

Etymology and Meaning of προαίρεσις in Aristotle's *Ethics*

MACIEJ SMOLAK

Institute of Philosophy

Department of Ethics

Jagiellonian University

Grodzka 52

33 332 Cracow

Poland

m.smolak@iphils.uj.edu.pl

ABSTRACT

Abstract: In *NE* III.2 1112a13 Aristotle raises the following question: “What is προαίρεσις?”. But προαίρεσις has different meanings and it is practically untranslatable into modern languages, as are most crucial terms of classical Greek. In this article, the author attempts to explain what προαίρεσις is for Aristotle. The author first presents the etymology of the term προαίρεσις based upon Aristotle’s remarks in his ethical treatises and shows that the term does not reflect what προαίρεσις is for him. Second, the author outlines characteristics of the uncontrolled person and indicates, on this ground, what Aristotle’s προαίρεσις is not. Finally, the author points out that προαίρεσις in the full sense involves two elements – the orrectical-deliberative element and the decisional-functional element – and sketches out their features.

INTRODUCTION

In *NE* III.2 1112a13 Aristotle raises the following question: “What is προαίρεσις?”, whereas in *EE* II.10 1225b19-20, he notes that one might be in doubt about the genus to which προαίρεσις belongs. But contemporary commentators have bigger doubts as to what προαίρεσις is. For this term has several meanings¹ and it is practically untranslatable into modern languages, as are most crucial terms of classical

Greek². However, it does not mean that προαίρεσις cannot be understood. Thus, an attempt at interpreting Aristotle’s προαίρεσις is not a completely hopeless task. Nonetheless, one must be careful not to be tempted to replace προαίρεσις with one word or to narrow its many

1 The term προαίρεσις occurs in different contexts and may mean, for example, “choice”, “decision”, “purpose”, “undertaking”. On the notion of προαίρεσις and the number of appearances of it in Greek writing or language, see Gauthier and Jolif (in Aristotle (1959), pp. 189-190). See also Formichelli (2009), pp. 21-32 who additionally presents the occurrence of προαίρεσις in the Aristotelian Corpus.

2 It should be noted that the main Greek terms are in principle untranslatable into modern languages: ἀρετή, εὐδαιμονία, ψυχὴ or just προαίρεσις are examples of such terms. This is due to the fact that they occur in a different and temporally distant cultural reality. The practice of using a one-word equivalent for the Greek notion is essentially an obstacle to becoming acquainted with semantic variability of it in different contexts. Thus, some commentators think that basic Greek terms should be left in transliteration or in Greek font and they ought to be treated as tool words with different meanings, see e.g., Adkins (1972), p. 4.

meanings down to only one³. That is why I will not translate this term throughout the paper and leave it in the original version⁴.

This article consists of three sections. In the first section, I present the etymology of the term προαίρεσις based upon Aristotle's remarks in his ethical treatises and show that etymological comments do not reflect what προαίρεσις is for Aristotle himself.

In the second section, I refer to the passage *NE* VII.10 1152a15-24 in which Aristotle claims, among others things, that ἀκρατής or the uncontrolled person has a decent προαίρεσις. This raises a question, because he insists in another place that προαίρεσις verifies human characters better than actions (*III.2* 1111b6)⁵. Thus, there is the following puzzle: If

προαίρεσις of ἀκρατής is decent, it will be a problem to distinguish between the character of the uncontrolled person and the character of the decent person or the serious one. Therefore, I outline features of the uncontrolled person, especially, of the melancholic and weak one. Next, I consider an example of an uncontrolled behavior that can be useful for understanding προαίρεσις. I try to indicate, on that basis, what Aristotle's προαίρεσις is not. I put forward a suggestion that προαίρεσις in the full sense, according to Aristotle, is none of the things included in a list of features, nor their arrangement. Hence, προαίρεσις cannot be reduced to any of these features: setting a goal nor to thoughtful undertaking nor to preferential choice, i.e., choice of one course of action rather than another, nor to deciding about proceeding with the realization of a thoughtful undertaking or a preferentially chosen course of action nor to deciding about proceeding with what is chronologically first in the sequence of steps which lead to reaching the set goal. At all events, προαίρεσις ought to be something more than the configuration of them, that is, if προαίρεσις is to be understood as a better verifier of human characters than actions.

In the third section, I attempt to demonstrate that προαίρεσις, as interpreted by Aristotle, consists of two elements – the orrectical-deliberative element and the decisional-functional element – and I try to sketch out their features.

to verify from the deeds what sort of person someone is".

3 See e.g., Nielsen (2011), p. 385, note 6) who suggests that προαίρεσις is a tricky term.

4 Commentators differently translate the term προαίρεσις used by Aristotle in *Ethics*. See e.g., Aquinas, Thomas (in Aristoteles (1949)) – *electio*; Irwin (in Aristotle (1985)) – *decision*; Crisp (in Aristotle (2000)) – *rational choice*; Dirlmeier (in Aristoteles (1962)) – *Entscheidung*; Gauthier i Jolif (in Aristotele (1958)) – *décision*; Gromska (in Arystoteles (1956)) – *postanowienie* (in English – *resolution*); Kenny (1979) – *purposive choice or choice*; Ostwald (in Aristotle (1962)) – *choice*, but see also Glossary – *choice, or moral choice*; Sorabji (1980) – *deliberative choice*; Tricot (in Aristotele (1959)) – *choix préférentiel*; Wróblewski (in Arystoteles (1977)) – *postanowienie, czyli świadomy wybór* (in English – *resolution, that is, conscious choice*); Zanatta (in Aristoteles (2012)) – *scelta deliberata*.

5 Cf. *EE* II.11 1228a2-3 and 1228a11; but see also 1228a15-17: "Furthermore, it is because it is not easy to discern what sort of προαίρεσις it is that we are forced

I. THE ETYMOLOGY OF THE TERM ΠΡΟΑΪΡΕΙΣ IN ARISTOTLE'S ETHICS

The term προαίρεσις consists of an adverb πρό (before) and a noun αἵρεσις (choosing or taking, seizing, grasping with the hand). Literally, it means “choosing one thing before another” or “taking one thing before another”. The adverb πρό, however, can be understood preferentially or temporally⁶.

The first interpretation would suggest that προαίρεσις is a preferential choice, i.e. a choice of one thing in preference to another or a choice of one course of action in preference to another⁷. Thus, προαίρεσις would require a comparison of alternatives.

In the case of the second interpretation the point can be understood in two ways: a] the adverb πρό can underline the point that προαίρεσις is made on the basis of deliberation that is prior to action⁸ – temporal as “before the action”; b] the adverb πρό can stress the point that προαίρεσις means to decide about

doing what is chronologically first in the deliberated sequence of steps which lead to achieving the set goal⁹ – temporal as “first in action”.

However, it must be added that there is another understanding of the adverb πρό. It is underlined by Nielsen ([2011]: 408) that the preferential and temporal understanding are not exhaustive. The adverb πρό can emphasize that the agent picks out the act for the sake of a specific goal and takes the position in front of it with the purpose to defend it¹⁰. Thus, πρό in προαίρεσις can also accentuate the idea that the agent is about to protect a certain goal in order to achieve it¹¹. What, however, does Aristotle himself say about the etymology of the term προαίρεσις?

In *EE* II.10 1226b2-8 – after emphasizing προαίρεσις is neither belief (δόξα) nor wanting (βούλησις)¹² – Aristotle

6 See e.g., Brown (in Aristotle (2009), p. 220) who maintains that the adverb πρό – in προαίρεσις – means both “before” and “in preference to”. However, she suggests that the first meaning emphasizes what happened before the action. She says that “choice is of one course of action rather than another, but it also [...] is *what has been decided by an earlier deliberation* (i.e. before the action)”.

7 The partisan of preferential understanding of the adverb πρό is, e.g., Aquinas, Thomas (1949), p. 128.

8 The partisan of the first temporal understanding of the adverb πρό is e.g., Irwin (1999) who points out in his comment to *NE* III.2 1112a15-17 that “what is decided is what has been previously deliberated (to *probouleumenon*)”.

9 The partisan of the second temporal understanding of the adverb πρό is e.g., Joachim (1955), pp. 100-101.

10 “This is a use of ‘pro’ that is evident in expression such as ‘*stēnai pro Trōōn*’: standing in front of, and hence in defense of, the Trojans. Latin uses ‘pro’ in a similar sense in expressions such as ‘*pro bono*’ (an abbreviation of ‘*pro bono publico*’, for the common good)”, Nielsen (2011), p. 408, note 39. See also Bostock (2000), p. 39, note 21 who insists that “‘choice-for-the-sake-of’, i.e., a choice made with some definite end in view” fits to Aristotle’s account of προαίρεσις.

11 Nielsen (*ibidem*), p. 408 thinks that Aristotle wants us to hear all three senses of the adverb πρό in προαίρεσις.

12 A few lines earlier Aristotle excludes the possibility that προαίρεσις could mean appetite (ἐπιθυμία) or spiritedness (θυμός), because both types of desire are typical for animals, whereas προαίρεσις does not occur in animals (*EE*

comes to the conclusion that προαίρεσις is the result of the combination of both these things. For they are present during realization of προαίρεσις. And he underlines that it is also shown, if only to a certain extent (δηλοῖ δέ πως; b6), in the name itself for “προαίρεσις is choosing/taking; not simply, but one thing before another, and this is not possible without examination and deliberation. Therefore, προαίρεσις is the outcome of deliberative belief”¹³.

In NE III.2 1112a13-17 – after underlining that προαίρεσις is not one of the things discussed before, i.e. ἐπιθυμία, θυμός, βούλησις, δόξα¹⁴ –

II.10 1225b26-27). Indeed, προαίρεσις is a distinct feature of human beings. And probably for this reason too, Aristotle thinks that προαίρεσις can be a human trait on the basis of which people’s characters are better fixed.

13 ἡ γὰρ προαίρεσις αἴρεσις μὲν ἐστίν, οὐχ ἀπλῶς δέ, ἀλλ’ ἐτέρου πρὸ ἐτέρου· τοῦτο δὲ οὐχ οἷόν τε ἄνευ σκέψεως καὶ βουλῆς. διὸ ἐκ δόξης βουλευτικῆς ἐστὶν ἡ προαίρεσις; EE II.10 1226b6-9.

14 In both *Ethics* Aristotle indicates certain features of προαίρεσις based on the outlined distinctions between προαίρεσις and four other phenomena of ψυχή, namely appetite (ἐπιθυμία), spiritedness (θυμός), wanting (βούλησις) and belief (δόξα). By juxtaposing προαίρεσις with ἐπιθυμία and θυμός, he concludes that προαίρεσις concerns the “good” or “bad”, whereas ἐπιθυμία and θυμός concern the “pleasure” or “pain”. Against the background of the distinction between προαίρεσις and βούλησις, he shows that προαίρεσις has only to deal with things that depend on us and are doable, whereas βούλησις may also refer to things that do not depend on us and are not doable. In turn, when it comes to the discrepancy between προαίρεσις and δόξα, he argues that προαίρεσις is classified on the basis of whether it is good or bad, whereas δόξα is classified on the basis of whether it is

Aristotle poses the question whether the object of προαίρεσις is what has been obtained by prior deliberation (τὸ προβεβουλευμένον; a15). The question seems rhetorical, as Aristotle adds “προαίρεσις is connected with calculation and thought – and even the name appears to signify that the object of προαίρεσις is in fact choosing/taking before another”¹⁵.

In MM¹⁶ I.17 – after underscoring that προαίρεσις is not the same as βούλησις (1189a12-13)¹⁷ – the Author states that προαίρεσις is as its name suggests: “Therefore, whenever we *take* the better in exchange for the worse – when it is a matter of choice – the term ‘τὸ προαιρεῖσθαι’ would seem to be correctly used”¹⁸.

true or false (see EE II.10 1225b26-1226b2 and NE III.2 1111b12-1112a11).

15 ἡ γὰρ προαίρεσις μετὰ λόγου καὶ διανοίας. ὑποσημαίνειν δ’ ἔοικε καὶ τοῦνομα ὡς ὄν πρὸ ἐτέρων αἰρετόν; NE III.2, 1112a15-17.

16 There are disputes as to the authenticity of the MM. Some commentators argue that MM is the work of Aristotle (see e.g. Schleiermacher (1835), Düring (1966)). Others claim it is not (see e.g. Jaeger (1923), Kenny (1978). Bobonich (2006) remarks that some ethical analyses in MM differ from analogical analyses in EE and NE. And this is – in my opinion – the case with etymology of προαίρεσις. For in MM the explanation is founded on the preposition ἀντί, while in EE and NE it is founded on the adverb πρὸ (see, however, note. 19).

17 A few lines earlier the author of MM declares that προαίρεσις is not desire (ὄρεξις) by referring to an argument, which is analogical to the argument in EE (see note 12). But there is a difference, for in EE II.10 1225b25-26 ὄρεξις is the general term for three types of desires, i.e., appetite, spiritedness and wanting, while in MM ὄρεξις refers rather to the first two.

18 ὅταν οὖν ἀντικαταλλαττώμεθα τὸ βέλτιον ἀντὶ τοῦ χείρονος ἐν αἰρέσει ὄντος,

Etymological notes do not exclude preferential nor temporal meanings of the adverb *πρό*¹⁹. But Aristotle clearly emphasizes that *προαίρεσις* remains in close relation with calculation and thought²⁰. So, there are reasons to assume that the adverb *πρό* refers primarily, in the case of *προαίρεσις*, to deliberation (*βούλευσις*), that is, to practical thought which precedes an action that ought to lead to achievement of a set goal. Indeed, the deliberation consists in discovering and developing a reliable way to the realization of the established goal. However, it does not follow that *προαίρεσις* involves the consideration of alternatives and choosing only one of them.

In *NE* III.3, where Aristotle studies deliberation, it is shown that it is a search which relies on finding the means needed to achieve the designated

goal. It is true that he permits situations in which a given goal can be achieved in many ways. Then, in such circumstances, the task of deliberation is, first of all, to find the easiest and finest way to do so (1112b17). In this sense, *προαίρεσις* could take the form of a preferential choice and to be a choice of one of several alternatives that have been previously considered. But it does not follow that it must be so and thus, that a preferential choice is the constitutive component of *προαίρεσις*. There are also situations in which the established goal can be achieved through only one means. In such circumstances, the task of deliberation is to consider how it will come about through this means and how this one can be obtained (b17-18). Thus, *προαίρεσις* does not have to take the form of a preferential choice. It does not have to be “choice of one thing in preference to another or of one course of action in preference to another”. What is required for *προαίρεσις* is to perform some sort of intellectual work, that is to make an investigation combined with analysis (*ζητεῖν καὶ ἀναλύειν*; b20) and finally to discover (*εὕρεῖν*; b19) the way that guarantees the accomplishment of designated goal. But it is necessary to add that the process of seeking may be successfully completed, when such a way is possible at all and the discovered way is possible for the person who was looking for it.

Thus, the preferential interpretation of the adverb *πρό* can be misleading. For *προαίρεσις* does not have to include the choice of one thing in preference to another. In this sense, the temporal

ἐνταῦθα τὸ προαιρεῖσθαι δόξειεν ἂν οἰκεῖον εἶναι; *MM* I.17 1189a14-17.

19 In *MM* the adverb *πρό* appears in I.17 1189a34, where the author points out an inseparable connection between *προαίρεσις* and thought: “If, then, *προαίρεσις* is certain desire, [that is] determined by deliberation, [that is] accompanied with thought (Εἰ τοίνυν ἡ *προαίρεσις* ὁρεξίς τις βουλευτική μετὰ διανοίας), the ‘voluntary’ cannot be identical with ‘*προαιρετόν*’. For we do many things voluntarily before thinking and deliberating about them (ἐκόντες γὰρ πολλὰ πράττομεν πρὸ τοῦ διανοηθῆναι καὶ βουλευσασθαι) – for instance, we sit down and stand up, and do many other things like that voluntarily but without having thought about them – whereas each action taken in accordance with *προαίρεσις* is in connection with thought” (1189a32-1189b1).

20 On the matter of close relation between *προαίρεσις* and deliberation in *MM*, see note 19.

interpretation of the adverb *πρό* is more promising, because *πρό* can stress that a thoughtful undertaking has come into play in *προαίρεσις* and therefore, it could simply be taking on something after prior deliberation. However, it may well suggest that it is about taking on something that was indicated by deliberation as chronologically first in the sequence of steps which lead to the achievement of the goal laid down.

The temporal interpretation of the adverb *πρό* seems to be confirmed by the summary note of III.3. Aristotle underlines that *προαίρεσις* is desire, determined by deliberation, for something that is up to us²¹. The statement draws attention to the connection of *προαίρεσις*, *βούλευσις* and *ὄρεξις*, and it is also important because of this connection. However, it does not follow that it is impossible to maintain the preferential interpretation of the adverb *πρό*. Rather, the point is that the application of the adverb *πρό* is not limited to its preferential understanding. Thus, given situations in which various alternatives of action must be considered, it may be suggested that in some contexts the preferential understanding of the adverb *πρό* is not wrong.

However, it must be added that Aristotle introduces his etymological remarks using phrases²² that seem to suggest that the explanation of the origin of the term *προαίρεσις* does not fully

reflect what it is for him. Admittedly, the Greek term does not reflect the relation between deliberation and desire in realized *προαίρεσις*. Furthermore, it does not indicate the connection between *προαίρεσις* and action.

Let's repeat again, Aristotle underlines the point that *προαίρεσις* means desire qualified by deliberation (*βουλευτική ὄρεξις*; 1113a11). This could suggest that *προαίρεσις* signifies desire which has gained an imprimatur of reason²³. Hence, it becomes a real desire to achieve a goal in accordance with an algorithm elaborated in the framework of deliberation. After all, wanting a goal is equivalent to wanting reliable means to achieve it, but only those that are in our power.

I think, however, that Aristotle is interested in something more. I will try to demonstrate that Aristotle's *προαίρεσις* consists of: a] setting the goal; b] thoughtful undertaking or preferential choice, where both assume deliberation about how to achieve the designated goal but second requires

21 ἡ προαίρεσις ἂν εἴη βουλευτική ὄρεξις τῶν ἐφ' ἡμῖν; *EN* III.3 1113a10-11.

22 See δηλοῖ δέ πως; *EE* II.10 1226b6; ἔοικε [...] ὡς; *NE* III.2 1112a16-17; δόξειεν ἂν; *MM* I.17 1189a17.

23 See e.g., Charles (2011), p 204 who suggests that *προαίρεσις* ('preferential choice' in his translation) is not "a combination of intellect and desire but rather a distinctive type of state: intellectual desire or desiderative intellect". It could be added that in *EE* II.10 1225b20 Aristotle raises the following question: "Where to locate *προαίρεσις*?" and he does not answer this question. In *NE* he does not even pose a similar question. Perhaps this is because *προαίρεσις* fulfills the function of the link which merges the rational and irrational dimension of *ψυχή* into a harmonious whole. Thus, it is difficult to formulate an unambiguous answer to the question "Where to locate *προαίρεσις*?".

deliberation on alternative courses of action; c] making the decision about proceeding with a thoughtful undertaking or preferentially chosen course of action; d] proceeding with the realization of the determined course of action, that is, taking on what has been determined by deliberation as chronologically first in the sequence of steps that lead to the achievement of the designated goal; e] continuation of action that leads to the achievement of that goal. Thus, Aristotle's προαίρεσις in the full sense ought to contain these five moments or features. This claim can be shown through the study of προαίρεσις in the case of the uncontrolled person.

II. THE UNCONTROLLED PERSON AND ΠΡΟΑΪΡΕΙΣ

In NE VII.7 1150b19-28 Aristotle shows two basic kinds of uncontrolled person: the impetuous uncontrolled person (προπετής ἀκρατής) and the weak one (ἀσθενής ἀκρατής). He additionally distinguishes within the first type the melancholic uncontrolled person (μελαγχολικός ἀκρατής) and the swift one (ὀξύς ἀκρατής)²⁴. When it comes to Aristotle's interpretation of προαίρεσις, it is NE VII.10 1152a15-20 that deserves attention:

"So the uncontrolled person is not like those who know and have regard for their knowledge, but like those who are asleep or drunk. Although they act voluntarily – for they know in a way

both what they are doing and for the sake of what they are doing it – they are not wicked; their προαίρεσις is decent. As a consequence, they are only half-wicked. They are not unjust either, since they do not draw up an action plan of their bad deeds. One type of the uncontrolled person is not apt to abide by the results of their deliberation, while another, the melancholic type is not even apt to deliberate at all. So, the uncontrolled person is like a city-state that passes all the indispensable decrees and has serious laws, but it makes no use of them"²⁵.

Aristotle points to general features of the uncontrolled person. They act voluntarily, because they are aware of what they are doing and in a way for what goal. Thus, they are responsible for their acts. Furthermore, they do bad things. But they are not unjust, even though they do unjust things. For they lack vicious dispositions or acquired states of being able to act unjustly²⁶. So, if they act unjustly, they will not do it deliberately. Indeed, they are not plotters²⁷. He also maintains that they are not wicked, but only half-wicked

25 οὐδὲ δὴ ὡς ὁ εἰδὼς καὶ θεωρῶν, ἀλλ' ὡς ὁ καθεύδων ἢ οἴνωμένος. καὶ ἐκὼν μὲν (τρόπον γὰρ τινα εἰδὼς καὶ ὁ ποιεῖ καὶ οὐ ἔνεκα), πονηρὸς δ' οὐ· ἢ γὰρ προαίρεσις ἐπιεικής ὡς θ' ἡμιπόνηρος. καὶ οὐκ ἄδικος οὐ γὰρ ἐπίβουλος ὁ μὲν γὰρ αὐτῶν οὐκ ἐμμενετικός οἷς ἂν βουλευέσθαι, ὁ δὲ μελαγχολικός οὐδὲ βουλευτικός ὅλως. καὶ ἔοικε δὴ ὁ ἀκρατής πόλει ἢ ψηφίζεται μὲν ἅπαντα τὰ δέοντα καὶ νόμους ἔχει σπουδαίους, χρήται δὲ οὐδέν; NE VII.10 1152a14-21.

26 See e.g., NE V.8 1135b24 or VII.8 1151a10-11.

27 See e.g., NE V.8 1135b20.

24 On the matter of typology of uncontrolled persons, see e.g. Charles (2011), pp. 187-209.

(ἡμιπόνηρος; a18). We can surmise why they are wicked from the expression “half-wicked” – their actions are bad. But why are they only half-wicked? Are they only half-wicked, because they lack vicious dispositions or acquired states of being able to do bad things? Possibly, but Aristotle insists that their προαίρεσις is decent (ἐπιεικής).

In this passage προαίρεσις is, at first glance, a general goal. That is what the analogy with a state’s laws refers to. For the uncontrolled person possesses knowledge about things they ought to never do in their life²⁸. In other words, it seems that in this context Aristotle understands προαίρεσις either as a general policy in life reflecting the person’s understanding of *eudaimonia* or as a goal that leads us in pursuit of *eudaimonia*. After all, the uncontrolled person is like a city-state that has serious laws, but makes use of none of them. Indeed, they possess knowledge – the equivalent of serious laws – but they do not use it. For they are like being in a dream or

drunk when they are doing something. Thus, they surrender to desires of irrational *psuchē* and do not follow their selves as rational beings. As a result of the lack of self-control, they listen to another aspect of themselves which does not fulfill, however, the function of an authoritative element in the structure of a human being. Nonetheless, Aristotle speaks about two different types of the uncontrolled person and the difference between them that can throw light on our understanding of προαίρεσις.

The lack of self-control (ἀκρασία) is brought on by excessive desire in the case of the melancholic uncontrolled person. And for this reason, they do not deliberate at all. In consequence, they do not deliberate before acting. Thus, it is not possible to observe *dissonance* between the elaborated action plan and the actual course of action in their case. In fact, they do not take any action plan because of their impulsiveness. That is why they act on the spur of the moment²⁹. Thus, in the matter of the melancholic uncontrolled person, when Aristotle says that the lack of self-control is contrary to one’s προαίρεσις he probably has in mind προαίρεσις as a general goal. And since προαίρεσις of every uncontrolled person is decent, we can assume that a general policy of life will

28 See e.g., *NE* IX.8 where Aristotle studies an *aporia* as to whether one ought to love oneself or someone else more (πότερον δεῖ φιλεῖν ἑαυτὸν μάλιστα ἢ ἄλλον τινά; 1168a28-29.). He shows that people criticize those who love themselves most and condemn them as “self-lover” in general (a29-30). And he stresses that they also accuse them of doing nothing apart from what concerns their own good (a31-33). So, those who make a value judgement in saying this, must possess knowledge that selfishness is a bad thing. But at the same time he underlines that such people or most of them do not use that knowledge and satisfy their appetites or non-rational aspect of their *psuchē* at the expense of others (1168b15-22). And it ought to be added that they satisfy their non-rational aspect of their *psuchē* at their own expense as rational beings.

29 It should be noted that the swift uncontrolled person is also guided by emotion (see e.g. *NE* VII.7 1150b21-22). But they are different from the melancholic uncontrolled person for they deliberate to some extent, though, as a result of an impetuous desire, they are unable to complete it. See e.g., Charles (2011), p. 194.

be *decent* in the case of the melancholic uncontrolled person.

The lack of self-control of the weak uncontrolled person is brought on by weak desires. But they are able to deliberate (βουλευτικός). In fact, they can deliberate before taking action that ought to lead to realization of the designated goal. And they are capable of deliberating by using a “moving back” strategy. They can begin the calculation from the desired situation and finish it after they get to the initial situation. Thus, they commence with the goal and move backwards through means, until they arrive at the first cause, which is the last in the process of discovery. As a result, they discover the sequence of steps that they are to follow, where the last is the first one to take. Indeed, those who deliberate ought to investigate and to analyze as with a geometrical figure³⁰. Nevertheless, they do not stand by what they have deliberated as a result of their susceptibility to relatively weak affective reactions (πάθη)³¹. Thus, they fail to be

practical, though they finish their deliberation and reach the good result from the point of view of some goal held fixed in mind. In other words, they do not realize what they have planned because of their unstable character, that is to say, on account of their vulnerability to be affected by non-insistent πάθη. There are discrepancies between their action plan and what they actually do. Thus, the weak uncontrolled person is not so bad as to reach the level of internal integrity that would confirm that they focus their life on an evil goal and strive for it deliberately³². And when Aristotle says that the lack of self-control is contrary to one's προαίρεσις he must have something more in mind about προαίρεσις than it was in the case of the melancholic uncontrolled person. Since the weak uncontrolled person deliberates before taking action and reaches the conclusion, their προαίρεσις will include a thoughtful undertaking or

30 “For the person who deliberates seems to investigate and to analyze [...], as he would in the case of a geometrical figure” (ὁ γὰρ βουλευόμενος ἔοικε ζητεῖν καὶ ἀναλύειν τὸν εἰρημένον τρόπον ὥσπερ διάγραμμα; NE III.3 1112b20-21).

31 See e.g., NE VII.8 1151a1-5: “Among uncontrolled people those who are excitable are better than those who have [action] plan but do not stand by it. For the latter are overcome by less affective reaction and, unlike former, are not without prior deliberation. For the [latter] uncontrolled person is like those who are quickly drunk and after little wine, that is, after less than most people” (αὐτῶν δὲ τούτων βελτίους οἱ ἐκστατικοὶ ἢ οἱ τὸν λόγον ἔχοντες μὲν, μὴ ἐμμένοντες δέ· ὑπ’ ἐλάττονος γὰρ πάθους ἡττώνται,

καὶ οὐκ ἀπροβούλευτοι ὥσπερ ἄτεροι· ὁμοῖος γὰρ ὁ ἀκρατὴς ἐστὶ τοῖς ταχὺ μεθυσκομένοις καὶ ὑπ’ ὀλίγου οἴνου καὶ ἐλάττονος ἢ ὡς οἱ πολλοί). It is clear, that Aristotle has in mind the weak uncontrolled person when he declares that the latter are overcome by less *pathē* than most people.

32 For Aristotle, a truly bad person has a corrupt character (κακός, πονηρός). They are characterized by an inner harmony between rational and sensorical-orectical functions of ψυχῇ. A sign of this harmony is a combination of character defects (ἡθικαὶ κακιαί), i.e. *competences* of ψυχῇ in sensorical-orectical function, and cunning (πανουργία), i.e., *competence* of reason in practical function. In fact, persons with a corrupt character are the master of evil, because they take actions based on προαίρεσις and for themselves (see e.g., NE VII.7 1150a20).

a preferential choice, depending on the situation. And since προαίρεσις of every uncontrolled person is decent, we can assume that both a general policy of life and a thoughtful undertaking or preferential choice will be *decent* in the case of the weak uncontrolled person.

As a consequence, προαίρεσις of the melancholic uncontrolled person differs from προαίρεσις of the weak uncontrolled person, although both are decent: προαίρεσις of the first will be limited to the setting of some goal (which is not bad); προαίρεσις of the second is something more, because deliberation is always a search for the means in light of having set down the goal. And since they conclude their deliberation, they will end it with a thoughtful undertaking or preferential choice.

Major characteristics of the weak uncontrolled person allow to assume that προαίρεσις is the combination of setting some goal and result of deliberation about how to achieve it. However, the deliberation is ended when it is completed by a thoughtful undertaking or preferential choice. Consequently, we could assume that προαίρεσις of the weak uncontrolled person includes such an undertaking or choice.

But it can be shown, against the background of the uncontrolled person's behavior, that could only apply to the weak one, that Aristotle's προαίρεσις is not limited to a thoughtful undertaking or preferential choice. I am going to show that προαίρεσις of the uncontrolled person could include making the decision about proceeding with the realization of an action plan or even

proceeding with the realization of the determined course of action, that is, taking on what has been determined by deliberation as chronologically first in the sequence of steps that lead to the achievement of the designated goal within the framework of the action plan developed. To show it, I will consider a certain example of behavior of the uncontrolled person.

We can imagine the uncontrolled person who realizes that they have an obesity problem. And we can assume that they deliberate before acting and consider possible action plans that would help them lose weight. For example, they take into account eating less sweets or jogging regularly, or following a slimming diet combined with physical activity³³.

Let us assume that our uncontrolled person comes to the conclusion, as a result of their own deliberation, that the last possibility is the most promising. They are going to change their eating habits and start exercising regularly. However, they know little about diets and slimming exercises. So, they plan to seek advice of a dietitian and to consult with a personal trainer. Thus, they make the preferential choice of one

33 Thus, there will be a preferential choice in the proposed example. However, it is already known that a preferential choice does not have to be an element of προαίρεσις. Of course, the example could be modified, because we could assume that our uncontrolled person considers only one way to lose weight – for example, a slimming diet combined with physical activity – and ends the deliberation with the thoughtful undertaking and not with the preferential choice.

course of action and decide to start the weight loss process from what is chronologically first in the sequence of steps that will lead to the achievement of the goal. In consequence, they try to register in a diet counseling center.

Hence, we can acknowledge that our uncontrolled person comes to the decent *προαίρεσις*, which is not reduced only to the setting of the goal, that is, the losing weight (the goal that harmonizes with the general policy in life reflecting person's understanding of *eudaimonia*). But their *προαίρεσις* also includes the preferential choice, making the decision about proceeding to the realization of the action plan and even proceeding with the realization of the determined course of action.

Let us imagine that they could not register in a diet counseling because of an objective reason – it is, for instance, too late and the counseling center is already closed. Thus, they put off the beginning of the weight loss process until the next day. But the next day they do not keep their preferential choice and do not put what they decided to do the previous day into action – they do not proceed with fulfilling the action plan and do not register in a diet counseling center. But they *abandon* it not because it is beyond their power. It is rather caused by their characteristic instability – instead of reaching for a telephone, they grasp something sweet. Consequently, their *προαίρεσις* is decent, but what they actually do does not follow their plans and even their decision about proceeding with realization of a preferentially chosen course of action. The result is

not surprising, since the uncontrolled person goes against *προαίρεσις* (see e.g., *NE* VII.8 1151a7).

However, what type of uncontrolled person is in our example? No doubt, it is not the melancholic one, because they do not deliberate before acting. But is it the weak one? It might be, though it is not clear, since our uncontrolled person makes the decision about proceeding with a preferentially chosen course of action and even tries to take on what has been determined by deliberation as chronologically first in the sequence of steps that lead to the achievement of the designated goal. Nonetheless, if a person is not serious, there will be room for the lack of self-control, because it is caused by conflict within the desires of *psuchē* between what is good and what is pleasant (*EE* VII.2 1237a7-9).

But it is significant that Aristotle attributes *προαίρεσις* a special role. He emphasizes that human characters are better verified by *προαίρεσις* than by action (*NE* III.2 1111b6). This is why, we judge who someone is on the grounds of *προαίρεσις* (*EE* II.11 1228a2-3). But it is hard to accept that it is possible to say “they are the uncontrolled persons”, if we only consider their *προαίρεσις* – after all, their *προαίρεσις* is decent. In fact, we will be able to recognize that someone is the uncontrolled person if we take into account not only their general policy in life, but also their preferential choice or thoughtful undertaking and even their decision about proceeding with realization of designated goal in line with accepted action plan. Our example ultimately has a gap between

what has happened before the potential beginning of realizing the designated goal and the actual beginning or implementation of that goal. When there is no such interval, it is difficult to determine what the scope of the *activity* of προαίρεσις is. So, it is not clear whether the *activity* of προαίρεσις ends before the action starts or whether it *overlaps* with the action. But the occurrence of the interval allows us to assume that the *activity* of προαίρεσις *does really overlap* with action and it is a specific moment of it, at least in the sense that προαίρεσις starts the action. Ultimately, Aristotle underlines the point that “προαίρεσις is the origin of action – that from which the motion begins”³⁴. But we could add that προαίρεσις is the beginning to a higher degree than the moment of starting something, because προαίρεσις not only begins the action, but it is also *responsible* for its course. For the adverb πρό in προαίρεσις can also point out that the agents pick out the act for the sake of a specific goal and take the position in front of it with the purpose of defending it, which means they aim to achieve the set goal to the best of their ability³⁵.

Thus, the example seems to suggest that Aristotle’s προαίρεσις is not

to be limited to setting a goal nor to a thoughtful undertaking nor to a preferential choice nor to the configuration of them. But it also seems to imply that προαίρεσις can be something more than deciding about proceeding with realization of what has been thoughtfully undertaken or preferentially chosen. If such a view was wrong, it would be questionable that human characters are better defined by προαίρεσις than by action³⁶. We would have a problem with distinguishing between the uncontrolled person and the decent person (ἐπιεικής) or the serious one (σπουδαῖος), since προαίρεσις of second and third person is also decent. After all, Aristotle often identifies the decent person with serious one³⁷.

III. WHAT IS ΠΡΟΑΪΡΕΣΙΣ FOR ARISTOTLE?

I have suggested, at the end of section 1, that προαίρεσις in the full sense, according to Aristotle, ought to consist of: a] setting the goal; b] thoughtful undertaking or preferential choice, where both assume deliberation about how to achieve the designated goal but second requires deliberation on alternative courses of action; c] making the decision

34 πράξεως μὲν οὖν ἀρχὴ προαίρεσις—ὅθεν ἡ κίνησις; NE VI.2 1139a31-32.

35 Thus, there is the question – whether the *activity* of προαίρεσις extends only to the commencement of action or does it go on during the action and eventually ends with (successful) completion of it. As Broadie (1991), p. 212 notes, “a prohairetic response [...] is always [...] posed for possible revision”.

36 It does not have to be understood that human characters are defined solely with reference to προαίρεσις, and the actions do not matter. Of course, they are important. But the actions themselves are insufficient (see e.g., NE V.8 1135b2-8). And there would be also a problem with distinction between the uncontrolled person and the truly bad person (see note 32) without taking into account προαίρεσις.

37 See e.g., NE IX.4 1166a12-33.

about proceeding with a thoughtful undertaking or preferentially chosen course of action; d) proceeding with the realization of the determined course of action, that is, taking on what has been determined by deliberation as chronologically first in the sequence of steps that lead to the achievement of the designated goal; e] continuation of action that leads to the achievement of that goal. Thus, Aristotle's προαίρεσις can not be reduced to any of the moments included in points a], b], c] and d], nor to their arrangement.

To show that προαίρεσις consists of these five moments listed above, I have outlined features of the uncontrolled person, especially, of the melancholic and weak one, based on the passage *NE VII.10 1152a15-24*. Aristotle underlines the fact that προαίρεσις of every uncontrolled person is decent. Since the melancholic uncontrolled person does not deliberate before acting I have demonstrated that προαίρεσις is limited to a general policy of life in the case of them. But it turned out that προαίρεσις of the weak uncontrolled person is something more, because they deliberate before taking action and conclude it, i.e., they end deliberation with the good result. Therefore, their προαίρεσις may include a thoughtful undertaking or a preferential choice, depending on situation. Indeed, major characteristics of the weak uncontrolled person has allowed to assume that προαίρεσις of the weak uncontrolled person is the combination of setting some goal and a thoughtful undertaking or a preferential choice.

Next, I have considered an example of an uncontrolled behavior and against the background of it I have shown that Aristotle's προαίρεσις can also include making the decision about proceeding to the realization of an action plan and even the attempt to take on what has been determined by deliberation as chronologically first in the sequence of steps that lead to achieve the goal within the framework of the action plan developed.

But Aristotle attributes προαίρεσις a special role, because he emphasizes that human characters are better verified by προαίρεσις than by action. However, the above-mentioned moments in points a], b], c] and d] as well as the configuration of them can belong to a certain kind of the uncontrolled person³⁸. So, if προαίρεσις of ἀκρατής is decent, it will be a problem to distinguish between the character of the uncontrolled person and the character of the decent person or the serious one. Thus, Aristotle's προαίρεσις ought to be something more, if it is to be understood as a better verifier of human characters than actions.

According to the interpretation given at the end of section 2 "something

38 Of course, it is not the melancholic one, because they do not deliberate before acting. Nor it is the swift one, because they do not conclude the deliberation process. However, it remains the open question whether it is the weak one. Anyway, the uncontrolled person, in our example, tries to take on what has been determined by deliberation as chronologically first in the sequence of steps that lead to achieve the goal within the framework of the action plan developed. It may be that Aristotle's typology of the uncontrolled person is not complete.

more” indicates that the activity of προαίρεσις overlaps with the action. But the activity of it is not limited to the start of the action. The uncontrolled person, in our example, tries to begin the action with what is chronologically first in the sequence of steps which lead to reaching the set goal. Therefore, προαίρεσις must be the beginning to a higher degree than the moment of starting something. It not only begins the action, but it is also *responsible for* its course. And that is why προαίρεσις takes also into account the third understanding of the adverb πρό, that is, “πρό” as *standing in front of, and hence in defense of something*. Indeed, προαίρεσις in the full sense, according to Aristotle, must also include the continuation of action that leads to reaching the set goal. Thus, I think Aristotle’s προαίρεσις is constituted by two elements: the orrectical-deliberative element and the decisional-functional element³⁹.

39 I was inspired by Formichelli’s distinction (2009), p. 147 to look at προαίρεσις in this way. For he distinguishes dispositional and occurrent προαίρεσις. The first accentuates the fact that we have deliberated about the specific situation we are facing, the second underlines the fact that the deliberation is effectively realized in action at that time. Furthermore, I am in debt to other commentators. As Kenny (in Aristotle (2011), p. 159) suggests, “carrying out a monastic vow or a New Year’s resolution seems to be the closest thing in modern life to making an Aristotelian προαίρεσις (‘choice’ in his translation)”. In turn, Price (2011), pp. 309-310 notes that προαίρεσις (‘choice’ in his translation) “is more than a desire: when the time is due it becomes an attempt, and (if all goes well) an action”.

I can not fail to owe a debt of gratitude to Petrycy, Sebastian z Pilzna (old print [1608]; reprint [in:] Arystoteles [2011]: 205-217) who translates προαίρεσις by “choice or undertaking”. In my opinion⁴⁰, the expression is not used accidentally. I think he tries to demonstrate that Aristotle’s προαίρεσις in the full sense consists of: 1] “undertaking” in the sense of the set goal⁴¹; 2] “own choice” in the sense of the preferential choice and decision about proceeding with the process of realization of the set goal in accordance with accepted action plan⁴²; 3] “undertaking” in the sense of starting and continuation of the action that leads to the achievement of the set goal⁴³. Thus, one can get the impression that Petrycy attempts to show that: i] Aristotle’s προαίρεσις is a kind of the link between “choice” and “undertaking”; ii] “choice”

40 See Smolak (2018), pp. 327-348.

41 See Petrycy (in Arystoteles (2011), p. 217) and my comments with respect to that in Smolak (*ibidem*), pp. 344-345.

42 See Petrycy (in Arystoteles (2011), pp. 208-209). Petrycy distinguishes two kinds of “choice”: “common choice” and “own choice”. The first is “taking something” caused by an affective reaction. Thus, it is not made on the basis of deliberation. The second is the immanent principle of the realization of thoughtful actions, and as a consequence it is made on the basis of deliberation. The person who makes own choice must be *actor agendi*. Indeed, προαίρεσις of such a person ought to consist of preferential choice and making the decision about proceeding with a preferentially chosen course of action. I present my interpretation of Petrycy’s “own choice” in Smolak (*ibidem*), pp. 338-342.

43 See Petrycy (in Arystoteles (2011), p. 217) and my comments with respect to that in Smolak (*ibidem*), pp. 345-347.

and undertaking” are specific aspects of Aristotle’s προαίρεσις⁴⁴. But it must be added that each one of “understanding” is in a different relation to “choice” of action plan. “Undertaking” in the sense of 1] is prior to it; “undertaking” in the sense of 2] is after it. Thus, “undertaking” sets boundaries for προαίρεσις. And “choice” is made within these boundaries. But the boundary of “undertaking” in the sense of 2] is movable and it changes jointly with carrying out the action that aims to achieve the goal already laid down.

So, what are the constitutive elements of Aristotle’s προαίρεσις in my interpretation? The orectical-deliberative element underlines the fact that προαίρεσις is either a general policy in life reflecting the person’s understanding of *eudaimonia* or a goal that leads us in pursuit of *eudaimonia*. But it also stresses that προαίρεσις is a thoughtful undertaking or a preferential choice. Thus both are preceded by deliberation, that is, by intellectual work that consists in searching for the best course of action and in discovering a reliable way to accomplish the designated goal. And such an examination is founded on the “moving back” strategy. According to it, what is at the end of the calculated way is the starting point of the process which leads to the achievement of that goal. Hence, within the orectical-deliberative element of προαίρεσις, the *auctores agendas* set the goal and come to a thoughtful

undertaking or to a choice of the best course of action, and both ought to lead to the achievement of the designated goal. Indeed, in several places Aristotle indicates that προαίρεσις is “desire qualified by deliberation” (βουλευτική ὄρεξις).

The decisional-functional element emphasizes that *auctores agendas* must: a] make the decision about proceeding with realization of what they have undertaken or chosen; b] proceed with realization of the action plan and continue on this path. Thus, the decision-functional element highlights two things.

Firstly, it accentuates that *auctores agendas* decide about proceeding with realization of what they have undertaken or chosen after deliberation and carry out what they have decided. It is important, because it may happen that to make a decision does not have to result in proceeding with action. However, it can not concern the situation in which an action is not started, because it is impossible to take such an action at a given moment or it is necessary to verify the accepted action plan as a result of the current difficulties or new data. It is rather about the situation in which *auctores agendas* do not act, even though it is up to them and failure to take an action undermines the opportunity to achieve the goal set by them. Thus, the decisional aspect of the decisional-functional element underlines the fact that the decision is fulfilled.

Secondly, it shows that προαίρεσις begins the action and defends it in its course. Thus, *auctores agendas* carry out the action which is chronologically first

44 It is confirmed by Old-Polish language at the turn of the XVI century, because the conjunction “or” is not limited to an alternative.

in the sequence of steps of the adopted action plan and they take responsibility for the realization of it. Indeed, they begin the realization of the action plan and also continue to implement it. Therefore, they guard against any kind of problems that could thwart the reaching the set goal. Of course, it is about problems that the avoidance is up to them. Thus, the functional aspect of the decisional-functional element underlines the fact that the sequential phases of the action plan are implemented.

The decisional-functional element complements the orrectical-deliberative one. Hence, it seems that Aristotle's προαίρεσις in the full sense takes place when *auctores agendus* carry out the line of action they have planned and decided to realize it. If indeed προαίρεσις better determines human characters than actions, then it will be questionable whether this criterion of προαίρεσις will be fulfilled without the decisional-functional element.

There are also additional advantages to this interpretation of προαίρεσις. It includes three understandings of the adverb πρό – that is, preferential, temporal and as *standing in front of, and hence in defense of something*. Moreover, it makes that such understanding of προαίρεσις covers its various meanings.

— CONCLUSION

As I have argued, προαίρεσις in the full sense, according to Aristotle, consists of: a] setting the goal; b] thoughtful undertaking or preferential choice, where both assume deliberation about how to achieve the designated goal but second

requires deliberation on alternative courses of action; c] making the decision about proceeding with a thoughtful undertaking or preferentially chosen course of action; d] proceeding with the realization of the determined course of action, that is, taking on what has been determined by deliberation as chronologically first in the sequence of steps which lead to the achievement of the designated goal; e] continuation of action that leads to the achievement of that goal. In other words, προαίρεσις also overlaps with the action and *take care* of its course.

This interpretation is not without foundation, because the points a], b], c] and d] are insufficient for a full assessment of human characters based on προαίρεσις. For Aristotle underlines the fact that προαίρεσις of every uncontrolled person is decent. Meanwhile, the above-mentioned moments in points a], b], c] and d] may belong to προαίρεσις of the uncontrolled person: “setting the goal as a general policy of life” (a]) is common for all kinds of the uncontrolled person; “thoughtful undertaking or preferential choice” (b]) appears or can appear as moment of προαίρεσις in the case of the weak uncontrolled person; “making the decision about proceeding with a thoughtful undertaking or preferentially chosen course of action and even trying to take on what has been determined by deliberation as chronologically first in the sequence of steps which lead to the achievement of the designated goal” (c] and d]) is present in the examined example of the uncontrolled behavior. But “continuation of action that

leads to the achievement of the set goal in accordance with accepted action plan" (e) requires the agent acts from a firm and unshakeable character (*NE* II.4 1105a30-33). If a person is not serious, there will be room for lack of self-control (*EE* VII.2 1237a7-8). Indeed, the serious person is the measure in the field of human affairs (*NE* IX.4 1166a12-13), and thus, in terms of προαίρεσις.

I would also like to remind the reader that I have mentioned, in *Introduction*, that the term προαίρεσις has different meanings and is practically untranslatable into modern languages, as are most crucial terms of classical Greek. But Aristotle often uses terms drawn from common language in the treatises and reinterprets them or assigns them technical meanings. That is also the case of προαίρεσις. Thus, if I were to be tempted to translate προαίρεσις, I would probably use the expression proposed by Petrycy, Sebastian z Pilzna, that is, "choice or undertaking", or I would limit myself to using the term "undertaking"⁴⁵. For

"choice", in the sense of *liberum arbitrium*⁴⁶, does not have to be the key component of προαίρεσις.

Furthermore, it can be added that "undertaking" means "przedsięwzięcie" in the Polish language. And it contains in itself three moments from the oractical-deliberative and decisional-functional elements, that is, deliberative, decisional and functional. Thus, "przedsięwzięcie" is: i] determined by deliberation; ii] taken on the basis of decision; and iii] carried out in accordance with action plan that is determined by deliberation.

Besides, the term "przedsięwzięcie" (przed-się-wzięcie) combines elements similar to those constituting the προαίρεσις. For it consists of the adverb "przed" – in English "before" – which has *inter alia* preferential and temporal meaning, i.e., in principle, equivalent of the adverb πρὸ, and of the noun "wzięcie" – in English "taking" – i.e., in principle, equivalent of the noun αἴρεσις.

45 See e.g., Rowe (in Aristotle (2002)) who renders προαίρεσις by "undertaking" in several places of *NE*. See e.g., I.1 1094a1-2: "Every sort of expert knowledge and every inquiry, and similarly every action and undertaking (προαίρεσις; a2) seems to seek some good"; I.4 1095a14-16: "[...] since every sort of knowledge, and every undertaking (προαίρεσις; a14), seeks after some good, let us say what it is that we say political expertise seeks, and what the topmost of all achievable goods is"; I.7 1097a20-21: "[...] in every activity and undertaking (προαίρεσις; a21) it is the end" [it needs to be added that he uses "undertaking", when he translates *tōn praktōn hapantōn* (of all practical undertakings) in the next line]. But it seems that προαίρεσις is not used as technical term in these phrases. As

Brodie (in Aristotle (2002), p. 262) notes in commentary to I.1. 1094a2, Aristotle will give προαίρεσις a stricter meaning, that is, "decision" in the context of his theory of deliberate action in III.2-3. Furthermore, in the *Introduction*, she points out that "as we find it (that is, προαίρεσις) in the non-philosophical writings of some of his (that is, Aristotle's) contemporaries is usually translated by 'undertaking' or 'policy'" (*ibidem*), p. 42.

46 See Arendt (1978), p. 62 who claims that προαίρεσις, the faculty of choice "is the arbiter between several possibilities" and "In Latin, Aristotle's faculty of choice is *liberum arbitrium*". But it must be recalled that it is not necessary to take into account "to choose between alternatives" as a part of προαίρεσις.

ABBREVIATIONS

Aristotle		<i>NE</i>	<i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>
<i>EE</i>	<i>Eudemian Ethics</i>	<i>MM</i>	<i>Magna Moralia</i>

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