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Aristotle on the *Αρχή* of Practical Reasoning: Countering the Influence of Sub-Humeanism

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**Aristotle on the *Αρχή* of Practical Reasoning:
Countering the Influence of Sub-Humeanism***

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My central aim is to show that Aristotle convincingly avoids what has been the linchpin of the dominant contemporary view of the starting point of practical reasoning: that practical reasoning must begin, both normatively and motivationally, with some desire or want (call this *sub-Humeanism*).¹ My task is made more difficult by the presence of a now common interpretation of Aristotle himself in which desire is both normatively and motivationally super-

1. I will not attempt an exhaustive list here; rather, let me point to some paradigm accounts which have been highly influential. See Donald Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events* (London: Oxford University Press, 1980); Bernard Williams, "Internal and External Reasons" in *Rational Action*, ed. Ross Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 17-28; David Gauthier, *Practical Reasoning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963); Robert Audi, "A Theory of Practical Reasoning" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 19, 1982, 25-39.

Robert Audi expresses a consensus view when he says that *the* basic form of practical reasoning must begin with a premise "I want ϕ ." (1982, p. 31). In most accounts, the second premise is somehow cognitive, in contrast to the first premise, specifying what action(s) would contribute to ϕ , and the conclusion is a judgement either to so act or that the agent should so act. His sense of "want" is clearly tied to the motivational/appetitive component: desire, though he avoids that term because of more narrow usages of it by other contemporary authors.

The label "sub-Humeanism" is due to Bernard Williams (1979). The reader may wonder why I use this label rather than the ostensibly more precise "internalism" or even "instrumentalism". In "Internal and External Reasons," Williams introduces the term *internalism* to describe the view that anything which can be a reason for acting must either be or serve some desire of the agent's. He then argues that *externalism* (just the denial of internalism) is incoherent. This essay is one of the best short illustrations of the pervasiveness of Hobbesian/Humean psychology in contemporary accounts of practical reasoning. Were Aristotle an externalist, I would adopt Williams's terminology and argue that Aristotle is a coherent externalist. But the very contrast which Williams draws relies on an understanding of desire which Aristotle does not share, and so to use Williams's terms would be to beg the question against Aristotle.

As for that other contemporary label, "instrumentalism" consider this paradigmatic expression. Herbert Simon, in *Reason in Human Affairs* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983), 7-8, says: "Reason is wholly instrumental. It cannot tell us where to go; at best it can tell us how to get there." While this may sound exactly like sub-Humeanism, it does not and need not include the thesis that *desires* are fundamental norms and motives. Thus while sub-Humeanism is a version of instrumentalism, they are not identical. For a recent discussion of instrumental rationality and decision theory as not quite exhaustive of the concept of rationality, see Robert Nozick, *The Nature of Rationality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), especially chapters 3 and 5.

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ordinate.² On this view, Aristotle cannot be a genuine alternative to the contemporary view, since he just *is* a contemporary: Aristotle is the first sub-Humean about practical reasoning.³

In order to show that Aristotle is a genuine alternative to the dominant contemporary view, I must recover (or construct) an Aristotle as far as possible untainted by modern philosophical psychology. That is, I must provide an alternative interpretation. My interpretation will rest on three moves: 1) Taking *EN* as the paradigmatic account of practical reasoning, and interpreting *DA* and *DMA* from that stance; 2) Examining the language which Aristotle uses for clues to his position; 3) Distinguishing between two respects in which practical reasoning might be said to have an *ἀρχή*: in respect of its moving the agent, and in respect of its character as reasoning.

1. Sub-Humean Aristotle

Were Aristotle at first blush clearly identifiable as an alternative to sub-Humeanism, my work would be fairly easy, for it would only be necessary to point to some relatively transparent passages and argue for their plausibility. And indeed the majority of Aristotle's discussion of practical reasoning (or the "practical syllogism", *συλλογισμὸς τοῦ πρακτοῦ* and its variants) is contained in three loci: *Nicomachean Ethics (EN)* books VI-VII, *De Anima (DA)* book III, and *De Motu Animalium (DMA)* chaps. 6-7.⁴ But several recent interpreters have wittingly or unwittingly assimilated Aristotle's views on the origins of practical reasoning to sub-Humeanism. Martha Nussbaum (1978, see also 1986, 1990), for instance, argues that the division of the premises in the practical syllogism mirrors the division between desire and belief, and that "...a really practical syllogism...has a desire of the agent's as its major premise." (p. 203) A generation earlier, G.E.M. Anscombe (1957, see also 1965) wrote: "This...is a point insisted on by Aristotle himself: the *ἀρχή* (starting point) is *τὸ ὀρεκτόν* (the thing wanted)." (p. 63). See also Robert Audi's (1989) explicitly assimilative interpretation, David Wiggins (1980), and Norman Dahl (1984, though Dahl in other respects argues against a Humean interpretation of Aristotle), among others.

There are two theses to be discerned here, in varying strengths: 1) The first premise of practical reasoning must *be* (strong form) or *express* (moderate form) or *mention* (weak form)

2. I will be surveying what are explicitly meant to be elucidations of Aristotle in G.E.M. Anscombe, *Intention* (London: Blackwell, 1957), and "Thought and Action in Aristotle" in *New Essays on Plato and Aristotle*, ed. Renford Bambrough (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965) 143-158; Martha C. Nussbaum, *Aristotle's de Motu Animalium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978) essay 4; Norman Dahl, *Practical Reason, Aristotle, and Weakness of the Will* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); Robert Audi, *Practical Reasoning* (London: Routledge, 1989); David Wiggins, "Weakness of Will, Commensurability, and the Objects of Deliberation and Desire" in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amelie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 241-266.

3. Of course, this view has its Anglo-American roots in the writings of Hobbes and Hume. See *Leviathan*, primarily chaps. 5 & 6, and Hume's *Treatise*, primarily II.III.iii & III.I.i.

4. Throughout this paper, I will use the term "practical reasoning" to translate *συλλογισμὸς τοῦ πρακτοῦ* and its variants. Where authors I discuss use "practical syllogism", I will in part continue their usage, but also use my term interchangeably. This reflects the fact that this is a quasi-technical term for Aristotle, denoting reasoning which terminates in action in general; such reasoning may contain what we would call syllogisms, but it is not restricted to any formal structure of inference.

Unless otherwise indicated, my Greek references will be to the Oxford Classical Texts edition of *Ethica Nicomachea*, ed. I. Bywater (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894), *De Anima*, ed. W. D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), and *Analytica Priora et Posteriora*, ed. W. D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964). The Greek text of *de Motu Animalium* is M. C. Nussbaum's edition in *Aristotle's de Motu Animalium*. Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

some desire of the agent's; 2) The first premise of practical reasoning must refer to an object of the agent's desire.⁵ The first can be called the Desire as Premise (DP) thesis, the second the Object of Desire as Premise (ODP) thesis.⁶ I think it fairly clear that Nussbaum argues for a strong form of DP, and Anscombe argues for ODP. What I wish to do next is briefly explore both Nussbaum's and Anscombe's interpretive arguments as representative cases of each thesis.

1.1 Nussbaum And The DP Thesis

Nussbaum proposes taking *DMA* as the paradigm locus for Aristotle's view of practical reasoning.⁷ A consequence of this is that Nussbaum's account stresses the continuity between the explanation of animal behavior and the explanation of human behavior. This fits nicely with the bottom-up aims of more contemporary explanatory strategies.⁸

The first interpretive problem which Nussbaum faces is Aristotle's use of *συλλογισμός* and the language of reasoning (premises, conclusions) throughout the *DMA* discussion. Why the language of reasoning? The theory of the practical syllogism is "an attempt to provide a model for the adequate explanation of animal activity...by invoking a parallel with the two premise structure of the theoretical syllogism."⁹ She notes that the closest parallels with the *Analytics* occur in *EN*, and concludes that the use of the language of practical reasoning is purposive, not because practical reasoning is technically the same as theoretical reasoning, but because Aristotle wants to gain "theoretical respectability" for practical reasoning "by giving it a title [*συλλογισμός*] carrying with it the prestige of the *Organon*."¹⁰ The practical "syllogism", then, is heuristic; it parallels theoretical syllogisms only because these are already well understood. The overall aim is to explain animal motion.

But the practical syllogism is, after all only a piece of formal apparatus that we invoke to explain what is supposed to be going on psychologically, and what faculties we must mention in accounting for the animal's behavior.¹¹

What is the character of these psychological explanations? Nussbaum claims that in *DMA* Aristotle wants to show how animal action can be explained by desire and belief. This sort of explanation can be modeled on the syllogism.

5. Wiggins' version of this second thesis (ODP) is so weak that it could be interpreted in a way which is consistent with the contradictory of Nussbaum's. It depends upon the force of "could". But I have included him here since he clearly thinks the connection with desire important enough for it to be definitive.

6. We might ask whether these are occurrent desires, dispositional desires, or future possible desires. But in so doing we will be heading up a blind alley -- at least for Aristotle. As will emerge, which of these types of desire is meant makes no difference to the truth or falsity of DP or ODP. So any further analytical sophistication would be superfluous at this point.

7. Nussbaum, 175. The other candidates for paradigm status which Nussbaum rules out are the relevant portions of *DA* and *EN*.

8. Nussbaum begins this line of interpretation in essay 1 of *Aristotle's De Motu Animalium*; she continues it in some of her later work on *DA*: "The 'Common Explanation' of Animal Motion", in *Zweifelhaftes im Corpus Aristotelicum: Studien zu einigen Dubia, Akten des 9. Symposium Aristotelicum*. eds. P. Moraux and J. Wiesner (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1983); "Aristotelian Dualism: Reply to Howard Robinson", in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 2, ed. Julia Annas (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984) 197-207; with Hilary Putnam, "Changing Aristotle's Mind", in *Essays on Aristotle's De Anima*, eds. M.C. Nussbaum and A.O. Rorty (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992) 27-56.

9. Nussbaum, *Aristotle's de Motu Animalium*, 205.

10. Nussbaum, 184.

11. Nussbaum, 187.

We should understand Aristotle to be distinguishing two sorts of premises in a single syllogism: there is the major, which mentions the object as desirable.... To judge from the "drink" example (701a32-33), the first is "said" by some sort of desire, the second by a cognitive faculty. In chapter 6, Aristotle enumerated the faculties that play a role in animal motion, and claimed that they are all species either of cognition or of desire. To this division there now corresponds a division of premises in the "practical syllogism." To have action we must have an end characterized as desirable.... The practical syllogism, thus conceived, becomes a model in the service of Aristotle's theory of reasoning back from a desired goal to the first action necessary for its achievement...¹²

This explanatory mechanism will apply to all animals; the difference between humans and animals is that humans may have different desires and their cognitive faculties are typically more sophisticated.

What does Nussbaum make of the claim in *DMA* that the first premise "arises from the good"?¹³ She assimilates good to an object of desire, though she nowhere argues this; rather, she passes from the use of the word "good" to the use of "desired end" or "desired goal".¹⁴ But these transitions mirror Aristotle's own unargued transitions from τὸ οὐ ἔνεκα ("the thing for the sake of which", i.e., the goal or end) to τὸ ορεκτόν (the object of desire) to τὸ ἀγαθόν (the good) in chapters 6 and 7 of *DMA*, and so seem a consistent and plausible interpretive maneuver.¹⁵

Nevertheless, the maneuver is crucial. For it is a consequence of this maneuver in Nussbaum (though perhaps not for Aristotle) that the goals of both human and animal behavior are *set* by their respective desires. Practical reasoning always begins with the expression of desire in the first premise. The paradigm case of this in *DMA* is the "drink" example. If some piece of reasoning does not begin in this way, then Nussbaum claims that it is not a genuine piece of practical reasoning. Discussing the two "walk" examples in *DMA* which do not fit her paradigm, whose first premises are "Walking must be done by all men" and "Walking must be done now by no man" Nussbaum says,

The major premise ought to point to some actual desire of the agent's. Aristotle would not, I think, concede that in our two cases there *was* a genuine major premise before the agent's *own* desires and goals became involved.¹⁶

Nussbaum treats similar examples in *EN* in the same way; if they do not fit the desire-as-first-premise pattern, they are not genuine examples. If the example cannot be plausibly interpreted as having a desire of the agent's as its first premise, it should not count as a genuine example of a practical syllogism. She writes:

Aristotle has invoked the practical-theoretical parallel for a very limited purpose: to suggest that both are equally valid patterns. He has gone so far as to compare the desirability characterization of a bit of practical reasoning with a premise of theoretical reasoning.... It is not surprising, then, to find him pushing the parallel a bit further and actually using syllogistic language in the practical sphere.¹⁷

12 Nussbaum, 190.

13 *διὰ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ*. *DMA* 701a23-25. Aristotle here claims that the premises are of two sorts: through (or arising from) the good and through the possible. But it is clear that it is the first premise which is "through the good".

14 The two transitions mentioned are Nussbaum, 183 & 189-190.

15 700b15-701a25. The passages in *DA* also seem to make the same transitions.

16 Nussbaum, 196. The two premises in question are "παντὶ βαδιστέον ἀνθρώπῳ" and "οὐδενὶ βαδιστέον νῦν ἀνθρώπῳ".

17 Nussbaum, 182.

But the parallel can only go so far. "If the analogy to the syllogism shows signs of strain, it, rather than the complexities of the *phainomena* of action, should be sacrificed."¹⁸ Indeed, when discussing the "sweets" example from *EN*, she says that Aristotle has pressed the practical/theoretical parallel so hard that the example is "completely crazy".¹⁹

Though Nussbaum first seems to argue for a version of ODP, it looks like her considered view is a strong version of DP. When interpreting the "sweets" example from *EN*, she says "We expect that the division of "premises" will follow the *MA* [*DMA*] lines: one will be a desire...."²⁰ Finding this expectation thwarted by the claim that the first premise is universal and the example "It is necessary to taste everything sweet" (*παντός γλυκέος γεύεσθαι δεῖ*), she suggests that "the most plausible reading" is that this example is meant to contrast "some bit of abstract reflection about candy and a really *practical* syllogism, which actually has a desire of the agent's as its major premise."²¹ Her proposal for a "more plausible form" for such a first premise is "I like candy."²²

1.2 Anscombe And The ODP Thesis

Towards the end of her discussion of Aristotle and practical reasoning in *Intention*, Anscombe says, "The mark of practical reasoning is that the thing wanted is *at a distance* from the immediate action, and the immediate action is calculated as the way of getting...the thing wanted."²³ Anscombe's own emphasis is clear, and this is meant to distinguish practical reasoning from cases where the thing wanted is immediate and no reasoning is involved. But what I want to emphasize is the strikingly Humean character of both the (merely) instrumental nature of the reasoning and the original nature of the want; there exists an antecedent want for some thing, and reason is engaged to do the bidding of the want. This is the central characterization of practical reasoning towards which Anscombe has directed her analysis of Aristotle. How does she reach this point?

Having introduced case examples of Aristotle's practical reasoning from the familiar places, Anscombe wants to know what begins the process. "Isn't it desire in some sense--i.e., wanting--that prompts the action in all the cases?"²⁴ Her answer is "This is so, of course, and is a point insisted on by Aristotle himself: the *ἀρχή* (starting point) is *τὸ ὀρεκτόν* (the thing wanted)."²⁵ Her claim here is a clear allusion to *DA* 433a10-30, and this seems to serve as a focal point for her interpretation.²⁶ In fact, in a later work which parallels this discussion, Anscombe repeats this claim, making explicit reference to *DA* as the clearest expression of the

18 Nussbaum, 187.

19 Nussbaum, 203.

20 Nussbaum, 202.

21 Nussbaum, 203. The passage is 1147 a25-34.

22 Nussbaum, 203.

23 Anscombe, *Intention*, 79.

24 Anscombe, 62

25 Anscombe, 63.

26 The two key sentences are: *οὐ γὰρ ἡ ὀρεξις, αὐτὴ ἀρχὴ τοῦ πρακτικοῦ νοῦ* (433a15-16 "The thing for the sake of which desire is [the object of desire], this is the origin of practical understanding"; and *τὸ ὀρεκτόν γὰρ κινεῖ, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἡ διάνοια κινεῖ, ὅτι ἀρχὴ αὐτῆς ἐστὶ τὸ ὀρεκτόν* (433a18-20 "For the object of desire moves, and through this thought moves, since the origin of this [thought] is the object of desire"). I reinterpret these passages later, though we should note that Anscombe follows Ross in reading *ὀρεκτόν* instead of *ὀρεκτικόν*: the object of desire instead of the desiring power or capacity.

doctrine (a doctrine which she says is not so clearly expressed in *EN*) that "the starting point of the whole business is what you want...."²⁷

Anscombe claims that for the purpose of specifying the origin of action, Aristotle's distinction between rational and non-rational desires is superfluous; the point is that practical reasoning does not get started until there is a want for something, which supplies the whole point of engaging in the reasoning. Without some desired object, and thus some desire, there can be no practical reasoning.

But since what is at issue is *practical* reasoning, it must result somehow in action. Again, it is wanting which supplies the motivational element, for it is wanting, not reasoning, whose primitive sign is "trying to get".²⁸ So practical reasoning must begin with some want if it is to be practical and not idle.

Supporting the practical life, then, for Anscombe, is a structure of desires which make sense of both what we do and our deliberations about what to do. To satisfy any query about our action or deliberation, it suffices to point to the relevant object of desire *under that description*; that is, as a characteristically desirable object. The chain of "What for?" questions will terminate in a desirability characterization.²⁹ Equivalently, "What's the good of it?" is something that can be asked until a desirability characterisation has been reached and made intelligible.³⁰

The first premise of practical reasoning, *qua* first, must characterize some object as desirable. But it does not itself express "I want":

The role of 'wanting' in the practical syllogism is quite different from that of a premise. It is that whatever is described in the proposition that is the starting-point of the argument must be wanted in order for the reasoning to lead to any action.³¹

We needn't worry about Anscombe's reasons for supporting ODP here over DP (they are, I believe, purely formal); for our purposes, it is enough to know that she clearly supports a version of ODP because she thinks that Aristotle makes practical reasoning dependent upon antecedent desire.

What does Anscombe make of the notion of good? To be sure, a good is desirable. In fact, Anscombe suggests that there is a conceptual connection between wanting and good: "good is the object of wanting".³² What is wanted is always wanted under the aspect of "good". But the question at issue here is whether the status of good is conferred by desire. Anscombe's answer seems to be affirmative, since she says that questions about the good of

27 Anscombe, "Thought and Action in Aristotle", 153. Later in this essay Anscombe makes some remarks which distance her from the earlier position that a distinction between non-rational and rational desire is beside the point. In fact, though it is not emphasized, her claims on pp. 154 and 155 about *βούλησις* and *ἐνδαιμονία* would be consistent with mine if she clearly made a distinction between motivational and normative origins for practical reasoning.

28 Anscombe, *Intention*, 68.

29 Anscombe, 68-74.

30 Anscombe, 75.

31 Anscombe, 66.

32 Anscombe, 76. Though Anscombe is careful to distinguish between her philosophically sophisticated sense of "wanting" and mere inchoate urges (she says "we are not speaking of the 'I want' of a child who screams for something" on p. 76), her sense of wanting is not that expressed by *δέομαι*, i.e., a lack of some good (see my section 2.1). In fact, although she criticizes Hume's theoretical treatment of wanting as an *impression* (p. 77), her own settled characterization of want is quite analogous to *ὄρεξις* as general desire, composed of different types. See her remarks on pp. 62-63; 68-70. More on *ὄρεξις* and *δέομαι* in sections 2.1 and 2.5 of this paper.

some action must ultimately be answered by characterizing the object in question as desirable.³³

2. An Alternative Approach: An *Αρχή* Without Desire

What doubt can be cast on DP and ODP? We have seen formidable support from Nussbaum and Anscombe for both those theses. My strategy will be first to produce some reasons of philosophical philology for suspecting anachronism, and then to sketch an alternative substantive interpretation of Aristotle's views of understanding (*νοῦς*), the (or a) good (*τὸ ἀγαθόν*), and desire (*ὄρεξις*) in relation to practical reasoning. I will take as paradigmatic Aristotle's account in *EN*, but that does not mean that I will reject any of the passages thus far canvassed from *DA* and *DMA*. It will emerge that DP and ODP, as theses about practical reasoning generally, have more support from Hume and Hobbes than they do from Aristotle; and as interpretive theses about Aristotle's views, they are misleading at best.³⁴

2.1 The Language of Practical Reasoning in Context

Perhaps we should return to some familiar territory and look at it afresh. In all save one example or description which Aristotle gives of practical reasoning in all three texts, the object (thing, action, product) referred to in the first premise is either explicitly identified as an end (*τέλος*) or a good (*τὸ ἀγαθόν*), and these are mutually predicable; *or* it is marked as something which must be done.³⁵ Though these two different types of expression are, as it turns out, conceptually linked, nevertheless we can initially separate them.

Take the expressions of "end" and "good" first. *Τέλος* is just what is pursued in action, any old thing for the sake of which we act: a goal. But Aristotle also claims that we aim at *τὸ ἀγαθόν*. He apparently means that we always aim at ends which we take to be good. So a good is that for the sake of which we act. This means that *τὸ τέλος* and *τὸ ἀγαθόν* can be used interchangeably (and Aristotle does so use them) in almost every context.³⁶ The most universal form which a premise about the good takes is "Such and such is the end (or 'the good') and the best."³⁷ This, says Aristotle in *EN*, is the first principle (*ἀρχή*) of practical

33 I do not wish to be unfair to Anscombe's rich and multi-faceted view. She, for instance, does not think that "I want x" serves as a premise, nor does she think that all good things are pleasant. Moreover, her discussion of wanting is more nuanced than it perhaps appears here, and she criticizes at least that portion of Locke's and Hume's psychology which makes wanting an internal impression, a simple original existence. For all of that, Anscombe finally supports a version of ODP, and so falls under the scope of my criticism.

34. It does no good to forestall my strategy by saying that what Nussbaum *et al* are up to is providing a charitable interpretation of Aristotle, in e.g. Donald Davidson's sense: that most of Aristotle's sentences are *true*. That presupposes that we now have the truth, and we should read Aristotle as if he had grasped the same "truths" we have, so far as is possible. If folk psychology is wrong, then such a reading does not extend charity to Aristotle. My approach suspends a final judgement of truth until difference, if any, is found.

35. The single exception to these terms is *EN* 1147a5-7, where the verb *συμφέρει* is used, meaning "benefits". But the beneficial is often synonymous with the good, so I don't think this exception is too damaging to the claims which follow.

36 For textual evidence, see, e.g., *EN* 1094a1-20, 1097a15-30 among numerous others. Were this point seriously debatable, I would spend more time establishing it, but it is not. The catch, as we will see, is that there is a difference between the genuinely good and the apparently good, and we *can* aim at the (merely) apparent good.

37. *EN* 1144a 32-33, my rendering of *ποιόνδε τὸ τέλος καὶ τὸ ἄριστον*. Irwin translates this "the [highest] end and the best good is this sort of thing, whatever it actually is". Note that the *EN* expression is compatible with both *DMA*'s first premise arising "from the good" and *DA*'s account of the object of desire being either the good or the apparent good.

reasoning.³⁸ As we noted earlier, *DMA* echoes the claim about reference to the (or a) good; the first premise "arises from the good".³⁹

That the definition (*ὅρος*) of good will not involve desire is beyond dispute, since in some famous remarks, Aristotle says that there is no single definition of the good: it is homonymous, and the various definitions of synonymous goods will refer to the nature of the objects singled out as good, not to any desire for them.⁴⁰ Nor will it refer to them *as* objects of desire. For though the homonymy of good is focused on one thing (*πρὸς ἓν*), and the phrase "as object of desire" might *function* as a focal meaning for "good", the only serious candidate for focal meaning which emerges from Aristotle's ethical works is virtue, which in human beings will be activity according to right reason. Thus the practical reasoning passages which explicitly refer to a good would not straightforwardly seem to support any version of **DP** or **ODP**.

But of course this is too glib; for as we noted earlier, it seems quite clear that in *DMA* Aristotle uses the terms "a good" (*τὸ ἀγαθόν*) and "object of desire" (*τὸ ὀρεκτόν*) interchangeably when discussing the movement of animals.

So that the first mover is the object of desire (*τὸ ὀρεκτόν*) and also of thought (*τὸ διανοητόν*); not, however, every object of thought, but the end (*τέλος*) in the sphere of things that can be done. So it is a good (*τὸ ἀγαθόν*) of this sort which imparts movement...⁴¹

We might take this passage in two ways. The first is that calling something good is just another way of saying that it is an object of desire, and what confers this status is the desiring faculty (*τὸ ὀρεκτικόν*) stretching out towards this object. This is the reading favored by supporters of **DP** and **ODP**. The second is to take *τὸ ἀγαθόν* as the characteristic object of thought, and *τὸ ὀρεκτόν* as the characteristic object of desire. The idea here is that, while the object of desire and the object of thought may be the same thing (a walk, e.g.), the walk is wanted as an object of desire, but is thought as a good. The object of (practical) thought is thus a good, and may also be an object of desire. Further support for this reading comes from the next chapter, where Aristotle gives examples of practical *reasoning*. In these examples, when the object is theoretically described, it is described as a good, not as an object of desire. But this should be expected on the second reading, since what is being described is the object of thought.

Unfortunately, this reading faces difficulty in *DA*, where Aristotle apparently says that the object of desire is the origin of practical *νοῦς*.⁴² This would seem to provide support for the first reading of *DMA*'s usage of *τὸ ἀγαθόν* and *τὸ ὀρεκτόν*. But the account in *DA* is further complicated by Aristotle's employment of the distinction between different species of desire: *βούλησις*, that type of desire which is "in accordance with" reasoning and thought, and *ἐπιθυμία*, which aims at the pleasant.⁴³ Here Aristotle says that *νοῦς* alone does not move

38. *EN* 1144a31-34. Though the expression here is, taken out of context, ambiguous as to whether Aristotle is talking about an ultimate or a proximate good, the highest good or anything which is good, it clearly means the highest good in the context. But this does not imply any good, only goods achievable by human beings.

39. *DMA* 701a24.

40. See, e.g. *EN* 1096a23-b35. For a recent account of homonymy of the good, see Scott C. MacDonald, "Aristotle and the Homonymy of the Good" *Archiv fur Geschichte der Philosophie* 71, #2 1989, 150-174.

41. *DMA* 700b23-26, Nussbaum's translation.

42. 433a15-16. *οὗ γὰρ ἢ ὄρεξις, αὐτὴ ἀρχὴ τοῦ πρακτικοῦ νοῦ*. "For desire which is for the sake of something, this is the origin of practical understanding."

43. The distinction is present, of course, in *DMA*, but it does not figure into the account of practical reasoning.

apart from desire. And to explain this, he says "for βούλησις is a species of desire, but whenever someone is moved according to reasoning, he is moved also according to βούλησις."⁴⁴ Taken together, these passages suggest that it is τὸ βουλευτόν which is the origin of practical νοῦς, and thus it seems that it is the object of desire which determines what the practical understanding takes to be good.

However, matters are not quite settled. For in all three accounts, there is a distinction between things which are apparently good and things which are genuinely good (though something might both be and appear good), a distinction between τὸ φαινόμενον ἀγαθόν and τὸ ἀγαθόν. Moreover, the object of desire will itself be either a good or an apparent good.⁴⁵ How are we to discriminate between these two? Will the discrimination be made by some kind of reasoning, or some kind of desire? What is at issue is the role of desire in the determination of what counts as good in the first premise of practical reasoning. Perhaps we can further the discussion by turning to the expression "must be done".

When something "must be done", there are three different expressions which Aristotle uses: the quasi-impersonal verb δεῖ, "it is necessary", usually with an infinitive; the impersonal construction of the verbal adjective by the suffix -τέον, either "must" or exactly as δεῖ, "it is necessary"; the personal verb δέομαι, "I am in need of", "I lack", "I want".⁴⁶ This last may seem to English readers to smack of desire, but that is because "I want" has in modern English become synonymous with "I desire". However, the sense of "want" which is expressed by δέομαι is the sense of lacking something, being in want of. The most general schema for this type of first premise is "Such and such a person must do such and such a thing."⁴⁷ None of these phrases in isolation lend themselves naturally to a desiring construction. In fact, they seem to have been chosen by Aristotle because they are relatively innocuous expressions, relatively neutral with respect to any substantive issues of practical reasoning. To be sure, once embedded in the theoretical matrix of Aristotle's view, they will have substantive significance, but as bits of language they do not seem to beg the question either in favor of or against DP or ODP. So what is their substantive significance?

First, δέομαι. What is the general answer to the personal question "What do I lack?" in Aristotle? It is the same as the intelligible answer to the question "For the sake of what do I act?". For the goal of every action is a good, and a good is always that for the sake of which we act.⁴⁸ For instance, when Aristotle discusses an incomplete life, he characterizes it with a compound cognate of δέομαι; and the incomplete life lacks some good or other.⁴⁹ So the object of δέομαι will always be τὸ ἀγαθόν.

As for what is impersonally necessary, every expression of δεῖ or the suffix -τέον is directly linked to an object or action: βαδιστέον ("walking must be done"); ποιητέον ἀγαθόν ("it is necessary to make a good"); γεύεσθαι δεῖ ("tasting is necessary"). One expression is particularly telling, for it links "I lack" with what is necessary: οὐ δέομαι, ποιητέον ("what I lack must be made").⁵⁰ The overwhelming presumption here is that these objects/activities are goods. And once again we arrive at the question of how goods are determined to be goods.

44. 433a23-25.

45. DA 433a27-29, DMA 700b28-30, EN 1113a15-b2.

46. DA 434a15-20 uses δεῖ plus the infinitive πράττειν, "it is necessary to do"; DMA uses -τέον plus the dative of agency four times, e.g. ποτέον μοι, "drinking must be done by me", and δέομαι plus the objective genitive twice, e.g. ἱματίου δέομαι, "I am in need of a cloak"; EN 1147a29 uses δεῖ plus the infinitive γεύεσθαι, "it is necessary to taste".

47. DA 434a18-19: δεῖ τὸν τοιοῦτον τὸ τοιόνδε πράττειν.

48. A point made earlier, but see further DMA 700b16, 25-29.

49. EN 1097b15. The word is ἐνδεᾶ, adj. from the verb ἐνδέω, "to be in want of". There is undoubtedly a difference of nuance in meaning, however both δέομαι and ἐνδέω take a genitive object.

50. DMA 701a18-19.

Anscombe's own discussion of *δεῖ* is illuminating here. For while she rightly points out that its use does not signal a special moral sense of "must" or "should", and that it, like "should" in English, has "unlimited contexts of application", she nevertheless assumes that the default general sense of *δεῖ* is as an indication of what must be done in order to secure the object of some desire or other.⁵¹ The contrast she wishes to draw is between the ethical and the ordinary. Since the term *δεῖ* is ordinary and ordinarily we satisfactorily answer "What for?" questions about our actions with a characterization of the thing we should do as desirable, then *δεῖ* signals that the thing necessary is necessary to satisfy some desire. In a telling phrase, Anscombe says that what a viable first premise of practical reasoning does is characterize the thing wanted as desirable.... Then Aristotle's terms: 'should', 'suits', 'pleasant' are characterisations of what they apply to as desirable. Such a characterisation has the consequence that no further questions 'what for?', relating to the characteristic so occurring in a premise, require any answer.⁵²

According to Anscombe, then, the appearance of some characteristic object of desire is what both satisfies the need of a first premise to be a starting point for action (and the end-point of queries) and is indicated by *δεῖ*. We must note, however, that Anscombe's interpretation of the use of *δεῖ* is a consequence of her account of desire-based practical reasoning as ordinary, everyday practical reasoning. If we find reason to reject her general account, then we should reject her interpretation of Aristotle's use of *δεῖ*.

An examination of the language employed in the first premise and its contexts of usage doesn't by itself suffice to reject the desire-based reasoning models **DP** and **ODP**. It does, however, raise at least two intertwined questions: "How are goods determined to be goods?" and "How is the (merely) apparent good to be distinguished from the genuine good?"

2.2 Interpretive Paradigms

Before I begin to answer the questions posed in the last section, let me make explicit some key interpretive assumptions which separate my account from the representatives of **DP** and **ODP**, Nussbaum and Anscombe. First, as we have seen, Anscombe takes *DA* as the paradigm locus for Aristotle's account of practical reasoning, Nussbaum takes *DMA*. While this is surely right *if* one's aim is to see what psychological features of humans are continuous with other species of animal, why should what we share with other animals be the paradigm for practical reasoning? It may seem obvious from a contemporary point of view that the way to proceed in psychology is from the bottom up, explaining higher order phenomena in terms of lower order and more simple processes, ostensibly better understood. And of course if this broadly analytical aim is right, then *DA* and *DMA* are the most attractive works in Aristotle's corpus. Moreover, if animal motion is the key element to be explained, then once again *DA* and *DMA* are the *loci classici*. For though I have overlooked this point up to now, it is quite clear that in the sections of *DA* and *DMA* under study, Aristotle's primary aim is to provide a common explanation for animal *motion* (*κίνησις*). Consider the introduction to chapter 6 of *DMA*:

Now whether the soul is moved [*κινεῖται*] or not, and if it is moved, how it is moved, has already been discussed in our work on the soul. Since all lifeless things are moved

51 Anscombe, *Intention*, 64-65.

52 Anscombe, 70-72. Anscombe translates the verb *συμφέρει* as "suits"; I earlier translated it as "benefits", noting its single occurrence (see my note 32). The use does not seem to indicate any departure from the generic language of *δεῖ*, though "pleasant" does, as the pleasant is explicitly the object of *ἐπιθυμία*, non-rational desires.

by something else...it remains for us to consider how the soul moves the body, and what is the origin of an *animal's motion* [emphasis mine].⁵³

And consider the introduction to chapter 9 of book III, *DA*:

Assuming the nature of perception and intellect to have been so far determined, we have now to consider what it is in the soul which initiates *movement* [τὸ κινεῖν; emphasis mine]...⁵⁴

I certainly have no quarrel with Aristotle's aims in these sections of the two works, and a good deal of what he says is illuminative of human behavior. The problem is taking the sections of his account which are meant to apply to all animals as paradigmatic of practical reasoning. For Aristotle allows that other animals have a share in the desiring and perceptive capacities (*ὀρεκτικόν, αἰσθητικόν*), but he denies them the reasoning capacity (*λογιστικόν*).⁵⁵ This should certainly make us pause before taking *DA* or *DMA* as paradigmatic of practical reasoning. Though it is attractive from a contemporary point of view to see Aristotle building from the bottom up with the widest genus, it may be an interpretive mistake.

Moreover, there is another sense in which the bottom-up approach may do interpretive violence. For Aristotle's ideas of final cause and actualization are top-down explanatory notions. The early modern rejection of teleology in favor of mechanism is a framework upon which Hobbes's and Hume's psychologies were constructed. And it is admittedly easier, on a mechanical push/pull view of causation, to see how passions conceived as brute motive forces can move bodies than it is to see how a mind can move them.⁵⁶ Thus there are tacit mechanical presuppositions about causal relations (and *relata*) built into the sub-Humean account of practical reasoning which makes final causation *prima facie* implausible.⁵⁷

Particularly regarding human activity, Aristotle's top-down approach dictates that the explanatory paradigm for human action (*πράξις*) will be the person who has fully actualized specifically human potential in action: that is, *ὁ φρόνιμος*, the person of practical wisdom. Departures from this norm are to be explained by reference to the human capacities fully realized in the *φρόνιμος* and the failure of others to realize them. The lack of a virtue is just as explanatory as the presence of one.

The paradigm of practical reasoning, then, should be the practical reasoning of the practically wise. And the paradigm account of this is in *EN*. Taking *EN* as paradigmatic will help to explain why Nussbaum and Anscombe both think the language of reasoning is strained and often merely heuristic. For it *will be* merely heuristic when applied to animals incapable of reasoning, and will seem strained when applied to humans if human action is assimilated to animal motion. And sub-Humean accounts of practical reasoning do almost seem to assimilate human action to animal motion, since desire and sense perception figure so heavily in them. But since the assimilation is mistaken, perhaps we should look to see what difference it might make to take the *EN* account as an interpretive paradigm. Paradoxically, a crucial element in that account is a perception of the good.

2.3 The Good and The Apparent Good: The Role of *Noûs*

53 *DMA* 700b4-11, Nussbaum's translation.

54 *DA* 433a17-19. The translation is R. D. Hicks', as amended by Michael Durrant, in *Aristotle's De Anima in Focus*, ed. Michael Durrant (London: Routledge, 1993), 66.

55 *DA* 433b25-30.

56 Even though Hobbes is an avowed materialist, the reasoning faculty is not a causal agent.

57 Gene Dimagno pointed out to me that the history of theories of motion and causation figure heavily in the development of not only English-speaking philosophical psychology, but also quite clearly in e.g. Descartes' and Malebranche's accounts.

That perception plays an important role in specifying the *terminus ad quem* of deliberation, the particular(s) which is the object of decision (*προαίρεσις*), has been repeatedly emphasized in recent years.⁵⁸ But that some sort of reasoned 'perception' plays an equally important role in understanding the *terminus a quo* of deliberation, the starting point, has not been as widely appreciated.⁵⁹ We may begin by citing three passages from *EN*:

...should we say that, unconditionally [*ἀπλῶς*] and in reality [*κατ' ἀλήθειαν*], what is wished [*βουλητόν*] is the good [*τἀγαθόν*], but to each person, what is wished is the apparent good [*τὸ φαινόμενον ἀγαθόν*]? To the excellent [*σπουδαίω*] person, then, what is wished will be what is wished in reality, while to the base person what is wished is whatever it turns out to be (that appears good to him)...In the many, however, pleasure would seem to cause deception, since it appears good when it is not.⁶⁰

But someone may say, "Everyone aims at the apparent good [*τὸ φαινόμενον ἀγαθόν*], and does not control how it appears; on the contrary, his character controls how the end appears to him."⁶¹

58. In fact, some of the very authors which I take to task here (for other reasons) have been concerned with this role for perception. See David Wiggins, "Deliberation and Practical Reason" *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, 221-240; Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), ch. 10, and *Love's Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), ch. 1-3. Others include John M. Cooper, *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986), part 1; Robert Loudon, "Aristotle on Reason, Practical Reason, and Living Well" in *Aristotle's Ethics: Essays on Ancient Greek Philosophy IV*, eds. John P. Anton and Anthony Preus (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), 159-192; C.D.C. Reeve, *Practices of Reason* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1992) chap. 2; and Nancy Sherman, *The Fabric of Character* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) chap. 2.

59. Though certainly there are people who hold this view. See, e.g., Reeve, chap. 1; Michael Woods, "Intuition and Perception in Aristotle's Ethics" in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy IV*, ed. Michael Woods (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986) 145-166; David J. DeMoss, "Acquiring Ethical Ends" *Ancient Philosophy* 10, 63-79; Loudon "Aristotle on Reason". Reeve's view is that there is a perceptive *νοῦς* in both science and ethics, and the process of establishing it is the same in kind in both endeavors. It is also the view to which I am most indebted. Woods' discussion presupposes, however, that what Aristotle has to say in his "scientific" works about *νοῦς* does not apply to ethical understanding. Consequently, he is barred from making the claims which I do about *νοῦς* in practical reasoning. Though DeMoss' claims that *νοῦς* is a form of perception, he claims that in practical syllogisms it only provides the minor premise, and he seems to regard *νοῦς* as a specialized faculty; I reject these last two claims. Loudon's remarks are quite brief.

Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice, Which Rationality* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), ch. 8,10 discusses the role of *νοῦς* in grasping the *ἀρχαί* from which practical reasoning will proceed, but does not discuss it as a form of perception.

Cooper, 62-72 argues that some form of ethical intuition, by analogy with scientific *νοῦς*, will be what sets ends. His claims here anticipate mine in their being directed against "a certain confused tendency on the part of some interpreters" to allot the determination of ends to a non-rational faculty or process.

60. *EN* 1113a23-1113b1 (in the same vein, cf. 1176a15-20). The translation is Irwin's; the Greek supplements are from the Bywater OCT text. What appears in () are Irwin's own interpolations, appearing in [] in his text. This will be the case in the following two *EN* citations. I have taken the liberty, in line 24, of supplying the gapped subject "*ἀγαθόν*" (of the indirect statement); "*τὸ θαινόμενον*" is clearly the article plus adjectival participle in the attributive position. The full term "*τὸ φαινόμενον ἀγαθόν*" occurs twice earlier, in lines 16 and 20.

The case usage in line 25, *τῷ...σπουδαίω*, is the dative of the standard of judgement. See Herbert Weir Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, revised by Gordon M. Messing (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), 1512.

61. 1114a31-b1 The expression *ὁποῖός*, "of what sort", is taken by Irwin to refer to the person's character in regard to vice and virtue.

For inferences [*συλλογισμοί*] about action have an origin [*ἀρχή*]: "Since the (highest) end and the best good [*τὸ τέλος καὶ τὸ ἄριστον*] is this sort of thing," whatever it actually is -- let it be any old thing for the sake of argument. And this (best good) is apparent only to the good person; for vice perverts us and produces false views about the origins (*ἀρχάς*) of actions.⁶²

I point attention initially to the claim in each of these passages that only a good person will be able to "see" the good rightly; that is, only in the case of the good person will the real good appear to be good.⁶³ The second passage, though the voice of an objector, nevertheless confirms the other accounts, since Aristotle goes on to accept the claim that we aim at the apparent good.⁶⁴ In each passage what is really good and what is apparently good are conceived as universals, or universal principles, though the first passage goes on to say that different characters will have different views of particular cases as well. And in the last passage reference is made to the highest human good, whatever it may be, the most universal premise of practical reasoning.

The context of the last passage is important for determining what it is about the good person which enables him to have a correct view of the human good. What is the condition of the good person such that what is genuinely good is apparent only to him?⁶⁵ If vice produces false views about the first principles of action, it must be virtue which allows for correct views. But not natural virtue, says Aristotle; full (*κύρια ἀρετή*) virtue is required. And full virtue differs from natural virtue by the addition of understanding (*νοῦς*). Each person has his type of character partly by nature, but these natural states "without understanding (*νοῦς*)...are evidently harmful."⁶⁶ He continues:

Just as a heavy body moving around unable to see suffers a heavy fall because it has no sight, so it is with virtue. But if someone acquires understanding, he improves in his actions; and the state he now has, though still similar [to the natural one], will be virtue to the full extent.⁶⁷

So if full virtue is required for someone to have a correct view of the human good, then the crucial element involved is the possession of understanding; an understanding of the good. We must admit that the first principle "Such and such is the good and the best" might formally be the first premise of anyone's practical reasoning, but it will only substantively be the first premise of the practical reasoning of the *φρόνιμος*.

62. 1144a31-36. Actually, the Greek in line 34 is negative: *τοῦτο δ' εἰ μὴ τῷ ἀγαθῷ, οὐ φαίνεται*, "But unless this is to the good person, it does not appear [to be good]."

63. Given what Aristotle says at *EN* Book VI, especially 1144a15-1145a5, about the necessity of virtue for *φρόνησις* and vice-versa, and the use of the adjectives *ἀγαθός* and *σπουδαίος* throughout, it is hard to avoid the view that *ὁ φρόνιμος* = *ὁ ἀγαθός* = *ὁ σπουδαίος*. This is not an equivalence of meaning, but a functional equivalence, as well as a co-extensional reference. Hence I will without further argument treat these terms, and their English equivalents, as interchangeable.

64. In the context of denying that this is an objection to the voluntariness of virtue and vice. Compare this to *EN* 1129b4-6, where we should choose what is good to us, but pray that what is good without qualification will become good to us.

65. Though it may be suggested that the consequence is that no one can understand what genuine goods are unless they themselves are good, this must be tempered by the developmental account of virtue which Aristotle gives. People at different stages on the road towards virtue will more or less approximate the views of the fully virtuous; thus only the fully virtuous can have a completely correct view of the good, but that does not bar others from having a substantially correct view, flawed in its details.

66. *EN* 1144b5-10.

67. 1144b10-14. Irwin's translation. I have omitted Irwin's interpolation at line 12 explaining the analogy: "A naturally well-endowed person without understanding will harm himself."

Now at first blush the language of appearance, both etymologically and conceptually linked to *φαντασία* (imagination), seems out of place.⁶⁸ For it is *νοῦς*, we are told elsewhere, which is of universal principles and origins.⁶⁹ But *νοῦς* names the same sort of thing that virtue and practical wisdom name: understanding is a type of *ἔξις*, a disposition or developed capacity, specifically a capacity for perceiving universals correctly. Though we may be able to distinguish between a theoretical and practical *νοῦς* (the psychological works would certainly encourage this with the use of the phrase *νοῦς πρακτικός*), nevertheless their function would be the same: to grasp first principles, whether practical or theoretical.⁷⁰

Posterior Analytics (*APo*) II and *EN* VI tell us that a grasp of universal first principles will be accomplished by a knowing disposition (*γνωρίζουσα ἔξις*).⁷¹ As such, according to *DA* II, it is at least a first actualization, a developed capacity, a stable possession of the soul, just as virtue and practical wisdom are.⁷²

What sorts of activity are necessary to produce understanding of ethical first principles? Generally, understanding requires both experience and dialectical argument from the phenomena or appearances of experience. These appearances are themselves partly taken from the perception of particulars, partly from the opinions of others, but it is the universal in perception (and in opinion) which is important for understanding.⁷³ That is to say, the universal which a particular exemplifies, or which characterizes a particular, is what perception is of, and this characterized particular is an appearance. Thus dialectic and induction are complementary aspects of the same overall process of arriving at *ἀρχαί*.⁷⁴

When many appearances are experienced and gathered together by induction under a single universal present in them all, this forms a first principle for *νοῦς*. Or rather, this achievement just is the resultant understanding both that and how this universal unifies a range of particulars under investigation. But since the universal is obtained through appearances, understanding is then itself a form of perception, a comprehensive perception of a unifying

68. The links between *φαντασία*, *φαινόμενα*, and *αἴσθησις* are explored in essay 5 of Martha Nussbaum's *Aristotle's de Motu Animalium*.

69. For example, *APo* II.19. This commits me to holding that ethical inquiry is continuous with the type(s) of inquiry described in *Posterior Analytics* and *Topics*. In brief, I hold that ethical inquiry in broad outline is both dialectical (towards *ἀρχαί*) and demonstrative (from *ἀρχαί*). Yet in the fine structure of inquiry we will find both dialectical and demonstrative syllogism, as well as dialectical specification of premises of practical argument which are from first principles. What we probably won't find in ethics is *ἐπιστήμη*, since that requires demonstration from simple, unchanging, exceptionless and necessary principles.

70. Whether Aristotle is merely pressing for an analogy with theoretical *νοῦς* in the realm of practice, or whether it is the same understanding which grasps first principles in both spheres, I am not sure. For instance, one way to read book VI of *EN* is that it shows that *φρόνησις* is the practical counterpart to theoretical *νοῦς*. But given what Aristotle says about practical wisdom being the ability to construct/identify what actions/objects will constitute/produce/conduce to well-being, it seems that its function is other than and presupposes the understanding of ethical first principles. So I will opt in what follows for a *νοῦς* which is common to both scientific and ethical inquiry, though it will grasp different first principles in each inquiry.

71. *APo* 99b18 & *EN* 1141a3-7.

72. 417a21ff.

73. That *φαινόμενα* include both perceptual deliverances (*φαινόμενα κατὰ τὴν αἴσθησιν*) and the opinions (*ἔνδοξα*) of either all people, the most, or the most wise is clear from *Top* 104a8-12, *GC* 325a13ff, *EN* 1145b1-20. See G.E.L. Owen, "Tithenai ta Phainomena", in *Aristotle: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. J.M.E. Moravcsik, (Garden City: 1967) 167-190, and Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, chap. 8.

74. Whether this process results in an inference to a first principle, or merely prepares the mind for its grasp thereof, remains an open question for my purposes. In either case, it is not desire which sets the end expressed in the first principle.

universal which serves as a first principle for the subject matter under study.⁷⁵ For practical *ἀρχαί*, however, Aristotle says that habituation, seemingly by contrast with induction and perception, is the process of acquisition.⁷⁶ However, habituation can be a form of induction to the extent that it is a learning process; one extracts the appropriate universal from the habits of virtuous action. The difference is that habituation will enable us to transform not only our intellectual understanding of the good, but our dispositions to act as well.⁷⁷

Thus Aristotle in *EN*, having already mentioned that there will be *νοῦς* of ethical first principles, says that there will be this same understanding of *both* first principles and particulars, since first principles are derived from particulars (consistently with *APo*).⁷⁸ On the basis of this parallel, he concludes that understanding is a form of perception.⁷⁹

Though there seems to be an initial contrast between understanding, which is of universals, and perception, which is about particulars, the apparent paradox in saying that perception is understanding is removed by noting that, while *αἴσθησις* is certainly about particulars, it is of the universal(s) characterizing the particulars: we perceive e.g. the glass of tea *as* a glass of tea. So since *νοῦς* grasps the universal, this means that our grasp of first principles will be a form of perception, a perception of the universal expressed in such principles. Couple this with his dialectical procedure throughout *EN*, and we are to arrive at an understanding of the highest human good partly through dialectic, partly through experience.

But now we must recognize that we may be mistaken in thinking that we have achieved an understanding of first principles, as the three passages which I gave to begin this section attest to. In other words, what appears to us to be genuinely good may not be really good, and in that case we have *misperceived* our end. For we will have understanding only if we are correct in our aim. Understanding is an achievement, a forming of the mind so that what appears good to that mind coincides with what *is* good. This is consistent with what Aristotle says about understanding never being mistaken.⁸⁰ It is not that understanding is a special intuitive faculty which never errs; it is that someone who errs in her perception of first principles has not yet achieved understanding. *Νοῦς*, when employed technically by Aristotle, is an achievement term.

In consequence, if we rightly perceive the good, we will also have understanding of the origin of practical reasoning, the ultimate first principle "Such and such is the good and the best". And since this was the condition of the practically wise person which separated him from the naturally virtuous, it follows that we will also know what constitutes this ultimate

75. I am indebted to the following discussions of these issues, not all in agreement with each other or me: J.D.G. Evans, *Aristotle's Concept of Dialectic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Reeve, *Practices of Reason*; and T.H. Irwin, *Aristotle's First Principles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

76 See *EN* 1095b4-8, 1098b3-4, 1151a17-19 among others. This point is stressed by Miles Burnyeat "Aristotle on Learning to be Good" in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, 69-92.

77 I am following Reeve's account of habituation and its role in the achievement of practical *νοῦς* in his *Practices of Reason*, 48-66. But whether habituation is different in kind from induction is an ancillary issue for my present purposes. The point is that on Aristotle's view we *learn* what the good is, we do not merely consult our desires.

78. 1143a25ff. This is a disputed passage. Some interpreters claim that only in science does *νοῦς* grasp first principles; in ethics, it grasps only the particular. I think it clear, however, that if it is not *νοῦς*, then 1) it is some other developed capacity of non-inferential understanding analogous to *νοῦς*, and 2) Aristotle is committed to the idea that the proper objects of each faculty of mind are individuated by subject matter. These consequences, I think, urge that it is *νοῦς* which grasps first principles in ethics.

79 *τούτων οὖν ἔχειν δεῖ αἴσθησιν, αὐτῆ δ' ἐστὶ νοῦς*. "Of these [universals derived from particulars] it is necessary to have perception, and this [perception] is understanding."

80. For example, *EN* 1141a3-7, *DA* 433a26-27, *APo* 100b5-17.

good, and thus understand what subordinate constitutive goods *are necessary* to obtain/achieve in action. An action "must be done", then, because it contributes to what we understand as our good.

Equally, however, a misconception of the good at the ultimate level will have a subsequent distorting effect on our other perceptions, so that we may systematically misidentify what our good is both here and now as well as more generally. What can disrupt understanding or prevent its development? A variety of things, ranging from bad education, natural disinclination, failures of habituation, bad desires, or some combination of these. The passages which begin this section indicate that bad character will separate the apparent good from the real good, but of course bad character just is the result of one or more of the factors mentioned. The point here is that just as the proper development of our understanding properly sets the ends which we should pursue in action, so improper development of this capacity leads us into error, an error of understanding.

To sum up this section: *if* the *ἀρχή* of the practical reasoning of the *φρόνιμος* is a specification of the good, and this specification is arrived at by the achievement of *νοῦς*, then the starting point of practical reasoning will be determined by the understanding, not by desire. The acquisition of the *ἀρχή* is thus an intellectual, but not exclusively intellectual, achievement. This is the view to be found in the three passages from *EN* which began this section. But we still have to deal with the apparent inconsistency generated by Aristotle's claim that the *ἀρχή* is the object of desire.

2.4 The Role of Desire

Where, then, does desire fit into the scheme of things? Consider what we can glean from Aristotle's discussion of *προαίρεσις* at the beginning of book VI, *EN*:

As assertion and denial are to thought, so pursuit and avoidance are to desire. Now virtue of character is a state that decides; and decision [*προαίρεσις*] is a deliberative desire [*ὄρεξις βουλευτική*]. If, then, the decision is excellent, the reason must be true and the desire correct, so that what reason asserts is what desire pursues.⁸¹

Now the origin of an action -- the source of the movement, not the action's goal -- is decision, and the origin of decision is desire together with reason that aims at some goal.⁸²

He goes on to say that it is a combination of *νοῦς* with *ὄρεξις* for the goal given by thought which is the specifically human way of originating movement.⁸³

Now though decision is about what will conduce to the end already given, and so the moment in practical reasoning which *προαίρεσις* describes occurs after an agent has *νοῦς* of the good, nevertheless in this discussion there is a clear contrast of how, in their movement, humans differ specifically from animals.⁸⁴ Humans are capable of informing their desires by their understanding in a way which non-rational animals are not, and the desire for the goal specified by reason is the origin of *movement*, not the source of the *τέλος* of practical reasoning.

Βούλησις, that part of *ὄρεξις* which *DA* tells us is in accordance with *νοῦς*, is in each person always directed at what appears good, which as we have seen will also be the real good

81 1139a20-26, Irwin's translation, with Bywater OCT Greek supplements. The following passage is the same: Irwin translation, Bywater supplement.

82 1139a31-33.

83 1139a35-b5.

84 Or rather how rational animals differ from non-rational animals, though I will continue with human/animal divide as roughly co-extensive with the rational/non-rational animal divide.

in the practically wise person.⁸⁵ So that the object [*τὸ βούλητον*] of this rational desire will be either (merely) *τὸ φαινόμενον ἀγαθόν* or *τὸ ἀγαθόν*.⁸⁶ Unfortunately, this still suggests that there is an antecedently formed desire, *βούλησις*, which motivates practical reasoning. But this is only apparently so.

Ὅρεξις and its types are themselves the result of the actualization of the desiring capacity (*τὸ ὀρεκτικόν*) by stretching out towards its object (*τὸ ὀρεκτόν*).⁸⁷ Desire is the coming together of the desiring capacity in the individual and the object of desire. But where does the capacity get its objects? Desire *comes to be* through imagination; and imagination in turn is either perceptual or reasoning.⁸⁸ That is, the desiring capacity requires its objects to be shown to it by (roughly) cognitive elements before the desire even exists. In the case of *βούλησις*, what has to be supplied is some good.⁸⁹ And we have already seen that it is practical understanding which supplies the individual with an adequate conception of the human good. It follows that what actualizes rational desire is a good discriminated by the understanding.

But if *νοῦς* is required in order to create *ὄρεξις*, how is it that, as Anscombe and Nussbaum point out, Aristotle can say that the object of desire is the origin of practical understanding?⁹⁰ The answer is that *he doesn't say this*. That is, he is not saying that *τὸ ὀρεκτόν* is the origin of practical reasoning in the sense of supplying the goal of practical reasoning. Recall that the texts in which these phrases occur are directed to a discussion of the movement of animals. Aristotle is rather saying that the origin of the *motion* of practical understanding, along with the motion of the rest of the individual, is the good pointed out by *νοῦς πρακτικός*, which is now taken up as the object of the desiring faculty in order to create the desire. Motion originates *after* the understanding has pointed out rational desire's proper objects as goods. After all, in *DMA* Aristotle says that *ὄρεξις* is the last cause (*ἔσχατη αἰτία*) of motion, which comes to be through some form of thought or perception. The process of motion which Aristotle seems to envision here begins with *τὸ ὀρεκτόν*, the external relatively unmoved mover, which moves *τὸ ὀρεκτικόν*, the internal moved mover, which in turn taken together just is the formed *ὄρεξις*, the last mover of the individual.⁹¹ The practical understanding thus does not move by itself, since its role is the specification of the good. But this specified good, *qua* object of desire, is the origin of motion.⁹²

The key claim to emerge here is that the goal of desire in rational animals, when exercising their rational capacities, is determined by what the understanding points out as good. This

85 DA 433a20-30, EN 1113a15-1113b3.

86 DA 433a27-30.

87 DA Book II, esp. 414aff and 432a15ff; DMA 700a25ff. The verb *ὀρέγω*, from which comes *ὄρεξις*, means "to stretch out, to reach". Thomas Olshewsky pointed this out to me in comments on an earlier version of this paper.

88 DMA 701a35-37, DA 433b25-30.

89 In addition to the passages in DA and EN already cited, see *Rhetoric* 1369a3.

90 DA 433a15-16.

91 DMA 700b5-701b1; DA 423a15-434a15. This is not meant to be an in depth discussion of the problem of motion in and out of the soul. Rather, this much needs to be pointed out to make it quite clear that Aristotle is talking about the *motion* of both rational and non-rational animals, not about their reasoning (except incidentally). This sketch relies heavily on Henry S. Richardson, "Desire and The Good in *De Anima*" in *Essays on Aristotle's De Anima* eds. M.C. Nussbaum & A.O. Rorty (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 381-400; Thomas M. Olshewsky, "Appetites and Action in *De Anima* III.10", unpublished manuscript; Nussbaum, *Aristotle's de Motu Animalium*, essay 5.

92 Richardson notes that the extant manuscripts of DA differ on whether *τὸ ὀρεκτόν* or *τὸ ὀρεκτικόν* is the first mover. The difference, while important in its own right, is unimportant for my purposes, since either is the origin of movement, not thinking.

good may, in turn and under a different description (object of desire), originate motion; but in order to do so it has first to be understood as a good by *νοῦς*.

The origin of *motion* is indeed the thing desired; but in the rational animal, it (the object/action which is desired) is also the object of thought. But neither human *πράξις* generally nor flourishing activity (*εὐδαιμονία*) should be assimilated to motion. And as we have seen, Aristotle himself separates his account of motion from his account of rational human action, noting that the starting point of reasonings about action is the good and the best. And this is so from the point of view of the fully virtuous person. So the good in the first premise of practical reasoning is, in the language of *DA*, the object of thought. In the practically wise, however, such a good will also be an object of desire precisely because it has been identified by the understanding. But it enters into reasoning *qua* object of thought; it originates motion *qua* object of desire.⁹³

Βούλησις is for either the good or the apparent good, but itself is powerless to discriminate between the two. Understanding is the only guarantor of an adequate conception of the good, and so Aristotle should be expected to say that if the ultimate premise of rational practical reasoning is of the good, it must be supplied by understanding. Rational desire is that part of general desire which ensures that what understanding identifies as good is motivational, and will result in action taken to secure that good unless something like badly directed non-rational desire hinders.

Thus the *motivational ἀρχή* of practical reasoning is indeed desire, specifically *βούλησις*. But the *normative ἀρχή* of practical reasoning is reason, specifically *νοῦς*. In fact, far from it being the case that desire sets ends for reason, we have seen that rational desire is partly *formed* by the understanding. The first premise of practical reasoning indeed serves desire, not by supplying it the means to its objects, but by informing desire of its proper ends.

3. Historicist Epilogue

Part of the game in contemporary philosophical accounts of practical reasoning has been to show how such reasoning could be practical. And this has been taken to be problematic because of a shared Humean inheritance of conceiving reason as inert, capable of moving nothing. So truly practical reasoning must therefore be in the service of some desire. A corollary to this is that anything which is to serve *as a reason for acting* must be connected to an agent's desires. Williams's characterization of this conception of practical reasoning as sub-Humean is doubly confirmed. Hence when individuating premises on this view, it seems necessary that one will somehow embody the agent's desires, since this is the way ends will be determined.

But Aristotle was not influenced by Hume so much as he was by Plato. And in dissenting from Plato, Aristotle did not move to a polar opposition on the subjects of the motivating and justifying force of reason and its opposition to desires. For Aristotle, the challenge was to *integrate* desire and appetite in rational action, in contrast with the view that they are simply to be superseded, if not overcome, by reason.⁹⁴ We shouldn't forget that for Aristotle's fully virtuous person, desire must participate fully.

The role of desire, however, is not that of setting ends. Rather, the role of desire in practical reasoning is to ensure that good things are also motivational. And it does this, as

93. In this paragraph I both paraphrase and juxtapose *DA* 433a10-30 with *EN* 1144a31-36.

94. I am not here imputing a definite thesis to Plato and Socrates so much as I am indicating an intellectualist tone which Aristotle himself both points out and reacts to not only in his ethics, but his physics and metaphysics as well.

βούλησις, by reaching for the objects which *νοῦς* sets it as ends. The philosophical mistake which sub-Humean interpretations of Aristotle make is to conflate the motivational starting point of practical reasoning with the normative starting point.

Aristotelian practical reasoning, then, does not face the problems which sub-Humean reasoning does. Thus, if something like the Aristotelian account just sketched is true, there is no reason to include desire in the specification of the first premise: practical reasoning without mentioning desire is motivational.⁹⁵ We must remember, however, that the practical reasoning which begins with a true specification of the human good will only be successful in motivating the fully virtuous person, whose non-rational desires will not overcome his rational desires and prevent action. We should expect a large degree of failure in the general populace.

It was therefore a mistake for Anscombe and Nussbaum to interpret Aristotle's views as if those views faced a more modern problem. And the difference between the DP/ODP theses and my account is a measure of the influence of modern on contemporary philosophy, an influence which is operative even at the level of tacit standards of plausibility.

One problem with assimilating Aristotle to more modern accounts of practical reasoning, besides a certain element of barbarism, is that an assimilated Aristotle cannot tell us anything really important which we do not already know. Such an anachronistic reading of Aristotle makes him useful for propaganda purposes (e.g. "No less a figure than Aristotle advocates this approach"), but renders him sterile as a source of novelty and alternative in the present. If you are dissatisfied with contemporary views on practical reasoning, but cannot read Aristotle in terms other than those set by the grid of contemporary alternatives, then Aristotle cannot provide you with any real alternative that is not already on the map. My primary aim has been both to suggest that a plausible anachronistic reading of Aristotle is false, and to offer an alternative reading which could change the map of contemporary alternatives.

95. And this clears the major obstacle to treating the apparently syllogistic elements in practical reasoning as straightforwardly syllogistic.