"VIRTUE & FREEDOM: AN EXPLORATION OF AUTONOMOUS HUMAN AGENCY IN ARISTOTLE"

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by

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Table of Contents

Abstract

This thesis will address the potential for an Aristotelian conception of autonomous human agency, and its relation to virtue and happiness by exploring Aristotle's "Physics" and "De Anima" (with associated texts). This will require an exploration of Aristotle's treatment of *ousia* or substance, and of the individual as capable of both normative and novel activity within nature. For Aristotle all natural beings are in a state of motion, specifically characterized as change in the form of generation and decay. There is a necessity within this natural motion that is characterized by spontaneity and chance; where the *arché* of spontaneity is seen as a determined, regulative, and automatic motion that is primarily manifest as the efficient and material causes. That is, for Aristotle, such actions are, in principle, necessitated as regulative or normative by the internally active, differentially integrating motion of nature. Thus, it is always for the sake of that sustained identity as its end, its *télos*, that cause is manifest as formal.

Novel motion is a capability, a *hexis*, of the human soul that is indicative of an informed independently active and cognitively responsive rational movement that underlies creative human actions in the world (the embodied new). That which is genuinely novel or new restores/refreshes activity, in that novel action interacts as both creative and supportive of new motion within the natural world. This concept of life having internally originating novel movement, when considered as a feature of the natural world, can be seen as a kind of freedom insofar as it induces new movement and is not merely an effect of spontaneous/normative movement.

The relation between spontaneous/normative and novel motion is especially significant with respect to human beings and other living things in that, as technologically skilled, we participate in the natural world. When we initiate change or motion we are providing purpose to that which we change or move; this represents a source for the new "fresh starts" or new motions Aristotle states in his *Metaphysics* must exist within nature, and thereby must be a capacity or potency within, most notably, living substance.

Thus my process will begin with an exploration of *ousia* and the natural world in Aristotle's "Physics", particularly book two, chapters eight and nine wherein the ground for the significance of novel action appears as Aristotle allows for the influence of matter in the natural world. This section underscores the interactivity of spontaneous motion within the natural world in which some motions support or impede other movements. But this also allows for novel action given human reason has the capacity to affect the world through what it knows. I will then explore the implication of novel motion for virtue as Aristotle presents it: the *nous*, insofar as it shapes virtuous activity tempered by habit, represents a locus of an Aristotelian conception of freedom as autonomy.

The novel expression of freedom becomes explicit in the overwhelming fact that the individual human can choose not to act on his/her knowledge at any time, in that having knowledge (specifically virtuous knowledge) does not necessitate such action.

This exploration will involve some consideration of texts from Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*, with selections from the *Parts of Animals*, and, finally, the *Politics*.

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Introduction and Biography

I will argue that a conception of human freedom, defined here as autonomous human agency, is anticipated by Aristotle's conception of *nous* and discernable in the active character of virtue as Aristotle defines it.[1] I will argue that autonomous human agency is a uniquely human expression of activity. While significantly distinct from the automatic activity demonstrated by all other living things and of nature in general, it is not mutually exclusive of that automatic activity and is, in fact, an expression of the human *télos*. If my contention is right, and autonomous human agency in fact turns out to involve or entail virtue (arête), then not only do we gain a small insight into the significance of the individual's moral responsibility, but we may also be able to explore the nature and efficacy of moral failure (akrasia). Autonomous human agency could also serve as a revelatory concept that enables one to gain, not so much a deeper understanding of Aristotle, but rather a more nuanced understanding that might let us see novel change (or newness or creativity) as not only an integral motion within Aristotle's conception of nature, but as a significant source of rational knowledge in that humans would therefore be capable of engaging in acts that are not determined by the automatic motions of nature.

When one considers the political volatility of the concept of human freedom, defined as the ability to freely choose and to act upon such choices without external interferences, in our world today, and the contested roles of autonomous agents, one is forced to consider politics as the space where individual freedom is experienced within a collective authority.[2] Entire nations

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[1] While the term 'agency' is often equated with the term 'freedom', it is important to note that this thesis will make a subtle but important distinction between them. In short, the term 'freedom' denotes the colloquial understanding of autonomous human agency, in that people typically describe themselves as free; i.e., as having the freedom to act and to choose for themselves, unrestricted by political, and possibly ethical, influences. In this thesis the term 'agency' will carry with it the implication of direct involvement by the individual with (and within) the world; thus agency implies not only effect but also motion; e.g., when one chooses a course of action one moves in that direction in order to achieve the goal the choice aims at, and further, each choice has a definite effect on the world. This will be further addressed throughout the thesis.

[2] Arendt, *What is Freedom*?

have been built on enlightenment conceptions of freedom, which perennially come under an especially urgent re-examination with respect to the rights, privileges and privacy of the individual as against the needs and demands of the state.[3] For Aristotle, politics is the highest of endeavours: political life is the place where virtuous activity is normative and manifest as that which is most required of the individual. While the individual is the place where knowledge and virtue are integrated in action it is in political life that the actions of the individual have significant and lasting effects on a potentially limitless scale. Indeed, it seems logically necessary that humans are indeed free, since without the act of choosing we are left without deliberate intent, without which an act cannot be virtuous in that one has not chosen the best good for one's self or polity.

To understand how Aristotle's conception of virtue implies aspects of what later comes to be called "freedom", we must revisit some of Aristotle's even more foundational conceptions: substance (ousia), nature (physis), soul (psyche), and mind (nous). I shall begin by exploring substance, in chapter one, and its relation with the eternal yet restful (stationary) motion of natural and artificial objects, as well as the relation between substance and nature itself. I shall rely heavily on Aristotle's *Physics* and related texts, such as *On Generation and Corruption*. In chapter two I will address Aristotle's conception of virtue and its connection with the good, which will involve a discussion of the soul and of ethics, for which I will rely on Aristotle's *De Anima* and *Nichomachean Ethics*. In chapter three I will discuss various issues and implications of autonomous human agency as a logical process within the human mind and as a revelatory concept that will provide an exploration of *akrasia* and novel motion.

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[3] Matthews, *The Absolute Violation.*

Aristotle

A brief biographical summary is in order to provide context and perspective for the political and philosophical implications I want to draw out. I rely upon Richard McKeon's summary of Aristotle's life in the introduction to his *The Basic Works of Aristotle.* Aristotle was born in the Greek city of Stageria on the Macedonian Chalcidice peninsula, in 384bce.[4] His father, Nichomachus, was court physician to the Macedonian royal family, and Aristotle's formation clearly included an emphasis in medicine and biology, which he would carry with him his entire life. In 367bce Nichomachus sent Aristotle to Athens to study with Plato, where he stayed for twenty years as both a student and as a teacher.[5]

After Plato's death (in 347bce), Aristotle left Athens to pursue his scientific interests, traveling extensively through Greece and Asia Minor while studying flora and fauna and pursuing several other intellectual research projects for approximately eleven years. In approximately 342bce Aristotle was invited by Philip II, King of Macedon, to tutor his son Alexander, later to be hailed as Alexander the Great, whose conquests were to establish an empire whose Greek political values and aspirations were to set the course of much later western history.[6]

After Alexander conquered Athens, Aristotle returned there in 335bce and set up a school of his own known as the Lyceum, where he lectured and conducted collaborative research on a great many topics including philosophy, psychology, biology and most of what, today, we recognize as the "sciences". After Alexander's death in 323bce, Athens rebelled against

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[4] McKeon.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.

Macedonian rule and reestablished its own independence.[7] As a result, Aristotle's already precarious political position, given his history with Alexander and Philip II, suddenly became dangerous as various Athenian political opponents took the opportunity to move against him. The sophists, Eurymedon and Isocrates, filed the infamous charges of heresy and corruption against Aristotle, and to avoid being put to death, Aristotle fled to the island of Euboea reportedly saying, "I will not let Athens sin against Philosophy twice". It was on Euboea, less than one year later, that Aristotle died of natural causes in March, 322bce.

The heart of the charges against Aristotle claim that he was morally responsible for the immoral actions his students were undertaking as a direct result of his teachings. This in turn presented a kind of moral threat to the general public. The central issue then is whether or not Aristotle, or anyone else, can be held morally responsible for their actions and for the actions of others. It would stand to reason that if autonomous human agency exists and moral responsibility can be ascribed to it, then any person could, in principle, be considered morally responsible of their actions.

Certain key issues recur in our reading of Aristotle's writing in all the various fields from biology to politics, logic, physics, and beyond. Today, we talk about Aristotle as everywhere trying to understand the relation between what he calls "universals" and what is particular, or individual, where the necessary individual is conceived as substance. In many ways, Aristotle is no different from the philosophers who came before him, like Thales and Heraclitus, who were also seeking to understand the relation between the universal and particular.

Though Thales and Heraclitus also had a conception of substance, it is clear that Aristotle perfected this concept, beginning with his logical works, collectively known as *The Organon*.

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[7] Ibid.

What distinguishes Aristotle from those that came before him is his methodology and his tenacity in exploring the implications and problems inherent in his own standpoint, using his method to play "devil's advocate" in order to test one set of theories against others by exploring their implications. It is these moments of intense examination that show Aristotle as not dogmatically asserting one argument over another in favour of any personal prejudices. They also show how he not only thoroughly engaged with those arguments that have come before him, but how he was also as thoroughly critical of various aspects of the problems of his own standpoint as well.

Given Aristotle's methodology and reputation for precision, it is difficult to conceive that Aristotle *did not* address the issue of human freedom. That said, we must consider the fact that perhaps as much as two thirds of Aristotle's original works have been lost, but what has survived did so in manuscripts of varying degrees of accuracy, lecture notes, and student commentaries. These texts have been the subject of problematic translations, causing some confusion that I shall have to consider in this study. It is important to be clear that this thesis is not a political treatise on Aristotle's work, but explores Aristotle's conception of virtue as informed by an implicit, and perhaps unacknowledged, kind of freedom that nonetheless has implications for the life of the individual, and perhaps for any polity that may be open to virtuous acts.

Chapter One: Substance & Nature

1.1: "The old question raised anew."

For Aristotle, the Greek term '*ousia*', often Latinized into English as 'substance', denotes the most basic event, or instance, of reality, or "being" or whatever is, that is capable of analysis. Aristotle argues that inquiry into substance (ousia) will enable one to understand the relation between the universal and the particular: Aristotle concludes that "being" is revealed as the answer to his question "what was it to be?" or in ancient Greek, *"to ti en einai"*. That phrase is often translated by another Latinised English term, 'essence'. Strictly speaking, the word 'essence', defined as describing the fundamental composition or truth of a thing, does not properly capture Aristotle's meaning, in that the original Greek phrase translates as "the what? *was* it to be", which includes three concepts that 'essence' does not include: of a temporal context, of motion, and of active analysis.[8] As the tortured Greek phrase "the what *was* it to be?" suggests, Aristotle unpacks the Greek term *ousia* to suggest that substance is *a* being in that its past ("was") implicates its infinitive ("to be"), and that it can be analyzed. Substance, for Aristotle, is therefore defined, in part at least, by its past actions, a theme which is explored throughout this thesis. The questioning aspect of the interrogative pronoun, 'what?', is Aristotle's way of emphasizing this tense-defying dialectical character of substance.[9]

Since, for Aristotle, substance is the most basic instance of reality capable of analysis, then we might therefore anticipate that if, for Aristotle, there is a conception of autonomous human agency or freedom within his philosophy, it will likely be a property, power or capacity that stands either as an aspect of substance or in some relation to substance.

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[8] *Analytics* Book 2, Ch 6, 92a7 cf 82b37-39 and Bonitz *Index Aristotelicus* at p.763b line 49- 765a line 6 and *Meta* Book 7 (Zeta) 9, 1034a30 and 1037a33. Also, Richard Hope's glossary entry under *ho logos ho tou ti en einai which gives "what-it-meant-to-be-something"* in his book *Aristotle's Physics,* newly translated, U. Nebraska Press 1961 (p.208).

[9] *Organon* 71b10ff.

Aristotle is not particularly interested in treating "existence" as a property of things that are, nor does he wish to discuss substance (ousia) in relation to non-existence. Aristotle is primarily interested in what is, what exists [10]; that is, Aristotle is seeking a way to analyze reality. Aristotle treats substance (ousia) as an *event* that is, itself, an act that occurs, and which can, in proper methodological conditions, be named and subsequently analyzed. Thus, for Aristotle, scientific knowledge involves what he calls "demonstration" which is his preferred procedure for revealing the core dynamics at work within each substance (ousia), in that, for Aristotle, substance as substance embodies activity.

If we are to demonstrate a substance as Aristotle does, by involving its properties, then we must examine how he sees the relation between properties and substances. More particularly for my purposes in this study, if Aristotle recognizes autonomous human agency, we will need to see how a particular substance, human substance, involves nature, *nous*, movement, and change: names that we often predicate as human properties.

Since Aristotle argues that substance (ousia) is an activity, or centre of activity, an *act*, he argues that, in its primary state, substance is not passive and can be understood with respect to movement, change, and its relation within nature.[11] To explain this, Aristotle focuses in the *Organon* on the aspect of activity inherent to the phrase '*to ti en einai*', which catches the motion that reveals substance as an existent thing, something that stands out as particular, or individual.[12] Aristotle does not conceive of substance as incapable of being experienced; it is manifest within nature in multiple varieties. As such, substance can be studied, analyzed, understood (or misunderstood) through debate and study.

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[10] *Meta* 19034a30 ff.

[11] *Organon* 2a13-19, *Physics* 192b26ff, 193a27- 29, and 192b9-19. Also, *Meta* Book V, Ch 15 and Book IX.

[12] *Organon* 1b3-9, 2a11-13.

Given the various possible meanings of the word 'activity', it is important that we understand how Aristotle is using the term, and how he justifies the claim that substance (ousia) is activity. Generally, Aristotle underscores substance as activity to emphasize that it exists as that which can have an affect, and, in certain circumstances, do so on its own and without itself being affected. The latter concept shall be explored later in this thesis, for now it is enough to say that it is central to the possibilities of autonomous human agency. Substance understood as an event or act suggests that what is occurring *now* is at least as significant as the results of such acts. More specifically, to see a living substance as an individual event completed within itself is to see its activity as purposeful, as *télos*.

Aristotle asserts that his scientific method must be applied in a very specific manner in order for anyone to come to understand nature and substance (particularly living substance). The scientist/*phronimos* must begin by studying universal or general properties and capacities, then proceed to analyze specific parts, while keeping in mind *the relation of the parts to the whole that they comprise.*[13] One's analysis begins by studying the genus of living substances (e.g. animals), then one narrows one's focus to a given species (humans) and then finally focusing on a specific individual within the species (one person).[14] This enables one to understand that studying the part is really the study of the whole that part comprises, and the specific role the part plays within its given whole. Thus, when Aristotle discusses the nature of substance he begins by exploring the nature of being as an existent, moving on to consider existence as activity, then to the specific purposive act as an event. All of which, while general, is nonetheless a narrowing from universals to particulars.

"… when any one of the parts or structure, be it which it may, is under discussion

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[13] *The Parts of Animals* Book I, Ch 5.
[14] *The Parts of Animals* 645a31-37, 645b20-28.

> it must not be supposed that it is its material composition to which attention is being directed or which is the object of the discussion, but the relation of such parts to the total form. Similarly, the true object of architecture is not bricks, mortar, or timber, but the house; and so the principle object of natural philosophy is not the material elements, but their composition, and the totality of the form, independently of which they have no existence."[15]

Accordingly for Aristotle, the scientific method is based upon the analysis of the purpose of each part within the whole they uniformly constitute.[16]

Aristotle sees substance in terms of its being for its own sake; i.e., substance acts for its own good, its own interests, serving to achieve its own goals in the best ways for it to do so. These goals are always good for substance itself, in that they are actions that enable substance to come to be and to continue to be *as it is*, which accords with what I have previously said concerning the fact that "being" ("the what? *was* it to be") is Aristotle's main scientific and philosophic focus.[17] Achieving its own goals (to be as it is in the best way for it to do so) *is* a good for any given substance; and in the case of humans, that achievement constitutes the *eudaimonia* (happiness) that, for Aristotle, normatively defines the human condition.[18]

Aristotle qualifies and expands the concept of activity with the term *energia* to further explain the activity of substance as being for itself.[19] *Energia* is a Greek term meaning "function", where the root of the word is '*ergon*' (meaning task, job, or work), suggesting an immanent ongoing functionality.[20] For Aristotle, substance (ousia) acts for itself, and thus already involves the concept of self-integrating purpose. This focus on the individual self

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[15] Ibid.
[16] *The Parts of Animals* 645b14-19.
[17] P.10-11.
[18] I will expand more on the normative human condition throughout this chapter, and I shall address *eudaimonia* in chapter two.
[19] LSJ – *Physics* 257b8, and *Meta* 1050a23.
[20] Ibid.

emphasizes the importance of the continuous activity of being as internal or immanent.[21] This internal activity *remains* internal, relying upon nothing external to it, and is in constant motion. Substance then, for Aristotle, is actively self-fulfilling and self-reliant as that which is engaged in the act of being of itself, where each natural substance is separate (i.e. as individual) from all other substances as centres of activity. Thus, such a being is, in a very real significant sense, its doing.[22] Since substance does not rely upon any external forces or other substances to be itself then it follows that substance is, with respect to its being, autonomous. This provides an excellent starting point for further exploration of the possibilities of autonomous human agency. It is "within" the natural world that Aristotle sees substances interact, and where we will be able to expand upon Aristotle's conception of substance.

1.2: Form and Matter

In order to understand how Aristotle conceives of nature as the locus of substantial interaction, we must be clear about how Aristotle defines "form" and "matter". Aristotle describes substance as a union of form and matter, where, in their ultimate simplicity, form is pure actuality and matter is pure potentiality.[23] Matter is the basic "stuff" of nature defined by its capacity to be(come) anything. Since form provides both specificity and purpose to matter, it is pure actuality. Form is act and matter is the power to be, to change, and to enact. Of course, form and matter as such cannot exist separately; since each is dependent upon the other, form and matter *are separable only in thought and not in being.* Because matter does not have to be anything (lacking definition, purpose or actuality), it will not, by itself, change to become any

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[21] *Physics* 192b26ff.
[22] *Organon* 2a13-19.
[23] *Meta* 1042b9-1043a30.

particular object; matter is *informed* by form. It follows that form is universally active yet lacks power, while matter has the power to be any specific thing yet lacks the differential integration required to specify its intensifying *télos* (its completion); i.e., it lacks direction or motivation. The relation between form and matter can be seen as the relation between the universal and the individual respectively.[24] But it can also be seen in other ways as well, as we will see.

Since form needs matter to become something and thus necessitates it (i.e., form provides motion towards an end, or goal), it follows that form *depends* upon matter as that which is capable of accommodating or having (hexis), or suffering (paschein), or accepting (being affected by) the active form to become something. In short, the relation between form and matter provides that substance is self-sufficient (autarchies), relying only upon itself. But if this self-reliance is indeed autonomous, what is the nature of this universal/individual, material/formal relationship within substance?

While matter gains purpose to be something particular, form, in turn, is fully actualized in that for it to be truly "actual" it must be *embodied* in matter so as to enact its goals. Form, considered by itself, is an activity that requires something to *act upon* (which cannot be itself), that has the capacity to receive actuality and to *enact* the form (hexis). It follows that substance both is and does: which is to say, that substance is itself a kind of Heraclitean change within nature, and that its union is characterized as an active unity of self-sufficiency and self-reliance.[25] Still, it is not quite enough to consider the relation between form and matter as an "activity". This can be too abstract for a clear understanding; so another way of understanding form and

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[24] Aristotle frequently uses the word 'individual' in place of 'particular' to emphasize the embodied nature of particular things (*Organon* 2a11-26, *Meta* 1043a2-30, and 1017b10-25).

[25] Given this understanding of form as actuality, is it somewhat debatable as to whether or not form is "pure" actuality given that it obviously lacks matter, but this is rather a confusion caused by our modern conception of 'actuality' as being that which is wholly complete and dependent only upon itself; i.e., to be actual is to be a fully concretely real substance. Form is pure actuality in that it provides purpose. In that sense, then, it is completely whole and dependent upon nothing else for that capacity.

matter is to see their relation as the realized movement from potentiality to actuality: as an act.

The movement from the potential to the actual is characterized by two Greek words: '*dunamis*' and '*energia*' respectively. Given that *energia* is an internal active functionality, we can draw a link to form in that it, as a function, has the power to do. *Energia* is contrasted with *dunamis* (*cf.* English 'dynamic'), which is that which can *be/*become something, and thus can be linked with matter.[26] *Energia* and *dunamis* are jointly substance, in action.

In his book *The Idea of The Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*[27], Gadamer explains this purposive (telic) integration by calling on Plato's term '*methexis*' as it is used in the *Philebus* and elsewhere. *Methexis* is often translated as "participation" to express Plato's (and Gadamer's) understanding of how the part interacts with the whole. More specifically, the part stands in unity with the whole, but is nonetheless distinct from it.[28] Insofar as the part is what it is, both as to its form and matter, the part is simultaneously integrated harmoniously with other parts to function as the whole. We know that the part is differentiated from the whole within which it participates because we can name it and come to understand dialectically how it influences the whole. That is, as argued earlier, form and matter are always unified as substance, and are separable in thought only.[29] To borrow a phrase from Hegel, who was intimately acquainted with Plato's and Aristotle's thought, the whole which the part comprises stands as a

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[26] Aristotle also had another word for Energia, in Greek it was '*entelecheia*' (alternative spelling, 'Intelecheia'), or 'entelechy' in English. *Entelecheia* referred to the specific aspect of energia to be complete within itself, its own fulfillment with respect to the being of a thing. Aristotle simply stopped using the word for this was implied with energia, but in the earlier books it helped to focus in on such an aspect to aid in communicating understanding. It must be noted that while Aristotle treats *entelecheia* as interchangeable with *energia*, the latter term emphasizes actuality as a "realization" (Irwin & Fine's *Aristotle: Selections*, Hackett Publihsing 1995. p.120 footnote 3, and Glossary entry p.565 note I).

[27] Hereafter referred to as *The Good.*

[28] Gadamer, *The Good* 10-11.

[29] P.14.

unity in distinction.[30]

The immanent activity of substance is what Aristotle also calls the substance's principle (arché) "of motion and stationariness", or rest.[31] Rest has two important meanings here: first, "rest" does not so much mean lack of motion but that the completed, *informed,* motion of substance is stable and in that sense unchanging and at rest. This restfulness is itself a state of motion that could also be characterized as a calm state of readiness, or preparedness, to engage in more active motion. For example, a skilled archer who has just fired an arrow at a target stands at rest; the state of rest integrates the archer's prior act of firing with the subsequent act, and so the archer acquires the character as "archer". This restful stability is contrasted to the untrained archer whose movements betray the uncompleted or unstable acts of someone who is not yet, and may never be, an "archer".

The second sense of the term 'rest', is that it represents a purposive limit that growth observes in the enacted embodiment; e.g., a man's nose will only grow so far and then stop. That is, since substance is a complete unity it needs nothing further to determine its integration; it is its own center of activity, and determines its own motion. Substance "stays within itself". It is not hypothetical. Substance does not depend on any external principle to be what it is in order to do what it does. This motion is an activity that determines where it moves, its goal; but it also determines where *it stops*. If a living substance (say, a bear) gets hungry then the bear hunts and feeds accordingly, and when it is sated it stops eating, having achieved its goal. In a simpler sense, the bear can move from one point within its den to another point and then stop moving: no external force is required by the bear to move.

There is another sense of rest that we must consider, and it involves a wider ranging

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[30] Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* p.391ff, 404ff, and 411ff.

[31] *Physics* Book II, Ch 1, 192b12ff.

implication. That is, the bear, as a species, lives in climates that are cold and dangerous. In order to survive, bears have thick warm fur with strong skin that provides adequate protection from the environment. The length and thickness of its fur are just enough to enable the bear to survive in its chosen environment. What is important to note is that the growth of fur *stops* at a certain point, not growing so long as to hinder the bear; a bear's fur is not so long that it overheats in the summer or so short that it freezes in the winter. The length of the bear's fur represents a state of *telic* rest that is indicative of the bear enabling itself, as a substance, to remain within itself.

It is clear that substance, for Aristotle, is causally autonomous with respect to its own being, but what remains to be seen is if this autonomy is indeed linked with substance's inner principle of motion and rest.

1.3: Nature and Change

For Aristotle, substance exists as a multitude of individuals as separate substances that interact within nature, and involves the Greek word '*physis*' (cf., English 'physics'). *Physis* is normally translated by the English word "nature", it is drawn from a Greek word meaning "to grow" from birth, thus nature/*physis* is, for Aristotle, that which lets something's action originate. Aristotle argues that nature is purposive, as belonging to "the class of causes which act for the sake of something".[32] So, like substance, this act of generation is actively self-unfolding/reliant/fulfilling in that nature relies on nothing external to it.[33]

Aristotle divides into genus and species in order to better understand nature. The term

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[32] *Physics* 198b10-11, and 199a7-8.
[33] *Meta* 1014b16-1015a20.

'genus' is derived from the Greek word '*gen*', primarily meaning "to **gen**erate or give birth".[34] Aristotle draws on this meaning, attributing to the structure of realty the capacity of active self-generation and change.[35] In the *Physics*, Aristotle portrays "nature" as a centre of activity that mediates between a natural thing's form and its specific event; i.e., nature's activity lies between the universal and the particular, between and within the enacted embodiment of substance, its form and matter.[36] Since we know that, for Aristotle, substance is self-sufficient/reliant and, to some degree, causally autonomous, we can conclude that the activity of nature is the same: however, this does not completely describe nature as it is not itself a substance.

The term 'nature' can refer variously to the characteristics of a thing, or to a group of things, or a person, or to the entirety of physical objects as a whole.[37] Aristotle adds that nature "*is the immediate material substratum of things which have in themselves a principle of motion or change*"; that is, substance.[38] Aristotle uses the Greek term '*hypokeimenon*' ('substratum' in Latin), defined as the underlying base or foundation of a thing(s), to emphasize that nature is the locus of substance. In order to elaborate upon what Aristotle means by "material substratum", we must discuss the difference between natural substances and artificial objects, and the latter's relation to the human artisan.

Nature is contrasted with that which is artificial, or man-made and is not normally found in nature.[39] Thus, artificial objects do not contain their own principles of motion or change, as they are dependent upon human agency for their actuality:

"'By Nature' the animals and their parts exist, and the plants and the simple

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[34] The "phy" in "physis" is the "grow" root, but the "gen" really is the "birth" root.
[35] The Greeks could capture both passive and active senses simultaneously in what is called the "middle voice".
[36] *Physics* 180a12.
[37] *Physics* 192b-193b20. In other words, the term 'nature' can be used in the effort to explain all things except, perhaps, for God/Divinity.
[38] *Physics* 193a27- 29.
[39] *Physics* 192bff.

> bodies (earth, fire, air, water) – for we say that these and the like exist 'by nature'. All [these] things mentioned present a feature in which they differ from things which are not constituted by nature. Each of them has within itself a principle of motion and of stationariness. On the other hand, a bed and a coat and anything else of that sort, qua receiving these designations – i.e. in so far as they are products of art – have no innate impulse to change."[40]

Aristotle's conception of "innate principle of motion and stationariness" represents one of Aristotle's most influential concepts, and, as such, is key to understanding nature, its relation to substance and change, and, as we shall see in Chapters Two and Three, to understanding the possibilities of autonomous human agency. By arguing that nature mediates the activity of substance, Aristotle is also arguing (particularly in *Metaphysics* Book XII) that nature has its own *arché* of motion and rest, which indeed it must if it is to mediate between the form of substance and the specific event of substance. Since Aristotle underscores the fact that both substance and nature are whole within themselves and need not seek purely mechanical completion through external forces or principles, it follows that the mediation (the active relation) that occurs within natural substances does not undermine their individual immanent acts, but is *complementary.*[41] That is to say that the immanent self-reliant activity within substance complements the self-reliant activity of nature, demonstrated in the activity of the latter in allowing the former to come to be and act independently (i.e. offering no impediment to substance as it acts in the best ways for it to do so).

Keeping in mind that all substances are centres of activity, it appears that nature maintains this multitude of individuals through the mediating power of its normative, regulative motion that allows for the differentiation between individuals, where this motion can be characterized as change. That is, the motion of nature is such that it creates and maintains what

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[40] *Physics* 192b9-19.

[41] *Meta* 1014b16*ff,* and *Physics* Books VIII and IX.

is individual. Nature *does not* seek to homogenize all substances into one single substance *nor* to destroy all substance in general.

What is key to understand from this normative and regulative motion of nature is that the activity of substance, while on the one hand subject to these motions, is in principle never prevented from engaging with and in itself; substance is always individual. We can further conclude that substance is therefore causally autonomous with respect to its being (of itself) *and* its individuality. Moreover, we can conclude that Aristotle's inner principle of motion and rest is the individual substance's principle of causal autonomous agency. Nothing external is required.

In so far as substances are self-sufficient individuals defined in their unified finality, they are **not** immutable nor, if they are living substances, immortal.[42] Aristotle views change as a kind of motion, so we must now explore how he understands both motion and change in order to see how substances interact within the natural world and within themselves.

First we will consider motion ("kinesis" in Greek) which Aristotle defines is a 'from to' movement that forms the basis of all motion within nature as the relation between being and becoming, the actual and the potential, form and matter.[43] For example, the seed moves from being a seed to becoming a flower, which in turn produces more seeds. The seed is actual in that it *is a seed,* but participates as actual in a flower's becoming; thus, the movement from the potential to the actual is when the seed grows into (becomes) the flower, where the flower can be seen as the fully actualized (or fulfillment of) the seed. With respect to being and becoming, the seed *is* a seed completely and wholly, but then it moves to become the flower; the seed is both gone and yet remains in that the end or purpose of the seed is to become the flower. This

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[42] I use the term "unified" here in a limited sense to focus on the fact that substance is *one*, a complete whole without moveable parts. Substance *is not* a harmony of separable parts that comprise a thing in the same way that the gears, cogs, springs and metal casing comprise the timepiece. Form and matter are separable *only in thought* and not in actuality *per se* (p.14-15).

[43] *Physics* 193b18-19.

regularly repeated movement, which Aristotle sees as purposeful in its pattern, is often seen as a process and underscores the continual active nature of motion.[44] It follows that nature is a motion that is purposeful, which is at once its self-unfolding, but it is also a cause of change.[45]

When a thing achieves its final cause then it is complete, and all of its actions can be said to have integrated with its properties and powers (which makes it easier to observe, analyze and explain): this is what, in animate context, Aristotle calls a thing's "virtue" (arête). That is, *arête* refers to a thing's capability (hexis) to achieve its purpose for itself, in that when it performs such acts then it has demonstrated its excellence or perfection in achieving its own final and defining purpose.[46] Since we have already noted that substance is autonomous with respect to its being, it follows that a thing's virtue (arête, excellence) is also autonomous from external causes.[47] Thus, when a thing achieves its purpose for itself then it *also* demonstrates its own autonomy.[48] But does it make any sense to extend autonomy to humans and what they do or make?

We must explore what, exactly, the human purpose or end is if we are ever to uncover the possibility for autonomous human agency. In light of how Aristotle defines substance as an act, and that a thing is, in some sense, its doing, then we can begin our analysis by exploring the various activities that humans engage in.[49] Perhaps one of the most important activities humans engage in is the manufacturing of artificial objects. Generally speaking, artificial objects are centres of activity in that they *are* (they exist), and that they are individual. However, artificial objects do not have within themselves their own *principle* of motion/stationariness, thus they are markedly different from natural substances since any motion they undertake is *given* to them

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[44] *Physics* 199a9-19.
[45] *Physics* 198bff.
[46] LSJ 238 a & b, and *EN* 1106a15ff.
[47] P.13.
[48] To what degree substance achieves its own autonomy, if indeed we can say such a thing and make sense, will be explored later.
[49] P.10-11.

from external cause. In a way, artificial objects are already actualized in that they serve a purpose (such as a tool), but since they did not come into existence naturally, nor are they able to innately come into their completion through natural motion, they are only ever *partially actualized* given they are only *sometimes* engaged in the activity of their intended purpose, which *may or may not occur*.

Thus the fulfillment of artificial objects exists primarily as potential despite its actuality as the object itself. That is, the original activity of the parts of the artificial objects (the wood of the bed, the steel of the hammer) has thus been changed into another, and not so accidentally but *purposely* (where that purpose is given as the normative good for the craftsman and not for the tool itself). As they now compose an artificial object, they rely upon the external forces brought by the craftsmen, or other users, for their completion.[50] For example, the wood of a tree is made into a bed, but, if left alone, the tree (and subsequently the wood) will not become a bed, nor will the bed grow into a tree if planted. Accordingly, the bed is only actually and fully a bed when someone is using it as such, thereby completing it. Further, to use a hammer as a paper weight is perfectly acceptable given its weight and size, but it is best used to hammer nails into wood. As such, artificial artifacts seen especially in tools, are not autonomous given that they require the actions of a human user (external motion) in order to achieve their *arête* (excellence). The hammer's purpose is finally and perfectly explained when it is used to hammer.[51]

It follows that the human artisan is a *causally* autonomous agent with respect to their crafting activity due to the fact that the artisan is that for the sake of which the crafted product exist. That is, given the artisan's products are artificial objects that require their completion

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[50] The word 'accidentally' here is used in the modern sense, and not in the Aristotelian sense (which views that which as accidental as both essential and necessary). Thus the tree is a bed in so far as someone sleeps in it not because it is also a bed: the end of the tree is "tree" not "bed".

[51] *Physics* 199a15-19.

through human acts, it follows that the human artisan has defined the shape and scope of activities said product(s) have and can engage in order to achieve their *arête*. Properly speaking, the *arête* of artificial objects participate simultaneously in the *arête* of the human artisan and user. The agency of the human artisan is seen in the fact that nothing external to the artisan determines the shape or function of their craft *per se*, given the actions of the artisan are done to suit specific circumstances in order to achieve the artisan's own goals.

Sara Waterlow, in her book entitled *Nature, Change, and Agency in Aristotle's Physics*, argues that humans are indeed autonomous casual agents with respect to their crafting. Waterlow states that it is the artisan's inner principle of motion and stationariness that determines the artisan as autonomous, given the artisan (or artificer) has the capacity to bring about a change in something other then himself.[52] Waterlow explains:

> "As artificer stands to the artificially induced change, so natural substance stands to natural change, *except that* in the former case the source and the subject of change are different, save *per accidens*, while in the latter they are necessarily the same … Now following the analogy, we find that a natural substance gives rise to change from "within" itself not merely in the sense that *it*, being the kind of thing that it is, helps to determine the changes occurring in it, so that under the same conditions it would change in a different way from a substance of some other kind. For the craftsman (as we ordinarily view such a one) is causally *autonomous* as regards his caftsmanly activities, in the following sense: *he* dictates the shape and pattern of the change he brings about and the object or new situation thereby produced. He adapts his activity to the particular circumstances, but the way in which they are allowed to influence the pattern of production is determined by his objective. They play no part in shaping the overall form of change, only being harnessed to realize a form already determined. *What kind* of change takes place depends on the craftsman and his purpose, and the external conditions are relevant only insofar as they make possible change of that kind."[53]

Waterlow is arguing that while the changes caused by nature that affect natural substances are wholly determined by nature, the artisan has the capacity to cause new motions

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[52] Waterlow, *Nature, Change, and Agency in Aristotle's Physics* 27.
[53] Waterlow, *Nature, Change, and Agency in Aristotle's Physics* 28.

embodied in his crafts. This element of novelty is significant, and we shall return to it in chapter three. Waterlow further explains that the motion of nature, while not interfering or altering the innate activity of substance, allows for substance to exist as it is by determining the external conditions of the "actual occurrence [of change] at a given time and place".[54] Thus, nature, as the material substratum, provides a complementary motion that enables natural substances to be as they are. It seems clear that Waterlow's statements support gthe conclusion that the human artisan, as with natural substances in general, has the capacity, at least to some extent, to determine the types of changes they are capable of undergoing and initiating by virtue of their innate principle of motion and stationariness. It is clear that this motion is also purposive, and that with respect to the human artisan, it is deliberate.

Aristotle asserts that since artificial objects come to be from some art or *techné* and not from nature, then they come to be from the actions of an agent: "It is absurd to suppose that purpose is not present because we do not observe the agent deliberating. Art (techné) does not deliberate".[55] The artificial objects produced through crafting are determined to be as they are *only by the artisan*, and subsequently characterized by the artificial object's *innate inability to shape its own arête*. It follows that the human artisan determines any activity or changes that occur; thus, the human artisan is an autonomous agent with respect to his craft (techné).

But much the same could be argued for activities engaged in by the beaver. A beaver can swim and hunt, but a beaver is not a beaver unless it builds a dam, its home, to facilitate both its own survival and to exert a degree of control over its immediate environment. Being able to perform its distinguishing act (dam building) may, then, prompt us to ask whether that act is somehow the beaver's final cause: has the beaver expressed a defining behavior unique to it that

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[54] Ibid.

[55] *Physics* 199b27-33.

is its own expression of actions that are good for it to do? It is clear that such acts do aid it to achieve its even more completely final good, flourishing as its own being through survival and reproduction. It follows that there are grades of actuality, of finality. One can say that by achieving its purpose the beaver has demonstrated the capacity to achieve its final purpose without the causal reliance on any other creature or thing.

In a sense then, the beaver is autonomous *in so far as it is able to achieve its final purpose*, indicating the fact that there is an element of *failure* present (the beaver may be unable to build its dam), which we shall see later as crucial to the possibility of autonomous human agency. That said, we must continue to explore the nature of purposive movement in order to explore the possibility that autonomous human agency is somehow different from the autonomous agency demonstrated by other living substances. In order to do this we must first explore change with respect to normative and random movement.

Before continuing, I should summarize what has been discussed thus far. We know that, for Aristotle, substance is composed, as a *methexis*, of a unity of form of matter. Nature is that which mediates the movement of substances as the material *substratum*, in that nature does not interfere in the activity of substance actively being for itself. Both substance and nature are actively self-reliant, relying on nothing external to be as they are. We know that, for Aristotle, there is a purposive motion to substance and nature which involves generation and change. We know also that substance is causally autonomous with respect to its being and its individuality, and that Aristotle's inner principle of motion and rest is the principle of causal autonomous agency for both substance and nature. We have also discussed how nature maintains the multitude of causally autonomous substances through the mediating power of its normative motion, which is in turn characterized as change.

We have also discussed how when a thing achieves its final cause then it is complete, and that all of its actions can be said to have integrated with its properties and powers, thus constituting a its virtue (arête). A given substance's virtue is distinct from the incomplete virtue of an artificial object, as seen in a human artisan's product (such as a hammer). The human artisan is not only causally autonomous with respects to its being (given that it is a substance), but the human artisan is also a causally autonomous agent with respect to his crafting given that the artisan is that for the sake of which the product exists (i.e., the artisan's products receive their purpose and subsequent completion through human activity).

Since we have discussed motion and change we must now explore the normative motions of nature with respect to spontaneous and chance motion, and then consider purposive agency before we move on to discuss the purpose or end of humans and the possibilities of autonomous human agency.

1.4: Spontaneity and Chance.

In so far as the four causes govern the motion of change within nature, the normative motions (what determines the thing's good) the causes enact within the world can be understood to occur either spontaneously or by chance.[56] Aristotle defines spontaneity in almost exactly opposite terms to its use in modern English: today, the spontaneous connotes the occurrence or growth of something from nature (natural processes) that is accidental, not intended, random, or has no recognizable origin. For Aristotle, the *arché* of spontaneity is the determined, regulative, and automatic motion within nature, primarily manifest as the efficient and material causes

[56] *Physics* 194b16ff.

though including all four.[57] Thus, for Aristotle, the term 'spontaneity' represents the chains of cause and effect that are the automatic and necessary natural motions of the world (nature) that differentially integrates all substances.

For example, in living substance, when the acorn falls from the tree it is determined by nature to sprout, take root, grow into an oak tree, create more seeds, and then wither and die. The acorn will not grow into any other object other than an oak tree. We can then see that spontaneous (normative) motion can give rise to other, further normative motions. That is, an oak tree will grow dozens of acorns that will grow into oak trees, giving rise to even more spontaneous (normative) motions.[58] So we can see that spontaneous motion can, in principle, be predicted with a relative high degree of accuracy in the light of these normative automatic motions.

Chance motion is essentially the opposite of spontaneous (normative) motion, though they are not mutually exclusive, and has two distinct meanings for Aristotle. The first meaning of "chance" refers to motions that occur seemingly without cause and are considered to be indefinite, occurring incidentally.[59] Chance occurrences can be conceived as being random, but as potentially being definite if their cause can be discovered.[60] It is important to note that chance motion results from the spontaneous (normative) motion of nature: without normative motion there can be no chance events.[61]

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[57] *Physics* II, 3.

[58] With respect to non-living substances, chemical reactions (as when hydrogen comes in contact with oxygen) are determined as necessarily having a determined or automatic outcome (H_2O), which can in turn create more spontaneous motion (such as when sufficient heat is applied to water to create steam which is the efficient cause of the transition between liquid and gaseous states).

[59] *Physics* 196b17-34.

[60] *Physics* 196b17-34, and 197b1-3. Today we could invoke mathematical laws of probability to approximate predictable chance occurrences; but certainly such predictions will not apply as a causal primary nor historically justified description.

[61] This understanding of chance motion also means that in any given spontaneous (normative) motion there is an

The second meaning of chance for Aristotle refers to motions that occur as a coincidental result of actions undertaken by intelligent moral agents that can nonetheless be understood to occur "for the sake of something".[62] Aristotle asserts that while some events occur normatively (through the necessary movement of nature), and some due to random chance (as just discussed), some occur "for the sake of something".[63] Aristotle asserts that whenever intelligent moral agents act, they do so "for the sake of something". But if the intended actions result in something unexpected (or something additional occurs which was unexpected), either beneficial or harmful, such unexpected events are considered to occur by chance.[64] Aristotle calls these chance results *incidental* to the initial deliberate purpose of the originating actions, and further argues that, "intelligent reflection … and chance are in the same sphere, for purpose implies intelligent reflection".[65] Accordingly, for Aristotle, chance is thereby an *incidental* cause, not a primary cause *per se*, and will thereby always be posterior to both nature and intelligence.[66]

Both spontaneity and chance stand in relation to one another: chance necessarily originates within spontaneous (normative) motion, but not *vice-versa*, since chance can create a series of effects and thereby "begin" a series of events that are *incidentally* governed by the normative motion of nature.[67] More can be said concerning chance motion with respect to moral agents. Indeed, we must explore chance motion to see if there is any possibility for autonomous human agency, but first we must finish our exploration of substance and purposive human acts.

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element of chance.

[62] *Physics* 196b10-197b13.

[63] *Physics* 196b17-24.

[64] *Physics* 196b25-197a4. We will explore the existence and powers of moral agents who act "for the sake of something" in Chapter Two and Three, for now we must focus on those actions considered to occur "by chance".

[65] *Physics* 197a5-8. Aristotle also calls chance in this case, "fortune" or "luck" (197a25-35).

[66] *Physics* 197a8-14, and 198a9-12.

[67] *Physics* 197a1ff.

1.5: Purposive Agency

There is no guarantee that substance will always be able to achieve its final cause since motions of other substances might impede or prevent its flourishing. For example, a human could harvest all of the oak tree's acorns and burn them in a bonfire, so we can say that in one sense the tree has fulfilled its purpose of being itself (growing from acorn into tree) and reproducing itself; but in another sense it has not *completely* achieved its purpose since none of its acorns have been able to take root. There is also the possibility that a chance occurrence, such as an automobile accident, will result in the death of a human before he can achieve happiness.

Aristotle points out that there is no deductive proof possible for *kinesis*, and that it would be absurd to attempt to prove nature's unfolding motion.[68] The recognition that nature is self-unfolding is inductive, *epagogic*. This is to say that it requires a form of ostensive demonstration, which is understood as the concept that something obvious does not immediately strike us precisely because it seems far too commonplace (or simplistic) to be significant.[69] That is, because something is commonly obvious, we tend to ignore it as a given, and pay it no focused, conscious attention. This focus problem or inattentiveness can affect our understanding of substance and nature and requires that our scientific method compensate for it.

It is through education that one can recognize the *epagogic*, and it is to education we must now briefly look. The student can be seen to be incomplete in that he has not been able to achieve virtue (the perfection of character) naturally on his own, and requires the teacher (an

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[68] *Physics* 193a1-6. Further, one must take it for granted, that is to say that we must assume that nature is mind-independent (185a12).

[69] This belief is called 'apodeixis' in Greek, which means, "that which is self-evident", certain or obvious, thus what can be known is in evidence all around us. For example, it is known that every human breathes in order to live, but we tend to "gloss over" or ignore this fact, i.e., not consciously recognize the continual act of breathing others engage in all around us all the time. We do this so much that we tend even to ignore our own breathing.

education in general) to complete himself.[70] This acquisition of virtue (or principle of self-originated action) would properly involve a study of Aristotle's psychology (as set out in the *De Anima*) and his conception of human completion in happiness (as set out in the *Ethics*). But for our immediate purposes here it is enough to note that, while humans have, according to Aristotle, within themselves their own inner principle of motion/stationariness, they nonetheless are capable of affecting and changing that principle as we will explore more fully in the next chapter.

Since, for Aristotle, humans as natural substances have their own inner principle of motion/stationariness, it follows that humans are also their own ends, their own final causes. For example, as mentioned previously, we give purpose to the hammer when we use it to hammer things. Left unused by the craftsman, the hammer will not engage in the activity of hammering; its potential is one that involves being acted upon by something else (the craftsman) to fulfill an external end. Though this at first appears to be applicable only to artificial things, we can easily extend this to natural substances; e.g., we can use a tree for our own ends as a bed, or we can chop it up and use it as firewood or to build a house. Extending this argument further, it can be said that humans are their own masters (causal autonomous agents) that are also able to treat themselves and others as tools.[71] It follows from this that ends can be fulfilled or unfulfilled; the seed can be burned and never actually become a tree, the hammer never used, or the human to fail to act as a human. And although we can use things for our own ends, those ends need not necessarily interfere with the normatively natural end of the things used; slaves can be freed.

When we craft an artificial thing, or come to know any natural substance (thereby participating with its motion in the world) we do so in respect of the four causes, on which Aristotle relies to achieve such knowledge; i.e. we provide matter with the necessity and power

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[70] *EN* Books VI-VII.
[71] *Politics,* Book 1.

to be and to do its task.[72] The four causes governing change allows us to stand in relation to those things that we create as that which initiated their movement and their coming to be, but we do not provide a sustaining activity except in respect of the initiation of movement as purpose. In certain circumstances, what we craft, like cities and states and other technologies, can also be seen to have purpose *arising* in their own action, thereby implicating us in its quasi-natural spontaneity.[73]

We can conclude from everything we have discussed thus far that substances are sources of both spontaneous (normative) and chance motion and change, and are thereby causes of their being. Substances are causally autonomous with respect to their being, and intelligent substances (humans) are, in addition, autonomous agents with respect to their crafts (techné). Further, substances have the capacity to instill purpose in other substances through various modes of reproduction and artificial production, most notably living substances.[74]

Living substances not only provide purpose to things to achieve their ends but they also can provide opportunity for their offspring to acquire, within themselves, the shared purpose of their being.[75] Thus, given that humans are causal agents of both natural substances and artificial objects, it follows that humans can be causal sources of spontaneous motion. We can also conclude that all substances that have an innate principle of motion and rest are thereby causal autonomous agents within nature.

The question to be explored in the next chapter is this: is the causal autonomous agency demonstrated by humans in their crafting (techné) indicative of a larger principle of human

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[72] This is of course only possible in so far as one is capable of acquiring knowledge; if one has the paideia or general education (*EN* 1130b25-29, and 1094b3, also *Politics* 128810ff).

[73] It is clear from Heidegger's work that he drew upon Aristotle's conception of purpose arising in technology out of their partial quasi-natural spontaneity. (Most notably in his article entitled *The Question Concerning Technology,* wherein he warns against the dangers of technology that can trap and bind human autonomy.)

[74] *De Anima,* Book II Chp 4 (415a15ff).

[75] *EN* books VI - VII.

autonomous agency that is somehow differentiated from the autonomous agency demonstrated by all other substances that have within them an inner principle of motion and rest? If this is so, we will also need to determine if it is somehow a natural power to act. These questions will open the possibility that humans, as rational beings, can engage in acts that are not determined by the mechanistic normative motions of nature. We will see the possibility for autonomous human agency becoming clearer, in that humans, unlike other living substances, are neither constrained to, nor prevented from, producing other natural or artificial objects.

We must now consider the nature of virtue, its relation to the soul, and the possibilities surrounding autonomous human agency.

Chapter Two: Virtue & Agency

2.1: Virtue

Aristotle's concept of virtue (arête) is at once both simple and complex. Simply put, the highest virtue is an activity of the soul that enables the individual to achieve happiness (eudaimonia), and is a capacity (hexis) that, in principle, all humans can possess.[76] I say "in principle" since, even though humans as a species have the potential to be virtuous and happy, many individuals nonetheless lack the opportunities to act out of this potential, such as those who do not benefit from a fundamental education (paideia) and/or prosperity. In addition, given that some humans are born with or suffer reduced capacities that prevent them from doing those acts that constitute the virtues, it follows that not everyone will actually achieve happiness.

Aristotle begins his *Nichomachean Ethics* [77]:

> "Every art (*techné*) and every inquiry (*methodos*), and similarly every action (*praxis*) and pursuit (*prohaeresis*), is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim. But a certain difference is found among ends; some are activities, others are products apart from the activities that produce them. Where there are ends apart from the actions, it is the nature of the products to be better than the activities. Now, as there are many actions, arts, and sciences, their ends also are many; the end of the medical art is health, that of shipbuilding a vessel, that of strategy victory, that of economics wealth. But where such arts fall under a single capacity- as bridle-making and the other arts concerned with the equipment of horses fall under the art of riding, and this and every military action under strategy, in the same way other arts fall under yet others- in all of these the ends of the master arts are to be preferred to all the subordinate ends; for it is for the sake of the former that the latter are pursued. It makes no difference whether the activities themselves are the ends of the actions, or something else apart from the activities, as in the case of the sciences just mentioned"[78]

Aristotle concludes these opening remarks by arguing for *eudaimonia* as the universal human good; "If, then, there is some end of the things we do, which we desire for its own sake

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[76] *EN* 1097aff, 1100b10-22, 1103aff, 1102a5-6, and 1114b26-1115a3.
[77] Hereafter referred to as the *EN*.
[78] *EN* 1094a.

(everything else being desired for the sake of this), and if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else (for at that rate the process would go on to infinity, so that our desire would be empty and vain), clearly this must be the good and the chief good".[79] Thus, the distinctly human good is happiness (eudaimonia), which results in the individual "living well and doing well", but only in so far as it is pursued for its own sake.

Despite the fact that Aristotle identifies the human good as *eudaimonia*, "the good", he does not present this condition as an emotional or intellectual contentment or satisfaction, nor is it a physical sensation of bliss or pleasure: rather, Aristotle uses the Greek word '*eudaimonia*' to connote *flourishing*. The "happy" individual flourishes as he lives, attaining fulfillment through his achievement of those acts in accordance with virtue that completes the best possible life, the good.[80] *Eudaimonia* is portrayed as denoting a condition of a natural being that is well integrated within itself; that is, within the necessities afforded by one's own innate defining properties and capacities as discussed above in chapter one.[81] Such "happiness" is applicable not only to human life as a whole but it is achievable by individual human beings, resulting in the integrated individual becoming happy.[82]

Thus, when Aristotle's theory of natural substance is taken into consideration it becomes clear that each human has the potential to flourish individually in his or her own way: i.e., when an individual human achieves his purpose (the "that for the sake of which" they are) in his own way that is best for him, then he flourishes accordingly. Aristotle further argues that happiness must be achievable and sustainable by humanity through action, and that it must be achieved for

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[79] Ibid.
[80] The term 'eudaimonia' has strong platonic echoes (as seen especially in the Symposium).
[81] *De Anima* 402b17ff.
[82] *EN* 1095a15-20.

its own sake, otherwise happiness can be mistaken or lost from view.[83]

Given that there are different sources of happiness (e.g. wealth, pleasure, honour, etc.), Aristotle explores whether there is some principle of economy among them, and which, if any, of these many possible goods are the most important. He argues that one must have been raised with those habits that are conducive to learning in order to understand the nature of happiness.[84] That is, while wealth can bring happiness, such a possible source of happiness can be lost or taken away upon loss of one's wealth. Further, since one tries to become wealthy in order to *become* happy it is clear that wealth is pursued for something else (happiness), and not for itself. So it follows that the good does not consist in wealth. Aristotle provides similar arguments to show that the good does not consist either in honor or in pleasure since neither of these are desired in their own right and for themselves. Only happiness (eudaimonia) fits the criterion of self-sufficiency. It follows that happiness pursued for its own sake is then considered a final good as the best/final end.

Since happiness is self-sufficient and does not depend upon anything else to justify its attainment, the act that attains this happiness must be the sustaining activity that humans can engage in.[85] Since virtue and happiness depend upon human actions, but specifically natural actions, that can, in some part, be learned, then Aristotle is emphasizing the fact that the individual can *acquire* virtue and happiness.[86] Therefore, happiness is further understood as that which makes "*life desirable and lacking in nothing*"; it is that in virtue of which one is said to flourish.[87] Given that humans are causally autonomous according to their being as living

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[83] *EN* 1097a15-1097b.
[84] *EN* 1095b1-6.
[85] *EN* 1097b7ff, and 1100b10-22.
[86] *EN* 1099b20-24.
[87] Ibid.

substances, and that virtue and happiness are achievable, then we can see a promising possibility for autonomous human agency.[88] That is, if happiness is indeed achievable through human action, then there is an element of autonomy to virtue and happiness that seems to accord with human agency. What must be established is whether there is a link between the human causal autonomous agency, and virtue and happiness. We must therefore explore how Aristotle conceives of virtue and happiness in this regard.

Aristotle spends a good deal of time dealing with various interpretations of happiness and the virtuous acts that may provide for its attainment, including pleasure and external goods (which Aristotle states are tools, friends, riches, clothing, shelter, education, and political power).[89] While there are separate arguments for and against both pleasure (physical and intellectual) and external goods as resulting in happiness, Aristotle argues that to be happy one must have *both* in order to lead a happy and virtuous life: this is what Aristotle calls "prosperity".[90] So, in order for one to achieve happiness and flourish one requires certain external goods, the opportunity to pursue actions that will enable one to flourish, the proper habits (hexis) conducive to learning, a fundamental education (paideia), and some sort of training or education in virtue.

Still, it is not quite enough to understand that prosperity and some kind of training in virtue are required for the acquisition of virtue and happiness. We must ask how the individual human is capable of this acquisition, and also, how humanity is capable of differentiating between those actions that are virtuous from the unvirtuous. Aristotle points out that, since humanity shares many capacities in common with other living things (growth, nutrition, etc.)

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[88] P.16ff.

[89] *EN* 1099b1-9. These good are considered "external" in that they are replaceable and changeable goods, contrasted to the "internal" goods of intellectual and moral virtues.

[90] Ibid.

except reason, it follows that what is good for humanity must be a function unique to it that involves rational thought and unique human acts.[91] This allows Aristotle to conclude that the function of humanity is an activity undertaken by the rational aspect of the soul, differentiating it from the souls and the activity of other living creatures given humanity's unique possession of the "rational element" and deliberation.[92] This rational human activity is then undertaken "in accordance with virtue" (arête, "excellence") in a complete life as the best and most self-sufficient.[93] Reason is further demonstrable through the human capacity of speech, an ability that no other animal possesses.[94] Speech is capable of finding knowledge through discourse, with one's self and with others, and is thereby capable of communicating knowledge to others.[95]

Since we have covered what virtue is, we must be clear on what virtue *is not*. Aristotle argues that if virtue were an already established human faculty then humanity would *already* be virtuous and happy to the greatest extent possible, which cannot be the case since not only are we inquiring about it, but it is also clear that a great many people are *not* happy.[96] And if some people are not happy, then how would it be possible to form contrary (unnatural) habits and capacities?[97]

Aristotle rejects any claims that virtue and happiness are gained randomly or are blessings provided by the gods. If virtue were determined by chance, then such a source would be irrational and inconsistent with the manner in which virtue is actually expressed, i.e., through rational deliberation. If virtue were randomly acquired by chance, then virtue and happiness

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[91] *EN* 1097b23-1098a20.
[92] Ibid. We will fully explore the human soul in the next section.
[93] *EN* 1098a5-19.
[94] *Organon* 1a17-1b9, and *De Interpretatione* 16a3-8.
[95] This shall be expanded upon throughout the thesis.
[96] *EN* 1103b11-13.
[97] *EN* 1102b14-20.

would not be self-sufficient since they would be relying upon something else to be somehow the means of their instantiation within an individual. The same objection stands if an individual were granted the blessings of the gods to be virtuous and happy. In both cases an individual would somehow gain the innate and explicit knowledge of virtue who would then benefit from it (i.e., become happy) by exercising it.

If virtue were *not* based upon and attainable through reason and rational action then we would be unable to deliberate on our actions, so that people would be able to engage in virtuous acts without thinking about them (before or after their performance). This would result in the inability to recognize virtuous (or vicious) actions. Virtuous human actions would therefore be instinctual, much in the same manner that a beaver is driven to build a dam. In such cases, virtue could not *be virtuous*, in that it would represent the automatic normative activity of nature.[98] If virtue originated in being granted either by chance or by divine blessing, happiness could not be something that all of humanity could/would strive to achieve for its own sake.[99]

Since virtue is an activity of the soul that requires rational deliberation by the individual, I contend that it is in the relation between reason and virtue that we will find the key to autonomous human agency: namely, in virtue as the *arête* (perfection) of reason.[100] The Greek term '*arête*', which I have here translated in the traditional way, as "virtue", is commonly translated today as 'excellence', and denotes a particular power for doing something.[101] It follows that virtue is the best activity that any human can engage in.[102] Perhaps, in order to show the differentiation between human autonomous agency and all other living substances, we will

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[98] Further, it is clear that humanity does not possess an internal or external organ that produces and regulates virtue in the same manner than the pancreas produces insulin or the heart circulates blood. That said, the implications of a "virtue transplant" (or a virtuectomy!) would revolutionize politics.

[99] Ibid. This is not to be confused with blessedness, as that primarily involves prosperity.

[100] *EN* 1097b23-1098a20 (life requiring a rational element).

[101] P.21-2.

[102] *EN* 1097a15-1097b22, and 1098a17-19.

need to call the agency humanity possesses as either reasonable or *rational* autonomous human agency. For such a term to point out anything significant, we will need to explore reason and its implications for human virtue and happiness.

2.2: The Reasonable Soul

Since virtue enables the soul to act we must explore the various capacities and powers that Aristotle attributes to the soul that, while different, stand in relation with the others.[103] Due to the focus of this thesis on reason and the possibilities of autonomous human agency, I will focus only on the faculties of desire and movement, and the intellect or *nous*.[104]

Desire and movement is a faculty of the human soul that involves all other faculties and capacities, in that each of them has an object(s) that we desire to move towards as ends.[105] Desire and the capacity to initiate movement is a major feature of living creatures given that they are natural substances that have within them an innate principle of motion and rest; i.e., they can choose to move towards an object they desire.[106] Also, to desire an object is itself a movement towards that object which is neither wholly physical nor present, which is characterized as a purposive kinetic 'from … to…' motion. For example, with respect to nutrition we desire food to eat which then enables us to reproduce and ensure that our species survives; but even though there can be nothing edible directly before us we can still desire it, so in a way, the very thought of food causes us to desire.

In a wider sense, to have an object before one's self is to desire it (or not) to some degree;

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[103] *De Anima* 413a32ff.

[104] While I do not explore all the various faculties of the soul I feel it necessary to list them: nutrition and generation (415a15ff), sensation/perception (417aff), common sense (sensus comunis) (418aff), imagination (*phastasia*) (427b25ff), desire and movement (433aff), and the intellect or *nous* (429aff).

[105] *De Anima* 433a9ff. For example, food is the object of desire for nutrition and generation.

[106] *De Anima* 433b15-30.

and when we desire we initiate within ourselves a movement towards (or away from) those objects as ends, where the movement away from the object is itself desired. Desire, in a sense, occupies the position between thinking (as potential) and doing (as actual) with respect to a "wanting to do"; and because this is a motion towards something it hints at a relation to the final cause of a thing, given we desire things as ends for a purpose with respect to our being. Aristotle argues that there is no one source or cause of desire and movement; the cause of movement is desire as mediated by reason and reflection. It follows that desire is involved with all of the soul's faculties and powers, mediated by reason, and is thereby a function of the whole soul.[107]

It is important to note that desire is an impulse and is subject to deliberation as being good to enact before engaged in by the individual. Since humans are not only capable of desiring movement but also capable of *reflecting* upon those desires and reasonably deliberating upon natural impulses to arrive at a specific judgment, this then leads us to consider the intellect or *nous*. Aristotle has two senses of the term *nous*: first, *nous* is the power of immediate perception of self-evident truths; and, secondly, it refers specifically to the human capacity to think reasonably for reasonable purposes.[108] Thus, for Aristotle, because the *nous* provides the capacity to reason, thereby setting humanity apart from all other animals as having the capacity to reflect upon and analyze one's choices (deliberate), it follows that humans alone can determine the best course of action to take fulfill their ends.

We can also conclude that the soul is the human inner principle of motion and rest, given

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[107] *De Anima* 423b3ff.

[108] *De Anima* 429a10ff, and 429a20-30. When Aristotle says "self-evident truths" he is referring to those axioms that are logically self-evident, such as the principle of non-contradiction.

Further, The nous is divided into a passive intellect and an active intellect. The passive intellect is that aspect of the mind that passively receives sense impressions and forms (*De Anima* 430a15). The passive intellect is the source of images, sensory appearance and the experience of sensation. The active intellect takes the forms provided by the passive intellect and then abstracts them, which to say that it takes them and produces an apprehension of the forms which is in turn governed by the active reason: the mind is thereby both passive and active simultaneously (*De Anima* 429a14-19).

that it controls the body by providing purposive motion.[109] More specifically, the soul is the form/*energia* of the individual human while the physical body is its matter/*dunamis*.[110] Thus, if we are to find rational autonomous human agency then it follows that it will involve the human soul and requires further investigation.

Aristotle characterizes the human soul as being divided into two elements with regard to the various acts it does and can perform, the irrational and rational.[111] The irrational element of the soul is further divided up into two elements, the nutritive and appetitive, which work in tension but are nonetheless complementary with the rational element of the soul.[112] The irrational element acts in ways that are contrary to the rational element, but the irrational element can still function "with reason", in that the objects it desires (e.g., food) can be recognized as good (for instance, in that they sustain life); but it is still properly to be regarded as irrational in that it tends always to move towards excess or defect (e.g. over or under-nourishing), as well as deeming bad objects good for the purposes of immediate satisfaction and pleasure (e.g., eating a chocolate sundae just because it tastes good).[113] This is seen in the incontinent (inconsistent) individual, who chooses both good things virtuously and bad things un-virtuously, i.e., ignorantly deciding they are good.[114] Thus, while contraries, the irrational and rational elements of the soul are not mutually exclusive: in fact the irrational and the rational are unified (methexis) within the soul.

That these two elements are unified (methexis) within the soul is of fundamental

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[109] *De Anima* 412a18-412b9, 413b27-29.
[110] *De Anima* 412a-413b29.
[111] *EN* 1102a26ff.
[112] Ibid.
[113] How this relates to Aristotle's conception of the mean is discussed in the following section.
[114] *EN* 1102b13-22.

importance. Aristotle argues that the rational informs and restrains the irrational.[115] The various elements of the soul, like form and matter for substance, unify to create the soul; that is, the rational, as form, "forms" the irrational as matter and is thereby a unified whole.[116] Just as substance is nothing without form and matter so to is the soul nothing without its irrational and rational elements. Just as the natural object requires its place within the natural world, so to do the irrational and rational elements require the soul.

2.3: Intellectual and Moral Virtue

Since we know that the human soul is rational and that our actions are undertaken in accordance with virtue for the purpose of achieving happiness/flourishing, it is now important to explore virtue in order to understand how it entails human excellence/*arête*. In the *EN*, Aristotle differentiates virtue into two fundamental elements: the intellectual and the moral.[117] Aristotle asserts that intellectual and moral virtues are not innate to humanity, rather, humanity possesses (hexis) the capability of achieving them through virtuous habits.[118] Intellectual virtue is exemplified in philosophic wisdom, practical wisdom, and understanding, while moral virtue is exemplified in liberality (generosity and kindness) and temperance (moderation and self-restraint).[119] Intellectual virtue is honed through life experience and scientific education, which, when combined with training in philosophy and political science, one learns of the benefits of rational analysis and of human governance.[120] Moral virtue must come about through the inculcation of virtuous habits (or acquisition of various virtues), and depends on the individual's

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[115] *EN* 1102b34-1103a2.

[116] Since the irrational aspect of the soul desires without rational control it can be equated with matter in that the rational aspect must inform it. Once unified, the individual can rationally enact their desires and purposes.

[117] *EN* 1103a3-10.

[118] *EN* 1103a14-25.

[119] Ibid.

[120] *EN* 1103a14-20. I will explore how habits are acquired later in this section.

reasonable (phronesis) deliberation and pursuit or choice of (prohaeresis) the acts (praxis) that result.[121]

To better understand the distinct relation between intellectual and moral virtue, we must first explore the two Greek terms '*phronesis*' and '*prohaeresis*'. Gadamer argues that Aristotle defines the Greek term *phronesis* as a knowing how to do a given activity in order to achieve happiness, and *prohaeresis* as choice.[122] Aristotle uses the term *phronesis* to name a kind of knowledge different from the "skill" conveyed in the Greek term '*techné*'. *Phronesis* is knowledge of practical matters and actions that are achieved through deliberation.[123]

What distinguishes *techné* from the practical action of *phronesis* is that the latter relates to a given action that is chosen to achieve a purpose (such as happiness), while the former relates to achieving an external physical good, e.g., a tool, a table, or some similar hypothetical or instrumental good. Further, whereas a *techné* is learned before performing the associated acts and can be subsequently perfected, acts that flow from *phronesis* cannot be learned prior to their performance, but must first be deliberated upon and then performed or enacted.[124] The learning that leads to *phronesis* consists, therefore, in practices or activities, in that one learns how to enact such actions properly. Thus we have a focus on both act and purpose as functions of the individual. *Phronesis* is only successfully achieved when it is done on one's own, and not on the initiative, or in imitation, of someone else.

While *prohaeresis* translates as 'choice' in English, there are subtler nuances for Aristotle we must explore. For Aristotle, choosing is giving preference to one thing over another thing based on reasonable deliberation. So, a person who chooses correctly based on such deliberation

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[121] Ibid.
[122] Gadamer, *The Good* pp.33-6, and 163-5.
[123] *EN* 1139b25ff, and 1141b12.
[124] *EN* 1103a26-1103b22.

is considered to have practical wisdom, but only in so far as such a choice is reasonable and only if it results in the desired effect of achieving and/or maintaining "the good life" for the one choosing.[125]

Prohaeresis and *phronesis* are related in that the latter informs the capacity of the former to determine the action intended to bring about a good. Thus, when one rationally deliberates about engaging in an action intended to bring about a good, one must ultimately choose to prefer one action over any other; whichever action one judges will result in the most appropriate good. When one is virtuous, one has been able not only to choose the best and most appropriate action to do at any given time, *but one is capable of doing the action well* (succeed). The actuality is substantial.

Effectively, *one must teach one's self* when such actions are appropriate to enact, and how to enact them well enough that the desired virtuous outcome results. This then is the element of knowledge that Aristotle asserts must be taught and learned, but it is not, in principle, teachable in the same sense that math or carpentry is teachable. That is, it is clear that while virtue can be taught and learned for one's self, the learning its not acquired in the same way as a *techné* nor in the way claimed by the Sophists: it is self-originating and oriented learning undertaken by the individual.

Since, as we have seen the good for Aristotle is "that at which all things aim", it follows that we can characterize the relation between *phronesis* and *prohaeresis* as the act of deliberate judging, of choosing in accordance with what determines. In so far as a teacher can help instill knowledge that aids the individual in deliberating, it is ultimately the individual who must *choose and then act*, refining both dynamics to suit what is best for him or herself. This brings

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[125] *EN* 1139b25-33.

us to consider habit and character insofar as practical wisdom (phronesis) and choice (prohaeresis) contributes to their formation.

The Greek word '*ethos*' is the origin of the English word 'ethics'.[126] Aristotle sees the virtue of practical wisdom (phronesis) as that state of character achieved by human activity through reasonable (*phronesis*) deliberate choice (prohaeresis).[127] In general terms, such virtue is a potential (hexis) that is actualized in the proper exercise of reason that develops one's character: since it depends upon reason (rational deliberation), a faculty that all humans possess, it follows that all humans can become virtuous.[128] It also follows that virtue is a self-originating action that is deliberately chosen by the individual human and that, virtue is acquired, *it arises out of virtuous acts.*[129]

This leads us to consider how it is that the intellect or *nous* can relate to human action and the acquisition of virtuous habits. First, Aristotle points out that the intellectual aspect of the soul discussed previously is divided up into two aspects: the scientific and the calculative.[130] Both aspects deliberate, but Aristotle asserts that since no one can deliberate about invariable things then the calculative intellect is that aspect that "grasps a rational principle".[131] This is important to virtue in that the intellect or *nous* is that which informs and enables the human capacity to make judgments and to choose. Aristotle asserts that not only is virtue "relative to its proper work", but that there are "three things in the soul which control action and truth – sensation, reason, [and] desire".[132] Sensation, while providing sense data, does not originate action but the

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[126] *EN* 1103a15-20.
[127] *EN* 1103a15*ff.*
[128] *EN* 1099b14-24.
[129] *EN* 1103b20-25.
[130] *EN* 1138b35-1139a15.
[131] *EN* 1139a12-16.
[132] *EN* 1139a16-18.

latter two do, in that Aristotle also asserts that "since moral virtue is a state of character concerned with choice, and choice is deliberate desire, therefore both the reasoning must be true and the desire right, if the choice is to be good".[133] Further:

> "Now this kind of intellect and of truth is practical; of the intellect which is contemplative, not practical nor productive, the good and the bad state are truth and falsity respectively (for this is the work of everything intellectual); while of the part which is practical and intellectual the good state is truth in agreement with right desire. The origin of action – its efficient, not its final cause – is choice, and that of choice is desire and reasoning with a view to an end. This is why choice cannot exist either without reason and intellect or without a moral state."[134]

Aristotle goes on to argue that the intellect itself does not move anything as efficient cause per se, rather, only when it aims at achieving a specific goal "and is practical".[135] That is, when the intellect involves production of artificial objects it is therefore practical, characterized by the fact that "good action is an end, and desire aims at this".[136] This leads Aristotle to conclude that choice is either "desiderative reason or ratiocinative desire, and such an origin of action is a man".[137]

From what has been said, we can conclude that the relation between intellectual and moral virtues is a unity within the human soul. In so far as intellectual virtue is the honing of knowledge, moral virtue represents the application of such knowledge, which cannot be anything but the completion of a natural act.[138] Thus, intellectual and moral virtues are unified (methexis) within the human soul, mediated by *nous* as that which enables rational thought and deliberation, subsequently the potentially virtuous person can choose those virtuous habits that he or she

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[133] *EN* 1139a21-25.
[134] *EN* 1139a26-31.
[135] *EN* 1139a35-1139b5.
[136] Ibid.
[137] *EN* 1139b3-5.
[138] *EN* 1099b18-24.

judges will result in achieving virtue, and eventually happiness, when enacted.[139] What is crucial is that humans are capable of *learning* through their actions: specifically, humans can learn how to consistently apply their choices successfully, as well as communicate and deliberate using speech with one's self and with others. One deliberates with one's self conceptually within the *nous*, and one can engage in verbal and written communication with others in the form of debates and lectures.

While it may seem that we have found a distinctly rational autonomous human agency that enables humanity to be free agents to both themselves and nature, we must nonetheless realize that there are several points that need clarification. For all that has been said we have yet to discuss how humans choose and we need to examine whether or not humans have the capacity to actually choose. Specifically, we need to explore, A) virtue in relation to Aristotle's conception of the "mean", B) the nature of the possession (hexis) of virtue, C) whether or not knowledge can be non-coercive, and lastly, D) the power of the individual human to effect change in nature and themselves. How virtue relates to the mean will complete this section while the other issues will be addressed in the remaining three sections of this chapter respectively.

How virtue relates to Aristotle's conception of the "mean" is important as it involves how humans choose. Aristotle himself relates virtue to his conception of the mean, defined as the reasonable balance between extremes, such as courage being the mean of brashness and cowardice.[140] Thus, we can say that virtue is the mean (intermediate) between the two extremes (vices) of dogmatic resolve (dictatorial adherence to principles and laws) and fickleness

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[139] *EN* 1103a3-10, and 1143b17-1145a12.
[140] *EN* 1106a14ff.

(inconsistent judgments based on one's changeable whims).[141] That said, one must choose the virtuous mean in opposition to vice through reasonable deliberation so as to find the best goods available, and successfully enact them.[142]

> "Virtue, then, is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e, the mean relative to us, this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it. Now it is a mean between two vices, that which depends on excess or defect; and again it is a mean because the vices respectively fall short of or exceed what is right in both passions and actions, while virtue both finds and chooses that which is intermediate. Hence in respect of its substance and the definition which states its essence virtue is a mean, with regard to what is best and right an extreme".[143]

It is critical and relevant to questions of autonomous agency to note that one must *succeed in the proper application* of the chosen virtuous act, given there is no guarantee of success.[144] Success leads to *arête*/excellence through a process of learning how to enact virtue better with each enactment. Further, the agent must be "of a certain mind" to benefit from engaging in virtuous acts (i.e., gain virtue): the agent *must* first have knowledge of the action being virtuous, they must not only choose the act but do so for *its own sake*, and lastly, the action must proceed from a "firm and unchangeable character".[145]

Aristotle places clear emphasis on the act of choosing and on the *enacting* of the agent's purposive choice, which in turn must originate from confidence born of deliberated knowledge. So, reason, disciplined by a preliminary education ('*paideia*' in Greek or 'schooling' in English), patience, and prosperity, will, for the most part, enable the individual to become virtuous and to

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[141] Examples would be the Sophists and Hedonists respectively.

[142] When Aristotle speaks about excess or defect within human actions we are involved with moral virtue, accordingly such actions are considered vices, while virtues are their mean. Thus, the inculcation of virtuous habits help to prevent us from engaging in the vices of excess and defect (*EN* 1106b*ff*).

[143] *EN* 1107a1-8.

[144] *EN* 1103a15ff, and 1106b28-35. One is reminded of *techné* here, but this will be explored in section 2.5.

[145] *EN* 1104b30-1105A. It should be noted that the firm and unchangeable character is partially developed and supported by one's *paideia*.

achieve happiness through the proper use and enactment of choice.[146] In a sense then, the training in virtue that one requires is simultaneously one that is received from teachers, gained partly from one's paideia, and extensively from one's life experience. Is the choice that Aristotle explores here proof of autonomous human agency? Almost, but not quite.

Given what we have said concerning virtue as an act of the soul, it follows that actions in accordance with virtues complete the soul's natural capacities to act, mold, and perfect human excellence, tempered by reason and deliberation. That there is an element of choice is, as I have said, both intellectually intriguing and, ultimately, necessary. That is, if virtue is to be considered a state or disposition of the soul, tempered by reason, to act in certain ways, then this requires the capacity of judging, of reasonable deliberation (itself tempered by education) in order to recognize the good, and subsequent virtue, of the acts and habits. Further, as I stated at the beginning of this thesis, without the act of choosing (prohaeresis) we are left without deliberate intent, without which the act cannot be virtuous in that one has not chosen the best good for one's self.[147] Thus, when one is virtuous, one has attained a state of excellence or perfection with regard to practical reason (phronesis), thereby gaining practical wisdom (and living the good life). To use Aristotle's analogy of the archer: without choice, the archer cannot aim at her target since none of the parts of the bow, nor the arrows, nor her skill with the bow coerce or necessitate her to take aim and shoot.

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[146] *EN* 1106b36-1107a3. Also, the word 'patience' here is used not in the sense that Aristotle treats of his exploration of "time" as an impediment that must be overcome (*EN* 1094b27ff, 1142a12-20, and 1147a17ff. Also, *De Gen. An* 735a10-11; *CF, & Phys.* 255a34f.; 255b11-13), rather, I use this word to refer to the simple ability to listen carefully and participate in lectures and debates (most notably political and philosophical), which can be lengthy and taxing on one's rational control.

[147] P.6.

2.4: Possessing Virtue

It is not unreasonable to see virtue as the mean of reason, given the importance of reasonable deliberation and particular act, a fact that Aristotle argues throughout the *EN*, referring to happiness in accordance with "perfect virtue", indicating that the virtuous person must *maintain* the virtuous behavior for the most part in order to become (and be) happy.[148] Since the emphasis is ultimately upon choice of the most virtuous action from all possible actions, reason itself must be perfected in order to choose the virtuous action successfully. It follows that, since all humans can become virtuous, then all humans can also be autonomous agents in the same manner, given choice is an element of the perfection of reason.

Since virtue is not a natural faculty of the soul like sight or hearing or even like generation and nutrition, but a "*hexis*", or "disposition" or "state of character", then it must be acquired. This acquisition is, as mentioned previously, a kind of self-training. It is important to understand that *hexis* does not mean "potentiality", rather, *hexis* points out the "possession" of that which enables; so, with respect to virtue, hexis points to the fact that virtue *can* be acquired or possessed, *or not*.[149] We can also infer that the excellence pointed out in the term *arête* can now be modified to include *hexis*: thus, *arête* as excellence is a possession that can enable one to achieve one's télos *or not*. This shift then accords with what has been discussed concerning virtue and the mean, in that individuals must act for themselves. That said, we must now explore the relation between knowledge and reason.

Given what we have discussed so far, virtue is a kind of knowledge; it must be deliberated upon and in part gained and then maintained through life experience. Aristotle supports this argument by emphasizing the importance of knowledge in the act of rational

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[148] *EN* 1114b26-1115a3.
[149] See also P.35.

deliberation and virtuous activity. As mentioned previously, if virtue were not knowledge, but an innate faculty of the soul, we would all be born virtuous (and be happy), before engaging in virtuous acts; in fact however, one must practice virtuous activity to *become* virtuous:

> "For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them, e.g. men become builders by building and lyre-players by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts … it is from the same causes and by the same means that every virtue is both produced and destroyed, and similarly every art; for it is from playing the lyre that both good and bad lyre-players are produced … For if this were not so, there would have been no need of a teacher, but all men would have been born good or bad at their craft. This then, is the case with the virtues also … [thus] states of character arise out of like activities. This is why the activities we exhibit must be of a certain kind … it makes no small difference, then, whether we form habits of one kind or another from our very youth; it makes a very great difference, or rather all the difference."[150]

In other words, repeatedly engaging in virtuous activities in order to form the proper habits will inculcate virtue within the character of whoever enacts them. The more one engages in virtuous actions, the more the habit becomes inculcated, then the more one becomes capable of engaging in virtuous actions without having to pause to deliberate about them before enacting them. That said one always stands ready to justify one's actions. Thus, through habit is the human soul made virtuous.[151]

Virtue points to habitually engaging in actions that make one virtuous; but more specifically, to properly choosing and engaging in the right acts, with the right objects (if applicable), with the right people, in the right ways, for the right reasons, at the right times.[152] If we push the implications further, we see that virtuous actions "contain" virtue, since the individual becomes more virtuous upon doing them. So, a virtuous act is only virtuous when

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[150] *EN* 1103a34-1103b2, and 1103b7ff.

[151] *EN* 1103a14-20. This also means that the human is capable of affecting their inner principle of motion and rest, in that they supply for themselves new states of motion and rest through the perfection of ethical acts, or virtue (P.30).

[152] *EN* 1106b15-23.

applied properly (right ways at the right times) and when the individual is aware of his actions after having chosen them. It is important to see that while the activity itself is virtuous it does not literally "contain" virtue as a vessel contains water, rather, this is a metaphor to indicate that the action is capable of *affecting* the individual; i.e., making one virtuous and subsequently happy.

2.5: Non-Coercive Knowledge

Given that virtue relies upon knowledge we must ascertain whether knowledge is coercive or not. If knowledge were coercive, then any virtuous activity (indeed, *any* activity) demonstrated by humanity would be nothing more than the normative instinctive behavior demonstrated by all other animals as determined by nature. In this section I shall argue that knowledge does not normatively coerce, or in any way force, bind, or limit the individual to act, rather, it *allows* for action.[153] In order to see this we must now consider ignorance and knowledge.

I contend that there are two kinds of ignorance: willful and natural. Both elements are expressed as actions and, as such, stand in accord with what we have said concerning Aristotle's conception of substantial activity. That is, both willful ignorance and natural ignorance represent both un-virtuous actions and the lack of virtuous action respectively.

Willful ignorance occurs when the individual knowingly chooses and engages in actions that are un-virtuous, that are the inappropriate goods given their circumstances (i.e. not the right actions at the right times in the right ways, etc.). Such a person is motivated by the irrational elements of his soul for the lesser goods, and enacts selfishness or some other such vice. Natural

[153] The Aristotelian tradition, from Socrates on, stands for the proposition that knowledge allows one to act, and can make an individual free. This is the kernel of their rationalist, "intellectualist", and ethical thought as it shapes western philosophy down to Kant and beyond.

ignorance occurs when the individual does not know what he needs to know in order to choose the best action concerning his circumstances, and thus never has the option to act virtuously in the first place. That said, such a person might still select the most virtuous option available, but that intent does not change the fact he has chosen to enact the wrong action at the wrong time in the wrong way. In short, such a person's heart is said to "be in the right place", but has yet to achieve *arête*. If we apply this distinction between the willfully and naturally ignorant to Aristotle's understanding of virtue, a willfully or naturally ignorant individual would be considered to be incontinent (inconsistent), but they are of course differentiated by their intent to aim at the chief good.

Knowledge informs our ability to act by giving us a variety of options, informed by our education in, and of, the world (science) and life experience. With greater knowledge more options become available to us from which to choose the best good and most virtuous actions, given the circumstances (right choices enacted in the right ways at the right time). If knowledge compelled us to choose the most virtuous actions consistently and at all times, then it would result in all rational individuals being happy and virtuous people, which is clearly not the case.[154] It follows that knowledge always presents us with the means to choose virtuously in light of the human *hexis* of virtue, which *may not be achieved* when attempted. This is then demonstrated in the very existence of the inconsistent or incontinent individual (akrates, or person of weak will).[155]

The inconsistent individual who desires to fulfill only his immediate pleasures, who has

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[154] This argument accords with what I have said concerning virtue not being a human faculty, given humans would already been virtuous and happy to the greatest extent possible (P.37). The parallel here is that knowledge, if it necessitated action, would result in one gaining virtue and happiness the moment one gained virtuous knowledge. But since we have already established that virtue must be enacted, this is proven false.

[155] It should be noted that opinion also plays a role in our process of decision-making. That is, just like knowledge, opinion has the capacity to inform us on the possible results of our actions.

habituated himself to constantly make such choices that deviate from the mean into excess or defect is, in effect, allowing his irrational desires to be viewed as virtuous. Such a person, insofar as he is willfully ignorant, is the perfect example of an individual capable of ignoring the knowledge that excess or defect leads to vice. That said, the individual who is naturally ignorant is simply hindered by his lack of knowledge, but who may become virtuous if he gains the appropriate knowledge/training.

I contend that knowledge of virtue and happiness is a non-coercive knowing that presents the individual with a kind of *moral urging* (disposition/*hexis*) that, if ethically adhered to, proportionately increases our natural tendency to act virtuously with each virtuous enactment. This moral urging is not coercive; rather, it acts as an *incentive* reinforcing the choice for virtuous activity by pointing to the goal of virtue: happiness. Since the act is a *good* and an *end* in *itself* it follows that Aristotle's conception of virtue is not a mere utilitarian or consequentialist account of human action since this incentive is, simultaneously, *for* both act and its goal.[156] If, as Aristotle asserts, a virtuous act is both pleasant and noble and leads to happiness, then why wouldn't we enact it? The distinction is this: the virtuous person would enact it, while the person striving to become virtuous would *attempt* to enact it, and while the incontinent person would probably ignore it. It follows that while knowledge urges us to act virtuously we have, given the nature of our souls, the capacity (hexis) to act counter to it.

2.6: Power and Responsibility

We must, therefore, explore Aristotle's conception of humanity as causally explained by, and consisting in an act. Aristotle emphasizes the importance of the act of virtuous reasoning as

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[156] *EN* 1094a, and 1140a1-24 (that making and acting are different).

enabling one to achieve happiness:

> "With those who identify happiness with virtue or some one virtue our account is in harmony; for to virtue belongs virtuous activity. But it makes, perhaps, no small difference whether we place the chief good in possession or in use, in state of mind or in activity. For the state of mind may exist without producing any good result, as in a man who is asleep or in some other way quite inactive, but the activity cannot; for one who has the activity will of necessity be acting, and acting well. And as in the Olympic Games it is not the most beautiful and the strongest that are crowned but those who compete (for it is some of these that are victorious), so those who act win, and rightly win, the noble and the good things in life."[157]

At least two inferences may be drawn from this passage, both of which are fundamental to Aristotle's thought. First, without action the individual cannot achieve happiness, since happiness is itself an act. The individual must act as a self-sufficient agent in order to achieve happiness. The responsibility of achieving happiness is therefore placed in the lap of the individual, which accords well with what we have concluded concerning substance in chapter one, and virtue in the previous sections of this chapter; i.e., that all individuals move, change, and act for themselves in their own ways as per their final cause. The second inference to be drawn is that happiness cannot be achieved, according to Aristotle, through thought alone: the *idea* of happiness, virtue, and the good are *empty* without action.[158] Thus, it follows that thought as virtuous must be enacted as the human good, and that such virtuous actions are a kind of *methexis* of thought and action with happiness (the good) as purpose.

There are three activities in which one can see virtue/*arête* demonstrated within the world by the individual: through virtuous living (involving everyday acts in living the good life), in political acts, and finally, in teaching and learning scientific and philosophic knowledge. This third mode of expression may be the most influential, particularity in combination with political

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[157] *EN* 1098b30-1099a6.

[158] *EN* 1096b16-26. This notion is certainly taken up by Kant, in his assertion that conceptions without intuition are blind. (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* A51, B75)

acts. That is, it is clear from Aristotle's writings as a whole that, those who are virtuous constantly strive to perfect their scientific knowledge of the world and engage with others in the love of wisdom (philosophy).

Aristotle's explanations and arguments, while informative on the nature of goods and happiness, are general even if they are practical. Reading the *EN*, one is reminded of Aristotle's explanations of substance. His generality is both satisfying and frustrating: that is, since the individual substance can only be understood *individually*, so too virtue and happiness can only be understood as practiced by the individual, *individually*.[159] This is especially seen in the individuals acting for themselves for their own happiness.

Aristotle spends a good deal of time exploring various specific interpretations of virtue and happiness, but he also points out that virtuous actions are pleasant. That is, since happiness brings pleasure in itself then such actions are also virtuous and noble.[160] For Aristotle, a good person will judge well virtuous actions that bring about pleasure and nobility, subsequently benefiting the most from them.[161] As mentioned previously, this element of judgment is key to the possibility of autonomous agency, since freedom is so often considered to consist in the combination of free choice with the ability to enact the choice without external interference. But the question we must address now is whether Aristotle considers the individual to be a free agent with respect to judgment.

In Book III of the *EN*, Aristotle points out that there is an element of responsibility in virtue that we must now consider. Aristotle explains that the consequences of our actions, be they positive or negative, can be characterized with the distinction between involuntary and

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[159] P.21ff.

[160] *EN* 1099a7-24. The emphasis on "noble" indicates a moral virtue that shall be expanded upon later in this chapter.

[161] Ibid.

voluntary actions. For Aristotle, involuntary actions are either grounded in ignorance, where the agents are not aware of their actions and/or the purposes of said actions, or when the agent is forced or coerced into action by others: in both cases the principle motion (cause) lies outside of the agent performing the action.[162] Voluntary actions originate within the agent, thus the agents are their own principle of motion and are aware of both their actions and their purpose (i.e., as chosen from deliberated knowledge).[163]

Aristotle does not address the distinction between involuntary and voluntary acts merely to delimit the state's power of punishing its people (though it certainly is of great importance), rather, he points out that the individual is *morally responsible* for certain kinds of actions, which can lead to both praise and punishment. An element of autonomy is thereby present, in that if all actions are involuntary then no morally acceptable punishment could exist. Further, this element of voluntary choice is distinctly individual; given it is the agent who chooses to enact choices, which can therefore only be performed by individual substances, specifically, substances capable of rational thought.[164]

From what we have discussed thus far concerning choice, it seems that we may have found autonomous human agency given it is clear that humans are free agents with respect to their judgments. But is the voluntary choice that enacts potentially virtuous actions proof of autonomous agency, or is it, conversely, proof that there is a normative human capacity, not unlike the beaver's instinctive drive to build a dam, that causes us to deliberate? Certainly there is an element of choice involved when the beaver selects a good place to build its dam. Still, as Aristotle has pointed out, the faculty of reason within the human *nous* sets humanity apart from

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[162] *EN* 1109b30-1110a20.
[163] *EN* 1111a20-25.
[164] *EN* 1111b14-17.

animals, in that it is the human capacity to reflect upon and analyze one's choices using reason (rational deliberation) to determine the best course of action, including the capacity to alter (if need be) one's actions according to circumstances.[165]

I firmly agree with Aristotle's position, in that it involves the power to enact. Aristotle points out that, ultimately, individuals deliberate about those actions that are within their power to enact.[166] When Aristotle says "power", he specifically means those actions by which the individual has the capacity to affect change in/with. Since choice originates within the individual human, based upon one's own purposive deliberation, then it follows that, for Aristotle, the individual is a source of efficient change.[167] Further, Aristotle asserts that since humans only deliberate about that which they have the power to change, we actually only deliberate about the *means* by which we achieve our goals.[168] This change is, itself, tempered by virtue since the human capacity to change, and to be changed, is driven by, firstly, the normative motion of nature according to their being (substance), and it is, secondly, guided by one's *nous* through the exercise of reason. It follows that the origin of purposive change concerns that which we have the power to affect change in and that it originates within the human *nous*, which is specifically demonstrable in human actions (changes) that one enacts.[169] It follows then that virtue and vice are within our power to affect change.[170]

To briefly summarize what has been said so far, we can see that virtuous action manifests the harmony of knowledge and practical activity with the right objects with the right people, in the right ways, for the right reasons, at the right times as embodied *and* enacted within the world

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[165] P.45ff.
[166] *EN* 111b26-30, and 1112a19-1112b.
[167] *EN* 1139a16-1139b14.
[168] *EN* 1112b9-1113a5.
[169] *EN* 1113a3-14.
[170] *EN* 1113a1-13.

by the individual person defined as person. Virtuous action is characterized as a unique purposively deliberated and voluntary human excellence (arête) involving that which we have the power to affect. Virtue is the *arête* of the mutual participation, the *methexis,* of the irrational and rational elements of the soul, in that virtue represents the perfection one has attained when one's rational element of the soul guides the irrational element in its desiring the good.

Since humans are causally autonomous with respect to their being, and since this implies that humans have the power to enact change in themselves, to become virtuous, then it follows that humans are *rational autonomous agents* with respect to initiating and establishing virtue for themselves according to their being. Therefore, rational autonomous human agency is a principle of human freedom within Aristotle's conception of virtue, and it is an element of the human soul given it is the innate human principle of motion and rest dealing specifically with rational (phronesis) action and rest.[171] In this sense, the emphasis on practical action/rest is thereby a *complementary hexis* to the innate motion and rest that is the foundation of human beings as living substances. Since all humans can become autonomous agents to the extent that all are capable of reasonable deliberation, it follows that the more knowledge one has, both scientific and philosophical, the more one is capable of choosing virtuous actions, gaining practical wisdom, becoming happy, and flourishing.[172]

If rational autonomous human agency is a kind of knowing, we might ask the logical question, why is it so difficult to identify and justify? I contend that rational autonomous human agency is difficult to recognize, both in Aristotle and in general, because it is *epagogic*. As mentioned previously, the term *epagogic* refers to the difficulty in recognizing that which is most

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[171] *Physics* Book II, Chapter 2.

[172] It is now clear that a human can indeed achieve their own autonomy, as first discussed in chapter one (P.22), given virtue can be acquired.

obvious, or most evident.[173] So, recognition of rational autonomous human agency is difficult *because* it is so obviously an aspect of the human soul that it does not immediately strike us as existing. Our inattentiveness reduces the power of rational autonomous human agency to mere judging, resulting in the mistaken assumption that the choices we make are so mundane that we do not attribute any level of significance to them. We tend to over-complicate both our capacity to, and understanding of, rational autonomous agency; i.e., I contend that we often assume that if rational autonomous human agency existed then it would *only* be demonstrable in those choices whose results caused a significant, perhaps drastic, affect on our lives. This is simply not the case, as paying more attention allows us to recognize what we already see.

It must also be noted that, for Aristotle, speaking at length about rational autonomous human agency simply does not make sense. Insofar as agency exists for Aristotle it simply is not productive to speak about it as being a distinct principle within the human soul, somehow separate yet related to deliberation and judging. Just as focusing too much on the form or matter of substance is counterproductive, since they are separable in thought only, so too is focusing too much on rational autonomous human agency. If one focuses too much on any one capacity of the human soul one is tempted to debate if the soul has parts, or is a harmony of parts, which is not the case: the soul is a unified whole. Further, just as the intellectual and moral virtues need to be honed to *arête*/excellence, so too rational autonomous human agency: it is through the activity of becoming virtuous that rational autonomous human agency is perfected *in its application.*

That said, we can still learn much from exploring rational autonomous agency as a *hexis* of the human soul. For an example of the benefits of exploring rational autonomous human

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[173] P.29-30, and note 69.

agency we must look to a passage of Waterlow's text *Nature, Change, and Agency in Aristotle's Physics*. Waterlow briefly discusses the point that change, for Aristotle, is a "concrete event in which the agency of an individual and the patiency of another are distinguishable but inseparable aspects".[174] Waterlow's position, that the parts of an event are separable in thought only, accords with what Aristotle has said concerning substance. However, Waterlow goes on to state that the conception of change as an event ultimately means that there is no such thing as actual agency and patiency:

> "If we and Aristotle find this account incredible the reason, I suggest, does not lie with the concept of change as such, but with the structure of the concepts we use to describe our own practical activities. Suppose we intend to produce some change in an object other then ourselves. Then in the event, if all goes well, we do, and take ourselves to be doing, *what* we already intended. If we describe what we are doing while doing it, the description differs only in tense from the verbal expression of the prior intention. So in seeing ourselves as executing the intention, we see the actual happening as of the same logical structure as the intention itself. But in the intention, which proceeded the change, the object-to-be-changed figured as something distinct from ourselves. This even when the change is actual it continues to figure as distinct. In short, when the change is one that *we* take ourselves to bring about in an external object, we cannot primarily view it as a concrete event undifferentiated into the aspects of agency and patiency. The point of view of the voluntary agent is one from which the "halves" already present themselves as distinct."[175]

At first glance, Waterlow's position would seem to relegate rational autonomous human agency to a psychological perception, but this is not the case. While I wholly agree with Waterlow's position concerning change as an event, to which her argument is completely committed to with respect to the motion of change itself, it must be noted that she is unconcerned with the human soul nor virtue *as it relates to motion and change*: her position is concerned primarily with the *Physics* and its associated texts. Let us balance the above quote with Aristotle's assertion that "it is absurd to suppose that purpose is not present because we do not

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[174] Waterlow, *Nature, Change, and Agency in Aristotle's Physics* 200.
[175] Waterlow, *Nature, Change, and Agency in Aristotle's Physics* 202-3.

observe the agent deliberating"[176]. Insofar as Waterlow's analysis of change is correct, once we take into account the human soul and everything I have stated thus far concerning non-coercive knowledge and the power of the individual human to enact purpose, we clearly see that rational autonomous human agency is not *merely* a psychological perception of change. Keeping to Waterlow's example in the above quote, we see that the intent to undertake an act by the virtuous individual (to produce a change in an external object) occurs *because* of rational autonomous agency, and that the *analysis* of the events occurs as Waterlow describes it; i.e., focusing on the change as an event rather than on a single aspect of the event itself (agency). This becomes clear when we remember that knowledge is non-coercive and that rational autonomous human agency is an element of the human soul as a *complementary hexis* of the innate human principle of motion and rest.

Since human rational autonomous agency is a complementary principle of the innate human principle of motion and rest, then it follows that human actions are demonstrative of this fact. This is so for two reasons: first, by simply its enactment autonomous action enables the inculcation of virtuous habits in the potentially virtuous individual, and helps to sustain virtue in the virtuous person. Secondly, it does not constrain the individual to make a particular choice or even to choose at all. Rather, rational autonomous human agency *allows* the individual to enact his or her choices, thereby making each autonomous action an instance of human autonomy. Thus, human rational autonomous agency is an *arche* of freedom to initiate movement and rest (insofar as and so long as it is tempered and guided by reason), and that freedom to choose completes the human soul's own activity (télos).

It follows that insofar as humans have an innate principle of motion and rest, humans are

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[176] *Physics* 199b27-33. Discussed on P.25.

capable of affecting it: that is, purposively guiding it towards virtuous rational goals that will lead to happiness. Thus, humans can acquire a degree of excellence with respect to their own being that *is their own being*. Specifically, *human rational autonomous agency is the unification (methexis) of reason and the innate principle of motion and rest* as a uniquely human télos. Further, it follows that rational autonomous agency is a distinctly natural *hexis* of humanity. This is the differentiating factor that separates humanity from all other animals, in that no other animal, according to Aristotle, can purposively reflect upon its actions using reason, learn from their actions and subsequently perfect them in order to achieve happiness and the good.

It follows that humanity is not *completely* normatively limited nor bound by nature with respect to its being since it can change (perfect) it through the activity of its reasonable soul.[177] This fact is made clear when we consider moral responsibility: we cannot and will not hold a beaver morally responsible for the damage caused by building a dam in a river, but we can and will hold a human morally responsible for any and all damage he inflicts that result from his voluntary actions that are proven to have been ignorant or unethical.[178]

In summation, autonomous agency is embodied in every virtuous act in so far as it is completed as Aristotle prescribes: the right actions at the right times, and so forth. Thus, rational autonomous human agency is the arête of reasonable (phronesis) activity that unifies and integrates (methexis) all virtuous activities as truly virtuous. Since knowledge is non-coercive then the potentially virtuous person can choose not to act on his or her knowledge at any time,

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[177] With respect to substance, it should be noted that this change is not *substantial* change, that is, humans cannot change themselves to become non-human. This change is *non-substantial* change, which is the ability to affect change(s) in substantial *properties* and not substance per se.

[178] Aristotle says as much when he asserts that we will hold a person responsible for his illegal actions while drunk given he made the incontinent choice to get drunk rather than adhere to the virtues of moderation and justice (*EN* 1113b30-1114a8).

thus, it is reasonable to assert that when the individual *does* enact his or her virtuous knowledge successfully he or she is demonstrating two interesting facts: first, the individual is expressing an instance of their own rational autonomous agency, and second, such instances can be called enacted knowledge. Since rational autonomous human agency is based on virtuous knowledge, and since it follows that rational autonomous human agency is perfected *in its application*, we can conclude that rational autonomous human agency is perfected through virtue.

Since substance achieves itself, then it follows that the individual human is, in principle, capable of achieving his or her own rational autonomous agency. This action is not a self-change *per se;* rather, it is a self-becoming wherein the individual has shaped himself more fully *as* himself.[179] This substantial self-becoming is analogous to the flower growing from seed to full bloom; the potentiality virtuous person grows into adulthood and then fertilizes his mind and hones his virtue in order to become himself more fully.[180]

But the analogy is not wholly adequate. In a sense, the process of becoming virtuous is a change when one considers that the unvirtuous man has changed into a virtuous man. But the process is more properly understood as a *becoming,* in this case a substantial self-becoming, a *télic* self-completion, in that the process involves change characterized as habitual ethical reflections and the perfection of virtuous actions (overcoming failure) with the purposive goal of becoming happy for the sake of happiness.

Since this self-becoming is an individual process undertaken *individually*, then it is removed from the normative processes of nature that determines the growth of the flower. This becomes apparent when we recognize that rational human autonomous agency is a *hexis* of the rational human soul, and is intrinsically involved with the individual's inner principle of motion

[179] P.10-14.
[180] P.21

and rest. The human is not completely bound by the normative motions of nature, and, unlike the flower or the beaver, the human's rational soul demonstrates the capacity that the human is, in principle, free to enact deliberated choice informed by non-coercive knowledge. Thus, rational human autonomous agency is an expression of the virtuous human *télos*.

Chapter Three: Issues & Implications

3.1: Virtue as a *Techné*

Now that we have found rational autonomous human agency we must discuss several important issues and implications: A) how virtue, as a human activity, relates to art or *techné*, B) the existence of slavery, C) how rational autonomous human agency, the good, and virtue are related with specific reference to Aristotle, D) moral failure (akrasia), and lastly, E) the existence of novel motion. How virtue relates to art or *techné* will complete this section while the other issues will be addressed in the remaining four sections of this chapter respectively.

There is a linguistic oddity, one that Gadamer explains quite well, that will lead to a crucial clarification of Aristotle's theory of moral education. Given the focus on actions with which *phronesis* (practical wisdom) is concerned, and what Aristotle has said about the good (that at which all actions aim), we need to explore how practical actions operate as final cause of the individual person, for whose substantial sake these acts function. Gadamer places a lot of emphasis on this point: "the knowledge of the hand worker plays such a paradigmatic role in any kind of knowing at all that language conforms to it".[181] That is, in relation to the justification of actions (i.e., which actions are deliberated upon and then chosen to be the most virtuous), one invariably defends one's reasons using practical and scientific language. Aristotle uses a metaphor of a balance scale weighing both good and bad events in a life, where too many bad events can "crush" and "maim" happiness, but a virtuous person faces such an unbalanced scale with virtuous nobility.[182] In other words, if questioned, one justifies one's actions to others with

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[181] Gadamer, *The Good* 35.

[182] *EN* 1100b22-32, and 1102b15-24 (cf.) The focus on physical metaphor, that of one's face turned to boldly confront bad events accords with the virtue of courage, while the actions of crushing and maiming happiness evoke visceral emotional and intellectual responses to pain. Since pain and bad events will always occur in life, one sees the benefit of accepting such events as inevitable and enduring them as nobly as possible given we cannot stop them from happening. In many respects, these metaphors accord with Socrates' analogy of philosophy and health; i.e.,

an eye towards the actions themselves being good, and resulting in the chief good.

This language use can often confuse the reader of Aristotle trying to understand how Aristotle conceives deliberation and learning. It can appear that virtue is in fact a *techné*, particularly when Aristotle argues that *techné* is indicative of a deliberative agent as primary cause and that virtue is acquired.[183] While it is easy to reduce *phronesis* to a mere *techné*, one loses crucial nuances in the process. Whereas a *techné* can be learned, mastered, and taught, *phronesis* is learned based on the individual doing first, *then* learning and *then* perfecting (as opposed to *techné* where one learns first then does the action), characterized entirely by one's own final cause (choosing one's own good).[184] This accords with the fact that humans can *produce themselves* given they have an inner principle of motion and rest.[185]

This final cause is at once universally common to all humans (achieving the good and becoming happy), and also, in the *manner in which the individual achieves it*, to be distinguished from *techné* by the actions each individual undertakes to achieve his or her own goals. Not only does one engage in acts in order to learn them, but each individual must achieve his or her *own* goods in his or her *own* ways. Thus, virtue and happiness are judged on an *individual* basis, while in contrast, a *techné* is a universal (unchanging) process that creates a product (a mechanism). One person cannot teach another how best to achieve virtue and happiness in his or her life; one must do this for one's self, particularly given that the circumstances around one's life can change, requiring the application of different goods. Famine and war, for example, can drastically change the acts one would normally perform. This certainly contests the sophistic standpoint, and was the source of much heated debate as Plato's *Protagoras* shows.

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that philosophy is preparation for death.

[183] P.22ff (art as a product of deliberative agency).

[184] *EN* 1103a26-1103b22.

[185] *Physics* 192b12-32.

While this accords with Aristotle's conception of individual substance, there is some reason to consider *phronesis* as a *techné*, or at the very least, to view them as less than total opposites or entirely exclusive of one another. That is, *phronesis* could be argued to produce a product (virtue and happiness) in the same manner that the blacksmith makes a horseshoe. But then we would have an individualized *techné*, rather than a single universal technique for achieving happiness. Thus, *phronesis* is simultaneously a *techné* of the soul, and yet not exclusively so, since the product of *phronesis* is considered the most permanent, complete and universal human act, while *techné* implies a product that is temporary. Eventually the horseshoe will wear out, but happiness endures.[186] And yet, there still seems to be an accord, given both produce a product of use: so, perhaps we could call *phronesis* (and subsequently virtue) the *arête* of *techné*, given that its product (virtue and happiness) is permanent. In a sense, we could say that individual humans can produce their own autonomous agency insofar as they can be virtuous. Ultimately however, to see *phronesis* as a *techné* is to miss the crucially important nuances of virtue.

With respect to education, therefore, in so far as virtue is informed by scientific knowledge of the world in much the same way that *techné* informs the artisan, this knowledge does provide a foundation of information that the individual's choices can use for justification, that contrasts with, (yet parallels) the training the artisan receives in *techné*. This then emphasizes the role of self-learning in the process of acquiring virtue, and is crucial as also emphasizing that virtue is a *hexis* of the human soul.

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[186] *EN* 1100b10-22.

3.2: Agency and Slavery

Since humans can become rational autonomous human agents, then we must now try to understand how Aristotle conceives of the "natural slave". The term 'natural slave' immediately calls to mind an individual that is incapable of being free, and therefore requires our attention. In so far as any person could become a slave through the circumstance of one's life, such as indentured servitude or enslavement through war, there seems to be a possibility for contradiction in the assertion that there exists a separate "sub-class" or "group" of humanity as being somehow naturally inclined to slavery. Of course, Aristotle distinguishes such enslavement (which he regards as wrong) from the condition of natural slaves.

In the *Politics* Aristotle argues that some humans are born to rule while others are born to be ruled, and that this is not only a necessity but also expedient.[187] Generally speaking, Aristotle argues that in the same way that the rational aspect of the human soul can control the irrational, some individuals are naturally subjugated by others; this subjugation benefits those subjugated as, like tamed animals, the subjugated are cared-for and allowed to engage in activities for which they are best suited (e.g. physical activities and labour).[188] When Aristotle relates natural slaves with the irrational aspect of the soul and masters to the rational, Aristotle is inferring four facts: first, that natural slaves are incontinent individuals, second, their intellectual capacities are highly limited, thirdly, that that their irrationality requires controlling, and lastly, that this coercive control is *natural*.

Like the irrational aspect of the soul, however, the natural slave is not completely without reason, given he still engages in acts he deems good. That said, since the natural slave lacks a

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[187] *Politics* 1254a20-23.

[188] *Politics* 1254b1-1255a2. Aristotle goes on to say that this relation between ruler and ruled mirrors the very structure of reality itself, and is indicative of a "ruling principle". This is evidenced by the controlling powers of reason within the human mind as it controls the soul's various desires, or is in turn subjugated by them in the mind of an irrational or inconsistent person (1254a20ff).

paideia he also lacks the opportunity to acquire virtue, much less successfully apply distinct virtuous acts consistently. Thus, the natural slave is an incontinent individual because, without intellectual reason, he is unable to gain virtue. The master who subjugates the natural slave provides the rational control that the natural slave lacks. Given that the natural slave is still human, it follows for Aristotle that the natural slave must be coerced into living as good a life as he is able.[189] In this sense then, Aristotle is also asserting that natural slaves, as incontinent individuals, need to be forcefully *morally oriented* by their masters "for their own good", so to speak.

Aristotle further argues that the only activities that the natural slave excels in are physical. When an individual can only accomplish physical tasks, then such an individual will benefit by being controlled by individuals who are fully rational and ill suited to physical labour(s).

> "When there is such a difference as that between soul and body, or between men and animals (as is the case of those whose business is to use their body, and who can do nothing better) the lower sort are by nature slaves, and it is better for them as it is for all inferiors that they should be under the rule of a master. For he who can be, and therefore is, another's, and he who participates in rational principle enough to apprehend, but not to have, such a principle, is a slave by nature."[190]

The natural slave then is one who understands reason, or the rational principle, enough to know that he is not fit to rule over others, and is thereby more naturally suited to being ruled by those who have reason. More simply, because the natural slave has not benefited from a *paideia* and is not prosperous, at least intellectually, and is aware he cannot perform complex or subtle reasoning, he knows he cannot help to control neither household nor city as either a master or politician, respectively. Subsequently, Aristotle asserts that just as a horse will accept the

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[189] *Politics* 1254a20-23, and *EN* 1140a25ff.
[190] *Politics* 1254b15-22.

mastery of its owner, the natural slave's instinct is to obey its master.[191]

The natural slave does not so much present a "problem" that needs addressing so much as it is an issue that needs to be viewed from the perspective of rational autonomous human agency, given that the latter has now been made more explicit. I would argue that, in principle, the natural slave is only such due to a natural defect: they are incapable of achieving intellectual virtue, and therefore unable to achieve virtue and happiness. This is supported by the fact that the slave is a mobile extension of the master's body and soul, and thereby must be treated with the utmost respect and care.[192] Therefore, albeit limited by his or her specific defect, the natural slave is still human given he or she still has reason, can deliberate in order to make judgments, and can become content, if not happy.

3.3: The Archer

How rational autonomous agency, the good, and virtue are related can perhaps be more easily understood with a slight modification of Aristotle's visual metaphor of the Archer.[193] The bow is philosophical knowledge (of the good and happiness), the quiver contains the supply of understanding we possess of the world (training, schooling, etc.) and its benefits (patience, experience), the arrows are individual acts of virtue which we *enact* by aiming towards the target (télos), and which we draw from the quiver using rational deliberation (phronesis). Autonomous agency is the principle that allows the archer to *take aim* (télos), and when the whole movement flows together from drawing and releasing the arrow to striking the target, the archer is displaying virtue (arête, excellence). The archer firing symbolizes knowledge being enacted

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[191] *Politics* 125422-1255a2.
[192] *Politics* 1155b4-15.
[193] *EN* 1094a18ff.

within the world: i.e., the movement, indeed the archer, becomes an embodiment of virtue (*becomes* virtuous). Thus the individual archer has *enacted* virtue at the right time for the right reason in the right way, etc.

The archer (the potentially virtuous person) is aiming not for the center of the target, the "bull's eye", though that is obviously a part of the entire movement itself, but rather the archer is aiming for perfection of the entire action itself (the drawing and firing of the bow) that represents the individual's *summum bonum* (the highest good), as that which is the best action to enact at the time. The archer aims at what Aristotle calls the "mark" ("skopos" in Greek), which Aristotle explains as a moral landmark that guides the entire movement. Simply put, the archer (the phronimos) uses the intention (the choice) of the act and its entirety and attempts to perfect its enactment in the world.[194]

If the archer misses the center yet strikes the target then she has still achieved a good virtuously, but perhaps not the best good. That there is an element of uncertainty in the enactment that prevents the archer from being perfect in all things at all times is expected and natural. That is, in so far as the archer is skilled, wind and environment are factors, as well as unforeseen circumstances can affect the outcome. Further, despite the fact that virtue is an excellence (arête) and a kind of perfection, we must accept that humans are not perfect, and cannot be perfect: sometimes we miss. Thus, when bad things happen either because we miss our target or due to events outside of our control, we must accept such circumstances virtuously in order to prevent our happiness from being crushed.

Thus, the archer understands that, should they miss either partially or *completely* she will draw again, learning from her mistake in the right way and re-aiming for the right reasons. For

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[194] *Politics* 1254a20-23, and *EN* 1140a25ff

each time the archer draws, aims, and fires, she is merging her knowledge and actions into one (methexis) fluid movement towards a rationally virtuous good involving both action and rest. This movement is unified by the good as goal for the archer's existence, her *télos*, in that the good (bowing) binds the archer, her actions, and her target as one into a virtuous activity.[195] Each time the action is performed it comes closer and closer to perfection, at least as much as humanly possible given context and circumstances; this asymptotic action (multiple variables approaching a limit or goal), not only helps the individual become more virtuous but it also serves to help define the individual as an individual, as an expression of the self.

Since autonomous agency is a complementary *hexis* that enables the archer to be *truly virtuous*, we know that the archer is under no necessitating constraint to *enact* her knowledge as virtuous activity. Because of this, the archer *knows* that the act is enacted by her for her own sake, and not for anything else. In so far as knowledge of the good, of virtue, morally allows for such embodied action, the archer is *not* determined to act. *No moral imperative exists that can command the archer (or phronimos) to draw an arrow, aim, and loose it at the target.* The archer *chooses* to take aim and shoot in virtue of the moral urging contained by her knowledge insofar as she, the virtuous person, wishes to remain virtuous. The archer is an example of habituated purpose; a purpose which, when refined, guides the individual to virtuous prosperity. The choice determines the act, and where the emphasis must lie.[196]

3.4: Akrasia

Akrasia or moral failure is, as I have stated in Chapter Two, necessary, and is

[195] By "bowing", I mean the specific motions involving the bow that enables it to be used, especially with respect to successive uses involving both motion and rest, particularly the rest between uses of the bow.
[196] *EN* 1114b18-25.

demonstrated in the individual "of weak will" (akrates).[197] Exploring the actions of the *akrates* will help to elucidate some of the implications of rational autonomous human agency I am addressing in this chapter. This will entail a brief exploration of the so-called "Socrates' paradox" from Plato's *Protagoras*.

In his work entitled *Protagoras*, Plato has Socrates assert, "no one does wrong knowingly".[198] In the *EN*, Aristotle comments that Plato is, in some sense, right.[199] The heart of the issue for Aristotle is this: if no one does wrong knowingly, and yet all human actions aim at some good, with happiness as the chief good, then how is it possible that A) evil is done, and B) how is it possible for the incontinent person to exist? Aristotle's solution elegantly accords with his conception of the good: either the incontinent individual *does not know* that his actions are evil; or, he is "not exercising the knowledge".[200] In either case, Aristotle asserts that the issue is not a matter of opinion versus knowledge, given the former is acted upon as though it is the latter.[201]

With respect to not knowing, the incontinent person can be characterized as naturally ignorant given his actions are determined by his lack of knowledge and its proper application. This then serves to answer both of the above issues in the Socratic paradox, though not entirely, as we must resolve the issue of choice and justification. The incontinent person who chooses not to enact his knowledge is willfully ignorant, having irrationally *justified* their unvirtuous actions

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[197] P.52ff.

[198] *Protagoras* 352b,c.

[199] *EN* 1145b21-25, and 1147b5-19.

[200] *EN* 1147a6-8.

[201] *EN* 1146b23-34. Using the syllogism, Aristotle asserts that the incontinent person is unable to draw proper conclusions given they do not use the practical premises and only the universal premises. McKeon writes: "If I am to be able to deduce from (a) 'dry food is good for all men' that 'this food is good for me', I must have (b) the premiss 'I am man' and (c) the premises (i) 'x food is dry', (ii) 'this food is x'. I cannot fail to know (b), and I may know (c.i); but if I do not know (c.ii), or know it only 'at the back of my mind', I shall not draw the conclusion" (*The Basic Works of Aristotle*, p.1040).

as good. Accordingly, since the incontinent individual has judged that the unvirtuous act(s) he does are actually *good* given his circumstances, he has enacted vice and not virtue, opting for either excess or defect. It follows that habituation of such choosing will lead to a life of vice.[202] Thus, we again find that knowledge does not *necessitate* action, but *allows* for action. This accords with what I have said concerning rational autonomous human agency being a complementary *hexis* of the human soul.

Given the discussion in chapter two section 2.5 and 2.6 it has become clear that rational autonomous human agency carries with it a clear indication of moral responsibility. The concept of moral responsibility at work here is intimately entwined with Aristotle's concept of virtue, non-coercive knowledge, and the power to enact one's choices. It is important to note that the moral responsibility pointed out herein does not involve religion, but rather, a moral urging that originates within the self, with the self as goal. It is clear that much more can and should be said concerning *Akrasia,* but such considerations lay outside the scope of this thesis. For the purposes of this thesis it is enough to see that there *is* moral responsibility in light of rational autonomous human agency.

3.5: Novel Change

Of all the implications stemming from an Aristotelian rational autonomous human agency, I would suggest that the most significant is that which involves Aristotle's conception of movement and change within the physical world, within nature. The concept of novel change within the physical world is argued by Aristotle to be necessary, in that a series of "fresh starts"

[202] Much more could be said, but, for now at least, those arguments lay outside the bounds of my thesis.

are required to maintain the motion of nature.[203] The issue many philosophers have debated is the necessity of novel motion and whether it is even possible: I contend that, for Aristotle, not only is it possible but necessary.

Proving that novel motion exists and stands in relation to rational autonomous human agency is actually quite simple, though by no means simplistic: given that autonomous human agency allows humans to create artificial objects that do not naturally occur within nature (e.g., tools, fine art, etc.), it follows that rational autonomous human agency simultaneously allows for and creates novel motion within nature.[204] Since humans are rational autonomous agents that have their own inner principles of motion and rest, then it follows that they can produce artificial objects that are capable of creating novel action: accordingly humans are sources of novelty.

To support this argument I offer the following observations. As discussed in chapter one, Aristotle explains that *kinesis,* a "from … to" movement, can be further explained as a causal chain of events or as a series of causal chains; i.e., an originating event causes an effect "A", which in turn causes event "B", then "C", etc., which is most easily seen as the cyclic process of efficient cause. Aristotle argues that eventually all causal chains end unless a sustaining event occurs or other causal chains occur. Otherwise, given enough time, all motion in nature will cease.[205] Aristotle himself argued that the activity of the *nous* as it participates in the world creates novel motion (fresh starts) through spontaneous (normative) human action.[206]

As I discussed in chapter two, Sara Waterlow takes this position in that the artisan's

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[203] *Meta* 1025b7-11.

[204] It must be understood that while the activity of nature did not cause the artificial objects to come into being, such substances are still subject to the normatively differentially integrating motion of nature.

[205] *Meta* 1027b10-14, *De Gen.* BII, Chp. XI. The primary source of sustaining motion within nature as a whole is Aristotle's conception of the Unmoved Mover.

[206] *On Interpretation* B9.

products create new situations not previously found in nature.[207] When a human creates tools he or she has caused a significant change within nature that directly affects the motion of applicable spontaneous causal chains (e.g., the growth of the tree). Whenever a human uses a tool he or she begins a new series of causal chains that have the potential to significantly change the environment: such purposive motion shows that humanity has the capacity to be causes in this *purposive novel motion.*[208]

Fine art occupies a far better position to prove novel motion, in that fine art is definitely not found in nature and yet causes motion. Fine art, such as a painting or a symphony, can, regardless of content, cause both spontaneous (normative) and novel motion through the emotionally and intellectually charged activity in the mind of the viewer who engages with it. That is, fine art can evoke emotions, thoughts, and actions within a viewer that can cause the individual to develop intellectually. This development can cause the individual to move towards specific aesthetic, moral, political, or personal spontaneous (normative) motions that they never would have engaged in, *per se*. Since novelty arises out of human action then we can characterize human novelty as a *hexis* of the rational autonomous human agent.

3.6: Summation

The concept of rational autonomous human agency has, I believe, yielded an intriguing series of considerations. While implicit within Aristotle's philosophy, rational autonomous human agency is nonetheless an active and necessary component in human rational activity. It is a complementary *hexis* of the human soul that licenses judgments and acts, while simultaneously providing a lens through which one can gain insights into human intellectual and political life.

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[207] P.23-4.

[208] Not to mention that most humans can and do drastically change their immediate environment, both individually and in groups.

Rational autonomous human activity serves as a revelatory concept that provides an opportunity for new reflections upon novel motion and moral responsibility, proving that humanity has a direct impact upon both itself and the world. Returning now to the charges of heresy against Aristotle by the sophists Eurymedon and Isocrates that I mentioned in the introduction, it is not unreasonable to say that Aristotle was exercising virtuous intent in his teachings, but that it was the willful (or natural) ignorance displayed by the sophists that resulted in the charges. This serves to underscore the crucial lesson of Aristotelian virtue: when bad things happen either because we make a mistake or due to events outside of our control, we must accept such circumstances virtuously in order to preserve our virtuous happiness.

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