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# CHOICE AND ACTION IN ARISTOTLE

A. W. Price

## I : PREFACE

A current issue in the philosophy of action is the grammar of intention.<sup>1</sup> Take a sentential schema:

(1) *A* intends to  $\phi$ .

Does this intention attach to something like a proposition? (1) might then be construed as follows:

(1a) *A* intends that he  $\phi$ .<sup>2</sup>

In terms of truth, (1a) takes the truth of ‘I  $\phi$ ’ to be intended by *A*: he intends that it become true that he  $\phi$ ’s.

More exactly, one should distinguish *A*’s believing (a) *that he will  $\phi$* , with the future indicative, from his intending (b) *that he  $\phi$* , with the subjunctive. (a), but not (b), can be true or false. Yet one might call (b) a ‘quasi-proposition’, since it shares (a)’s subject-predicate form.

However, there is an alternative way of reading (1). We may propose instead that it should be taken as it stands, which might, in quasi-English, be rendered so:

(1b) *A* intends  $\phi$ ’ing.

Here what *A* intends is *an act* (the act of  $\phi$ ’ing). What identifies this act as an act of his own is not the addition of some specification to the content of his intention, but the *absence* of any specification. It is supposed that *A*’s intentions are *by default* intentions simply *to act* – though he may on occasion form an intention that he (or another) act.

Here I shall focus on Aristotle, who has been neglected in this connection. This may be because he either lacks, or fails to focus upon, our concept of intention.<sup>3</sup> However, he gives a central role to what he calls *prohairesis* (most often translated by ‘choice’, sometimes by ‘decision’) and *boulēsis* (traditionally translated by ‘wish’). Where these play roles in the explanation of action, they may well be forms of intention, and relate to

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<sup>1</sup> Contrast, on different sides, Broome (2002) with Madden (2011), Hornsby (2016).

<sup>2</sup> Note that the ‘he’ here is self-referential, which captures that the intention is *de re*. Less happy would be the paraphrase ‘*A* intends that *A*  $\phi$ ’, which is *de dicto*, with both ‘*A*’s signifying *the referent of ‘A’*’; for it can be true that *A* intends to  $\phi$ , even if he falsely believes that he is not the referent of ‘*A*’.

<sup>3</sup> Something at least very like our concept of intention is deployed at *Rhet.* II.2 1378b2-4; yet it fails to become a theme.

acts as intentions centrally do, even if not all the acts that we count as *intended* count for Aristotle either as *chosen* or as *wished for*. Hence no conceptual deficiency precludes him from facing the same question of logical grammar that *we* raise about intentions. We shall find that he consistently takes a line that is of a piece with a preference of (1b) to (1a). My first task here is to substantiate this claim; my second is to explore the role that this plays within his account of the relation of thought to action.

## II : THE GRAMMAR OF CHOICE AND WISH

I shall discuss first the grammar of choice, and then that of wish. What, according to Aristotle, is choice *of*? I believe that the evidence supports the following answer: an agent chooses an act, in preference to alternative acts, for the sake of a goal. (I shall consider the relation of choice to deliberation, which also enters into its definition, in the next section.)

The *Eudemian Ethics* [EE] provides evidence to resolve an unclarity present in the *Nicomachean Ethics* [EN]. Here we read that the very term *prohaireseton* indicates a thing ‘selected before other things’ (*pro heterōn hairaton*, EN III.2 1112a16-17).<sup>4</sup> What does ‘before’ signify here? One possibility is that, being chosen as a means to a wished-for goal, the *prohaireseton* comes – conceptually within intention and execution (when it is intended and enacted for the sake of something else), though not temporally within deliberation (when it is derived from a given goal) – *before* the object of wish.<sup>5</sup> However, a different possibility is explicit within the *Magna Moralia*: ‘Choice seems to be what its names suggests: I mean, we choose one thing instead of another; for instance, the better instead of the worse’ (I.17 1189a12-14). This would be decisive – if the status of that work was undisputed. As it is, we need to attend to a passage in the *Eudemian Ethics* from which it may well derive:

The very name makes it plain. For choice is not simply selection, but selection of one thing before another (*heterou pro heterou*) ... About the end no one deliberates (this being fixed for all), but about that which tends to it – *whether this or that tends to it* ... No one chooses without preparation and deliberation about *what is better and worse* (II.10 1226b6-15).

It is surely indicated here (as my italics highlight) that choice is *between* alternative ways or means towards a given goal.<sup>6</sup>

A choice is further characterized by its goal: ‘No one chooses an end but rather things that contribute to an end – for instance, no one chooses to be in health but to walk or to sit for the purpose of keeping well’ (II.10 1226a7-9). More generally, ‘All choice is *of* something and *for the sake* of something’ (II.11 1227b36-7). Thus choice looks through a

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<sup>4</sup> In translating from Aristotle’s ethical writings, I generally keep close to Barnes & Kenny (2014).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. III.3 1112b19-20. Aquinas asserts the converse of the end (*ST* qu. 18 art. 7): ‘Finis est postremum in executione, sed est primum in intentione rationis.’

<sup>6</sup> This is why ‘choice’ is better as a rendering of *prohairesis* than ‘decision’; more explicit, but clumsy, would be ‘preferential choice’.

way or means towards a further goal.<sup>7</sup> Further, whereas deliberation may pursue a goal that conflicts with, or at least falls outside, the agent's conception of acting well, the ultimate end of choice is always *eudaimonia*. This emerges in the context of *akrasia*: *akratic* agents, like base ones, may 'deliberate' for the sake of ends whose achievement will harm them (*AE* B.9 1142b18-20);<sup>8</sup> and yet the *akratic*, unlike the wicked or corrupt, act contrary to choice (C.4 1148a417, 8 1151a5-7, 10 1152a17).

Choice therefore has a double complexity, looking sideways (as it were) towards alternatives that are *not* preferred, and ahead towards ends that orient the preference.

In choosing how to act, does an agent choose *to do something*, or *that he do something*? If choosing *to do something* differs from choosing *that one do it*, this is because one chooses an *act*, whose doing (if it occurs) will constitute an *action*. Most explicit are remarks that Aristotle makes about the grammar of choosing:

We choose to get or avoid something good or bad, but we have beliefs about what a thing is or whom it is good for or how it is good for him: we can hardly be said to believe to get or avoid anything. And choice is praised rather for being of the object it ought to be, or for being correct, belief for being true (*EN* III.2 1112a3-7).<sup>9</sup>

As it happens, his distinction is clearer in English than in Greek. We can't say, e.g., 'I think to be well today', meaning that I think *that I am* well; but Greek words for thinking typically permit just such a construction. Aristotle is making the following connected points:

- (a) I make a choice to  $\psi$ , but do not have a belief to  $\psi$ , but about (e.g.) whether it is beneficial to  $\psi$ .
- (b) A choice can be correct (*orthos*), while a belief can be true (*alēthēs*).

Taken on its own, (a) might be making a simple contrast in onus of match: if a belief fails to fit reality, it is faulty for that reason; if reality fails to fit a choice, it is defective in that respect. Yet (b) allows choices to be correct or incorrect, not just effective or ineffective. In Aristotle's view, it would seem (cf. *AE* B.2 1139a21-6), a choice to  $\psi$  is correct if it accords with a true piece of reasoning (*logos*).

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Rhet.* I.8 1366a14-16: choice reveals character since it 'refers back (*anapheretai*) to the end'. This connection also lies behind an unexpected sentence in the *AE*: 'While virtue makes the choice correct, the choice of what should naturally be done to carry it out belongs not to virtue but to another capacity' (B.12 1144a20-2). This apparently equates choice and wish; which becomes half-explicable given that choice relates to an end as well as to a way or means.

<sup>8</sup> So when Aristotle contrasts *akratic* action with action upon deliberation (*bouleusis*) or calculation (*logismos*) (*EE* II.8 1224b21-9, *AE* C.7 1150b19-21), this does not exclude that there may have been some means-end thinking on *both* sides. I follow Anthony Kenny in referring to the common books (*EN* V-VII = *EE* IV-VI) as *AE* A-C.

<sup>9</sup> The construal of 1112a5-7 is contested. I follow Brown's revision of Ross (2009); but Barnes & Kenny (2014), following Ross (1925), has 'Choice is praised for being of the object it ought to be rather than for being correctly related to it, belief for being truly related to its object.' The rendering I adopt makes a parallel with *AE* B.2 1139a24-5: 'The *logos* must be true and the desire correct if the choice is to be virtuous.'

However, it complicates the contrast that choice *can*, though rarely, be said to have a propositional (or quasi-propositional) content, as here: ‘There is nothing better than such a capacity [viz. political] which they [politicians] could bequeath to their states, or could choose there to be to themselves or, therefore, to those dearest to them’ (EN X.9 1181a7-9). Choosing *to have* some capacity might be analogous to choosing *to do* something (say, in order to acquire the capacity); but choosing *that* those dearest to one *should have* it clearly relates what is here called ‘choosing’ to a state of affairs that is given by a quasi-proposition (not strictly true or false, since the ‘should’ stands in for a subjunctive, yet of subject-predicate form). No such usage is present in another passage, but it might well have been: ‘He [a virtuous agent] may even surrender up actions to his friend, and it may be nobler to become the cause of his friend’s acting than to act himself’ (IX.8 1169a32-4). Here, the agent chooses *that* his friend should act nobly rather than *to act* nobly himself.<sup>10</sup>

What I have just illustrated may be a distinct use of the term *prohairesis* that we should set to one side. Yet the following question arises: when Aristotle writes of a man’s choosing *to do* something, does he really mean that he chooses *that he do* it? This is not excluded by points (a) and (b) above. For a quasi-proposition cannot be true, even if choosing that one act in a certain way counts as ‘correct’ if one should act in that way; and choosing that one act in some way is not itself an answer (even if it goes with an answer) to the question how one should act. So we need supplementary evidence if we are to insist that the choice that emerges out of practical deliberation is irreducibly a choice *to act* in a certain way; this evidence should further show how we are to interpret this way of speaking.

In fact, there is no lack of textual evidence that does both, identifying what is *chosen* with what may be *done*, and so implying that to choose to act in some way is to choose an act, or something doable (*prakton*) whose doing constitutes an action (*praxis*). The decent agent is a chooser and a doer (*prohairesitikos kai praktikos*) of just acts (AE A.10 1137b35). We choose what we especially know to be good, presumably acts (EN III.2 1112a8-9). The self-indulgent equally do, pursue, and choose pleasant things, i.e. acts (AE C.2 1146a31-2). Those living in concord choose and do the same things (EN IX.6 1167a27-8). Most explicitly, the *prakton* and the *prohairesiton* are the same (*Met. E.1* 1025b24). The same identity carries over to the objects of deliberation (*bouleuta*), though with a distinction. The *bouleuton* and the *prohairesiton* are the same, except that the latter ‘is already determinate’, since it ‘has been decided upon as a result of deliberation’ (EN III.3 1113a2-5); thus one deliberates whether to  $\chi$  or to  $\psi$  (let us suppose in order to  $\phi$ ), whereas one chooses (say) to  $\chi$ , where the phrase ‘whether to  $\chi$  or to  $\psi$ ’ indicates a need to decide between the disjuncts. ‘Things towards the end’, which are acts, are *bouleuta* and *prohairesita* (III.5 1113b3-4), though strictly (if we respect the point made at a2-5) not both at once.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> However, an earlier passage (III.3 1112b27-8) admits an alternative formulation: he chooses to act well *through* his friend.

<sup>11</sup> Charles (1984: 85-6) infers from AE B.2 1139a21-6 that the object of desire is a proposition which ‘is represented as a mode of accepting the conclusion which reason has asserted to be true (e.g.  $\phi$  is good)’. So, whereas an assertion might be represented as ‘AS. ( $x$  is an apple)’, desire can be represented as ‘DES. ( $\phi$ ’ing is good)’. This respects in a way the requirement for a good choice that it pursue the same things that the *logos* asserts (a25-6), but yields a ‘DES.’ formula that cannot be read on the model of ‘AS.’; for one can

Let us next consider wish (*boulēsis*), with a special interest in its role as a starting-point of deliberation. Wish itself is far from intention. This is clear in the following distinction between wish and choice:

Choice cannot relate to things impossible, and if anyone said he chose them he would be thought a fool; but you may wish what is impossible, for instance immortality. And wish may relate to things that could in no way be brought about by one's own efforts, for instance that a particular actor or athlete should win; but no one chooses such things, but rather the things that he thinks could be brought about by his own efforts (III.2 1111b20-6).<sup>12</sup>

What is the grammar of wishing (*boulesthai*)? Aristotle permits it to be varied: I may have a wish *of*, or *for*, something impossible, such as immortality (b22-3); or I may wish *that* some actor or athlete win, which may be possible, but not through my own agency (b24); or I may wish *to be* healthy or happy (b27-9). Can we press a question like that which has already arisen about choice: can I have a wish *to*  $\phi$  that is not a wish *that I*  $\phi$ ? A general reason for supposing that I can, even when the wish is idle, is derivable from reflections of Bernard Williams (1973) about imagination: I can more easily imagine being, and wish *to have been*, say, a member of Plato's Academy than I can wish *that I had been* a member; for, knowing that I am Anthony Price, I cannot coherently imagine *myself* there, while I may have at least a coherent (if scrappy) idea of the charms of *being* there. Aristotle may have this in mind when he writes vaguely of a wish 'of immortality' (b23). Death is as natural and necessary for animals as generation (*On Youth, Old Age* 23 (17) 478b22-6). So I can no more coherently conceive of my being immortal while remaining human than I can conceive of my surviving *without* remaining human; and yet I may – as perhaps we all do – have an idle and unfocused wish *to be* immortal.

The matter becomes clearer once an object of wish has become an end of deliberation. Take the wish to be *eudaimōn* (EN 1111b28) that may be general, or focused upon a particular context of action. I may take it as my goal *that I* live and act well by trying *to bring that about*, like the young Hippocrates of Plato's *Protagoras*, who wishes to take the sophist as his teacher, so that he may thereafter achieve *eudaimonia* (313a6-b2). That doesn't yield a choice to  $\psi$  as *itself* an instance of acting well. The point appears to

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assert that  $x$  is an apple, but not desire that  $\phi$ 'ing *is good*. (One might desire that  $\phi$ 'ing *be good*, but that would not yield a choice to  $\phi$ .) Aristotle's view must rather be that a correct choice pursues what a true *logos* declares *to be good* (or the like – no predicate is specified). Which is consistent with EN III.2 1112a3-7, about which Charles's book is silent.

However, he has paid attention to those lines since. He now cites them in distinguishing 'preferential choice' from 'the conclusion of practical reasoning' (2011: 193 n. 9.) Most recently, he has written as follows (2015: 80): 'Preferential choice is not identical with any opinion because it is a distinctive type of truth-assessable state directed to action, in which desire and intellect are inextricably connected.' Here he also cites 1111b33-4: opinion 'is distinguished by falsity or truth, not by badness or goodness, while choice is distinguished rather [or more, *mallon*] by these.' It is unclear to me how he understands *mallon*, which can be either a comparative ('more than') or an excluder (if  $x$  is 'rather'  $F$  than  $G$ , it isn't really or precisely  $G$ ). A comparative reading makes little sense here: if a good choice is also true, how is it *more* one than the other? So I take Aristotle's meaning to be that, unlike opinion, choice is strictly *not* 'truth-assessable'.

<sup>12</sup> This passage shows that the traditional rendering of *boulēsis* by 'wish' is sometimes precisely pertinent. However, it often isn't. I shall retain it, with this caveat, because of its familiarity.

generalize: to have as my goal *that I*  $\phi$  is to aim to bring it about (or let it happen) that I  $\phi$ ; but aiming at this need not amount to aiming to  $\phi$  intentionally *by* and *in* doing something or other.<sup>13</sup> Yet it is this last aim that ideally results in a *choice* to  $\psi$  as a way of  $\phi$ 'ing, and thus as an instance of acting well. To prepare for that, we rather need to start with a wish *to* act well:

Wish relates rather to the end, choice to what contributes to the end; for instance, ... we wish to be happy (*eudaimonein*) and say we do, but we cannot well say we choose to be so; for, to generalize, choice seems to relate to the things that are [sc. immediately] in our power (1111b26-30).<sup>14</sup>

Wish ceases to be idle when it sets off a stretch of deliberation (*bouleusis*): 'We deliberate about things that are in our power and are matters of action' (III.3 1112a30); once deliberating, 'if we come on an impossibility, we give up' (b24-5). As is stated in the *De Anima*, there is a kind of *nous* 'that calculates for the sake of something and is practical' (III.10 433a14). Such thinking starts from a provisional intention to achieve a goal – provisional in that the goal may turn out to be unachievable, or not acceptably achievable.<sup>15</sup> It is when wish supplies such an intention that it becomes 'a starting-point of practical *nous*' (a16).

Deliberation connects doubly with intention, being intended to serve a goal through identifying an action that intentionally achieves it. When the deliberating is for the sake of acting well, the agent is looking for an act that he can *choose*, in Aristotle's restricted sense. In so deliberating, the agent gives thought *in order to* identify a means to an intended end for him to choose and enact.<sup>16</sup> It is not, as Anselm Müller has emphasized (1992: 166), that he has first to give thought about *how* to give thought in a way that will

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<sup>13</sup> Imagine that my local council has neglected to clean up snow on the pavement outside my house; so I repeatedly walk along it in the hope of slipping, and then suing them. I thus intend *that I* slip, but not *to* slip, since what I have in mind is slipping unintentionally.

<sup>14</sup> I omit a parallel at 1111b27-9 between 'being healthy' (*hygiainein*) and 'being happy' (*eudaimonein*) that is only partial. Being healthy is a state *displayed in*, say, feats of fitness, whereas being happy is an activity *identical to* living and acting well; see Price (2011: 39-40).

<sup>15</sup> The former danger was explicit at III.3 1112b24-5. I speculatively interpret the second as implicit at *AE* B.9 1142b31-3: if it is good deliberation that *settles* the goal, this may be because it establishes whether a presumptively desirable end is desirably achievable in context (Price, 2011: 226-8). Clark (1997: 21) offers a slight correction of what I say, for simplicity, in the text: a doctor may conduct an operation in the hope of saving the patient's kidneys, without knowing whether this will be possible. In this case, where the agent is not just conscious of human contingency, but *well aware* of obstacles to his success that he may well turn out unable to surmount, it is slightly too optimistic even to talk of a 'provisional intention'; and yet the agent has a goal that he hopes to achieve, and makes his decisions with an eye to that. This will apply, in medically problematic cases, to the doctor who wishes to heal his patient (*EN* III.2 1111b27, III.3 1112b13):

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *DA* I.3 407a23-4 ('Practical thoughts have limits, since they aim at something other than themselves', Ross), and *Pol.* VII.3 1325b18-19 (thoughts about how to act 'occur for the sake of the results of action'). It is also most likely for this reason that the good of practical thinking is 'truth in agreement with correct desire' (*AE* B.2 1139a29-31): it is only with the help of desire that practical reasoning can achieve its inherent end, which is action. Charles states the point as follows, identifying the goal with doing what is good (2015: 75): 'Practical thinking ... is a type of thinking essentially directed at finding out what is good to do so as to do it. It results (unless impeded) in action, having as its goal the doing of what is good. This type of thinking is, in its nature, desire-involving.'

be practical: that would risk a regress, even if the preliminary thinking were determinate enough to be useful, and yet not too determinate to anticipate the content of practical thinking proper. Aristotle is conceiving of deliberation as a mode of intentional activity that is fully rational, but not itself the product of any prior stretch of deliberation (cf. *EE* VIII.2 1248a18-22).

We thus reach a double conclusion: Aristotelian wish or *boulēsis* must be directed not just at an object of aspiration, but at a goal that is both putatively achievable and provisionally intended, before it can prompt *bouleusis* or deliberation; and Aristotelian deliberation is itself an intentional activity directed towards intentional action. If it results in a choice or *prohairesis*, this will constitute the formation of a restrictedly rational variety of intention.

### III : CHOICE AND DELIBERATION

Aristotle further defines choice as ‘deliberate desire of things in one’s own power’ (*EN* III.3 1113a10-11, *EE* II.10 1226b17). We need additionally to understand that this deliberation is for the sake of acting well; for the akratic agent can ‘deliberate’, even correctly (*AE* B 9 1142b18-20), and yet he does not act on a choice (C.8 1151a6-7). Typically deliberation is initiated by a wish for a goal (*EN* III.2 1111b26, III.4 1113a15) that one thinks *good* (*AE* A.9 1136b7-8, *Rhet.* I.10 1369a2-4); it may well involve selecting what is easiest or finest among alternative ways or means (cf. *EN* III.3 1112b17). Hence the resultant choice is a desire that is *decisive* (*krithen*, 1113a4), often in being resolved between different *desirabilia*.

Effective deliberation for the sake of acting well leads the agent to a choice. More fully, a choice has a dual content, to  $\psi$  for the sake of  $\phi$ ’ing (*EE* II.11 1227b36-7), where  $\phi$ ’ing is a goal both *specific* enough to allow for a calculation of ways and means, and sufficiently *worthwhile*, in context, to constitute a way of acting well – which is the ultimate end of choice and chosen action.<sup>17</sup> An object of wish, say  $\phi$ ’ing, becomes a target of thinking what to choose when the agent starts to deliberate with the provisional intention of finding and intentionally enacting a way of  $\phi$ ’ing that is also, and at least in part thereby, a way of acting well. He may discover as he proceeds that there is no  $\psi$ ’ing, practicable in context, by which he can  $\phi$ , or  $\phi$  acceptably; then he must go back to the beginning, and think through another way of acting well.

It is debated whether Aristotle holds that every instance of choice is preceded by an actual stretch of deliberation. If it is usually supposed that it need not be, this may rather be for the sake of philosophical plausibility than of textual fidelity. For the definition that I quoted (from *EN* III.3 1113a10-11) is at once followed by the following gloss (a11-12, cf. *EE* II.10 1226b19-20): ‘For when we have made an assessment as a result of deliberation,

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. *An. Po.* I.24 85b27-35, where the goal is to pay a debt in order not to act unjustly. In *EE* II.10 Aristotle instances the conveying of goods as a reason for walking; when he adds ‘Those who have no aim fixed are not in a position to deliberate’ (1226b28-30), he envisages a concrete goal, and not just a determinable one (like acting well or nobly).



we desire in accordance with our deliberation’ (or else, cf. *DA* III.10 433a24-5, ‘with our wish’). Yet the following passage is often, and aptly, cited:

It is thought the mark of a more courageous man to be fearless and undisturbed in sudden alarms than to be so in those that are foreseen; for it must have proceeded more from a state of character, because less from preparation; for acts that are foreseen may be chosen by calculation and a *logos*, but sudden actions (*ta exaiphnēs*) in accordance with one’s state of character (*EN* III.8 1117a17-22).

This appears to state plainly that an action may be chosen, and yet uncalculated (and so not an upshot of deliberation). Yet I have argued before (Price, 2011: 213), with reference to two other problematic passages, that Aristotle can write carelessly in such cases, inviting a supplement other than the automatic and grammatical one; here, we should perhaps understand after ‘sudden actions’ not ‘may be chosen’ but ‘may occur’. Hence I think that there are two possible readings: he may mean that sudden actions are guided by choices that are in character but unreasoned, or that they are guided by character without choice or reasoning. I take his standard view of choice to exclude the first, and require the second.<sup>18</sup> If so, such spontaneous actions are intentional but unchosen.<sup>19</sup>

It is a tempting third alternative to take the *logismos* and *logos* that are excluded to be not ethical deliberation for the sake of the noble, but prudential calculation that is based on experience.<sup>20</sup> There is then a contrast between a courageous lack of ‘preparation’ (1117a20), and the soldiers who flee when let down by their ‘preparations’ (1116b17). The ‘sudden cases’ of 1117a22 can then be occasions for choice based upon a rapid process of deliberation that is high-minded and less circumstantial. However, this last suggestion conflicts with *NE* III.2 1111b9-10 and *EE* II.8 1224a3-4, both of which exclude choosing on the spur of the moment (with the same term, ‘*exaiphnēs*’). And the reference of *logos* and *logismos* at 1117a21 may be not to the calculations of the prudent, but to the *logos* of 1117a8 that was associated with the *kalon*, especially if (as isn’t clear) it not only conceives of the goal as noble, but specifies how to achieve it (cf. 1112b15-16). If so, even ethical deliberation is excluded here, and we must rather suppose that Aristotle is writing carelessly, and that it is actions, and not choices, that may be spontaneous and yet in character.

This must disappoint contemporary interpreters who would wish to connect Aristotle’s concept of acting in accordance with choice to our concept of acting on reasons, and would rather relate the second to an ability to *give* reasons than to a causal process leading from a conscious consideration of reasons to action. However, Aristotle is not at a loss for words

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<sup>18</sup> See *EN* III.2.1112a15-16; III.3 1113a11-12; *AE* A.8 1135b8-11, b19-25; *EE* II.4 1224a4; II.10 1226b6-9, 14-15, 32-6. It is true, though only marginally helpful, that some of the deliberation may have been performed in advance; so Cooper (1975: 7-8), Irwin (1999: 322), Taylor (2006: 189), Corcilius (2008a: 254).

<sup>19</sup> It is then implicit that a greater courage (*andreioterou dokei einai*) can be displayed in courageous acts that are not done *courageously*, since not from choice (cf. II.4 1105a28-32); which may well seem implausible (cf. Taylor, 2006: 189). To which I reply as follows: a *full* expression of virtue must do justice also to its rational aspect, and so involve deliberation and choice; it may yet be true that, in certain contexts, a greater courage may be displayed – *but only imperfectly displayed* – in spontaneous action.

<sup>20</sup> So Gauthier-Jolif (1970: ii. 234); cf. *Rhet.* II.12 1389a34-5, which say that *logismos* is of the advantageous, virtue of the noble.

to convey that reason can be active without a need for ‘choice’ (as he uses that term). What he *does* admit in such cases is a kind of wish: ‘We do many things that we wish suddenly’ (*EE* II.8 1224a3). (These will be a significant sub-set of the many voluntary acts that we do ‘without deliberation or forethought’, II.10 1226b32-3.) This need not conflict with the usual contrast of wish for an end, and choice of a means. An urgent situation can prompt the adoption of a concrete end that may in certain cases be very close to action, so that only obvious premises, which can be implicit, are needed to make the connection; here there is no gap between end and means to be crossed by a process of reasoning. We can still represent the rationality of the action by a practical syllogism that sets out what the agent did not need to think through. Of such curtailed thinking Aristotle provides an example (*DMA* 7 701a25-8), which I represent with square brackets around the premise that thought ‘does not waste time considering’:

Talking walks is good for a man.  
[I am a man.]<sup>21</sup>

In a case of simple spontaneity, a man says or thinks to himself, ‘Taking walks is good for a man’, in a context to which it straightforwardly applies, and starts to walk. We would say that he walks for a reason; Aristotle can say that he acts in accordance with a rational desire or ‘wish’. In the case of spontaneous courage, we might have an explicitly ethical premise, say ‘It is noble to stand one’s ground in the face of the enemy’, thinking which a hoplite stays put. Yet Aristotle opts to privilege acts that he counts as chosen, perhaps because deliberation is an *overt* exercise of practical rationality.<sup>22</sup>

#### IV : FROM WISH TO ACTION

We have no reason to expect Aristotle to give a single and uniform account of how thought gives rise to action. However, I shall now set out a sequence of perceptions, desires, and deliberation that draws upon various elements that surface in different contexts.

Take an agent who finds himself in a situation that invites action of him: ‘The intuition (*nous*) involved in practical reasonings grasps the last and variable fact, i.e. the minor premise. For these variable facts are the starting-points for the apprehension of the end, since the universal is grasped from the particulars; of these therefore we must have

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<sup>21</sup> In translations from *DMA*, I draw upon Nussbaum (1978).

<sup>22</sup> If choice presupposes deliberation, there is a further restriction that Aristotle states, but may not have thought through. Deliberation is indeed a *searching*, and one does not search where there are no uncertainties: ‘The things that are brought about by our own efforts but not always in the same way are the things about which we deliberate ... Deliberation is concerned with things that happen in a certain way for the most part, but in which the outcome is obscure, and with things in which it is indeterminate’ (*EN* III.3 1112b3-9). As Corcilius puts it, deliberative thinking is ‘heuristic and inventive’ (2008a: 254). This may fit the connotations of our ‘choice’ (and the Greek *prohairesis*): I am not idiomatically said to *choose* to  $\chi$  rather than to  $\psi$  when it is always, or evidently, best to  $\chi$ . Aristotle may intend this, but its implications are restrictive. If choosing to act as one does is a precondition of not only doing the brave thing but doing it *bravely* (II.4 1105a28-32), it will follow that one can act bravely only in a situation of practical uncertainty.

perception, and this perception is *nous*' (AE B.11 1143b2-5).<sup>23</sup> He perceives some feature of the context that prompts him, giving the standing concerns that he has, to think of a certain goal with a desire to achieve it. Say that he has a generous nature, and perceives someone in need. (This perception need not be instantaneous. He may even reflect how to interpret the situation, and thereby come to perceive it as one where someone is in need, though not patently so.) It is then characteristic of him to form a practical desire – which is more than an idle wish, or a detached evaluation – to give help. The content of his attention is then an act: *offering help*. This stands for him as the object of a wish that is not idle, but directed towards what seems an achievable goal. This reveals his character, and does not depend upon any reasoning. So Aristotle can write, 'Virtue [sc. of character] makes the target correct, and practical wisdom the things [i.e. ways or means] leading to it' (AE B.12 1144a7-9, cf. C.8 1151a18-19, EE II.11 1227b19-25). However, such desire, though not a creature of inference, is not independent of judgement. His standing concerns correlate with patterns of evaluation; a man cannot desire an object without conceiving of it under a desirability-characterization (in Elizabeth Anscombe's phrase), and no one wishes for what he does not think to be good (AE A.9 1136b7-8). Aristotle's statement 'This perception is *nous*' (1143b5) is not ideally perspicuous. Yet, in my example, we could read it as implying a close internal relation between two different forms of words: I perceive the situation as one that invites me to give help, and I am struck, in context, by the thought that it would be *kind* to act so. Such a piece of contextual-*cum*-conceptual awareness is at once desiderative, perceptual, and epistemic; it evidences a good character, one that, from occasion to occasion, prompts effective desires to act in ways that one *sees* to be virtuous in some way (with a 'see that' which is both experiential and veridical).<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Here I draw on Ross's translation (1925); yet, with Susemihl, D.J. Allan (marginale in his copy of Bywater), and Wiggins (2012: 102), I read *to katholou* for Bywater's *ta katholou* (1143b5).

<sup>24</sup> Yet it is impossible to identify Aristotle's precise position here with any confidence. There are two uncertainties:

A. Within his stratification of the human soul, does he place rational desire (choice and wish) (i) within reason, or (ii) alongside passion and perception?

B. Does (i) judgement wear the trousers (in J.L. Austin's dated phrase), or do (ii) rational desire and practical judgement enjoy a modern marriage (viz. of a complementary equality)?

I have argued in the past in favour of A(ii) (1995: 191-2, 2011: 120-1), while adding (2011: 121-2) that Aristotle takes the edge off that issue through his recurrent analogy with the convex and the concave (EN I.13 1102a28-32, EE II.1 1219b32-4). That these are conceptually distinct but actually inseparable throws open the significance of the demarcation between the two strata. However, we need to opt for a combination of A(i) and B(ii) if we are to assert what I propose in my text; for it would be problematic, given the cognitive pre-eminence that he assigns to reason, to attach B(ii) to A(ii). The main obstacle to this is EN I.13, which appears to prescribe that desire *of any kind* should stand to reason in a relation of *obedience*. However, some (including Michael Frede in discussion) have taken the phrase 'the appetitive and in general the desiderative element' (1102b30) to apply there only to appetitive and spirited desires, and not to rational ones; if they are right, rational desire may not be subordinate to judgement. What I have written in my text does maximal justice to the statement 'Virtue makes the target correct' (B.12 1144a7-8). However, what follows, which is 'and practical wisdom the things leading to it' (a8-9), excludes the end's being set by *syllogismos* or *logos* (cf. EE II.11 1227b22-5) without clarifying how virtue of character relates to *nous*, which also plays a role in setting the end (B.11 1143b4-5), and appears to fall within practical wisdom (B.8 1142a25-30).

What stands in my text shares a main thrust with Charles (2015: 73): 'It is not that intellectual judgement leads to desire: rather to see (or judge) something as the good thing to do (in this way) just is to desire it.' Yet I do not take the relation of judgement and desire, of the relevant kinds, to be one either of

Aristotle fails to deploy any pair of terms to capture the distinction between two different attitudes, being attracted towards a possible goal (perhaps among others), and adopting it as one's practical goal (rather than any other). It is explicit that one can wish only what one thinks *good*; that is a necessary condition, or aspect, of wish. In one place, it is envisaged that one wishes for an end that one thinks *best* just because one is virtuous (*AE B.11 1144a29-34*). However, it isn't evident that the second is required. What is clear is that, if an end is selected by virtue of character, this cannot depend upon a relative evaluation of the kind that is said (*DA III.11 434a7-10*) to involve the measurement of practical alternatives (*doing* this or that) by a single standard, most likely against the background of a further goal already given. On occasion, virtue may stipulate an end for the sake of which a man 'ought to choose and do whatever he chooses and does' (*AE B.5 1140b17-20*). In other cases, we should think of a practicable goal that becomes salient in context: the circumstances privilege it, and the agent pursues it without viewing it as required, or even as *best* in addition to *good*.

He will then engage in a process of deliberation, whereby he *searches* (*zētein*, *EN III.3 1112b22-3*, *AE B.9 1142a31-2*, b14-15) for a way or means of achieving the end. This may well involve discovering not just a single means to the goal, but a sequence of means and ends, through a series of steps where each means becomes in turn itself a goal, until the agent identifies an act that he can perform here and now without any further reflection. He will partly think his way through a series of hypothetical necessities: at least in context, if he is to go to achieve end *E* he may *have* to pursue means *M*. In other cases, *E* may leave him a choice between  $M_1$  and  $M_2$ ; he may then want to consider by which means 'it is most easily and best produced' (1112b17), which may require measurement by a single standard (*DA III.11 434a8-9*). He may come upon a dead end: 'If we come on an impossibility, we give up, for instance if we need wealth and this cannot be got' (*EN III.3 1112b24-6*). If it is *E* that cannot be achieved, his present deliberation is over, though his situation may then suggest another end to pursue. If it is *M* that turns out to be impracticable, he will explore the possibilities of realizing a different means instead. (We could represent this by a tree structure, where deliberation retreats from a node whose branches lead to nothing practicable to a higher node with other branches of which at least one may lead to action.)

Ideally, the upshot will be a single *logos* 'for the sake of something' (*AE B.2 1139a32-3*) that spells out the content of a resultant choice. It will specify what he is choosing, for the sake of what, and how his ways or means derive from his end. This will constitute what Aristotle calls a 'practical syllogism' (*AE B.12 1144a31-2*).<sup>25</sup> We can present the essence of this by a simplified schema (whose premises may only hold in context):

*Starting-point*: to  $\phi$  (an act)

*First premise*: To  $\phi$ , one should  $\chi$ .

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identity or of one-way dependence. I am influenced here by the ethical writings of David Wiggins and John McDowell (which make it puzzling how Charles can recommend his own related view as a radically new Third Way, 'long overlooked but perhaps suitable for revival', 2015: 93); cf., most recently, Wiggins (2012: 97-106).

<sup>25</sup> It has been doubted whether 1144a31-2 should be so construed; for a defence, see Price (2011: 220 n. 36).

*Second premise:* To  $\chi$ , one should  $\psi$ .  
*End-point:* to  $\psi$  (an act) <sup>26</sup>

Here  $\psi$ 'ing is proposed as the way (in context) to  $\chi$ , which is proposed as the way to  $\phi$ .  $\phi$ 'ing may often be less determinate than  $\chi$ 'ing: in my earlier example,  $\phi$ 'ing is giving a certain person help, while  $\chi$ 'ing might be escorting them home. Yet the essential difference, if deliberation is called for, is that the agent is not ready to  $\phi$  until he has given thought how to  $\phi$ , whereas he can simply  $\psi$  at will. He is now ready to act: so we read 'What is last in the order of analysis seems to be first in the order of becoming' (*EN* III.3 1112b23-4), and 'The object of desire is the starting-point (*archē*) of practical reason, whereas its end-point is the starting-point of action' (*DA* III.10 433a15-17).

Two disputed issues in the interpretation of the practical syllogism have been these: how does it relate to deliberation, and what does Aristotle mean when he says that the conclusion is an action? I shall answer the first question fairly briefly, and explore the second more fully.

Our main source of examples of the practical syllogism (though the phrase does not appear there) is *De Motu Animalium* 7. This chapter is puzzling in that its purpose is to give a general account of animal motion that applies not only to human beings, but also to lower animals which, lacking reason, even lack beliefs (*DA* III.3 428a20-4, 11 434a10-11). And yet it presents us with sequences of propositions, even quite sophisticated ones. Thus we read 'Every man should take walks' (*DMA* 701a13), which is universally quantified, even though we are told elsewhere that the lower animals lack general suppositions, and only have imagination (*phantasia*) and memory of particulars (*AE* C.3 1147b4-5). We are much closer to animal capacities when we read, more simply: "I should drink", says appetite. "Here's a drink", says sense-perception or *phantasia* or thought. At once he drinks' (*DMA* 701a32-3). Part of Aristotle's point is purely analogical, comparing the way in which, in the case of a theoretical syllogism, thinking its conclusion follows from thinking its premises (a10-11), and the way in which an animal that has a desire, and perceives an object to satisfy it, at once goes for that thing. It doesn't follow that human beings, who *can* think and reason, don't think their way into action in a manner that really involves a practical syllogism, and does not just admit an analogy with a theoretical one.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> I do not offer this as the normal form of Aristotle's practical syllogism (for there is no such thing, cf. Kenny, 1979: chs 11-12), but as a perspicuous representation of some salient things he says. The starting-point will be associated with some judgement, say that it is good in context to act in a certain way. I have suggested elsewhere (2011: 242-5) that the deontic judgements that Aristotle offers in this context are typically hypothetical (like my first and second schematic premises); cf. Corcilius (2008a: 253). I leave it open here whether the force of the 'should' is to introduce a way or means that is not only sufficient in context (alongside other steps that one envisages taking), but also necessary. On that, cf. Price (2011: 240 n. 60, 246-50).

<sup>27</sup> Corcilius (2008a) argues with an untiring integrity that the practical syllogism is no more than an analogy for the efficient causation of movement by a combination of desire and cognition. This holds good of the lower animals, who do not act upon practical inferences. It becomes problematic in the case of human agents, who can apply universal quantifications to particular cases (*DMA* 7 701a13-14), pursue a chain of means-end reasonings (a17-23), and pause, or pass quickly, over a certain premise (a25-8). What carries over from the explanation of animal motion, I shall argue in indebtedness to him, is that an awareness of what is stated in

Indeed, this is confirmed, with a qualification, a passage that follows: ‘As sometimes when we ask dialectical questions, thought does not stop and attend to the second premise, the obvious one. For example, if taking walks is good for a man, it does not waste time upon the consideration that he is a man’ (a25-8). Here one premise (‘Taking walks is good for a man’) receives attention. The other (‘I am a man’) is not overlooked, for it is essential; yet it doesn’t receive a moment’s thought. If we only had an analogy between acting and syllogizing, there would be no such distinction. Even in such cases a practical syllogism is operative, though only part of it takes time (so that there is no *actual* process of ‘calculating’, a28); in other cases, where both premises invite attention, action takes a little longer.

I have elsewhere detailed a mass of evidence that *associates* talk of deliberation with syllogistic vocabulary (2011: 220). Any claim that the practical syllogism, whatever its role, has no connection with deliberation is not credible. It does not follow, however, that deliberation, as a whole, *takes the form* of a practical syllogism. Deliberation, we were told, is a kind of *search* (EN III.3 1112b22-3). We can tell a story that converts the schema I offered above into a series of questions and answers: ‘How shall I  $\phi$ ?’ ‘I shall  $\chi$ .’ ‘How shall I  $\chi$ ?’ ‘I shall  $\psi$ .’ We have a need for deliberation, involving wondering, and looking around (literally or figuratively), so long as the answers aren’t obvious. Yet that schema was greatly simplified. Most often there will be options, and the agent will want to reflect how to achieve some goal ‘most easily and best’ (1112b17). Given that his total goal is not simply to  $\phi$ , but thereby to act well, this is not just an instrumental question about means to a given end: the agent may need to weigh up the independent costs and benefits of alternative ways and means; and as he thinks through what  $\phi$ ’ing involves and excludes in context, he may need (as he didn’t initially) to *reflect* about whether it is really a good idea. Part of his deliberation may be exploring what turn out to be dead ends. Only some of this will leave a deposit within the content of the resultant practical syllogism. That is a precipitate out of deliberation that connects the eventual act to the initial goal through a chain of connecting steps relating ways or means to ends. This conveys *what* the agent is minded to do, *for the sake of* what, and *through* what. The eventual choice is of an act for the sake of an end; the practical syllogism makes it explicit, step by step, how the two connect. The choice, and the syllogism, are products of deliberation; they do not themselves constitute deliberation.

As I presented it, both the starting-point and the end-point of a practical syllogism are *acts*. The deliberator starts with an act of  $\phi$ ’ing, often indeterminate, that constitutes the content of a *wish*; he ends with an act of  $\psi$ ’ing, determinate and practicable without further thought, that constitutes the content of a *choice*. If all goes well, the upshot is an *action* that involves the performing of both acts. These theses already point to part of what Aristotle may have in mind when he counts the conclusion of a practical syllogism as an action. He states this in two passages within *DMA* 7:

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the premises suffices to attach a general desire to a particular object; what follows in the human context is action – but in a broad conception of action that does not divorce it from thought.

Here [as opposed to a context of theoretical reasoning] the conclusion which results from the two premises is the action. For example, whenever someone thinks that every man should take walks, and that he is a man, at once he takes a walk (701a11-14).

I need a covering; a cloak is a covering. I need a cloak. What I need, I have to make; I need a cloak. I have to make a cloak. And the conclusion, the ‘I have to make a cloak’, is an action. And he acts from a starting-point. If there is to be a cloak, there must necessarily be this first, and if this, this. And this he does at once. Now, that the action is the conclusion, is clear (a17-23).

One aspect of the argument applies to the lower animals: animal action upon perception and desire is analogous to a man’s embracing a theoretical conclusion out of two premises. In his simplest example, a desire to drink generates a drinking out of the perception of a possible drink (701a32-3). He comments: ‘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’ (a33-6). So the animal starts with a desire *to drink* (which is an act of a kind), and acts out of a desire *to drink this* (which is an act of a more determinate kind). However, Aristotle offers details that go beyond that analogy, and fall within a narrative whereby human beings act not only *with* reason but *upon* reasoning whose role is inherently practical.<sup>28</sup> In the more complex, and distinctively human, example of a man and a cloak, ‘I need a covering’ presupposes a desire to get what one needs (in this case, presumably, for health or warmth). That might not generate any practical thinking; what makes the thinking practical is the further premise, either unreal or highly contextualized (since it isn’t generally true), ‘What I need, I have to make.’ In the context of that, getting what the agent needs becomes not just a desideratum, but a practical goal whose realization is up to him. The practical syllogism then traces a sequence of acts: *making a cloak*, *making this<sub>1</sub>*, *making this<sub>2</sub>*. The last of these he can perform without further ado. Thus the practical starting-point and end-point are both acts, as is the transitional *making a cloak*.<sup>29</sup>

My schema set out a sequence of objects of thought or desire. It started with an act (‘to  $\phi$ ’), which is an object of wish, continued with two propositions (‘To  $\phi$ , one should  $\chi$ ’, and ‘To  $\chi$ , one should  $\psi$ ’), and ended with another act (‘to  $\psi$ ’), which is an object of choice.

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<sup>28</sup> Only so can Aristotle count *phronēsis* as at once an intellectual virtue, and a *hexis ... praktikē* (AE B.6 1140b20-1); cf. the characterization of *epistēmē* as a *hexis apodeiktikē*, i.e. a state that issues in proofs (B.3 1139b31-2). Thus *phronēsis* is actualized in action. As Jean-Marie Guyau has put it (1985: 97-8), ‘Action is only the prolongation of the idea ... He who does not act as he thinks, thinks incompletely.’ Quite different, and less bold, is the conception in the mid-4<sup>th</sup> century (but pseudo-Platonic) *Sisyphus*, where the goal of deliberation is not acting, but identifying how best to act (387b3-4, 389b2-3).

<sup>29</sup> Cf., without explicit reference to Aristotle, Philip Clark. He proposes (2001) that the content of a practical conclusion (and of an intention) is *to do something*, whereas the content of a theoretical conclusion (and of a belief) is *that p*. The grammar of this carries back to Aristotle’s ‘wish’. We say things like ‘My reason for  $\psi$ ’ing was (in order) to  $\phi$ ’, as we say ‘The reason why Socrates is mortal is that all men are mortal.’ He concedes (1997: 20) that one can conclude that *p*, but not to  $\psi$ , and so suggests that what is analogous to a theoretical *conclusion* is a practical *step*. He says two things that fit well in a way with my earlier schema (1997: 21): ‘The end’s being something you want is not a premise of the practical step ... One might say the inference is valid just in case truth in the believed premises entails that the action is sufficient for the desired end.’

Does this already give a sense to the thesis, ‘The action is the conclusion’ (701a22-3)? Not exactly. What it does do is display an *act* (‘to  $\psi$ ’) as analogous to the content of a theoretical conclusion (such as the implicit ‘To  $\phi$ , one should  $\psi$ ’). Yet an *action*, as I am using the terms, is the doing *of an act*, and not an act itself. An alternative translation of 701a12 would accommodate this distinction nicely: we might hope to render this as ‘The conclusion from the two premises becomes the action’, or equivalently ‘The action comes out of the conclusion from the two premises.’ Aristotle’s thesis could then run as follows: the conclusion (of a practical syllogism) is an act, which becomes an action. The elegance of this is tempting. However, it is doubtful whether the Greek word-order permits it. That rather places the phrases ‘the conclusion’ and ‘the action’ in apposition, conveying that, out of the premises, a conclusion emerges that, in some sense, *is* an action.<sup>30</sup>

When human reason is engaged, and the syllogism is not just an analogy, what *is* the conclusion anyway, apart from being (in some sense) an action? Aristotle uses the term ‘conclusion’ (*symperasma*, or *to symperanthen*) several times in connection with the practical syllogism (*DMA* 7 701a12, 23; *AE* C.3 1147a27). Most often, however, he leaves it implicit (as at *DA* III.11 434a17-19, where he states two premises but mentions no conclusion), and offers no formulation of it. If he does formulate it at *DMA* 7 701a20, this may be because it then sets in train a further sequence of thoughts. My schema offered, instead of a conclusion, an ‘end-point’ that was simply the content of a choice, ‘to  $\chi$ ’. Yet a conclusion must at least be implicit when the syllogism encapsulates a process of reasoning. Presumably, as the content of a conclusion, we must have something like ‘I should  $\chi$ ’ (just like ‘I should make a cloak’ at *DMA* 701a20). Yet how should that be read? The premises from which it follows are hypothetical, and the starting-point was ‘to  $\phi$ ’ as the content of a wish. About that I suggested earlier that it involves the thought ‘It is good to  $\phi$ ’, but may select  $\phi$ ’ing as a goal of thought and action not because it takes  $\phi$ ’ing to be best, let alone mandatory, but because  $\phi$ ’ing presents itself in context as the salient option. So in some cases there may be no first premise ‘I should  $\phi$ ’ from which a categorical ‘I should  $\chi$ ’ could derive. What we shall always have, implicitly if not explicitly, is a kind of hypothetical imperative: the agent must be willing to say to himself ‘I should  $\psi$ ’, with a ‘should’ that is relativized to the goal of  $\phi$ ’ing. This will prescribe  $\psi$ ’ing *given* that  $\phi$ ’ing is his goal, whether or not he takes  $\phi$ ’ing to be the best available goal. While there is no direct indication of this in Aristotle, it is wholly of a piece with his conception of choice: the agent chooses to  $\psi$  *for the sake of  $\phi$ ’ing* (which does not entail his supposing that he *should  $\phi$* ).<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> See Nussbaum (1978: 342-3). In trying to make sense in a different way of 701a18-23, Charles (1984: 93-4) claims that LSJ takes *symperasma*, within the phrase *hypo to symperasma* in *An. Pr.* II.1 53a17, to signify ‘the subject matter of the conclusion’, i.e. not a proposition but ‘the objects referred to the proposition’, thus avoiding ‘a use/mention confusion’. If we apply this to *DMA* 7, it is not the conclusion of a practical syllogism, but its subject matter, that is identical to an action; which replaces a paradox by a truism (though far from facilitating the flow of the text, it impedes it). But Charles misreads LSJ: what they say is that the term may signify not ‘conclusion’ but ‘subject of the conclusion’; they are in no disagreement with Ross (1949: 426), who glosses the *An. Pr.* phrase as ‘subsumed under the minor term’ – a usage that is of no help to us.

<sup>31</sup> Even in such a case, judging ‘I should  $\psi$ ’ does not become a mere exercise of executive know-how (*deinotēs*, *AE* B.12 1144a23-6). One may deliberate *correctly* without deliberating *well* (B.9 1142b18-21).



How then do thinking and acting connect? The *Metaphysics* presents a transition from thought into production (*poiēsis*): ‘Of the processes of generation, the one part is called thinking, namely that which proceeds from the starting-point and the form, and the other is called production, namely that which proceeds from the end-point of the thinking’ (Z 7 1032b15-17). The *De Anima* speaks similarly of action: ‘That of which there is desire is the starting-point for practical *nous*, and the final step is the starting-point for action’ (III.10 433a15-17, cf. *EE* II.11 1227b32-3). It might be inferred that the thinking and acting do not overlap, and that the acting *takes its departure* from the thinking (cf. Corcilius, 2008a: 251). Drawing the conclusion can then at most be a preliminary to enacting it. However, the term ‘starting-point’ may mislead in a way that the Greek *archē* should not; an alternative rendering might be ‘beginning’.<sup>32</sup> The ‘form’ (*Met.* 1032b16) is part of the content of a thinking that rather starts *with* it than *from* it; and the object of desire is likewise part of what practical *nous* attends to.<sup>33</sup> In the *De Motu Animalium*, Aristotle can write, ‘The conclusion which results from the two premises is the action’ (7 701a11-13, cf. a22-3), and even ‘The conclusion, the “I should make a cloak”, is an action’ (a19-20), although this conclusion is not the end-point of thinking, but a point of transition. To make sense of this, we must suppose that he can permit himself to place the inception of action earlier than we might expect. The agent can count as starting to *act* once he infers ‘I should make a cloak’, even though he only starts to *move* once he has further concluded that he needs, more specifically, at once to realize a final ‘this’ (whatever that may be, a22).

Both thought and movement belong *within* action. We have in any case to note that commonly, when movement starts, thought continues. As Peter Strawson (1974: 172) urged years ago against any attempt to separate out mental and bodily components within a typically human activity such as writing a letter, ‘Writing a letter is essentially not something that a mind does or something that a body does, but something that a person does.’ Writing a letter, like giving a paper, involves a continuing mental engagement with a bodily process. There are cases when one loses control: Aristotle cites throwing a stone, where it was in one’s power not to throw it, but is not in one’s power to stop it (*EN* III.5 1114a17-19). In other cases, he writes, ‘We control our actions from the beginning to the end if we know the particular facts’ (b31-2). Here exercising care and intelligence continues through the execution, through a period of time, of an *archē* that both initiates action and sustains it.<sup>34</sup>

To understand *DMA* 701a17-23, we need not only to extend thought through action, but also to bring action forward into thought. Once the agent has seen that he can, and

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Choice as such is still for the sake of *eudaimonia*, and the agent may miss that target even if he succeeds in  $\phi$ ’ing.

<sup>32</sup> Within the *DA*, Ross has ‘starting-point’. Shields has ‘starting-point’ in 416a16, but ‘beginning’ in a17.

<sup>33</sup> Thus no one supposes that what is given as the *archē* of a practical syllogism at *AE* B.12 1144a31-4 (‘Such is the end and what is best’) *cannot* be part of it – though I have suggested that it *may* not be (2011: 245 n. 70).

<sup>34</sup> McDowell (2010: 422) writes, ‘*Going on* intentionally doing something cannot be equated with drawing a conclusion from some practical reasoning, any more than going on believing something can be equated with drawing a conclusion from some theoretical reasoning.’ However, the equation is rather between persisting in action, and continuing to accept a theoretical conclusion.

decided that he should, make a cloak, his further calculations are part of putting his decision into effect; he has discarded any uncertainty as to whether making a covering *is* indeed what he ought to be doing now. (It may yet be prevented or interrupted; but he has set aside the possibilities of its turning out to have always been either impracticable or inadvisable.) We may say that, at this point, he has no further need to *deliberate*. Hence we can view further thought about how to make a cloak, like later attention to its making, as aspects of a unified psycho-physical process that constitutes an action. This is why Aristotle can say that, having reached the initial conclusion that he must make a cloak, he ‘acts from a starting-point’ (701a20-1). In Aristotle’s conception of change, making a cloak is an actuality that realizes a capacity to bestow the form of a specific kind of covering upon some appropriate matter; part of what the capacity enables one to do is to give expert and effective thought to how to make a cloak – and one can start to exercise this aspect of the capacity before one’s hands are actually at work.<sup>35</sup>

We can thus make sense of the thesis that the conclusion of a practical syllogism is an action, interpreting it as meaning that drawing the conclusion is itself *part* of the activity of acting upon the premises; for this acting includes thinking. As I have said, even when (as with the lower animals) syllogizing is only an analogy for acting, acting upon a desire and a perception is presented as being analogous to making an inference: just as premises yield a conclusion, so a desire that is focused by perception upon a particular generates action. It is striking that at *DA* III.11 434a16-21 it is the pair of premises, and not the conclusion, of a practical syllogism that is taken to generate action. When it is remarked earlier in *AE* C.3 (1147a9-10), ‘To know in one way would not seem at all absurd, while to know in the other way would be extraordinary’ (in the case where pertinent knowledge *fails* to generate action), the knowledge is of the premises, with no mention of a conclusion.<sup>36</sup>

Any interpreter who gives the crucial role to a practical judgement or choice that ensues (in the case of deliberation) upon reasoning, and then directs action, relegates the practical syllogism to the *background* of the explanation of action. Reasoning, or something analogous to reasoning, explains the emergence of a practical judgement, say ‘I should now take a walk’, and it is the link between *this* and desire that explains why action follows.<sup>37</sup> So long as it is sincere, the judgement would have no less effect if it came out of nowhere (though of course it doesn’t). Aristotle seems rather to suppose that, in the case of the lower animals, the focusing of a general desire (‘I should drink’) upon a particular (‘This is drink’) *immediately* generates movement (*DMA* 7 701a32-3). It is true that he can continue, ‘This, then, is the way that animals are impelled to move and act: the proximate

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<sup>35</sup> Imagine the following scenario. Looking in at a friend’s house, I see him bent over his desk, doing some drawings and making some calculations. He looks up, and says in a preoccupied tone, ‘Come back later – I’m making a cloak in a new style.’ In such a case, reflection is part of action. Such a conception is indicated at *AE* B.4 1140a10-13, where a coming-to-be, and exercising a craft, and reflecting how some possibility may be realized, are all equally things with which each craft is concerned.

<sup>36</sup> However, this text needs discussion in the light of Morison (2011). He reads it as contrasting two ways of knowing a conclusion, citing *An. Pr.* II.21 67a9-21. I would rather compare *EE* II.9 1225b8-16 on two ways of knowing a particular fact. (Taken so, *AE* C.3 1147a9-10 depend on the *EE* much as B.12 1144a7-9 depend on *EE* II.11 1227b22-5.) This connects with whether one supposes ‘the last *protasis*’ (*AE* C.3 1147b9) to be a premise or a conclusion.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Charles (2007: 205-8).

cause of movement is desire, and this comes to be either through sense-perception or through *phantasia* and thought' (*DMA* 7 701a33-6). However, he seems to suppose, reasonably enough, that in the case of animals, who do not actually reason, the final premise *at once itself* focuses the general desire upon a particular object. The term 'immediately' (*euthys*) is recurrently applied to the relation between the action and the premises (*DMA* 7 701a14, 15, 17, 22, 30, 33; *AE* C.3 1147a28).<sup>38</sup> It seems to convey the absence at once of a time-lapse, and of any causal intermediary.<sup>39</sup> This carries over to human agents once we take any judgement or choice that rests on premises and directs action as integral to action itself.

Of course, this is subject to a qualification: a conclusion may *fail* to be an action through incapacity or interference. A more cautious statement is that action follows on the premises when the agent 'is able and not held back' (*AE* C.3 1147a30-1; cf. *DMA* 7 701a16, 8 702a16-17).<sup>40</sup> However, this should not be read as a further condition, additional to the drawing of a conclusion, which must always be *present* if action is to follow, but rather (as Klaus Corcilius puts it, 2008b: 171 n. 23) as 'a sort of *ceteris paribus* clause' which indicates the *absence* of impediments to the ensuing of action 'once the "premises" are given (not the "conclusion")'.<sup>41</sup> When chosen action follows, it follows on the premises and is initiated by the conclusion; if it doesn't follow, we need an explanation in terms of inability or impediment. This qualification does not take away the thesis that, when nothing goes wrong, the conclusion *is* the action, in the sense that to draw the conclusion is to start the action. The identity is not unqualified, but forms the default that Aristotle displays in his deployment of the practical syllogism.

Doubts may remain especially about the relation of *judgement* to action. How can it be that, if nothing interferes, judging that I should make a cloak *already embarks* me upon making one? *Judging that I should do* an act sounds nothing like *doing* it. Here, I suggest, the entry of choice may make a real difference. Judging that I should make a cloak brings with it, in the right context, choosing to make one. This may well require giving further thought to the means: 'If there is to be cloak, there must necessarily be this first, and if this, this' (*DMA* 7 701a21-2). Such productive thinking starts from a choice much as practical thinking starts from a wish. It is striking, as I have noted, that Aristotle places the former *within* 'acting from a starting-point' (*DMA* 701a20-1). The choosing, the calculating, and the actual manipulating all fall within the action of making a cloak. Perhaps this permits

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<sup>38</sup> Slightly different is *DMA* 8 701a15-17: 'It is pretty much at the same time (*hama*) that he thinks he should move forward and moves forward, if nothing else impedes it.' The *hama* may link a deontic conclusion and action yet more intimately than *euthys* links the premises and action. However, Nussbaum (1978: 358) takes the reference to be to the major premise (comparing 'Every man should take walks', 7 701a13), explaining this as follows: 'The minor premise does not detain the agent, and the bodily parts interact rapidly; so there is virtually no gap between the thought of the major premise and the motion.'

<sup>39</sup> See Corcilius (2008a: 268, 2008b: 171 n. 23), who cites Bonitz 296a12-17.

<sup>40</sup> I say little here about the important passage *AE* C.3 1147a24-31; for more, see Price (2011: 291, 295-6 n. 35).

<sup>41</sup> Ideally, Aristotle would have distinguished two kinds of hindrance: one makes the syllogism idle from the first, so that no cloak-making even begins; the other interrupts a cloak-making, so that the agent turns out to *have been making a cloak* though not to *have made one*. A standing state of paralysis may cause the first, whereas a subsequent interruption causes the second. An impediment that is effective and evident must cancel or suspend the practical conclusion.

him to view the action as also, though derivatively, taking in the judgement that is inseparable from the choice.

If this is right, it remains true that choice and action are more intimately connected than action and judgement. If the content of this choice is precisely an act of  $\psi$ 'ing, then choice is correlative to execution: one and the same act is both chosen, and carried out. This parallelism makes it apt that the grammar of choosing ('What I choose is to  $\psi$ ') should be of a kind with the grammar of doing ('What I do is to  $\psi$ '). An act must be the kind of thing to be carried out, and also to be chosen, *both* falling within the action of an agent.

## V : CONCLUSION

Though Aristotle's focus is narrower than we might prefer, his account of *prohairesis* has turned out to be illuminating in two ways. First, it is felicitously that he identifies what one chooses as *to act*. A background wish to act well is translated by deliberation into a choice to act in some concrete way. Acting as I choose, I do what I choose to do. An intention *that* I  $\phi$ , like an intention that someone else  $\phi$ , is more precisely an intention *to bring it about* (or else *let it happen*) *that* I  $\phi$ . In some cases, I may bring it about that I  $\phi$  simply by  $\psi$ 'ing, where  $\psi$ 'ing is a way of  $\phi$ 'ing; but in others, I may bring it about that I  $\phi$  by taking preliminary measures that have my  $\phi$ 'ing as a consequence. If I intend that I  $\phi$ , without being in a position either directly to intend to  $\phi$  or simply to let it happen that I  $\phi$ , I must directly intend to take whatever preliminary steps are needed; which is also what, in Aristotle, I may *choose to do*.

Secondly, the relation between choice and action that I have unearthed in Aristotle is one elaboration of what John McDowell has explored under the label 'intention in action'. Just as, on one persuasive account, intending to  $\psi$  turns into  $\psi$ 'ing intentionally as  $\psi$ 'ing starts, so, as I read Aristotle, choosing to  $\psi$  can help to constitute  $\psi$ 'ing 'voluntarily' (*hekōn*) as  $\psi$ 'ing starts. Such choosing can even count as starting to act (as when I start making a cloak in my head); and it typically continues to infuse its own execution. Choice *is* action, when all goes well, not just in commencing it, and setting it going, but (where it calls for continuing control) in initiating a state of active attention that sustains it.

In the case (central to Aristotle) where the agent aims at acting well, it is this intimate relation between choice and action that permits reason to be practical in the double and unified sense of being exercised for the sake of acting well, and of issuing in action. Choice is the hinge that links reasoning for the sake of acting well to acting: it is a corollary of a practical conclusion, and the beginning of its realization. Within Aristotle's moral psychology, rational action centrally involves choice, and it is by analyzing choice that he displays how reason can be practical.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> This paper has benefited from the participants in two occasions when an ancestor of it was presented, at Stanford, and in Oxford; also from the comments of an anonymous referee.

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