



Aristotle's Account of Voluntary Actions and Agent-Based Determinism

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Abstract

In *Nicomachean Ethics* Book III, Aristotle contends that voluntary actions originate within the agent and are “up to the agent” (*eph' hautō*) rather than determined by any external event. This has led some interpreters to read Aristotle as implicitly rejecting determinism—the view that every event is necessitated by antecedent causes. In this paper, I argue that this reading is not persuasive. Rather, Aristotle's account of voluntary action is compatible with a form of determinism, namely *agent-based determinism*, according to which an action is determined by the agent's own psychological properties, such as desires, deliberation, and character, rather than by any prior external event. Drawing on Chisholm's notion of immanent causation and Daigle's reformulation of *agent-based determinism*, I show that Aristotle's voluntary agent is best understood not as an uncaused cause but as an agent whose actions are caused by her own psychological constitution—character and reasoning.

Keywords: *Aristotle, voluntary action, determinism, agent-based determinism, moral responsibility, agent causation, immanent causation, Nicomachean Ethics*

Introduction

In Book III of *Nicomachean Ethics* (*NE*), Aristotle investigates the conditions under which an action is voluntary. He considers an action voluntary if its origin lies within the agent, if it is not forced by any external events, and if the agent performs the action with knowledge of the relevant circumstances. This means that a voluntary action originates within the agent and is under her control, or “up to the agent” (*eph' hautō*) (Aristotle, 2019, *NE* III.1, 1111a). This notion of voluntary actions raises the question of whether Aristotle's account implies a rejection of determinism, the view that holds that every event is necessitated by prior causes. Although Aristotle himself was not explicitly engaged with the problem of determinism, the phrase “it is up to us” later became central to debates on freedom and determinism, particularly among Stoics and their opponents, including Platonists and Epicureans (Frede, 2021, p. 53).

In this paper, I argue that Aristotle's account of voluntary action does not reject determinism as such. Rather, it can be interpreted as compatible with a form of determinism, namely, *agent-based determinism*, developed from Roderick M. Chisholm's notion of immanent causation, according to which voluntary actions are determined by the agent's own psychological states, such as character, desire, deliberation, and reasoning, rather than by external compulsion. I adopt the term *agent-based determinism* from Daigle (2015, p. 8) in preference to Chisholm's own term “agent

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Journal homepage: <https://jssh.bou.ac.bd>

causation". This interpretation differs from libertarian accounts of free will, which hold that self-determination requires the agent, rather than her desires, preferences, or any other mental states, to be the sole cause of her free choices and actions (O'Connor & Franklin, 2022, Section 2.5). I argue that Aristotle's primary concern is to distinguish actions that originate in the agent from actions caused by external force. On the agent-based determinist reading, the determining cause of a voluntary action lies in the agent's own psychological constitution, and this is what makes the action genuinely "*up to the agent*".

The paper proceeds as follows. In Section 2, I explain Aristotle's distinction between voluntary, non-voluntary, and involuntary actions, and present the strongest case for thinking that his account is incompatible with determinism. I argue, however, that this case rests on an ambiguity in Premise 2 of the incompatibility argument, and that once this ambiguity is resolved, the apparent conflict disappears. In Section 3, I develop a positive interpretation of Aristotle's account as a form of *agent-based determinism*, drawing on Chisholm's distinction between transeunt and immanent causation and on Daigle's reformulation. Then, I consider and respond to the hard determinist objection and conclude that the origin of Aristotle's voluntary action is best understood as lying within the agent's own character and reasoning rather than in external compulsion.

2. Aristotle's Account of Voluntary Actions

The first part of Book III in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (*NE*) explores the distinction between voluntary and involuntary actions, focusing on how individuals bear responsibility for their voluntary actions. He defines "a voluntary action" in contrast to an involuntary action. According to Aristotle, involuntary actions are those done due to force or compulsion and those done in ignorance. An action is done due to force or compulsion when its cause is external, and the agent does not contribute anything to the action (Aristotle, 2019, *NE* III.1, 1110b). So, in the case of compulsion, the cause lies in the external factor to the agent, and the agent contributes nothing to the action. For example, when a person is carried by a whirlwind or a person is kidnapped by someone, it is beyond the person's capacity to resist, and this action of being carried away by a whirlwind or the action of being kidnapped is painful, not pleasant, or noble for the person carried away or kidnapped. This action is therefore involuntary. Aristotle is well aware of the cases where an agent is forced or compelled to act to achieve an object which is pleasant or fine to her. According to Aristotle, since we act to achieve a pleasant object with pleasure and afterwards, we do not regret or do not find it painful, our action toward achieving the pleasant object is considered voluntary, even though it is compelled by an external event, i.e., it is forced by the pleasantness or fineness. For if we do something due to compulsion or force, we find it painful, not pleasant (Aristotle, 2019, *NE* III.1, 1111a).

The second type of involuntary action is done through ignorance. It should be noted here that, according to Socrates, all evil actions are the outcomes of ignorance. That means that no one can perform a wrong action if she knows that it is wrong. On the other hand, according to Aristotle, an agent should be excused for her evil action if she is ignorant about the fact, i.e., she does not understand the relevant particular circumstance, not about the rules or principles (Hardie, 1980, p. 156), and she feels sorry afterwards. For example, when an agent intends to save a person suffering from a skin infection by giving an antibiotic without knowing that the patient is allergic to the antibiotic given to the patient, and eventually the patient dies because of the agent's ignorance, the agent's action is considered an involuntary action. This is because, afterwards, it is painful for the agent, and she feels sorry for her action. Aristotle says, "What is forced, then, would seem to be

what has its principle outside the person forced, who contributes nothing” (Aristotle, 2019, *NE* III.1, 1111a).

He further states, “[Hence] the agent who acts involuntarily is the one who acts in accord with this specific sort of ignorance, who must also feel pain and regret for his action” (Aristotle, 2019, *NE* III.1, 1111a).

He concludes, “Since involuntary action is either forced or caused by ignorance, voluntary action seems to be what has its principle in the agent himself, knowing the particulars that constitute the action” (Aristotle, 2019, *NE* III.1, 1111a).

These relevant particulars include the agent of the action, the action performed, the object or recipient of the action, the instrument used, and the manner in which the action is carried out. So, an involuntary action always involves pain and regret. If an action is done by ignorance, but the agent does not regret or feel sorry for the action, the action is not considered an involuntary action. Rather, it is non-voluntary. This is because an agent who performs an action due to her ignorance and afterwards regrets for her action performs her action unwillingly, and hence it is an involuntary action. However, if the agent performs an action in ignorance and she does not regret or feel sorry, then the action can be considered done non-willingly but not unwillingly. For example, when an agent causes a car accident because of being drunk while driving, the accident is caused due to her drunkenness, not by her ignorance of the relevant circumstances, and hence it is a non-voluntary action (Aristotle, 2019, *NE* III.1, 1110b). On the other hand, giving a poisonous drink to a thirsty person to save her life that eventually causes her death is involuntary if the agent does not know that the drink is poisonous. This is because the agent is ignorant of the relevant particulars, especially what she is doing, i.e., she is giving a poisonous drink, and what the result of the action is.

In contrast to an involuntary action, a voluntary action is an action that is caused neither by force nor by compulsion, nor by ignorance. Rather, it originates within the agent herself, and the agent is aware of the relevant particular circumstances of the action in which the action takes place (Aristotle, 2019, *NE* III.1, 1111a). That means that if the principle of the action is in the agent and the agent understands the relevant particular circumstances, e.g., she is doing the action, she is doing a particular kind of action, she is doing the action with a particular instrument, she knows the potential outcome of the action, and so on, then the action is voluntary. By saying that “the origin of an action is in the agent”, Aristotle means that the agent, rather than any outside forces or compulsion, is the *efficient cause* of the action. In other words, the cause of the action lies in the agent’s “own beliefs, desires, states of character, and other psychological states” (O’Keefe, 2021, Section 2.1). For example, if an agent mixes poison with a cup of tea and gives it to her friend to kill the friend so that she can fulfill her desires of getting her friend’s property, the agent’s action of mixing the poison with the tea and killing the friend will be considered a voluntary action. Here, the agent who kills her friend does her action without being forced by someone else and knowing all the relevant circumstances, i.e., she is giving poison to her friend, her friend will die if she takes the cup of tea, and so on. Here, the action originates from the agent herself, rather than resulting from any external force, and she is the contributor to the actions; hence, it is a voluntary action. On the other hand, if the friend is drunk and she mixes poison with a cup of tea, considering the bottle of poison as a bottle of sugar, her action will be considered non-voluntary, as she makes this mistake because of drunkenness, rather than ignorance.

Aristotle talks about mixed actions. In some cases, an agent does an action knowingly but unwillingly. He gives examples of a captain’s action of tossing a cargo overboard to save himself

and other passengers during a storm, and a person doing an evil action to save his family from a tyrant's hand. In these cases, even though the agents perform their actions under coercion, i.e., in the first case, the coercion is the storm and its threats to the lives of the people on the ship, and in the second case, the coercion comes from the tyrant who endangers his family, nevertheless, these actions are voluntary. This is because in both cases, the agents understand the relevant particular circumstances, and both actions originate from the agents, and both agents are responsible for their actions (O'Keefe, 2021, Section 2.1).

So, two criteria must be satisfied for an action to be voluntary:

- (a) The action originates from the agent, not any external forces. In order to be the origin of the cause, an agent has to contribute something to the action. That means that to be an unforced action, "the agent has to be at least a causal co-contributor" (Bobzien, 2021, p. 56).
- (b) The agent knows or is aware of the relevant particular circumstances of the action in which the action takes place.

Aristotle says:

For what results from the necessary is necessary; but the results of the contingent might be the opposite of what they are; what depends on men themselves forms a great portion of contingent matters, and men themselves are the sources of such contingent results. So that it is clear that all the acts of which man is the principle and controller may either happen or not happen, and that their happening or not happening—those at least of whose existence or non-existence he has the control—depends on him. But of what it depends on him to do or not to do, he is himself the cause; and what he is the cause of depends on him. And since excellence and badness and the acts that spring from them are respectively praised or blamed—for we do not give praise or blame for what is due to necessity, or chance, or nature, but only for what we ourselves are causes of; for what another is the cause of, for that he bears the blame or praise—it is clear that excellence and badness have to do with matters where the man himself is the cause and source of his acts. We must then ascertain of what actions he is himself the source and cause. (Aristotle, 1985, *EE* II.6, 1223a1–15)

From the above lines of thought, it is clear that, according to Aristotle, voluntary actions are not necessary as they are not necessitated by any prior events; rather, they are contingent in the sense that their happening or not happening depends on the agent, and the agent is the controller of the voluntary actions. In the case of a contingent action, the outcome could have been different from what actually occurred, whereas, in the case of a necessary action, the opposite outcome is impossible (Aristotle, 1985, *EE* II.6, 1223a1–15). Thus, according to Aristotle, a voluntary action is one that originates within the agent, meaning it is "*up to the agent*" to decide whether to perform the action or not. Since the agent is considered the source of her voluntary actions, one may claim that Aristotle here is rejecting determinism—the view that an action is caused by a sufficient prior event or action external to the agent, and therefore, the action is not "*up to the agent*". This claim can be explained in a different way as follows: according to Aristotle, since human beings are responsible for their voluntary actions, they should be praised for doing noble actions, and they should be blamed for doing shameful actions. When an action is voluntary, the decision to perform it—or to refrain from performing it—rests in the agent. This means the agent has the capacity both to carry out a noble deed and to avoid doing so, as well as to choose between noble and shameful actions. Therefore, the agent possesses the power to act or not act, implying that voluntary actions

originate within the agent as their source and controller. Such actions are contingent, not necessary, in the sense that they may occur or not occur depending on the agent's choice. Since voluntary actions depend on the agent's choice, they are not determined by any prior events external to the agent (Aristotle, 1985, *EE* II.6, 1223a1–15). Therefore, determinism seems to be false. From this point of view, Aristotle's concept of voluntary actions appears incompatible with determinism. This claim can be restated as follows:

Determinism: The origin of an action is a sufficiently prior event external to the agent, meaning the action is not under the control of the agent.

Premise 1: If an agent *x* is morally responsible for an action *A*, then *A* is voluntary.

Premise 2: If *A* is voluntary, then it is up to *x* to perform *A* or not to perform *A*, and *A*'s origin is in *x*.

Premise 3: If *x* is morally responsible for *A*, then *A* is contingent, not necessary.

Premise 4: Aristotle holds that agents are morally responsible for their voluntary actions.

Conclusion: Therefore, according to Aristotle, voluntary actions are contingent and not determined by external prior causes; hence, determinism is incompatible with voluntary actions.

The above argument is plausible if we accept a particular reading of Premise 2. Premise 2 states that if an action is voluntary, then “it is *up to the agent*” in the sense that the action's origin lies in the agent rather than in any external prior cause. The argument then assumes, implicitly, that this rules out all forms of determinism, including determinism by the agent's own internal psychological states. But *agent-based determinism* denies this assumption. The argument is therefore only against event-causal determinism—the view that actions are determined by prior external events. It therefore does not establish incompatibility with a form of determinism in which the determining cause is the agent's own character, desires, and deliberation. In other words, Premise 2 is ambiguous between two readings:

(P_{2a}) If *A* is voluntary, then *A* is not causally determined by any prior event external to the agent.

(P_{2b}) If *A* is voluntary, then *A* is not causally determined by anything at all.

The argument succeeds against determinism only on reading (P_{2b}). But Aristotle's own account of voluntary action, in which the agent's desires, deliberation, and character are the internal origin of the action, supports only (P_{2a}). On (P_{2a}), voluntary action is compatible with determinism by the agent's own psychological makeup. *Agent-based determinism* captures this reading.

Now, consider whether Aristotle's notion of voluntary actions is compatible with determinism or not, and whether Aristotle rejects determinism or not. Aristotle himself does not appear to be directly concerned with this issue. His focus lies rather in identifying the conditions under which an action is “*up to the agent*” or voluntary. For Aristotle, an action is voluntary if it is performed “without compulsion by external force”, and with knowledge of the relevant circumstances. Moreover, it “must be in accordance with the agent's deliberations and choices”, and its “aims or ends must be in accordance with the agent's wishes” (Frede, 2021, pp. 53–54). In the following section, (i) I will show that Aristotle's account of voluntary action cannot be accused of rejecting determinism; (ii) I will give an interpretation of Aristotle's account of voluntary action showing that his account is compatible with a form of determinism. In support of my interpretation, I will borrow the idea of agent causation (immanent causation) from Roderick M. Chisholm. However,

instead of using agent causation, I will use the term *agent-based determinism* following Jennifer Daigle (2015, p. 8).

3. Agent-Based Determinism and Aristotle's Account of Voluntary Action

From Section 2, it is evident that Aristotle's two conditions for voluntary action, origination within the agent and knowledge of relevant circumstances, do not entail the rejection of all causal determinism. I now develop a positive interpretation of how those conditions can be understood as a form of *agent-based determinism*. To do this, I draw on Chisholm's distinction between transeunt and immanent causation as a theoretical framework, before showing how Aristotle's own account of the self-moving agent maps onto that framework.

Chisholm, in his lecture *Human Freedom and the Self*, distinguishes between transeunt causation (event causation) and immanent causation. He says:

...when one event or state of affairs (or set of events or states of affairs) causes some other event or state of affairs, then we have an instance of transeunt causation. And I shall say that when an agent, as distinguished from an event, causes an event or state of affairs, then we have an instance of immanent causation. (Chisholm, 1964, p. 7)

So, according to Chisholm, a transeunt causation holds the relation between two events. For example, if a person died from drinking poisonous tea, according to Chisholm, the event of her death is caused by the event of her drinking the poisonous tea. On the other hand, immanent causation bears the relationship between an agent and an event such that the event is caused by the agent themselves, rather than by some prior external event. There are some events which, "almost certainly occur only within the brain" of an agent, are not caused by other events, but rather "by the agent in whose brain they occur" (van Inwagen, 1978, p. 568). Borrowing the idea of agent causation, I want to formulate a notion of *agent-based determinism*, which is slightly different from Chisholm's immanent causation. Instead of claiming that an event is caused by the brain state of an agent, I aim to follow Dorothea Frede's view that when an action is voluntary, it originates from the agent's psychological features, such as desires, choices, and deliberation (Frede, 2021, p. 54). In the earlier sections, we have discussed that according to event-causal determinism, every event is caused by an antecedent prior event or a state of affairs. So, it is necessary that an action A_2 , that happens at time T_2 , is necessarily caused by an action or a state of affairs, A_1 , at time T_1 . So, as per determinism, a voluntary action must be necessarily determined by an antecedent event or state of affairs. However, according to *agent-based determinism*, a voluntary action is necessarily determined by an agent, rather than a prior event. So, it is necessary that a voluntary action A_2 , that happens at time T_2 , is necessarily caused by the psychological makeup of an agent x rather than an action or a state of affairs, A_1 , at time T_1 . *Agent-based determinism* can be reformulated as follows:

Agent-Based Determinism: The source of a voluntary action A lies in the agent x if and only if A is caused by the various psychological features of x , and A is not caused by any prior event e (Daigle, 2015, p. 8).

It is worth clarifying how these three positions, namely Chisholm's immanent causation, Daigle's *agent-based determinism*, and the present Aristotelian interpretation, relate to one another. Chisholm's immanent causation locates the causal source of action in the agent as a substance, distinct from any event, including events occurring within the agent's own brain. This makes Chisholm's view a form of libertarianism—the agent is a kind of uncaused cause—and this is precisely what preserves free will against determinism. Daigle's *agent-based determinism* retains the core structure—the agent, not a prior event, is the cause—but leaves the libertarian commitment.

On Daigle's view, the agent's causal power is itself grounded in, and determined by, her psychological constitution—her desires, character, and deliberative capacities. The agent is not an uncaused cause but a determined determiner. My use of *agent-based determinism* follows Daigle in this respect. What I add is the claim that Aristotle's own account of voluntary action, particularly his emphasis that the origin of action lies in the agent's appetitive desires, deliberation, and choice, is best understood as an early articulation of precisely this structure. Aristotle's voluntary agent is an agent whose actions are fixed by what she is, psychologically and characterologically. This is determinism—it is determinism by the agent, not determinism of the agent by external prior events.

Now, let us consider why Aristotle's account of voluntary action can be interpreted as compatible with *agent-based determinism*. First, by claiming that an agent is the source or origin of her voluntary actions, Aristotle means that "the agent is a *self-mover*" (Meyer, 2011, p. 151). A *self-mover*, for Aristotle, is something that initiates motion by itself, not because it is moved by something else. He illustrates this concept of *self-mover* with the example of a man, a stick, and a stone: the man moves the stick with his hand, and the stick moves the stone. In this sequence, both the stick and the stone are movers that are moved by something else, namely, the man. However, the man can move without the stick and the stone (Meyer, 2011, pp. 150–151). In this sense, the man is the *self-mover*—the origin of motion—who is not moved by anything external, and thus functions as an *unmoved mover*. As Aristotle writes, "anything that is in motion must be moved by something" (Aristotle, as cited in Meyer, 2011, p. 152). Therefore, when a voluntary action originates from an agent, the action originates from the agent as the *efficient cause*—a *self-mover* who initiates action without being moved by a prior external cause. As Meyer explains:

In the case of the *self-mover*, ... Aristotle effectively blocks this troublesome question by claiming that the *self-mover* is unmoved in causing its own motion. This claim allows him to maintain that the chain of efficient causation originates with, rather than simply involves, the *self-mover*. (Meyer, 2011, p. 153)

Following Meyer, and from this self-movement attribute of an agent, it is evident that the voluntary action of moving an agent's hand is caused by her various psychological features, such as her desires or choices, rather than any outside forces. In this sense, the action is determined by the agent, not by any prior external event. As discussed in the previous section, Aristotle holds that virtue and vice are both voluntary and are therefore both up to us (Aristotle, 2019, *NE* III.5, 1113b3–8). When we wish or desire an object, the object of our desire is the final cause. Based on our desire for the end, we deliberate about the means and choose how to achieve that end. That means that our desire and deliberation are the origin of our choice. Thus, after deliberating about what to do or not to do, we make a choice. In other words, choice originates from our deliberation. And our deliberate actions performed toward the desired end are the origin of the actual event. So, an action must align with the agent's deliberation and choice, and its aim must accord with the agent's wishes (Frede, 2021, pp. 53–54). Thus, an agent's psychological features—such as appetitive desire, deliberation, and choice—are the internal sources of her voluntary action (Aristotle, 2019, *NE* III.3, 1112b11–1113a13; III.5, 1113b3–7). That also distinguishes adult moral agents from children and animals. For although children and animals perform voluntary actions, they are not moral agents, as they cannot decide with deliberation (Aristotle, 2019, *NE* III.2, 1111b5–10).

Secondly, let us consider those cases where an action is performed voluntarily under compulsion, e.g., the action is done "because of fear of greater evils or because of something fine" (Aristotle, 2019, *NE* III.1, 1110a5–15). In Aristotle's example, when a tyrant forces an agent to do something shameful by endangering the family members of the agent, he (the agent) chooses the

action with knowledge of the relevant particulars and deliberation. In this case, although the agent is forced, he was the controller of his choice and decision. For he could have done otherwise, i.e., he could have chosen to sacrifice his family for the sake of noble things. Similarly, when a ship captain, knowing the relevant circumstances, throws cargo overboard during a storm to save the passengers, the act is painful and reluctantly chosen. Yet, because he understands the relevant circumstances and is not compelled by another agent, he remains the origin of the action and could have chosen otherwise (Aristotle, 2019, *NE* III.1, 1110a5–15). However, his action was not initiated by any external mover; rather, he himself was the *unmoved mover* or the origin of the action, being unmoved. So, in both cases, agents' choosing actions provide sufficient reason to consider that the agents, not any outside force, are the origins of their actions. Here, the agents are the contributors. If those actions originated from compulsion, the agents would not contribute anything to those actions (Aristotle, 2019, *NE* III.1, 1111a15). Since the agents are the contributors to their actions, they are the origin of those actions. Thus, voluntary actions are determined by the agent rather than external forces. In this sense, Aristotle's account of voluntary action is fully compatible with a form of determinism based on internal psychological causation. To put it differently, Aristotle should not be accused of opposing or rejecting determinism.

Thirdly, consider cases in which an agent chooses something pleasant or fine because its attractiveness draws her attention toward it. This might appear to be a form of external compulsion (or force)—the pleasant object, as it were, forces the agent's hand. However, Aristotle claims that even though a pleasant thing or a fine thing is compelling, by choosing a pleasant thing, the agent does not regret or feel shy. Moreover, she can easily decline to choose a fine thing or a pleasant thing, and when an agent chooses a pleasant thing, she chooses it with pleasure, not with pain (Aristotle, 2019, *NE* III.1, 1110b10). So, the attractiveness of the object is a reason for action, not a compulsion; it informs but does not override the agent's deliberation and judgment. This is consistent with *agent-based determinism*: the agent's response to the pleasant object is mediated by her own desires and deliberative choice. Hence, it is the agent's psychological features, not the object itself, that are the determining cause of her action. This is because a voluntary action is up to the agent. So, it is up to the agent to do a noble action or a shameful action; it is *up to the agent* to do what is good or bad. It follows that it is up to the agent to be good or to be bad by performing a good action or a bad action. Hence, to be good or to be wicked is equally voluntary. If the origin or the moving principle of a noble or shameful action is in the agent, then it is up to the agent, not any external event. That is to say, the voluntary action is caused by the agent's appetitive desires, deliberation, and choice, not any external event. If an agent knows what constitutes a noble action and chooses to perform it in order to become virtuous, then she becomes virtuous voluntarily. Likewise, if an agent knowingly performs a vicious action, she becomes vicious voluntarily.

Aristotle holds that not only are virtuous and vicious actions voluntary, but the character traits from which they originate are themselves voluntary (Aristotle, 2019, *NE* III.5, 1113b3–7). Since both virtuous and vicious actions are up to the agent and performed voluntarily, it follows that virtuous and vicious characters themselves are also voluntary. Therefore, a virtuous person tends to perform virtuous actions, just as a vicious person tends to perform vicious ones—both perform in accordance with their character and deliberate choice. Put differently, a virtuous action A is up to the agent x necessarily implies that it is up to x that x has the virtuous character trait, T. That means that it is a contingent fact that a voluntary action can happen or not happen, but it is necessary that it is up to the agent, not any outside force, that depends on the character trait of the agent. So, it is determined that the voluntary action is "*up to the agent*", even though the agent could have done otherwise. This point aligns with *agent-based determinism*: the psychological features that determine the agent's voluntary actions are something the agent has. Here, the causal chain does

not run from external prior events to the agent's actions; it runs from the agent's earlier choices to cultivate her character, and from her character to her later actions. The agent is both the product and the producer of the determining cause of her voluntary actions. This is what it means, on the present interpretation, to say that voluntary actions are "*up to the agent*". In such a way, Aristotle's account of voluntary action can be explained as compatible with a form of determinism, namely *agent-based determinism*.

One might object that *agent-based determinism* does not genuinely escape event-causal determinism. A hard determinist would argue that even if an agent's desires, character, and deliberation are the proximate cause of her voluntary actions, those psychological features were themselves shaped by prior external causes, such as upbringing, environment, heredity, and circumstance. If so, tracing the causal chain back reveals that the ultimate source of the action is not the agent at all, but some prior external event.

The above objection is compelling against libertarian accounts of agency, which must posit a genuine threat to the causal chain. However, it is less persuasive against the present interpretation of Aristotle. Aristotle does not claim that the agent's character and desires are uncaused; rather, he acknowledges that character is formed through habituation (Aristotle, 2019, *NE* II.1). What he insists upon is that once a character is formed, it is the agent's own—she is identified with it, acts from it, and is appropriately held responsible for actions that originate from it. The relevant causal boundary for moral responsibility is not between caused and uncaused states, but between states that are internal to the agent and states that are external compulsions. On this view, *agent-based determinism* does not require the agent to be a first cause in the cosmological sense; it requires only that the determining cause of her action be her own psychological makeup rather than an external force acting upon her.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that for Aristotle, a voluntary action is "*up to the agent*" in the sense that the agent possesses the power to act or not to act, provided the action is neither compelled by external forces nor performed in ignorance of the relevant circumstances. Although Aristotle does not explicitly engage with the problem of determinism—the notion that every event is causally necessitated by prior events—his account does not entail the rejection of determinism. The apparent incompatibility dissolves once we distinguish between two kinds of determinism: determinism by prior external events, which Aristotle clearly rules out, and determinism by the agent's own internal psychological constitution, which his account positively supports.

Drawing on Chisholm's notion of immanent causation and Daigle's reformulation of *agent-based determinism*, I have argued that Aristotle's voluntary agent is best understood as an agent whose actions are causally determined by her own desires, deliberation, and character, and who is therefore appropriately held responsible for them. This reading positions Aristotle as an early compatibilist—his framework is compatible with a form of determinism called *agent-based determinism*, in which actions are determined by the agent's own psychological makeup, such as beliefs, desires, and character, rather than by external or antecedent events. From this point of view, a voluntary action remains "*up to the agent*"—the determining cause of a voluntary action is the agent herself.

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