C. Baracchi (ed.), Bloomsbury Companion to Aristotle, 227-240. Bloomsbury: New York/London.

11

THE VISIBILITY OF GOODNESS

1

The main objective of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is to examine how one should acquire and actualize the appropriate intellectual and ethical virtues in order to accomplish morally good actions (*praxeis*). In this line of argument, Book VI is devoted to explaining how practical wisdom (*phronêsis*) and ethical virtues depend upon each other and furthermore, not to say principally, how they constitute the necessary and sufficient conditions for a good action to be performed: if the agent possesses ethical virtues and practical wisdom, the actions he brings forth are necessarily good. *A complementary approach* is, however, required, since moral action does not merely constitute the outcome of a deliberate choice (*prohairesis*) of the agent occurring within his psychê but, at the same time, an "event in the world"[1] accessible to external observers who are invited to appraise "from without," so to speak, whether an action is really and fully good or not. If this appraisal were not possible, no genuine kind of praise and blame—which are, according to Aristotle, core constituents of moral experience—would be possible either.[2]

The question as to whether or not moral actions are susceptible of being properly appraised "from without" underlies the much-debated distinction between agent-centered and act-centered virtue-ethics that is grounded in the following assumption: two actions can share the same external side, though they represent the outcome of two different intentions (motives, desires, etc.) or, more accurately, characters. True moral intentions involve questions of moral decision implicating the principles to which the agent adheres and, consequently, depend on what kind of character he really has (1144a18).[3] Therefore, decisions, motives, desires, etc. are not taken to be detectable from the objective side of a *single* action; instead, in order to correctly appraise moral actions, one should *also* know "the motive[s], intention[s], emotion[s] and desire[s], [that is to say] the agent's inner moral life."[4] As far as this picture goes, the character of the agent cannot be displayed and recognized, let alone evaluated, unless one observes him acting several times (or rather, throughout his whole life) and in difficult circumstances (or rather, in circumstances in which he encounters serious dilemmas and experiences inner conflicts).

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In what follows, I will argue that the previous account is out of tune with Aristotle's ethics. Needless to say, I do not mean to maintain that external observers can unambiguously recognize whether a moral action is "really and fully good" or not. I only mean to clarify the nature of this ambiguity, by demonstrating that, according to Aristotle, the goodness of moral actions does *not* display any specific kind of *ambiguity or invisibility*. To support my thesis further, I will conclude by highlighting the way in which *the visibility of goodness* is thematized and praised by Aristotle as a practical desideratum met by two major ethical virtues related to others (*pros heteron*), namely, by friendship (*philia*) and magnanimity (*megalopsuchia*).

2[5]

Accessibility to external observers becomes puzzling inasmuch as one is usually inclined to dissociate the alleged goodness of actions from the goodness of the agents themselves:

> Actions are called just or temperate when they are the sort that a just or temperate agent would have realized, whereas the just and temperate agent is not the one who realizes these actions, but the one who also realizes his actions in the way in which just or temperate agents do. (1105b5–9)

In other words, the goodness of actions cannot be appraised in its full and real significance unless one takes into consideration the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom and the ethical virtues of the agent. Conversely, these virtues are defined not by reference to the actions themselves (which would be circular), but by reference to deliberate choice (*prohairesis*), the latter being defined as "desire combined with thought" (1139b5).

It is worth emphasizing that what Aristotle is envisaging here is the confusion about the goodness of actions (namely, its being true or merely apparent) to which *the external observers* of actions fall prey. By contrast, from the first-person perspective, the distinction between true and apparent goodness is formulated in terms of "apparent good" (*phainomenon agathon*). Once this confusion has been clarified (i.e. once it has been explained that nonfully virtuous agents do not accomplish really good actions), however, accessibility to external observers becomes more and more awkward, since it is at odds with the undeniable empirical truth that external observers have no access to the practical principles and the ends taken into consideration by the agent himself when he acts (of course the agent too may have defective access to his ends and principles but for different reasons).

But is an appraisal of the genuine goodness of actions by external observers really possible? It *should* be possible precisely because the goodness of deliberate choice and, hence, the actuality of intellectual and ethical virtues,[6] evaporates once deliberate choices are dissociated from the corresponding actions. True, Aristotle often detaches deliberate choice from actions in order to maintain that the former, rather than the latter, constitutes the proper criterion certifying the actuality of ethical virtues: "[deliberate choice] seems to be a better criterion to discern (*krinein*) ethical characters than the actions are" (1111b6; see also 1163a22–3). Nevertheless, it is equally true that disconnecting deliberate choices from the corresponding actions induces serious misunderstandings since deliberate choice

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itself has moral relevance only as the efficient cause of action:

> deliberate choice is the starting-point (*archê*) of action—that from which and not that for the sake of which (*hou heneka*) the motion is. (1139a31–2)

Consequently, deliberate choices themselves are morally relevant only as embodied in actions, since goodness is not an attribute to be assigned to mere deliberate choice irrespective of the action accomplished.[7] The ultimate practical end, that is, the good proper to the moral realm, is acting-well (1140b7). By contrast, according to the previous passage, deliberate choice is not an end and, thus, cannot count as an action either. Hence, neither deliberate choice per se (which proves to be morally irrelevant) nor action per se (conceded that the goodness of action presupposes the goodness of the correlate deliberate choice), but only actions as the vehicle for deliberate choices instantiate the goodness one ascribes to the virtuous agent. Thus, the real target of Aristotle's argument cannot be that deliberate choices, instead of actions, attest to the goodness of character.[8] Actions fail to constitute evidence of the actuality of goodness, therefore, only if one falls prey to the error of conceiving the goodness of actions in dissociation from deliberate choices. That is to say, only insofar as one assumes that actions that originate in different deliberate choices may, nonetheless, share the *same* objective side. In reality, the objective sides of two actions that originate in different deliberate choices are *only apparently* the same. Once this confusion is dispelled, actions do constitute the requisite sort of evidence. Likewise, the passage about temperate and just men (1105b5–9) should not be considered to show that just agents realize actions that meet two conditions, namely, to be *externally* good and to be also *fully* good. Aristotle rather says that just agents are just only if they realize *actions* and realize them on the base of a correct deliberate choice. Significantly, Aristotle concludes his argument by blaming whomever abstains from action "by taking refuge in arguments" (1105b13). Hence, the previous passage does not mean to define what a good action is but to explain how good actions are possible.[9] And they are possible only by being realized by virtuous persons.

3

Obviously, morally different outcomes might seem to be identical. Nonetheless, so I will argue, that apparent sameness does *not* constitute a peculiarity proper to moral actions (i.e. a peculiarity due to the implication of "invisible" intentions, desires, motives, etc.) but holds true of productions (*poiêseis*) too. I begin by quoting two well-known passages that might seem to provide a basis for the misleading interpretation I intend to revise:

> Moreover, the case of crafts is not similar to that of the virtues. For what is generated by the crafts has its goodness in itself, since it is enough if it is generated to be in a certain state. By contrast, what is generated in accord with the virtues is not an action of justice or temperance if it is in a certain state, but under the further condition that the agent is in a certain state when he acts: first, that he acts with knowledge, second, that he has deliberately chosen the action and deliberately chosen it for its own sake, and third, that he acts while being in a solid and unchangeable state. (1105a26–33)
>
> As some people, we maintain, perform just actions and yet are not just

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> (for instance, those who do (*poiountas*) what the law enjoins either unwillingly or in ignorance or for some ulterior goal and not for the sake of the actions themselves, although they are as a matter of fact performing the actions they ought to perform and what the good person should), likewise there is a state enabling the agent to act in each case in a way that renders him good. (1144a13–19)

At first sight, it seems that Aristotle demarcates a radical distinction between action and production, since two moral agents, although they each are in a different ethical state, might accomplish a seemingly identical action. Hence, it is not sufficient for observers to certify that one has accomplished what the virtuous person should have done in the same circumstances but, in addition to that, one should also know the kind of character the agent has. Consequently, judgment about actions cannot restrict itself to observing external outcomes, since these are ambiguous and cannot display in themselves the moral worth either of the agent or of the action. Furthermore, this ambiguity appears to be a point of difference vis-à-vis products. Thus, one commonly reads that the aforementioned passages either mirror "Kant's distinction of legality and morality" (by presupposing that different intentions result in similar worldly actions, as the reference to justice and law might also imply), or testify to the "doctrine of the two components of virtuous action, that is, the subjective intention and the objective work" and, in more neutral terms, that the virtuous and the nonvirtuous person "(in a sense) do the same thing but with a different intention."[10]

The previous formulations are, however, misleading in that they take for granted the *sharp disparity* between actions and productions with respect to their ambiguity or invisibility from outside the agent.

To refute that *alleged* sharp disparity, *one should first refute the hypothesis that products are unambiguous and univocal entities manifested as such before our eyes*. Even though our recognizing them as products is equivalent to our detecting in them the actuality of the process from which they spring, Aristotle clearly maintains that the same beings might constitute either products of craft (*technê*) or the outcome of chance (*tuchê*) and of nature. The previous passage from Book II provides us with a clear testimony in this direction:

> it is possible to produce something grammatical either by chance (*apo tuchês*) or by following someone else's instructions. Someone will be a grammarian, then, if he both produces something grammatical and produces it grammatically—that is to say, produces it in accord with the craft knowledge of grammar internal to him. (1105a22–6)

Hence, the whole discussion of ethical virtues and their being accessible to external observers begins by pointing out not the disparity but the continuity between actions and productions.[11]

Indeed, "chance is the cause of some things of which craft is equally the cause" (*Rhetoric* 1362a2; see also *NE* 1140a18–20). In order to illuminate the theoretical thesis lurking under this strange affirmation we must turn to a discussion in the *Physics*. There Aristotle says that we treat chance and spontaneity (*automaton*)[12] *as if* they represented a purposive activity if and only if their results might have also been the outcome of human activities. In case someone comes to the market for some other reason and then happens to meet his debtor and recover his debt, we should say that "the recovering of his debt was not an end involved in the causes themselves of

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the action, but was yet of the class of things that may be the result of deliberate choice and reason" (*Phys*. 197a1–3). That is why chance and spontaneity are *accidental* causes regarding what might also have been done of its own sake. By which he means that they are not genuinely explanatory per se causes (*haplôs*) of the result we attribute to them.

All this is familiar ground to the readers of Aristotle's *Physics*. Nevertheless, as far as I know, no one has sufficiently exploited the idea that the products of craft do not bear in themselves any sign that could prove without a shadow of doubt that they are the outcome of production and craft. A correct harp performance, for example, consisting of the skillful production of certain sounds and the accidental production of exactly similar sounds as a result of chance may be indistinguishable. Hence, a correct series of sounds produced on the harp is not necessarily a correct product of craft. The resulting ambiguity inherent in products culminates in the fact that they harbor their goodness in themselves, thereby making room for two different sorts of correctness: the correctness of harp performance in general (which is attributable, indifferently, either to production or to chance) and the *poietical* correctness of the same performance. The first resides in the product irrespective of how it has been generated, whereas the second necessitates the reference to a possessor of the relevant craft.[13] Aristotle claims that, although the general notion of correctness derives its meaning from the technical one, the difference between these two crystallizations of goodness is not detectable in the things themselves.

The previous point may be strengthened. There is a large amount of evidence showing that the ambiguity in how one can recognize technical products from without permeates the realm of the crafts. Let me give, indicatively, three such cases expressly thematized by Aristotle: First, when an observer encounters a product already accomplished, he cannot be confident either about the skills actually displayed by the particular producer[14] or about *which kind* of skills and *which kind* of craft is really the efficient cause of the goodness of the product in question. As Aristotle puts it, "a badly constructed ship often sails better though not because of itself but because it has a good steersman" (*Eudemian Ethics* 1247a25–6). Second, a glimpse at the previous passage from the *NE* (1105a22–6) proves that when one encounters a certain product already accomplished, one cannot judge whether the possessor of the required craft coincides with the actual producer of the product in question. That is to say, although the actualization of craft is a sine qua non for a genuine *poiêton* to be brought forth, the actual producer of this particular product may not necessarily possess the required craft-knowledge[15]: he may be a learner or a low-level-artisan guided by the craftsmaster or he may act under compulsion. Third, when one encounters a product already accomplished, one cannot always be in a position to certify its being the outcome of craft at all. This time, ambiguity is not the result of the intervention of chance but of the way we apprehend nature in terms of causality. In the *Metaphysics* VI.9, we are told that certain products of craft could have been generated by nature. Aristotle's example is that health might be either the product of medicine or the product of nature itself (1034a9–10; see also: *Physics* VIII.2, 199a12–13).

When viewed from the outside, therefore, products of craft do not unambiguously display the skills of their producers. Nevertheless, external observers experience

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this ambiguity without assuming that it is somehow due to the invisibility of the "inner self" of the producers. Instead of invoking impediments of psychological nature,[16] *the ambiguity in question testifies to a world harboring chance as accidental cause and supplying nature and human beings with a shared scene to generate their products*.

On the basis of the previous analysis of the realm of craft, I will argue that the ambiguity as to how external observers appraise whether a morally relevant action is fully or only seemingly good *is not different in kind from the ambiguity proper to our understanding of products of craft* and, hence, is not due to the *alleged exceptional invisibility* of the intentions of the agents either.

I will begin by recalling the parenthetical clause appearing in the passage from Book VI (1144a13–19). It is plain that Aristotle names here two kinds of outcomes that do not constitute fully good actions, namely, involuntary actions, such as actions performed under compulsion or through ignorance, and actions that are performed for the sake of a different end, such as a just action performed for the sake of pleasure. Although these two kinds of actions are morally different and merit a totally different assessment, they enjoy here a common status in that they represent *accidental* outcomes. In fact, in opposition to the enigmatic formulations of 1144a, Book V.8 establishes a neat distinction between *adikêma*, that is the proper outcome of voluntary actions, and *adikon*, that is what only seems to be the result of a voluntary action without really being one. In this context, Aristotle demarcates further distinctions that nicely mirror the parenthetical clause previously quoted. On the one hand,

> One does injustice or justice whenever one does these actions voluntarily. For when one does these actions involuntarily, one neither does justice or injustice except accidentally (*kata sumbebêkos*) (1135a16–18; see also 1135b5–6)

What matters here, as it concerns the accessibility to external observers, is that the outcomes of the involuntary actions are *accidentally* good actions, as Aristotle repeats five times within the same paragraph (1135a18; a26; b3; b6; b7–8). Seemingly good state-of-affairs may be the outcome of involuntary activities and, hence, although "something unjust may happen" (1135a22–3), there is no true case of injustice and no reason to blame the agent. On the other hand,

> [If one acts] in knowledge but without previous deliberation (*mê probouleusas*), he does an action of injustice; [. . .] and his actions are actions of injustice, but he is not thereby unjust or wicked, because the harm is not out of wickedness. By contrast, whenever his action is out of deliberate choice, he is unjust and wicked (1135b19–25).

This time, the distinction being drawn holds true within the category of voluntary actions. An unjust outcome corresponds to an action of injustice, but an action of injustice is not unambiguously the action of an unjust agent (that is to say, it may be termed unjust only homonymously). The agent is unjust when injustice is something he decides on ("out of deliberate choice", 1136a1) in order to accomplish his ends. It is true that Book V identifies actions that are not done from deliberation as being motivated "by anger or other passions" (1135b20–1). These actions, however, are opposed to actions done out of deliberate choice, that is, to actions done "for the sake of the actions themselves"—an opposition that is again reminiscent of the

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previously quoted parenthetical key-phrase from Book VI.[17] The actions of injustice that are not done "out of deliberate choice" are accidental too, in the sense that they do not originate in the true character of the agent. That is why, even though he has performed them, the agent is not considered to be unjust or wicked, since we cannot explain the action in question by reference to the agent's character as being its origin.

Admittedly, Aristotle's analysis of the distinction between really good actions and seemingly good actions is not carried out in terms of chance but of accidental causes and results and, hence, it might appear that the ambiguity proper to actions is different in kind from the ambiguity proper to products of craft. But these two approaches are anything but irreconcilable, since chance is an accidental cause. More importantly, similar distinctions are employed by Aristotle when he considers the role of chance and of nature in the realm of moral actions. I am referring to the well-known passage from the *EE* 1246b37–1248b7.[18]

Here, first, Aristotle envisages a natural disposition that makes people hit on the right action from impulse, though they lack practical wisdom (*aphrones*). In such cases, one should say that people are not *eutucheis* (lucky) in the literal sense of the word but rather of good nature (*euphueis*). On the basis of the comparison between moral action and craft figuring in the text (*EE* 1247a21ff.), it is legitimate to argue that, in parallel with what happens in the case of health, Aristotle examines here how natural processes and human actions may result in the same effect. In both cases, namely, in action and in production, nature is considered a cause "in" things (namely, in agents and products respectively). But whereas in the case of productions nature denotes the way in which matter might initiate its own motion without any intervention of the producer, in the realm of actions nature seems to denote the way in which ethical states initiate deliberate choice without any intervention of practical wisdom.

Second, Aristotle also refers to the case of someone who acts contrary to any natural good disposition and, nevertheless, realizes good actions only *by chance* (*apo tuchês* or *dia tuchên*), even though "he wanted another good, or a smaller one, than he got" (*EE* 1247b32–3). Beyond the strong differences in style, concepts and arguments, it is easy to recognize that the latter case corresponds to what the *NE* takes to be an action done by accident. It is also revealing that chance is here explained by reference to the case of crafts and, in particular, to the example of shipbuilding I pointed to earlier. For the purposes of my present argument, it is enough to emphasize that in the *EE* Aristotle explains the implication of chance in the realm of morally relevant actions in the same terms in which he often explains the role of chance in our understanding of products as well as the role of accidental causes in our understanding of seemingly good actions.

Hence, there is no critical difference between actions and productions here—their only critical difference regards the role of compulsion that I put aside for reasons of space. The crucial issue is that the inconclusiveness or ambiguity proper to the way we understand the outcomes of production and action does not mirror our incapacity to unfold, respectively, the skills of the producers and the intentions, desires, motives, etc. of the agents—thereby crediting the invisibility proper to the "inner moral life" of moral agents with a distinct status—but *reflects an ambiguity of the world*, in that it harbors accidental causes and chance.[19]

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In order to strengthen my thesis, I will subsequently bring the focus on the visibility of the goodness proper to ethical virtues, a sort of visibility that is already implied by Aristotle's conception of the good in terms of the fine, *to kalon*: "*to kalon* is the end (*telos*) of [ethical] virtue" (1115b13).[20] Actually, Aristotle's ideals of friendship (*philia*) and magnanimity (*megalopsychia*) constitute *a praise of visibility*. This is hardly astonishing. Visibility to external observers presupposes a relation to others grounded in the recognition of their ethical virtues—whereas justice does not always take agent's virtues into consideration—and, furthermore, a kind of politics inherent, so to speak, in the ethical life.

4.1

Notwithstanding the deep perplexities of the matter, I assume that there is not much doubt about a critical feature that Aristotle attributes to perfect friendships, namely, *reciprocal visibility*. In fact, Aristotle defines perfect friendships in terms of a mutual access friends have to the true principles upon which their actions are grounded. Let it be briefly examined how visibility is implicated in this context:

(1) friendship is distinguished from goodwill (*eunoia*), their difference being precisely reduced to the fact that goodwill entails a deficient visibility, since it is directed even toward strangers or since it might not be perceived by the person concerned (1166b31) or even lack any mutual awareness (1156a2–5). This deficiency is inescapable to the extent that goodwill gets growing irrespectively of whether one observes or not the actions of the other.

(2) Perfect friendship is defined as mutual access to the true moral identity of friends, that is, to the principles by which their deliberate choices and actions are motivated and, what is more, this true access is what Aristotle again and again reminds us of in order to distinguish perfect friendship from the lower kinds of friendships: within perfect friendships, friends are visible in themselves (1156a11), in what the friend consists in (a16), for being what precisely he is (a18). Throughout, perfect friendship presupposes that friends mutually display and recognize their true selves; furthermore, this visibility proves to be even more perfect than what the isolated agents might have ever attained in privacy (1170a1–8).

(3) Flourishing by definition only between virtuous persons, perfect friendship appears to be not only grounded upon common principles (this seems to hold for every kind of friendship; 1156a9–10), but upon the principles only virtuous persons unmistakably and permanently recognize (1156b7–9). This unequivocal visibility, not to say transparency, of principles hinges on the identity of the principles virtuous friends are inspired by. This Aristotelian thesis culminates in the assumption that, provided that they share the same principles, it is indifferent which among the friends will bring forth the very *realization* of a particular action (1169a32–4).

(4) Perfect friendship is a kind of a broad common space of shared actions (1167a1–2) displaying the common principles their friendship is ani[illegible]d by. Once these principles become invisible or disappear, that is, once the virtue of friends becomes doubtful, perfect frien[illegible]ps cannot be sustained any more and vanishes (1165b). That is to say, perfect friendships exist inasmuch as they live up to the expectations nurtured within a space of mutual visibility; by contrast, not visibility but utility is the criterion for lower forms of friendship to uphold or vanish.

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(5) Visibility in friendship is a genuine source of pleasure: "someone's own being is choiceworthy because he perceives that he is good, and such a perception is pleasant in itself. Therefore, he must also perceive his friend being (existing) and this will come about through living together and sharing conversation and thought" (1170b8–12). Waive for now all reservations as to this much-disputed passage;[21] it is at least clear that visibility within perfect friendships presupposes or consists in the *visibility of goodness*, in the sense that the actions and the sayings of my friend constitute definite embodiments of goodness.

Admittedly, Aristotle's analysis fosters the impression that perfect friendship ascertains the accuracy of the claim—commonly made by virtue-ethics—that goodness is fully visibly only when we know in advance or verify over and over again the character of the agent. On this account, perfect friendship flourishes only on the ground of an already established shared life of actions and is conditioned by the common—already established too—good principles, intentions, motives, etc. of the friends. Part of the problem here is that, by considering ethical goodness as being the foundation of perfect friendship (i.e. of visibility), one relegates friendship to a simple supplement to goodness and deprives it of any critical ethical worth.[22] To mitigate the effects of this undesirable conclusion, the issue of the philosophical friendship put aside, one should qualify the aforementioned prevailing interpretation.[23] Indeed, it is possible to argue that visibility itself, far from being reduced to an external adjunct to goodness, is rather raised by Aristotle to a *criterion for goodness*, by which I mean that only whoever is visible in his true self (1156a11, 16, 18; see also: *EE* 1237b3–5) can be virtuous too (while the inferior forms of friendship give access to a mere aspect of our friend's self on account of what appears to be the present-circumstantial source of the benefit we are after). Besides, perfect friendship does not require the friends to be perfectly good. Otherwise, friendship could never fulfill its mission to serve as a source of mutual assistance with a view at correcting the ethical imperfection of the friends (1165b19). What is required between perfect friends is their being recognizable (i.e. visible) in themselves (1165b20–2). According to this reading, friendship delineates the space within which visibility and, hence, complete goodness becomes possible in the first place. As far as this picture goes, a shared life is not necessary for friends in order for their true character to be progressively unveiled but in order for visibility to be constantly actualized. In other words, visibility and goodness depend on each other.

4.2

And yet perfect friendship represents neither the only *topos* wherein visibility of goodness is tangible nor the most prominent one. Aristotle's demand for visibility is paradigmatically satisfied by the virtue of magnanimity.

This virtue is much-debated too, attached as it is to a variety of interpretive questions.[24] It is, however, prudent to take Aristotle's words at face value when he says that magnanimity "is a sort of ornament of the virtues" (1124a1). Indeed, magnanimity is a very odd virtue, since it refers to the other virtues and not to further incidents of action. This becomes apparent once we realize, on the one hand, that magnanimity is conditioned by the acquisition of the other virtues and even, no matter how rare it might be, of the "complete virtue" (1124a28–9; 1123b29)

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and, on the other, that its function consists in "making them (i.e. the virtues) greater" (1124a2). That is why it is closely connected with the fine, *to kalon*. Before I venture to cope with the inner perplexities of magnanimity by reducing them to the inner logic of visibility, let me clarify in advance that magnanimity exemplifies Aristotle's praise for visibility not to the extent that it demonstrates an alleged unambiguous access to goodness, but insofar as it clarifies that visibility is both a necessary feature of goodness and an achievement goodness should aspire to. It is now time to proceed in describing magnanimity in five steps:

(1) It is worth noticing that magnanimity refers to a *claim* and not to an object or an external good: "magnanimous persons claim (*axiousin*) to be worthy of honor" (1123b23).[25] Claiming the honor they deserve (honor being the Greek equivalent of public recognition) is tantamount to claiming public visibility. Given that the reference to a claim (1123b2) is reiterated by Aristotle at several places, it would really be an astonishing error (recurrent though it is) to maintain that magnanimity is in search of honor: not only is honor the proper object of another virtue, namely of *philotimia*—not only is it something given and, therefore, dependent on the honor-giver—but also magnanimity is always tied in with the awareness that honor is relegated to an external good that a truly virtuous agent could not evaluate as something praiseworthy (1124a6–9). Hence, magnanimity treats honor neither as an end nor as a means conceived in terms of utility (1233a7), but claims the right to honor,[26] that is, it claims that the agent's goodness be recognized and praised by the community.

(2) Honor means recognition by external observers and "great honor" (*EE* 1232b17–18) may only be conferred by virtuous observers. From this point of view, magnanimity seems to be inescapably located within perfect friendships (1124b31–1125a1). However, *there is a crucial difference*: while perfect friendships illustrate the effective visibility virtuous friends really have the benefit of, magnanimity depicts a mere claim to visibility without presupposing the effective virtue of the observers involved. That is why, puzzling though it is, the magnanimous person is indifferent toward the effective honor conferred upon him (1124a6–7) or even seems to be arrogant (a20) and ironical (b30–1). Consequently, the demand for honor is tantamount neither to the desire for honor nor to the need for an external witness certifying the agent's merits. Honor, far from being a certificate or a means toward self-affirmation, merely represents a prize the agent deserves and claims to (1123b20, 35).

(3) It is legitimate to presume that, in the absence of magnanimity, moral agents remain *defective* insofar as they lack visibility, that is, what greatness, by essence, claims to. This visibility is not reduced to a mere luxury virtuous persons might care for without however being obliged to. By contrast, its lack is identical with a sort of moral mistake (1125a27) witnessing both a lack of self-knowledge and a lack of energy. Small-hearted persons (*mikropsychos*) "turn away from fine actions and accomplishments" (1125a25–6) and, then, greatness reflects the quintessence of morality, insofar as it mirrors agents' readiness to perform fine actions.

(4) Being reduced to a claim rather than to an effective recognition, and being compelled in front of any observer rather than in front of virtuous persons, magnanimity cannot claim the effective understanding of its principles. In fact, the community may not be

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in a position to understand, let alone to adequately evaluate, the real principles displayed by virtuous actions. Let me illustrate what the magnanimous person affirms: the virtue of my actions (*axios ôn*) claims to (*axioi*) be recognized and honored (*timê*) by the community, that is, my actions ought to be provided with a visible stand, even though this same community may not be able to grasp their true worth. So we arrive at the threshold of magnanimity that proves to coincide with the core of the paradoxical status assigned to visibility: visibility is a necessary constituent of goodness virtuous persons should aspire to and, retrospectively, should be considered a piece of evidence testifying goodness.

Greatness, goodness, and visibility are intrinsically tied up with one another. The subterranean passages that make this connection possible are grounded in the assumption that great actions enjoy a privileged kind of visibility, precisely because greatness is a favorable condition for something to be visible. Even a community that has no real access to the principles motivating the magnanimous person is compelled to accept that goodness is effectively detectable, if anywhere, within great actions and, hence, to blame on itself the inability to recognize what is in reality out there. In other words, the case of great actions crystallizes *par excellence* the idea that the visibility of goodness is not a question of psychological factors impeding our access to the inner life of the agents but rather a question of recognizing what is actually harbored in the actions themselves.

(5) That is the reason why, unless based on complete virtue, this claim to honor is a sign of conceited and foolish persons. On behalf of what evidence external observers might distinguish between claims to honor laid by magnanimous persons and similar claims laid by conceited persons? Aristotle copes with this challenge by drawing a detailed image of the actions and attitudes a magnanimous person is designated to perform. No doubt, this image might not be exhaustive. Nonetheless, Aristotle is quite pedantic in introducing sufficient delicate distinctions and sophisticated criteria in order for observers to discriminate the true magnanimous persons from those who merely pretend to be. This is why the magnanimous person's attitude has been presented as a tremendous and thorny everlasting balancing between seemingly incompatible activities performed under the permanent risk of deviations that, no matter how slight they might appear, prove to be sufficient to render this comportment an object of ridicule: interest and disinterest, sociability and privacy, activation and retreat, willingness and reluctance, memory and oblivion, truthfulness and irony, etc. This extremely detailed picture, unique as it is within Books II–IV on ethical virtues, aims at inserting external criteria in order for magnanimity to be correctly appraised and for the actions of the magnanimous person to be considered as trustworthy witnesses of the principles they are guided by.

The conviction underlying this long description proves to be that conceited persons, even though they try to imitate the comportment proper to magnanimity, *fail to deceive us* because of the inner complexity of magnanimity: "If we examine *particular cases*, the magnanimous person would appear altogether *ridiculous* if he were not good" (1123b33–4; my italics). It is not an exaggeration to claim that magnanimity provides Aristotle with the most suitable pattern for establishing the connection between chance, goodness, and visibility:

> for without virtue it is hard to handle good fortune (*eutuchêmata*) in a suitable

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> way, [those who lack virtue] act in a random way (*tuchôsi*). This is so because they imitate the magnanimous person without being like him and imitate him only in what they can. (1124a30–1124b)

In other words, imitation and deceit are hardly possible within the ethical realm and this state-of-affairs becomes obvious each time we focus on particular actions, let alone on great actions.

* * *

By focusing on the visibility of goodness from outside the agent, one *establishes a new point of view*, that of the external observers of morally relevant actions, and thereby counterbalances the current tendency to exclusively examine Aristotle's ethics from the first-person perspective, that is, in terms of moral psychology. It would be a major project to attempt to show that the pattern of the visibility of goodness also provides the most reliable bridge connecting Aristotle's ethics to his *Poetics* and his *Politics*.[27]

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NOTES

1 Natali, 2004, 155.
2 See Pakaluk, 2005, 119.
3 Where there is no other indication, quotations are from the *NE*. Translations are mine.
4 Nussbaum, 1999, 170.
5 I have developed with more argument the claims made in paragraphs §§2–3 in: Kontos, 2011, 9–31.
6 Ethical virtues should not be considered inner traits inaccessible to external observers. On the one hand, they are expressed in our actions. On the other, as Reeve nicely points out, "pleasure and pain, and not action alone, should be taken as the sign of someone's state of character", that is to say, of someone's virtues. But pleasure and pain are effectively detectable in how enthusiastically, hesitantly, etc. we act (Reeve, 2012, 47).
7 See Stewart, 1892, 27.
8 My insistence on the priority of actions is in continuity with the incompatibilist account of character, education, and responsibility, offered by Destrée, 2011.
9 Contrast Williams, 1995 and Taylor, 2006, 94–6.
10 See, respectively, Ando, 1965, 196–8; Gauthier-Jolif, 2002, 549; Broadie, 1991, 87.
11 Hardie, 1968, 105 and Pakaluk, 2005, 104 have also drawn attention, though only in passing, to this point.
12 Chance and spontaneity differ in that the former is restricted to what concerns the human affairs, that is, to the realm of actions (*Physics* 197b4).
13 Contrast Wolf, 2007, 68.
14 The same holds true about the indistinguishable results of experience and craft (see: *Metaphysics* I.1).
15 This is why the ultimate cause of certain products might be taken to coincide either with the producer himself or with the relevant craft (*Phys.* 195b22).
16 I take my suggestions to further and partially amend Broadie's, 2007, 100 thesis that "craft is non-psychological."
17 Compare Sherman, 1999 and Pearson, 2006, with the second of which I am sympathetic despite some differences.
18 In disagreement with Woods, 1992, 168–9, I concur with Dirlmeyer's interpretation of the core section 1247b28–1248a19.
19 My analysis has purported to present the case of an Aristotelian argument that "bears a vital relation to models supplied by the *technai*" (Angier, 2010, 1), without being however—in opposition to the models examined by Angier—"philosophically problematic."
20 I meet thereby the remarks by Lear, 2006, 122–3, and the challenging analysis by Burger, 2008, 68–92, who understands the fine (beautiful) as an "independent principle" of goodness.
21 See, indicatively, Kraut, 1989, 139ff. and Kosman, 2004.
22 Cooking—Kennet, 1998.
23 See Kontos, 2002, 90–3.
24 Gauthier's 1951 prominent study remains an authority on the subject. Nonetheless,

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I do not adhere to the identification of magnanimous men with philosophers, a claim he reaffirmed in his comments on *NE* (Gauthier-Jolif, 2002). I do not share either the suggestion that we should "unterbewerten" magnanimity (Dirlmeyer, 1969, 371) or Howland's 2002 assumption that Aristotle's description should be read as conveying an objection against the very sibility of magnanimity. I believe that that these interpretations "rest on the assumption that Aristotle *could not* have meant what he said about greatness of soul" (Crisp, 2006, 175). In his challenging book, Faulkner, 2007, 15ff., makes a number of points in line with my reading: he opposes magnanimity to courage (since the latter aspires to nobility, whereas the former "involves a more comprehensive prudence"), points out the strong affinity between magnanimity and truth/truthfulness, and nicely explains the kind of honor the magnanimous claims to.

[25] A brief word about translation is in order here: I prefer to render *axiousin* as "claim to be worthy of" on the ground that the Greek term points to both, namely, to claiming and to worthiness.

[26] Contrast Schütrumpf, 1989, 19–20.

[27] I read earlier versions of this paper at the *Oxford Workshop in Ancient Philosophy* and the Roma Tre University. I am grateful to David Charles, Riccardo Chiaradonna, Terence Irwin, Michael Pakaluk, and Michael Weinman for their insightful comments.

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