

Acting in Character: A Re-examination of the *Hekousion* in Aristotle

George Reuter  
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First Reader: Professor Ravi Sharma

Second Reader: Professor Danielle Macbeth

Recent commentators find fault with much of Aristotle's account of the *hekousion* in III.1 of his *Nicomachean Ethics*. According to Anthony Kenny, Aristotle seeks to draw a distinction between the voluntary and the involuntary that does not depend on moral evaluations.<sup>1</sup> This project fails since "the details of [Aristotle's] argument, in NE 3, are intolerably obscure" (Kenny, 36). David Bostock thinks the whole account is muddled by Aristotle's inconsistent use of the term *hekousion*, which in Aristotle regularly refers to actions done "intentionally" but occasionally slips into the more colloquial meaning "willingly."<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, there seems to be a deep tension between the two halves of the chapter. The first half, focused on actions resulting from force, seems "to drive a wedge between the way the person feels about the episode as it takes place, and the question whether it is voluntary."<sup>3</sup> This wedge is then removed in the second half, concerning actions done in ignorance, in which regret (*metameleia*) holds a prominent role in considerations of voluntariness.

All of these concerns come from the most sympathetic of Aristotle's readers, who are willing to accept that Aristotle still may have something to say about the voluntary, even if he spends no time refuting determinism. In this paper I will accept Kenny's characterization of Aristotle's project – to separate the voluntary from mere considerations of an individual action's praiseworthiness – but argue that Aristotle's argument is not "intolerably obscure." Contrary to what Bostock maintains, Aristotle consistently uses the term "*hekousion*" to indicate a particular characteristic of actions.

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Kenny. *Aristotle's Theory of the Will*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

<sup>2</sup> David Bostock. *Aristotle's Ethics*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 103, 119.

<sup>3</sup> Sarah Broadie. *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 38.

Understanding this will be crucial to appreciating the unity between the two halves of the chapter.

Although many commentators cite Rosalind Hursthouse's paper "Acting and Feeling in Character: NE III.1" as an example of an interesting interpretation of this chapter, few embrace her reading in their own explanations of III.1.<sup>4</sup> I will structure this paper around a reconsideration of her views. The first section of my discussion considers why Aristotle complicates his analysis of the voluntary by adding a third term (the *ouk hekousion*), which labels certain actions done in ignorance. Following Hursthouse, I will argue that the term allows us to recognize how an agent's character is relevant to voluntariness. In the second section I will consider whether it makes sense to think about an agent's character in situations of force or compulsion. I will argue, largely in agreement with Hursthouse, that it does. Finally I will consider why a re-interpretation of a relatively short passage from Aristotle is relevant to modern philosophical concerns. In my view, Aristotle offers us some useful insights about responsibility and our judgments about morality.

A brief comment on determinism may be necessary. The subject, which a modern audience may feel is immensely relevant, is largely ignored in the following argument. This omission is based on the fact that Aristotle never considers the possibility that we may not be responsible for our actions simply because everything we do is predetermined; a question that is debated by modern philosophers. Although Aristotle

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<sup>4</sup> *Phronesis*. Vol. XXIX/3. (1984), p. 252-266. Bostock mentions the paper underneath the heading "Further Reading" and calls it a "distinctly unusual interpretation of III.1" (Bostock, 121). Broadie includes the paper in her "Select Bibliography" on "Action and the Involuntary," but gives little weight to Hursthouse's argument in her commentary (460).

begs this question, the Greek worldview, within which Aristotle's work fits, might lend some insight into how responsibility exists even within a deterministic metaphysics. Indeed, many of Aristotle's predecessors and contemporaries, from what Classicists can ascertain, believed in something like determinism but never thought it should lead us to doubt our responsibility. In Ancient Greek literature it is not uncommon for a mortal to take responsibility for an action a god "forces."<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the Greeks believed in fate (*moira*, literally an "allotment"), but did not think that the concept meaningfully limited one's ability to choose one's actions. Therefore, although Aristotle does not make any arguments intended to refute determinism, I suspect his arguments about the *hekousion* are relevant regardless of how issues about free will and determinism are resolved – particularly in the way character figures in voluntariness.

#### *I: Ignorance and the Ouk Hekousion*

In Aristotle's discussion of ignorance, the *akousion* action is separated from the *ouk hekousion* by the agent's regret after the action. Even sympathetic commentators often consider this division irrelevant.<sup>6</sup> The charge is based on the idea that feelings (like regret) can influence the status of an action's voluntariness only before or during the action. Feelings are important only in so far as they excuse the action, making it *akousion*. This is reasonable, if one thinks that the only purpose of III.1 is to define a quasi-legal responsibility. Courts are not in the practice of reversing the guilt of parties

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<sup>5</sup> Gorgias' *Enconium of Helen* is a notable exception. In this short work the famous sophist argues that Helen should not be blamed for running off to Troy with Paris since (among other reasons) she was forced by the gods. However, the Ancient Greek reception of this piece is unclear. Gorgias likely used it as a demonstration of his rhetorical power, which suggests that the argument, at least on its face, might have seemed absurd (thus making the "proof" all the more impressive). A recent poetic translation is done by John Dillon and Tania Gergel. *The Greek Sophists* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 76-84.

<sup>6</sup> Kenny (169), Bostock (111-112).

on account of remorse or repentance,<sup>7</sup> although they might consider whether the action was done in a particular emotional state (e.g. rage or fear). Hursthouse argues that the *ouk-hekousion/akousion* distinction is not only relevant to Aristotle's discussion of ignorance, but is critical to a complete reading of III.1.

Let us do a quick review of the relevant section on ignorance, which I will recount with as little interpretation as possible. All acts done in ignorance are *ouk hekousion* (1110b18). Those that bring regret (*metameleia*) after the act can additionally be designated as *akousion* (1010b19). However, only the ignorance of particulars relevant to the action can lead it to be called *akousion*, whereas an agent's ignorance of "universal" moral standards does not make her action *akousion*, for she is simply a *hekousion* agent who is vicious (1110b31-1111a2). For example, here are two very different kinds of ignorant horse-stealers:<sup>8</sup> I may be unaware that 1) taking other people's horses by stealth is to *steal*, or 2) this particular horse is not mine. If I am ignorant of 1), then I am ignorant of a universal moral standard, and I will steal the horse *hekousion*. If I steal the horse being ignorant of 2), then I steal the horse *akousion*.<sup>9</sup>

Hursthouse presses a particular interpretation of this passage, which hinges on a reading of *metameleia* (literally after-concern). Many commentators identify *metameleia* with repentance and then contend that Aristotle has erred. Repentance does seem like

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<sup>7</sup> A court might reduce (or do away with) a punishment because a criminal is suitably remorseful, but that does not suggest the criminal is any less guilty of the crime.

<sup>8</sup> An example borrowed from Martin Ostwald. *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*. (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1999), p. 55.

<sup>9</sup> It is evident that Aristotle's initial statement at 1110b18 is not quite accurate. He apparently means all acts done in ignorance of a particular are *ouk hekousion*. This separates him from the famous position of Socrates, who argued that all wrongdoing was done in a state of ignorance, and therefore all wrongdoing was done *akousion*. Aristotle's rejection provides room for the knowledgeable, voluntary villain.

nothing more than a post-action feeling with no influence on responsibility. The fact that I repent an action does not suggest that I did the action involuntarily. Hursthouse agrees that Aristotle is deeply mistaken if he means something like repentance, but she argues that there is a better reading. *Metameleia* does sometimes mean repentance, but it also can mean regret, which can extend to any event one has no control over.<sup>10</sup> Virtuous people do not look indifferently on (and they are certainly not pleased by) wrongdoing. I am a vicious person if I have no regret after discovering that the water I gave a friend was poisoned. Similarly, a virtuous person does not regret the good actions that she performs in ignorance. Hursthouse is thinking of the agent who “refrain[s] from a bodily pleasure through ignorance, [e.g.] not realizing that the liquid in the bottles is wine [instead of water]” (255). Hursthouse presumes that the virtuous person refrains from such bodily pleasures, and therefore, if the agent is disappointed about missing the chance to get drunk, then she is not virtuous and has acted *akousion*. Since she acted *akousion*, we have no reason to praise her as the kind of person who drinks an appropriate amount of alcohol, despite the fact that she did refuse a glass of wine (at least underneath one description). Thus *metameleia* can tell us, albeit after the fact, something relevant about the agent *at the time* of the action, namely, it indicates the agent’s character.<sup>11</sup> This interpretation escapes the problem with “merely post-action feelings,” for regret points to a quality of the agent *at the time of action*. Repentance, on the other hand, does not seem

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<sup>10</sup> Although Broadie agrees that *metameleia* is not the same as remorse or repentance, she disagrees with Hursthouse’s contention that *metameleia* can extend to what is done by someone else. Broadie suggests that the “regret is not a bystander’s sadness *that* the accident happened; it is regret at having cause it” (Broadie, 313). However, Hursthouse does not depend on examples of events in which the agent is not a participant, so Broadie’s concern is perhaps avoided. Hursthouse may even be amenable to the correction.

<sup>11</sup> Sarah Broadie similarly thinks feelings like regret indicate ethical dispositions (39).

to possess this quality. Certainly repentance points toward something about the agent's character, but it makes clear something about the agent's character *at the time she is repenting* rather than at the time the action was performed.

One way to evaluate Hursthouse's interpretation is to consider why Aristotle would feel a need to introduce a third term in his account of voluntariness. Aristotle himself begins the chapter by acknowledging that there are *two* types of action we are interested in differentiating, and these are the kinds important to lawgivers, the *hekousion* and *akousion*. To the first we can give our praise or blame, and to the second we give pardon (*suggnômês*) and sometimes pity (*eleos*) (1109b31-33). What compels Aristotle to complicate this straightforward distinction? It seems likely that he had in mind a figure much like Oedipus as Sophocles famously represented him.<sup>12</sup> What should we do with Oedipus? Sophocles' play ends without answering this question,<sup>13</sup> but Aristotle may point us in a satisfactory direction. Oedipus is entirely ignorant of the fact that he murdered his father and married his mother, but these terrible sins have still brought down a "pollution" (*miasma*) upon himself and the city. Oedipus is no model of virtue, but he also is not a particularly bad guy; his most constant characteristic is an insatiable desire to get at the truth.<sup>14</sup> Aristotle might have noticed that just as we cannot equate

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<sup>12</sup> I do not mean to suggest that Aristotle sat down intent on resolving issues in this play. However, we certainly know that Aristotle was not only familiar with the play, but found it exceedingly interesting (Aristotle uses the play as an example several times in his *Poetics*).

<sup>13</sup> Oedipus asks for the severe punishment of banishment, but Creon, the new king, refuses to make a sentence before consulting the gods.

<sup>14</sup> In the effort to show why Oedipus "deserves" what he gets, many have pointed out that he is quick to turn on his friends (Creon and Tiresias) in fits of anger, and would be happy to torture an (arguably) innocent man to get information. Although the effort to prove Oedipus gets his just deserts is probably misguided, these people are correct to note that Oedipus is no model of virtue. For more on this point see E.R. Dodds. "On

Oedipus with a man who knowingly kills his father and marries his mother, we also cannot equate Oedipus with someone who fails to regret killing his father and marrying his mother in ignorance of their identities. Oedipus defies either characterization.<sup>15</sup> The examples Hursthouse raises also fall outside the focus of the complementary terms, *hekousion* and *akousion*, and they do so in exactly the way Aristotle could be made aware of by the Oedipus story.

Furthermore, the Oedipus example illustrates that it is a mistake to identify *hekousion* action with the virtuous person (Hursthouse, 254).<sup>16</sup> *Akousion* actions are practiced by the virtuous, the vicious, as well as the rest of us. How virtuous people can be recognized as virtuous despite doing an apparently vicious act – and how vicious people likewise can be recognized as vicious despite doing an apparently virtuous act – is an important unanswered question that arises following the discussions in Books 1 and 2 (253). Hursthouse thinks the distinction between *akousion* and *ouk hekousion* allows us to differentiate the virtuous person from the vicious person even when they apparently perform the same action. The ability to recognize these figures as virtuous or vicious is vital to Aristotle’s student of virtue, who must imitate a certain group of people (the virtuous ones) to acquire the correct disposition. Any tool that could help students of virtue distinguish these two characters would be enormously beneficial.

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Misunderstanding the *Oedipus Rex*.” *Oxford Readings in Greek Tragedy* ed by Erich Segal. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pg 177-188.

<sup>15</sup> I am suggesting, following Hursthouse, that the knowing man acted *hekousion*, and Oedipus acted *akousion*, which can be separated from the unregretful man who acted *ouk hekousion*.

<sup>16</sup> There are textual reasons why readers might tend to do this. Aristotle writes, “it is painful to act under constraint and involuntarily” (Ostwald, 54), and “[f]or as a rule...what we are forced to do is base” (Ostwald, 53).

David Bostock finds Hursthouse's argument concerning the *ouk hekousion* unconvincing. He poses two counter-examples: (1) Consider the man who, walking in the forest, steps on an ant. He was not aware of the ant when he stepped on it, and only realizes his previous action when he peels it off the bottom of his shoe. Does it matter how he reacts to this new knowledge? Bostock's answer is a firm "no," for "in either case [the man] has killed that ant involuntarily, since [he] did not know that that was what [he] was doing" (Bostock, 111). Bostock does not want the reader to think this intuition is based on the relative unimportance of the ant's existence, so he ups the moral ante in his second example. (2) Consider Frank, who plans on murdering Sean this very afternoon, and heads off to the shooting range to practice.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile a group of bandits, for their own unrelated reasons, kidnap Sean and tie him up directly behind the targets at the shooting range. Frank continues practicing – eventually shooting Sean through the target. Is Frank's action any more voluntary than that of a person who bears no grudge against the dead man? Bostock again says "no": the issue of responsibility is unchanged. Regardless of how each agent feels about the action, they both commit involuntary manslaughter.

Bostock's response misses the force of Hursthouse's point. She does not deny that in a quasi-legal sense actions done in ignorance are "*akousion*." The action itself, in so far as it is separated from the person performing the action, is the only thing at issue in this sense of responsibility. Indeed, it is important for the law to make this separation so as to avoid a bias against certain groups of individuals. Hursthouse's point is rather that this is only one type of responsibility that is important in Aristotle's account. Two factors

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<sup>17</sup>I have added names, but the events are the same as Bostock describes (111-112).

are aligned in the *hekôn*, the action itself and the character of the agent. If these components are in conflict, at least when the agent is ignorant of a relevant particular, then the agent fails to act *hekousion*. I have suggested that it makes sense to call such an action *akousion*. These agents perform actions that are not *characteristic* of their dispositions (e.g. the regretful poisoner, regretful wine-refuser). On the other hand, some actions that fall short of the *hekousion* are not done in conflict with the agent's character; an agent may act in ignorance of a relevant particular but still perform an action in accordance with her character, in which case she acts *ouk hekousion* (e.g. Frank, the ant-stepper, the unregretful wine-refuser). Since we can discern a difference between the ways agents fail to be *hekôn*, it makes sense to give them different names and perhaps also different kinds of responsibility. That is, it makes as little sense to treat Oedipus like someone who fails to regret killing his father and marrying his mother in ignorance as it does to treat him like someone who knowingly killed his father and married his mother. He, like Frank, fits neither paradigm.

Can our concept of the voluntary admit this third category? I have suggested that our ability to discern the difference between the "*ouk hekousion*" and the "*akousion*" agent seems like good evidence. Still, it may be useful to note that these triplets are somewhat common in our psychology. Consider our modern concept of happiness.<sup>18</sup> Since happiness and unhappiness are contraries, rather than contradictories, one can be in an emotional state in which neither term applies. Just because I am not happy does not mean I am unhappy. The same is true of our religious beliefs. I may be a believer, a

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<sup>18</sup> I mean the normal cheerfulness that can be experienced moment to moment, rather than the robust sort of happiness, *eudaimonia*, talked about by Aristotle and others.

disbeliever (an atheist), or neither (an agnostic).<sup>19</sup> I mean to situate our concept of voluntariness in a similar way. I may fall short of being happy in two ways: 1) I may be unhappy, or 2) I may be neither happy nor unhappy. I may similarly fall short of being a *hekôn* in two ways: 1) I may be acting *akousion*, 2) or I may be acting neither *akousion* nor *hekousion*. In the case of voluntariness I have suggested that the critical difference between 1) and 2) is the state of one's character. It should also be noted that these third kinds of psychological states are not devoid of content. Learning that a person is agnostic, or that a person is currently neither happy nor unhappy, tells us something about the person. There is a temptation to believe that these "neutral" states, which run the course between contraries, are somehow impotent or merely the absence of content – but that temptation is misguided. There is content to the idea that I am simply "not happy." Although that content is expressed by a negation, something positive is still conveyed about my current condition. Similarly, I will argue that we can, should, and do treat people who act *ouk hekousion* differently than the way we treat people who act *akousion*.

If there is some space for a third category of the voluntary, what kind of responsibility does it bring along? I have suggested above that it does not make sense to consider the agent legally culpable for actions done *ouk hekousion*. In so far as that is true, I agree with Bostock that both Frank and a regretful shooter are equally guilty of involuntary manslaughter. However, when we are morally evaluating an agent it makes sense to consider how that agent feels about her action. Virtuous people feel a certain

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<sup>19</sup> Agnostic is perhaps too broad a term, since it includes people who believe it is impossible to know whether gods exist as well as people who (up to this point) have seen no evidence that gods exist. I think the latter agnostic, who is willing to believe that one might be able to prove gods existence (or inexistence) but that it has not been done yet, is closest to the "middle term" I am interested in.

way about actions that they do in ignorance; they welcome the good acts (the ones they would have chosen anyway) and regret the bad acts. Therefore, when the student of virtue sets out to imitate the virtuous person, she also respects a responsibility for how she feels about her actions.<sup>20</sup> Those who do not set out to become virtuous violate this responsibility, and for that we, those of us who are interested in virtue, can justifiably blame them. This blame is independent of the legal court's evaluation of guilt, but it is justified by the evaluator's system of moral values.

There still may be a nagging suspicion that Bostock's argument is deeply significant. How can the state of one's character influence an agent's voluntariness? The force of this question, and I think Bostock's intuition, is that it seems odd to hold both of the following: a) an agent's character does not *cause* (in a legally relevant sense) her to act in a particular way, and b) character is relevant to evaluations of voluntariness. I think part of the answer to this question comes from recognizing that two agents who have different characters, and apparently do the same act, can be meaningfully described as performing different actions. To elucidate this idea I will draw a parallel with ignorance, which has thus far been treated as obviously having an influence on what is voluntary. However, exactly why this is the case requires some philosophical explanation. Although

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<sup>20</sup> Whether the virtuous person herself feels a responsibility to feel the way she does is another question. I will argue in the second section that virtuous people are not necessitated (compelled, *ananke*) to do the things for which we call them virtuous. This argument suggests that although virtuous people act in accordance with this responsibility, they do not *feel* that responsibility as such. Virtuous people are just the kind of people who (rightly) recognize, for example, what is regretful about poisoning one's friend in ignorance.

I am discussing Bostock, my primary interlocutor, the reading of Aristotle he summarizes can be traced to the work of J. L. Ackrill.<sup>21</sup>

[An action described as a  $\phi$ -ing] may also be described as a  $\psi$ -ing, and it may be that I knew that I was  $\phi$ -ing but did not know that I was  $\psi$ -ing. In that case, I  $\phi$ -ed voluntarily, but did not  $\psi$  voluntarily, even though the  $\phi$ -ing and the  $\psi$ -ing were the same action. And in practice we are going to be most interested in that description, as a  $\phi$ -ing or as a  $\psi$ -ing, that is most relevant to the appraisal of the action as a good or a bad thing to do (Bostock, 108).

The central point here is that the description of the action an agent performs influences our judgments about voluntariness. Oedipus *voluntarily* killed the old man at the triple-forked intersection, but he *involuntarily* killed his father, despite the fact that these descriptions are of the same action. How we bundle the information about the action is relevant to whether we call the action *hekousion*. I am arguing that it makes sense for character to be bundled with the action in certain judgments about voluntariness. The proper setting for character considerations is not the courtroom, but such considerations are useful as a guide to how individuals should hand out praise and blame to the people around them. When character is bundled into the description of the action, it seems appropriate for us to withhold blame from our regretful ignorant poisoner (the *ouk hekousion* agent) even as we heap criticism on Bostock's Frank (the *akousion* agent), although both indeed committed involuntary manslaughter. In other words, we do not blame Frank for committing "involuntary manslaughter," but we can hold him accountable for having the kind of character that allows him to kill someone without any regret – that is, for killing someone *ouk hekousion*. Moreover, it is critical that the student of virtue, who is the audience targeted by Aristotle (1095b4-6), be able to distinguish

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<sup>21</sup> J. L. Ackrill. "Aristotle on Action." *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* ed by Amelie Oksenberg Rorty. Berkeley: University of California Press, 93-102.

Frank and the regretful ignorant poisoner, for it is only permissible to imitate the latter. One cannot obtain virtue by rejoicing in wrongdoing – even if that wrongdoing is performed in ignorance. To put it in terms an Ancient Greek would recognize: we should feel distress when our actions release pollution (*miasma*) into the world.

## *II: Character, Bia and Ananke*

In the previous section, I supported Hursthouse’s interpretation of the much derided distinction between the *ouk hekousion* and the *akousion*. We contend that this distinction is not simply an unfortunate error, but an important moment that reveals character’s role in the way an agent fails to act *hekousion*. I argued that agents acting in ignorance who have different characters *perform* different actions,<sup>22</sup> which opened the possibility that they fall short of acting *hekousion* in relevantly different ways. The *ouk hekousion* agent is not distressed by the action that was done in ignorance, whereas the *akousion* agent finds the action done in ignorance distressing. Although these differences may not be relevant in legal settings, they are useful in our distribution of moral praise and blame. In this section I will consider whether the role of character in our evaluations of voluntariness is limited to circumstances involving ignorance.

The earlier portion of III.1 naturally divides into two sections, a discussion of actions resulting from force (*bia*) and those done under compulsion (*ananke*), which are also called “mixed actions.” Hursthouse thinks that the former – actions resulting from *bia* – easily conform to the *ouk hekousion/akousion* model developed later in Aristotle’s

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<sup>22</sup> Frank’s act can be described as the kind of thing he would have done had he known that Sean was strapped behind the target. This cannot be said of the shooter who regrets the murder.

discussion of ignorance.<sup>23</sup> Actions resulting from *bia* are those that an agent “does” when he is not in control of his physical body, such as when a stiff wind pushes him to a new location.<sup>24</sup> If we follow the line of thinking from cases of ignorance, then the agent acts *ouk hekousion* when he has no regret about the action. Thus, when he ended up at Ithaca – exactly where he wanted to go – he acted *ouk hekousion*, but landing on Ogygia – where he spent his day weeping – he acted *akousion*. If Aristotle is open to this distinction, why does he not bother to mention it? Hursthouse argues that his focus on *wrongdoing* overshadows his account. For this reason he is led to write “all *biaion* is painful” (1110b11), which is ridiculous if not confined to the wrongdoing an individual is forced to engage in. Why would landing on Ithaca be distressing?<sup>25</sup> Hursthouse thinks that Aristotle would agree that such actions are not painful and can be described as *ouk hekousion*. Although Hursthouse’s explanation is perhaps sufficient, it can also be noted that Aristotle correctly specifies the way most people are likely to experience most if not “all *biaion*.” The average person is not blown exactly where she wanted to go, at least not without some careful planning, and therefore most of the time experiences *bia akousion*. Aristotle ignores the cases where, for example, people are blown to a desired location, but it seems likely that he would admit such actions are performed in a different way. If

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<sup>23</sup> Hursthouse is quite confident of this similarity. She even groups the two together in a single section of her paper, “Actions done through ignorance and ‘acts’ that occur through force (*bia*)” (254).

<sup>24</sup> A modern reader probably may not think of this category as something an agent “does” at all. Aristotle is sensitive to this idea, pointing out that this is the kind of thing one “suffers” rather than performs (one is a *paschôn* rather than a *prattôn*, 1110a3), but that does not expel the category from the realm of action.

<sup>25</sup> It is of course not distressing, so long as we do not put too much weight on the idea of the *hekousion*. Modern commentators discussing something altogether different – as I have suggested before – may link pleasure to acting intentionally, as an actualization of our freedom.

the action that resulted from *bia* involved something relevant to the agent's virtue,<sup>26</sup> then regret (or the lack of regret) will be a reliable measure of the agent's character, which, in turn, separates the *ouk hekousion* from the *akousion*.

The second category of actions – “mixed actions” – is more difficult to set down. They can be recognized by two components; a) they are done with the agent in full control of her limbs (like *hekousion* actions), and b) considered absolutely (*haplos*) or in themselves (*kath' hauta*) they are *akousion* since no one would choose such a course of action “in itself.” Hursthouse demonstrates that the “obvious way to take [b] is] equally obviously wrong” (259). If all actions that are not done “for themselves” are *akousion*, then actions like “cutting a piece of meat” are *akousion*. Hursthouse prefers to read b) in a positive formulation. Rather than calling them actions that no one (rational) would choose, Hursthouse calls them actions that people avoid. Thus mixed actions are set down as a) within the physical control of the agent, and b) avoidance-worthy. Since the action is avoidance-worthy and within the control of the agent, these kinds of actions are only performed (wittingly) when the agent attains some benefit.

After describing what a “mixed action” is, Aristotle considers whether all such mixed actions can be compelled (*ananke*). Aristotle asserts: “There are, I suppose, some acts that cannot be compelled, but one must rather suffer the most terrible death” (1110a27). Hursthouse thinks there are two possible interpretations of this passage (261-262):

1) Aristotle may believe that his assertion establishes a technical definition of compulsion. In this case we might read the passage in this way, “No one can be

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<sup>26</sup> For example, a harsh wind might blow my hand into another's face.

compelled to do certain acts, for when confronted with these situations everyone chooses to suffer the most terrible death.” On the face of it this may seem absurd, for there are people who perform the heinous acts that Aristotle is referring to – namely, the people who fall short (through weakness of will or vice) of behaving virtuously. Thus, to be coherent, 1) must suggest that *compulsion* is not simply any motivation, but is the kind of motivation felt by virtuous people. We might rephrase the passage for clarity: “No one can be compelled to do certain acts, *since compulsion is felt only by virtuous people, and since a virtuous person would never perform heinous acts.*” The problem with this reading, according to Hursthouse, is that a person who feels compulsion may be determined, by the objective standard of virtue, not to have been compelled. Thus when Alcmaeon turns to his judges and pleads, “Look, I had to (I was necessitated to) kill my mother, because otherwise I would suffer the curse of my father,” they may find him guilty on the grounds that he was not compelled (necessitated) to kill his mother, although there was an external motivation (1109a28-29). 1) limits the term “*ananke*” to a certain kind of motivation felt only by virtuous people (or people feeling the way a virtuous person would). It is an external (or objective) account of compulsion, in that the agent deficient in character thinks he acts under a compulsion, but actually acts in accordance with some other kind of motivation. In other words, the agent’s *subjective experience of compulsion* does not imply that the agent was compelled.

2) Aristotle presumes his reader is either virtuous or someone interested in behaving virtuously (262). We would then read the passage in this way, “None of you people pursuing virtue can be compelled to do certain acts, but must rather suffer the most painful death.” People pursuing virtue must suffer death if it is the only way to

preserve their virtue. 2) places no limits on the kinds of things that people, in general, can be compelled to do, but suggests that those pursuing virtue cannot be overwhelmed by certain compulsions. Alcmaeon is correct to say that he was compelled to kill his mother, since he does subjectively experience compulsion, but he is wrong to think that compulsion absolves his guilt. People may act in accordance with their compulsions, but they still may be responsible for the actions they perform. Everyone has compulsions, but virtuous people have a particular kind.<sup>27</sup> Hursthouse calls this the “internal or personal” account of compulsion (262).

Hursthouse thinks there are complementary problems with 1), which hinge on the fact that according to this model one may *feel* compelled without *actually* being compelled – and be compelled although not feel compelled (263). Consider the man who submits to the law simply out of fear of suffering some punishment. If we use 1), the man cannot be said to be compelled to do what he does, for he does not follow the law for the same reason the virtuous person does.<sup>28</sup> He feels compelled, but, because of the technical definition of compulsion, is not. Second, “[s]uppose a tyrant threatens to kill my father if I do not submit to his perverted desires. Far from being faced with a dilemma I am, being licentious, delighted at the excuse to indulge in such practices without fear of reproach” (263). Although I do not feel any sense of compulsion, I am – by 1) – acting by some objective idea of compulsion. Hursthouse thinks it absurd to rule that the first is “uncompelled” while the second is “compelled.” It does not makes sense to say that the

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<sup>27</sup> It is important to note that virtuous people, within Aristotle’s framework, do not have the same compulsions as the rest of us. Virtuous people do not choose certain compulsions to act on and others to ignore, for this describes the behavior of the person who is merely *enkratês* (continent).

<sup>28</sup> Presumably the just/virtuous person does not follow the law simply to avoid punishment.

licentious person is “compelled” to do exactly what she finds delightful, just as it is ridiculous to say that the corrupt person (unhappily) acting within the law is not compelled. Hursthouse thinks 2), which avoids this trouble, is therefore the far better reading. If someone feels compelled, then they simply are compelled. The agent’s experience of compulsion is *all it is* to be compelled. Furthermore, Aristotle makes it clear that the *Nicomachean Ethics* is intended for exactly the audience 2) suggests, and not meant to help just anyone achieve happiness (*eudaimonia*), but just those who have been raised to be interested in pursuing virtue (1095b4-6).

2) allows Hursthouse to divide the mixed actions into two categories in a way that parallels the *ouk hekousion/akousion* distinction we used for cases of ignorance. The line is drawn based on the kind of compulsion different figures feel when, under one description, they perform the same action. Just as with ignorance, character, as it is revealed by the kinds of compulsion agents feel, is the critical factor that separates the two actions. Hursthouse offers some examples:

1(a): The virtuous cargo owner jettisons his cargo without hesitation or regret. Naturally he regrets the circumstances that make this necessary, but the cargo is, after all, worthless in comparison with the lives on board.

1(b): The illiberal cargo-owner, anxious to save his own skin, does the same, bitterly regretting the necessity and the fact that the captain could not be persuaded to throw the women and children overboard instead.

2(a): The courageous man does not endure [either] death [or] wounds *hekon* (3.ix), yet he presumably endures them gladly (or at least without distress 1104b7-8) when they are honourable and it is necessary.

2(b): The cowardly man likewise does not endure them *hekon*, and when compelled to do by his commander (3.vii) presumably does so *with* distress.

3(a): In a time of famine the virtuous person undermines his own health sharing the little food he has with his friends and family; he regrets the circumstances that make this necessary, but does it gladly all the same.

3(b): The non-virtuous person also goes without, but his reason is that a law has made it mandatory and the punishment for not obeying is death (265).

Since we can distinguish these figures, which indicates that the a) and b) groups are in each case doing different actions, both deserve their own name. Hursthouse suggests, if we want to follow the terms laid out by ignorance and *bia*, that we call the a-group *ouk hekousion* and the b-group *akousion*. Of course we can also divide them simply by acknowledging the difference between virtuous and non-virtuous compulsion. Virtuous people act because they “gain the good of acting well,” whereas “non-virtuous merely avoid a greater evil” (265).

Hursthouse’s argument against an external account – interpretation 1) – of compulsion is persuasive, and certainly the internal account she embraces coheres more easily to our colloquial use of ‘compulsion.’ Corrupt people *are* compelled to obey the law, even though they are compelled by different reasons than well-meaning citizens.<sup>29</sup> She is also right to note the discernible difference between the above a-group and b-group, and indeed, following Aristotle, it seems appropriate to give each a name of their own. However, I will demonstrate that the categories she builds are in direct conflict with Aristotle’s position and argue for a different understanding of the status of the “mixed” actions that are at issue here.

Hursthouse thinks one way to separate the a and b-groups is the *ouk hekousion/akousion* distinction. This reading is in direct conflict with Aristotle’s final word on mixed actions. Although there is a way in which mixed actions can be

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<sup>29</sup> This is what the positivist legal thinker H.L.A. Hart points out to his predecessor John Austin. *The Concept of Law: Second Edition*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 40.

considered *akousion*, for general purposes they should be treated as *hekousion* (1110b8-10). Hursthouse – perhaps – means to set down the a-group as a mixed *hekousion-ouk-hekousion* action and the b-group as a mixed *hekousion-akousion* action, but her designations are still misleading. Indeed, it seems unlikely that even this compromise is her view, when we consider her repeated position that “compelled actions” should receive pardons (262, 264, 265). Aristotle argues exactly the contrary – on balance, we should take mixed actions as *hekousion*, and therefore not worthy of a pardon (and *therefore* worthy of blame or praise even in the “quasi-legal” sense of responsibility).

Hursthouse’s second way of dividing the a and b-groups is equally difficult to harmonize with Aristotle. She suggests that virtuous and non-virtuous people are separated by the kinds of compulsions they feel. “[T]he virtuous find that honour or virtue necessitates their action; the non-virtuous that personal advantage or the avoidance of pain necessitates their [action]” (265). This may seem like an apt description of the gap between group-a and group-b, but Aristotle takes the time to refute the idea explicitly (1110b9-18). If noble and pleasant things compel virtuous people, then we must say that all the good actions relevant to our virtue are done in a state of compulsion – a position which he finds simply absurd.<sup>30</sup> Virtuous people are *not* compelled to do the virtuous things they do, but they simply do them because those actions are the kinds of things virtuous people do. That is not to say virtuous people are ambivalent about the issue, and they are certainly motivated, but they are not *compelled* by virtue to be virtuous.

Recognizing this fact will lead us to some interesting conclusions about how (and when)

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<sup>30</sup> Here more than anywhere else it is clear that Aristotle is unconcerned with modern conceptions of Intentionality/Freewill/Voluntariness in comparison to a deterministic model.

virtuous people feel compulsion. Hursthouse's reading of Aristotelian compulsion seems right; if someone feels compelled, they *are* compelled. However, since she thinks compulsion will absolve the agent of responsibility, she misses the interesting way compulsion is related to virtuous actions. If someone is compelled to do what a virtuous person would, then they are *not* acting through virtue (even if they end up doing the kind of thing a virtuous person does). This observation is critical not only because it allows us to separate the a and b-groups, but because it illustrates the (unique) way virtuous people feel compulsion.

The examples Hursthouse used can make this point more clearly. Consider the virtuous cargo owner and the illiberal cargo holder (1a and 1b). What exactly are these figures compelled to do? One way to recognize the kind of action each was compelled to perform is to look at what each agent regrets. The virtuous cargo owner regrets that he has run into these circumstances, but he has no regret about his response – throwing the cargo overboard to save the lives of the people onboard. The illiberal cargo holder also regrets the circumstances, but he additionally regrets throwing the cargo overboard to save the lives of the women and children. Of course, as we noted in the previous section, the way we “bundle” a description of the action makes a difference. We can truthfully describe both as being compelled to throw their cargo overboard, but such a description misses an important difference between the two figures. Both cargo owners are compelled to deal with the storm, but only the illiberal cargo owner is compelled to save the lives of the women and children. The virtuous cargo owner is just the kind of person who would like to preserve the lives of the women and children, and he therefore chooses to throw cargo overboard as a function of that value. The illiberal owner must be

compelled to value the lives of the children and women. That is, each figure is compelled to do the actions that his character feels distress about.

Hursthouse's perverted tyrant presents a complementary example. The virtuous person is compelled by her circumstances to submit to the tyrant's perverted desires, because she values the life of her father. She is not "compelled to save the life of her father," for she simply has the kind of character that values her father's life and is compelled to do certain actions that are in accordance with that value. If the licentious person happens to respect her father, then she probably feels no compulsion whatsoever in this situation. She is offered the opportunity to do something that does not distress her character (submit to the perverted desires of the tyrant), in order to save her father, which she also does not regret. Although if she is not simply licentious, but actually vicious, then she may feel compelled to save the life of her father (and therefore regret that action) but still save her father in the process of satisfying the desires of her (corrupted) character. Such a vicious person grudgingly saves the life of her father but happily submits to the tyrant's perverted desires.

Hursthouse's internal account of compulsion is persuasive, but she fails to recognize the ways people with certain characters feel compulsion. I have pointed out that Hursthouse suggests a reading of Aristotle that is explicitly refuted – compulsion is neither grounds for a pardon nor does it drive the virtuous to do their noble deeds. However, I think there are also positive reasons for my reading of compulsion, which are based on the idea that "compulsion" is not quite the correct, although commentators use it frequently, translation of *ananke* in this passage. A closer translation of *ananke*, and the translation used for most other passages in Greek literature, involves the concept of

“necessitation.” Hursthouse agrees that the translation “compulsion” is less than “ideal,” and finds it “unfortunate that ‘necessitation’ and ‘he is/was necessitated’ are so unnatural” (261). However, the difference in the English does not seriously confuse her argument. I do not think the word “compulsion” seriously confuses my argument either, although I think the better translation – necessitation – fits more neatly. I argue that in circumstances where virtue is relevant, virtuous people are not necessitated to do any particular action – but simply do the kind of action they judge (rightly) to be the right thing to do. On the other hand, people who have less than virtuous characters *are* necessitated to do the virtuous actions they perform. To summarize, virtuous people are not necessitated to do the kinds of things for which we call them virtuous, and people who fall short of virtue are not necessitated to do the kinds of things for which we refrain from calling them virtuous.

I do not mean to suggest that Hursthouse’s interpretive mistakes tear down what is central to her reading of III.1.<sup>31</sup> On the contrary, my argument is meant to strengthen Hursthouse’s assertion that we must consider the importance of character in Aristotle’s account of the *hekousion*. Looking at cases of ignorance informed us how character comes into play in actions done in ways short of the *hekousion*. Similarly, looking at mixed actions reveals the way character is involved in actions that are, on the whole, *hekousion*. Let us return to the examples Hursthouse offers. We are able to discern the difference between group-a and group-b, but now we must recognize that all these agents act *hekousion* and therefore must be awarded either praise or blame (that is, they are not suitable candidates for pardon). Each agent acts *hekousion* and does (in at least one way)

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<sup>31</sup> Hursthouse ignores that Aristotle believes: 1) the noble and the good do not necessitate action, and 2) an action that is necessitated (in the sense of *ananke*) is done *hekousion*.

the same action. However, we need not treat both the same, for group-b's "virtuous" actions are necessitated, and *for that* we can blame them even as we hold up group-a's actions in praise.

### *III: Hekousion and Intentionality*

In the previous two sections I have suggested that Aristotle does not introduce an inconsistency by asserting the existence of the *ouk hekousion*. I have followed Hursthouse in thinking that this extra designation reveals something important about Aristotle's conception of voluntariness, namely, that an agent's character is relevant. An agent performing an action that conflicts with his or her character *performs* a different action than the agent performing an action in accordance with his or her character. In the first section I suggested that this framework parallels why we think ignorance is relevant to voluntariness. Every action can be described in multiple ways, for example as a  $\phi$ -ing and a  $\psi$ -ing. Although " $\phi$ " and " $\psi$ " are said of the same action, one may still voluntarily  $\phi$  and involuntarily  $\psi$ . For example, Oedipus voluntarily strikes the man at the three-way junction, but involuntarily strikes his father. This example makes clear how our judgments about voluntariness are altered by a description, which involves bundling different bits of information relevant to Oedipus' knowledge. Bundling character in to the description of the action will also modify voluntariness, although in a way that is not useful in a legal setting. Considerations of character are instead helpful in making moral judgments about an agent, which in turn allows us to distinguish the virtuous and vicious person performing what appears to be the same action (e.g. both 1a and 1b from above can both be said to "jettison cargo to save lives," but we can still recognize a difference).

The position I have set out hopefully seems more intuitively correct, but there is also good reason to suspect my position is closer to the one Aristotle sets out to articulate in III.1. The alternative reading, which I illustrated with Bostock's remarks, creates a dissatisfying tension between the two halves of this short chapter. On the one hand Aristotle asserts that we must only make judgments about voluntariness with reference to the moment of action (*hote pratei*), but on the other hand Aristotle blatantly violates this rule by considering a decidedly post-action feeling, regret. We can resolve this tension by noticing that Aristotle's interest in regret is based in the observation that regret indicates something about the agent at the time of the action, namely the agent's character. Of course, for this position to be coherent, it must be shown how character is involved in our evaluations about voluntariness. This was the project of the previous two sections.

But what does it all matter? Even if I succeed in presenting a more accurate reading of Aristotle, should a modern audience care? The historian's stock answer is that there is intrinsic value in setting down the history of ideas more accurately, and one is either intellectually better off or can obtain some pleasure by making sense of these treatises. I have no intention of denying this value. However, there will always be those who insist that the history of ideas is important only in so far as it sheds light on current issues. In an attempt to satisfy these readers I will now turn to some recent discussions about intentionality as they are presented by "experimental philosopher" Joshua Knobe. I have refrained from translating *hekousion* as "intentionality" out of a suspicion that the modern philosophical term is used in a very different way than Aristotle uses "*hekousion*." However, I think it will become clear why the work Knobe does with "intentionality" is very different from its broad philosophical use.

Knobe's research lies at the intersection of psychology and philosophy, and he is particularly interested in thinking about how "folk psychology" might have other uses than "predicting, explaining and controlling behavior."<sup>32</sup> To demonstrate this possibility Knobe considers the common conception of what it means to describe an action as "intentional." Knobe primary goal is to show that folk psychology uses the concept of intentionality in ways that cannot be defined as predictive or explanatory. Although this explicit goal is tangential to the issues here at hand, Knobe's investigations of the concept of intentionality are relevant because Knobe argues that the concept of intentional action is "used in the process by which people assign praise and blame" (227). It may come as no surprise that Aristotle, a philosopher who has gained a reputation for creating a philosophy of common sense, will be relevant to a philosophical interpretation of folk psychology.

Knobe bases his argument on empirical data that he collects through his own studies. He sets out to examine whether "moral considerations" alter people's intuitions about intentional action. Two chairmen, equally driven by a desire to increase profits, were presented to the participants of the study. The first chairman is informed that a new program about to be implemented will increase profits and also harm the environment (205). The second chairman is informed that a new program about to be implemented will increase profits and also help the environment (206). Both chairmen express their ambivalence about the environment and order the new programs to be administered. The information turns out to be reliable, and the first chairman's program increases profits and harms the environment, whereas the second chairman's program increases profits and

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<sup>32</sup> Joshua Knobe. "The Concept of Intentional Action: A Case Study in the Uses of Folk Psychology." *Philosophical Studies*. V. 130. (2006), p. 203.

helps the environment. The participants were asked if the first chairman “*intentionally* harmed the environment,” to which most respondents said yes (206). However, when asked if the second chairman “*intentionally* helped the environment,” most respondents said no (206). Indeed, the asymmetry was rather drastic: 83% said the first chairman intentionally harmed the environment, whereas only 23% said the second chairman intentionally helped the environment (206). In addition, these asymmetric results could be recreated in other studies that alter the cultural context or age of the subject as well as various incidental details of the story (207). People might be expected to use the term “intentionality” in different ways: a) someone does  $x$  “intentionally” so long as she does  $x$  “knowledgably”; b) someone does  $x$  “intentionally” so long as she sets out to do  $x$ ; or c) someone does  $x$  “intentionally” so long as she sets out to do  $x$  and does  $x$  knowledgably. However, it would also be expected that individuals would use a), b) or c) consistently, at least when the cases are so similar.<sup>33</sup>

The data suggest to Knobe that the concept of intentional action in folk psychology is not primarily concerned with predicting, controlling and explaining behavior, since these “scientific goals” would not be altered by moral issues (207). After doing a survey of interpretations that ultimately fail, Knobe puts forward his own explanation of this asymmetry; the concept of intentional action is used as a tool “for determining how much praise or blame an agent deserves for her behaviors” (222), or in other words, “people’s intentional action intuitions tend to track the psychological features that are most relevant to praise and blame judgment” (225). All of the above,

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<sup>33</sup> Anyone using just one of these conceptions of intentionality would be consistent across the cases. People who believe in a) would think both chairmen act intentionally, and supporters of b) or c) would think the both chairmen acted unintentionally.

including the empirical data, fits well with what Aristotle argues – as I will explain below – but Knobe’s final conclusions veer sharply off course. He argues:

[T]hat we use different psychological features when we are (a) trying to determine whether or not an agent deserves blame for her bad behaviors from the ones we use when we are (b) trying to determine whether or not an agent deserves praise for her good behaviors (226).

This is one way to make sense of the asymmetric data. When confronted with the first chairman the person notices that the behavior itself, harming the environment, was bad. When a person is confronted with bad behavior – behavior that is a candidate for blame – foresight is a sufficient indication of intention. Therefore the first chairman harmed the environment intentionally. However, in cases of good behavior foresight is not a sufficient indication of intention, so there is no reason to praise the second chairman, who did not intentionally help the environment. All of this comes down to a thesis that we are quicker to blame than we are to praise: “people are far more inclined to give the agent [blame] for a side-effect when they regard that side-effect as bad than [give praise] when they regard it as good” (224). Although Knobe’s interpretation makes sense of the data, I will suggest that the new asymmetry it raises – the different criteria for the praiseworthy and blameworthy – is as odd as the original asymmetry. Aristotle can help us out of this problem.

Let us begin by acknowledging the degree to which Knobe’s work fits well with Aristotle. If we follow the reading that I have been suggesting, then the original asymmetry of the respondents’ answers is unsurprising. Although the two chairmen can be described as doing the same action – implementing a new program that increases profits regardless of the effect on the environment – they are different kinds of agents doing different actions. Both fall short of behaving virtuously, but they do so in different

ways. Although my argument ultimately suggests that mixed actions, like those of the chairmen, land on the side of *hekousion* action, it is unsurprising to find people noting the difference of the chairmen with respect to intentionality. The respondents were of course limited to a simple yes or no answer, and most chose to split the difference – yes, the one harming the environment acted intentionally; but no, the environmental helper did not act intentionally. The respondents were given two different figures, and two different options. As Aristotle points out, it makes sense to give different names to what is noticeably different. I would suggest that Knobe’s data is most interesting because respondents thought the two chairmen were *different* with respect to intentionality, rather than because respondents specifically thought the environmentally helpful chairman was acting *unintentionally* and the environmentally harmful chairman was acting *intentionally*. Since they thought the chairmen were different in respect to intentionality, and they were offered only two choices, they made use of those two options.

Furthermore, if we sat down with the respondents and asked them to think about the data, I think it is likely that most respondents would be able to understand why these results are “strange,” “surprising,” and “puzzling” (205, 207, 224). Indeed, the readership of the New York Times was expected to observe immediately the puzzling asymmetry.<sup>34</sup> All of this suggests that although we are quick to notice that these chairmen act differently with respect to intentionality, we may not be ready to expel the environmentally helpful chairman from the realm of intentional action. We simply do not think the second chairman acts intentionally in the way the environmental harmer does. The data suggests

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<sup>34</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah. “The New New Philosophy.” *The New York Times*. December 9, 2007.

that there are some shades to intentional action, just as I have argued in the previous section.

If Knobe's data agree with the idea that intentional action comes in shades, does it also agree with the general categories that I have laid out, which use the character of the agent to indicate something about voluntariness? Certainly the first chairman falls into a familiar category of the *hekousion*, one in which one's character is not distressed by the action. Therefore, he will receive our unrestrained praise or blame depending on whether the action is good or bad (in this case he will receive blame, since hurting the environment is bad). In my terms, the first chairman has not been necessitated to do any part of his action, for he is *characteristically* going to harm the environment and create profits.<sup>35</sup> The second chairman has the same character, but ends up performing the action differently with respect to voluntariness. He characteristically makes profit and in the process of that action is necessitated to help the environment. In our moral estimation, actions that are necessitated do not count as intentional, which leads the respondents to say the chairman did not help the environment intentionally. The two chairmen may seem like an extension of the theory because Hursthouse and Knobe choose to use different constants. Hursthouse examines two agents whose actions are externally the same, but whom we can differentiate through considerations of their character (for example, the a

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<sup>35</sup> This assumes that someone who has a character that leads him to be ambivalent about the environment will tend to harm the environment. That is, I take ambivalence about the environment to be something like ambivalence about, for example, killing one's parents. In the first section of my discussion I suggested it makes as little sense to treat Oedipus like someone who does not regret killing his father and marring his mother in ignorance as it does to treat him like someone who knowingly killed his father and married his mother.

and b-groups in the previous section). On the other hand Knobe considers two agents whose characters are the same but can be differentiated by the results of their actions.

Knobe's experiment and my reading of Aristotle agree that intention figures prominently in the way people assign praise or blame. His data can be interpreted in line with a concept of intentional action that considers an agent's character. From here we can get a clear view of what I suggested was Knobe's mistake. Knobe looks at the data and notices that in these cases respondents were reluctant to assign praise and quick to hand out blame, and therefore concludes that different criteria are being used to make judgments of blame and praise. Knobe summarizes the view I am rejecting, "[P]eople are far more inclined to give the agent [blame] for a side-effect when they regard that side-effect as bad than [give praise] when they regard it as good" (224). This may or may not be true, but the chairmen experiment does not speak to this. If Aristotle is right, then it is not the case that people are simply quicker to blame, but it is rather that the first chairman, because his action is wholly intentional, is *more* morally responsible for his action than the second chairman. Our reluctance to praise the second chairman is not a function of being reluctant to praise *per se*, but is a reluctance to praise *this* action, since the agent acts in a way that is less than wholly intentional (although it meets the general criteria for intentional action). Knobe's mistake is probably a function of his limited focus on this particular study, which considers two figures with equally corrupt characters. After all, it seems perfectly natural that it is "easier" to blame than praise

corrupt characters. However, my argument also suggests that we would be “quicker” to praise than blame virtuous characters, which again seems perfectly natural.<sup>36</sup>

The argument I present here leaves Knobe’s larger project – to demonstrate that folk psychology could do more than predict and explain behavior – intact. However, Knobe’s work offers two opportunities to the Aristotelian scholar. First of all, Knobe’s empirical study supplies useful support to the interpretation of Aristotle I have presented, and suggests that Aristotle’s theory got something *correct* about the *hekousion*. Furthermore, the work done in the interpretation of ancient texts is not isolated to a realm of irrelevance. Aristotle’s insights about the *hekousion* have bearing on what a modern philosopher has to say about intentionality. Character, in our evaluations of moral action, has a role in the *hekousion*.

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<sup>36</sup> Knobe does mention another study of his own that focus on people who are morally good. In this case 92% of respondents thought the good person acted intentionally when the action was good, thereby confirming what I suggest here. Knobe perhaps ignores this finding because he is focused on another aspect of the study, which was meant to test whether we think an agent “intentionally” does an action if he does not have sufficient capacities to accomplish that action (and therefore accomplishes the feat on account of some luck) (211).

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Word List:

<i>akousion, akôn</i>	Involuntary
<i>ananke</i>	Compulsion, necessitation
<i>bia</i>	Force
<i>eleos</i>	Pity
<i>enkratês</i>	Self-Controlled, continent
<i>eudaimonia</i>	Happiness
<i>haplôs</i>	Absolutely, without qualification
<i>hekousion, hekôn</i>	Voluntary
<i>kath' hautô</i>	In itself
<i>metameleia</i>	Regret
<i>miasma</i>	Pollution
<i>moira</i>	Fate
<i>ouk hekousion</i>	Not Voluntary
<i>sungnômê</i>	Pardon (sometimes sympathy)