pronoun “οὗ”. The relative pronoun is totally tricky and gives rise to many philological and philosophical issues. The first and foremost issue is to know exactly what is the antecedent

of the pronoun. Three options are usually put forward⁹: (i) the pronoun takes the word “συμφέρον”; (ii) the pronoun takes the whole phrase “συμφέρον πρὸς τὸ τέλος”, or (iii) the pronoun takes just “τέλος”. The first option is the weakest exegetical one and might be easily discarded. Firstly, “συμφέρον” is an awkward option in virtue of being very distant from the relative; there is a long expression between them. One strong reason to reject the first option is that the word “συμφέρον” taken alone is absolutely inconclusive. To make sense, it must be qualified by some expression or word. For example, in the passage one has the expression “πρὸς τὸ τέλος” that could clearly qualify the word “συμφέρον”. Thus, it is not an interpretative alternative to hold that the pronoun “οὗ” refers to “συμφέρον” alone and in consequence that *phronesis* is the true supposition of the convenient.

Most interpreters are grouped around options two and three. These are options with more philosophical depth. In the second alternative, Aristotle is taken as arguing that *phronesis* has a true supposition of *what conduces to the end*. Such interpretation goes hand in hand with the Aristotelian claim that one does not deliberate about the ends but just about the means (cf. 1112b11-12, 1112b34-35, 1113b3-4, EE 1226b9-10, and EE 1227a7-8). Aubenque, Angioni (2009), Greenwood, and Burnet espouse this exegetical alternative, which is deeply grounded in Aristotle’s previous arguments. In this interpretative line, Aristotle is not presenting a new claim but reaffirming an old one, already known by the reader. The third option is preferred by those who attempt to demonstrate that moral ends are supplied by *phronesis*. Ac-

⁹ Not all the interpreters below put forward the three exegetic options but all of them consider at least two options: Stewart, 1892, p. 83; Burnet, 1900, p. 277; Greenwood, 1909, p. 66, p. 113 n. 3; Gauthier; Jolif, 1959, p. 518-519; Aubenque, 1965, p. 46; Kenny, 1979, 106-107; Sherman, 1989, p. 89; Angioni, 2009, p. 193-194; Angioni, 2011, p. 329-331; Moss, 2011, p. 230-232; Moss, 2012, p. 180-182.

ording to them¹⁰, the passage is a strong evidence to prove their interpretation. They take the excerpt as saying that *phronesis* has a true grasp of the end, playing the role of providing the moral ends of the actions. Such approach has some problems. First, in the NE, Aristotle nowhere defends one doctrine according to which *phronesis* provides moral ends. On the contrary, he insists on the claim that character virtue supplies the ends (cf. 1144a7-9, 1145a5-7, 1151a15-19, to some extent 1114b22-24, evidence found also in the EE 1227b23-25). Thus, it would not be charitable with Aristotle to read the passage in such a way that he would seem to be advancing a claim that finds *no explicit* support from elsewhere. Given the obscurity of the passage and the lack of such doctrine, it seems implausible to ascribe the third interpretative choice as making part of Aristotle's moral doctrine. Not even the NE VI.9's preceding lines of the passage offer some clue to such reading. The closer step given by Aristotle in this direction was to say that good deliberation presupposes a good aim, what is not strong enough to attribute now to *phronesis* the power of providing ends.

Notwithstanding, there is a second interpretative choice for those who take the relative pronoun “ὃν” as making reference to “τέλος”. Instead of arguing that *phronesis* provides the moral ends, one might sustain that Aristotle's intention was to claim that *phronesis* has an apprehension of the end, nonetheless it does not entail in any way that *phronesis* provides the end. *Phronesis* has a rational apprehension of the end, which is given by other ways. Reeve puts the point in the following terms: “*phronesis* does grasp the truth about the ends, but it is natural or habituated virtue that enables it to do so” (Reeve, 1992, p. 87). Angioni (cf. 2011, p. 330), implicitly reconsidering his previous position, endorses the position that the passage is arguing that *phronesis* has a compre-

¹⁰ Examples of such interpretative option are Kenny, Gauthier and Jolif, and Sherman. The precise references were given in the last footnote.

hension of the moral ends, but it does not signify that *phronesis* has the task of furnishing them.

To ascribe to *phronesis* the power of comprehending ends is not the same as arguing that one of its functions is to be provider of ends. Moss also adopts a similar view: “what *phronesis* adds is the right ‘supposition of the end’, where this means, [...], being aware of it as an end, i.e. using it to guide deliberation” (Moss, 2012, p. 183). According to her, in the deliberation, *phronesis* has a clear view of the pursued end and uses it to steer the actions and to choose the more efficient and appropriate means. The end is given elsewhere, namely by character virtue, *phronesis* just conceptualizes the end (cf. Moss, 2012, p. 182).

The passage discussed holds that *phronesis* is an *ὑπόληψις* of the end. In NE VI.5, there is one passage where Aristotle associates *phronesis* and *ὑπόληψις*. It is worth a look:

(i) That is why we give *sophrosune* [moderation] its name, as something that *sozei ten phronesin* [preserves *phronesis*]. And it does preserve the sort of supposition [*ὑπόληψιν*] in question. What is pleasant and painful does not corrupt, or distort, every sort of supposition [*ὑπόληψιν*], e.g. that the internal angles of a triangle do or do not add up to two right angles, only suppositions in the sphere of action. For the principles are constituted by what those projects are for; (ii) and once someone is corrupted through pleasure or pain, straightaway the principle does not appear, nor that one should choose everything, and act, for the sake of this, and because of this – for badness is corruptive of the principle. (1140b11-20)

The passage (i) clearly states that temperance somehow preserves *phronesis*, which is said to be an *ὑπόληψις*. Next, Aristotle argues that pleasure and pain have influence on the principles of actions so that they might corrupt or distort the principles. Aristotle, however, does not make it plain in passage (i) whether pleasure and pain are responsible to give rise to the *ὑπόληψις* of *phronesis* or whether they have only a negative role, that is, to

corrupt the view of the good¹¹ established by *phronesis*. Passage (ii) appears as repeating the same claim. The principle does not appear to someone who is corrupted by pleasure or pain. Nonetheless, it leaves open the possibility for pleasure and pain to be determinant of the ὑπόληψις of *phronesis*.

The positive role of pleasure and pain – topic fully treated and developed throughout NE II –, emerges implicitly in the NE VI's final chapter. Here, Aristotle seems to be akin to the idea that pleasure and pain, when mastered by virtue of character, give rise to an ὑπόληψις about the principles of actions and not just corrupt them:

[...] chains of practical reasoning have a principle – since the end, i.e. what is best, is such-and-such (whatever it may be: for the sake of argument let it be anything one happens to choose), and this is not evident [οὐ φαίνεται] except to the person who possesses virtue, since badness distorts a person and causes him to be deceived about the principles of action. (1144a31-36)

In the passage above, virtue, a disposition related to feel properly pleasure and pain (cf. 1105b25-28, 1106a11-12), appears as a *sine qua non* condition for the apprehension of the correct principles. A sturdy evidence for such claim comes from NE VII.8:

¹¹ Irwin argues that the convictions of *phronesis* about noninstrumental goods must compete with convictions about noninstrumental goods formed by our uneducated desire for pleasure. The consequence is that, when there is a struggle between these two convictions, the moral agent is not able to have the sort of conviction required for being *phronimos* (Irwin, 1999, p. 242-243). Taylor (2008, p. 209) argues that in the passage Aristotle meant to say that the role of temperance is only to preserve the true supposition of the end, which is clearly provided by *phronesis*. Sorabji (cf. 1980, p. 212) construes the passage in a similar way.

Virtuous and badness respectively keep healthy, and corrupt, the fundamental principles, and in action this is that for the sake of which, just as in mathematical arguments the initial posits are principle. Neither in that case, then, does reasoning teach us the principles, nor does it in the present one; instead, it is virtue, innate or resulting from habit-training, that gives us correct judgment about the principle. (1151a15-19)

The principle, which might be taken as *ὁλόληψις* of the end – the association between them can be drawn from lines 1140b11-20 –, is taught by virtue and, then, apprehended by *phronesis* from such teaching. Taking the passage in this way, I do not preclude *phronesis* from having a supposition of the end. *Phronesis* must have such supposition, for it is completely necessary if *phronesis* is going to fulfil its duty of finding the efficient and appropriate means to achieve the end. The supposition of the end works as the horizon towards which deliberation directs its efforts. So by following the Angioni's (2011), Reeve's, and Moss' suggestions, and taking into account the passages above, it is hard to assume that Aristotle's intention in lines 1142b31-33 is to support a doctrine according to which *phronesis* has the power to pick out moral ends.

Even though the interpretation advanced is very reasonable, the interpretation (ii) also has its own merits and can hardly be completely discarded; it fits perfectly into Aristotle's claim that deliberation, which is the task of *phronesis*, deals with things that conduces to the end (cf. 1112b11-12, 1112b34-35, 1113b3-4, 1144a 6-9, 1144a20-22, and 1145a5-6). It is a more straightforward interpretation, because it does not presuppose a sequel of grounding steps. The list of passages quoted gives strong support to the interpretation. They clearly state that the reach of deliberation is the things that conduces to the end. Nonetheless, to uphold that *phronesis* is an apprehension of the things that conduces to the ends adds nothing to Aristotle's early statements and just reaffirms Aristotle previous position.

Either way, regardless of which of the two interpretations is endorsed, Aristotle remarkably does not seem to grant to *phronesis* the capacity to deliberate about ends or to select them in the passage considered, which is usually taken as the most promising one to ascribe to Aristotle such claim. Such role is ascribed to character virtue. However, in order to implement appropriately its goals, the character virtue requires the presence of *phronesis* (1144a36-1144b1, 1144b16-17, and 1144b36-1145a2). Finally, it is necessary to stress that it still leaves open the possibility that Aristotle had ascribed to an intellectual capacity, other than *phronesis* – or even to *phronesis*, but in other passages –, the function of electing moral ends¹². Unfortunately, such investigation is not within the scope of this paper¹³.

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¹² In the NE, Aristotle refers to a practical *nous* in two occasions (cf. 1143a35-1143b5 and 1144b6-13), apparently claiming that such *nous* would be able to furnish the moral goals. Although the evidence is cryptic and short, it manifestly can be explored in order to display practical *nous* as the rational capacity responsible *par excellence* for providing the moral ends.

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