

## Compulsion, Ignorance, and Involuntary Action: An Aristotelian Analysis

Huiyuhl Yi\*

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*Abstract:* Some remarks in the *Eudemian Ethics* and the *Nichomachean Ethics* indicate that the voluntariness of actions is significantly related to compulsion and ignorance. According to a plausible interpretation, these remarks suggest that if an agent performs an action under compulsion or due to ignorance of some relevant facts, then she does so involuntarily. An objection to this interpretation with regard to compulsion is that an agent can voluntarily do what she is compelled to do. With regard to ignorance, one might object that it is necessary to clarify the proper range of relevant facts when considering whether an action performed out of ignorance is involuntary. In this paper, I develop two principles that align with the view that compulsion and ignorance are sufficient conditions for involuntary actions, while accommodating potential counterexamples and complications.

*Keywords:* Aristotle; compulsion; *Eudemian Ethics*; *Nichomachean Ethics*; ignorance; involuntary action.

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\* Ulsan National Institute of Science and Technology

 <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2221-6406>

 School of Liberal Arts, 50 Unist-gil, Ulju-gun, Ulsan, 44919, Republic of Korea

 [huiyuhl@unist.ac.kr](mailto:huiyuhl@unist.ac.kr)



## 1. Introduction

There are various conditions that can absolve us from the presumptive moral responsibility for our actions. Aristotle famously identifies two such exculpatory conditions—compulsion and ignorance—which he links to the concept of voluntariness. For instance, in Book III of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (hereafter NE), Aristotle makes the following remarks: “Those things, then, are thought involuntary, which take place by force or by reason of ignorance” (NE, 1109b35–1110a1)<sup>1</sup> and “that which is done by force or by reason of ignorance is involuntary” (NE, 1111a21). Also, in Book II of the *Eudemian Ethics* (hereafter EE), he writes: “Anything one does without ignorance that is up to oneself not to do is necessarily voluntary, and the voluntary is this. Everything that one does in ignorance and due to ignorance is involuntary” (EE, 1225b8–11).<sup>2</sup> These remarks suggest that compulsion and ignorance are each a sufficient condition for involuntary action. We can formulate the ideas in the form of two principles, which may be called *the compulsion-voluntariness principle* and *the ignorance-voluntariness principle*, respectively, or:

(CV) If S  $\Phi$ -s under compulsion, then S  $\Phi$ -s involuntarily, and

(IV) If S  $\Phi$ -s due to ignorance of relevant facts about  $\Phi$ -ing, then S  $\Phi$ -s involuntarily,

in which ‘S’ stands for the agent and ‘ $\Phi$ ’ stands for the action under a certain description in the relevant context. As subsequent analysis will reveal, critical considerations may cast doubt on the truth of these principles. In the following discussion, I examine potential counterexamples and observations that challenge them. Additionally, I formulate revised principles to address the complications that arise. By offering these revised principles,

<sup>1</sup> I use David Ross’s (2009) translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* in this paper.

<sup>2</sup> I use the translation of Brad Inwood and Raphael Woolf (2013). Robert Heinaman (1988, 253) analyzes the notion of voluntary action in EE as follows: A  $\Phi$ -ed voluntarily if and only if (i) A  $\Phi$ -ed, (ii) It was in A’s power not to  $\Phi$ , (iii) A  $\Phi$ -ed with knowledge, (iv) A  $\Phi$ -ed through himself. According to Heinaman, (ii) and (iv) are crucial in understanding Aristotle’s views on compulsion. Part of this paper can be seen as a complement to the clarification of (iv).

my aim is to articulate the relationship between compulsion and involuntary action, as well as the relationship between ignorance and involuntary action, while striving to accommodate an Aristotelian perspective on these notions.

## 2. Compulsion and involuntary action

I begin by considering the principle governing compulsion and involuntary action, namely, (CV). There may be apparent counterexamples to this principle. Consider the following scenarios:

### **Poisoning (I)**

George could not stand the arrogance of his boss and planned to poison him. He was strongly determined to murder his boss. But just before putting his plan into action, George was stopped by Elaine, who also wanted to eliminate him but did not want to get her hands dirty. Elaine threatened George so that he would poison the boss. Afterward, George gladly, and voluntarily, poisoned him, although his action was performed under compulsion.

### **Robbery**

Jerry is a bank robber. On his way to rob a bank, he was stopped by Kramer, the sniper, who had a personal vendetta against the bank owner but did not want to risk getting caught. Kramer threatened Jerry so that he would rob the bank, telling him that doing otherwise would cost his life. Although Jerry was a bit surprised and intimidated, he gladly, and voluntarily, robbed the bank.

In both scenarios, each agent voluntarily did what he did although he was threatened to do so. Therefore, apparently, these cases work as counterexamples to (CV). It might be objected that the mere fact that an agent is doing something gladly does not imply necessarily that she thereby does it voluntarily. However, in providing these examples, I do not mean to suggest that voluntary actions are always accompanied by pleasure, even though Aristotle may be interpreted as asserting that voluntary actions should be pleasant, while involuntary actions tend to be painful (NE, 1110b12–22).

Why the action in each case can be characterized as voluntary is because its driving force stems from the agent. According to Aristotle, “the voluntary would seem to be that of which the moving principle is in the agent himself, he being aware of the particular circumstances of the action” (NE, 1111a22–24).<sup>3</sup> Many philosophers throughout history have acknowledged that voluntary actions must originate from the agent. For instance, in the *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas argues that an action is voluntary when it is “according to the inclination of the will,” asserting that “it is impossible for a thing to be absolutely coerced or violent, and voluntary” (I Q82 A1), as exemplified by a man who is “dragged by force” (I.II Q6 A4). Similarly, in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, John Locke emphasizes that voluntary action is the product of volition. Since volition is the “particular determination of the mind” (II.XXI.30, 250), he asserts that the “forbearance or performance of action, consequent to such order or command of the mind is called [v]oluntary,” whereas “whatsoever action is performed without such a thought of the mind is called [i]nvoluntary” (II.XXI.5, 236). If a voluntary action originates from the agent, as suggested by the preceding remarks, then it follows that the agent in each of the previous examples performs the action in question voluntarily.

However, it may be argued that these examples take the notion of compulsion too broadly. There, given that “the moving principle” resides in each of the agent when they acted, the threat does not play a role in the execution of the act. Therefore, it is reasonable to claim that George and Jerry were not really forced to do what they did. In a similar line of reasoning, Harry Frankfurt (1969, 832–33) claims that in a circumstance in which an agent is committed to perform a wrongful action while being threatened to do it, if she is not motivated by the threat in performing the action, then it is most plausible to say that she is not really coerced to do it. Here, the crucial idea is that in order for someone to be properly coerced

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<sup>3</sup> In a similar vein, in his analysis of relevant passages from EE and NE on this point, John M. Cooper (2013, 276–77) observes that “[t]he voluntary is whatever action has its originating source within an agent,” and that “what it is to be voluntary is to be an action that has that sort of source, viz., a causal one internal to the agent.”

or compelled to do something, the driving force of the action must not originate from the agent herself.

In this sense, those who defend (CV) may argue that cases like Poisoning (I) and Robbery misinterpret the notion of compulsion as used by Aristotle. As an example of an action performed under compulsion, Aristotle mentions a case of a person who “were to be carried somewhere by a wind, or by men who had him in their power” (NE, 1110a2–3). He also states that actions are involuntary “when the cause is in the external circumstances and the agent contributes nothing” (NE, 1110b2).<sup>4</sup> In the previous scenarios, the agents’ actions stemmed from themselves, and they did contribute to what they did. The objection goes that, from Aristotle’s viewpoint, they did not act under compulsion.

In response, I would like to note that the notion of compulsory action held by this objection is inconsistent. If the cause of the alleged “action” is in the external environment and not in the agent herself, how could she be said to perform an action at all? This is a legitimate question because, in most natural understandings of the term ‘act’ or ‘action’, when an agent acts, she should be able to control the immediate result of the action, such as the change in her bodily position, at her own disposal. Thus, when someone is carried away by a strong gust of wind, she cannot be said to act in any appropriate sense of the term; such an incident may be something compulsory, but it cannot be an action. Likewise, if a person is taken somewhere by those who have overpowered him, he does not seem to exercise his own agency.<sup>5</sup> This consideration leads us to think that if we follow the notion of

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<sup>4</sup> Jozef Müller (2015) has argued that on the Aristotelian conception of voluntary action, the cause of the action must be based on the conditions under which the agent is the efficient cause of her action *qua* the individual that she is. On this view, a voluntary action differs from an action performed in virtue of one’s nature. By contrast, Giulio Di Basilio (2021, 12–16) argues that, according to Aristotle, the impulse that underpins the voluntariness of an action must be not only internal, but also *natural*, to the agent.

<sup>5</sup> Cooper (2013, 279–82) offers alternative interpretations of the two examples given by Aristotle. In his view, the first example involves a person who ends up going somewhere he did not wish to go, just like “a sailor in a boat who is blown by the wind to a landing in some harbour [he was] not sailing to.” In such a case, the sailor was indeed *acting* in confrontation with the wind (e.g., erecting the boat,

compulsion suggested by the objection—i.e., if ‘compulsory’ implies that the cause of the given action is in the external circumstances (or “the moving principle is outside” (NE, 1110a2)) and the agent contributes nothing—then it makes no sense to talk of “compulsory action.” What is compulsory in that sense cannot be an action. If this is correct, then in performing a compulsory action, an agent should be able to exercise some sort of control over what she does although she is forced or compelled to do so.

The notion of compulsory actions may be understood as analogous to what Aristotle described as “mixed actions.”<sup>6</sup> According to Aristotle, mixed actions involve “things that are done from fear of greater evils or for some noble object” (NE, 1110a4–5). Typically, refusal to perform such actions results in severe consequences, such as “beating or imprisonment or death” (EE, 1225a5). On the one hand, these actions seem involuntary, since “no one would choose any such act in itself” (NE, 1110a19). On the other hand, they appear voluntary in the sense that they “are chosen at the time when they are done, and the end of an action is relative to the occasion” (NE, 1110a12–13).

According to these remarks, individuals who perform mixed actions can be seen as being compelled to act in a certain manner by external forces or

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keeping the rudder, and so on), but involuntarily arrives at an undesired place. Likewise, the second example may involve a walking person who is “pushed... and restrained from going off in other directions” and ends up somewhere he didn’t intend to go to by those who have him under their control. The problem of Cooper’s suggestion, though, is that what happens at the end of the process in each example is not the result of the agent exercising his own agency. For instance, though it is correct to say that the sailor performs many actions during the voyage in the proper sense of the term, it is not these actions that transport him to the destination. Rather, it is the wind that causes his migration. For this reason, it seems correct to say that he was *made* to reach the place because of external circumstances, as opposed to exercising his agency involuntarily. A similar remark applies to the second example.

<sup>6</sup> For an extensive discussion of the nature of mixed actions, see (Nielsen 2007). According to Nielsen, ‘mixed action’ does not fall under a category of the ontological structure of actions considered by Aristotle. She argues that it is a provisional label for coerced acts with the purpose of enlightening Aristotle’s genuine view on compulsion.

circumstances, even though it is not impossible for them to choose otherwise. For instance, consider a situation in which someone is coerced into performing a disgraceful act to save family members held hostage by a tyrant. Similarly, imagine a scenario in which a ship's captain must jettison the cargo during a storm to ensure the safety of the crew and himself (NE, 1110a5–9). In both instances, the actions of the agents can be characterized as mixed. However, it is crucial to note that compulsory actions are not synonymous with mixed actions described as such. In his discussion of mixed actions, Aristotle refers to cases where the agent is forced to act against their will. For example, if an agent coerced into performing a disgraceful act to save their family happens to have desired to perform the act, it is still accurate to say that they act under compulsion. Nevertheless, Aristotle would not consider this an appropriate example of a mixed action.

Regarding the preceding discussion, one might suggest that we interpret the Aristotelian notion of compulsory action in terms of reasons rather than causes. On this interpretation, the presence of an internal reason for an action is sufficient to deem that action voluntary. Therefore, compulsory actions rule out internal reasons in the sense that one is compelled to act only if one lacks an internal reason for doing so. To say that the cause of a compulsory action is external to the agent simply means that the reason for the action is external to the agent.<sup>7</sup> In this line of thinking, Poisoning (I) and Robbery fail to exemplify compulsory actions because the agent in each scenario acts for a reason internal to the agent. Similarly, a dishonorable action performed under threat does not constitute a compulsory action if the agent had a desire to perform it, as this desire indicates that the agent had an internal reason for acting.

I find this alternative interpretation misguided because it does not align with ordinary cases of compulsory actions. In typical situations where a person is compelled to act, they do so to avoid informed undesirable consequences, which may be overwhelming or devastating. Consequently, it is natural for the agent to develop a strong desire to avoid such consequences. This desire must belong to what Bernard Williams terms the “subjective

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<sup>7</sup> I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer from *Organon F* for guiding me to consider this alternative interpretation.

motivational set" (1979, 18). If this is correct, then in carrying out a compulsory action in most ordinary contexts, the agent would have an internal reason for acting as they do.

If we allow for the possibility that a compulsory action can be performed even when the agent has an internal reason to do so, then (CV) is once again vulnerable to the aforementioned counterexamples. In the Poisoning (I) scenario, when George is coerced by Elaine to poison his boss, following her directions would align perfectly with his purpose, indicating that he had an internal reason to poison his boss. The same applies to Jerry in the Robbery scenario. Although it is not impossible for Jerry to refuse to rob the bank despite Kramer's instructions, following the directions would be most advantageous for him. This again demonstrates that Jerry had an internal reason to rob the bank. Generally, it is entirely possible for a threatened person to willingly and voluntarily do what they are coerced into doing. In such cases, (CV) would be shown to be false.

However, rephrasing compulsory actions in terms of reasons rather than causes may illuminate how we should revise (CV). As noted, the problem with (CV) arises from the fact that the agent's action is not motivated by the coercive force in the previous examples. Rather, it is the internal reason of each agent that explains their behavior. Given that an agent has an internal reason to act in a certain way, the mere fact that they are under compulsion does not necessarily imply that they act *because of* the compulsion. Compulsory actions should be those in which one is motivated to act by the compulsion itself. As such, it is tempting to add a clause specifying that the agent's action should originate from the compulsion. Accordingly, to avoid the difficulty raised by the previous examples, I suggest that (CV) be revised to:

(CV\*) If (i) S  $\Phi$ -s under compulsion, and (ii) S would not  $\Phi$  if S was not under compulsion, then S  $\Phi$ -s involuntarily.

Thanks to the addition of clause (ii), (CV\*) now successfully explains why the agents' actions in the preceding examples are not involuntary. Given that George had an internal reason to poison his boss, he would have poisoned his boss anyway even if he had not been threatened. Hence, his action of poisoning the boss is not an instance of an involuntary action. The same is true for Jerry: provided that he had an internal reason to rob the bank,



he would have done it anyway even without the threat from Kramer. The fact that the two agents would have acted in the way that they actually did even without the threats shows that the threats presented to them did not play a part in the performance of their actions. The added clause places a constraint which enforces this point.

Another theoretical advantage of (CV\*) is that it avoids the aforementioned problem inherent in the Aristotelian understanding of compulsory action. According to Aristotle, the impelling cause of a compulsory action must originate from the external environment rather than from the agent. This raises a difficulty in comprehending how something classified as compulsory can be considered an action at all. Notably, (CV\*) does not reference the cause of the agent's action, yet it aligns with Aristotle's view that the driving force of a voluntary action must reside within the agent herself. In this regard as well, (CV\*) represents an improvement.

### 3. Ignorance and involuntary action

I now turn to the Aristotelian principle regarding ignorance and involuntary actions. While some remarks in EE and NE seem to imply something like (IV), Aristotle's distinction between involuntary and non-voluntary actions (NE, 1110b17–24) indicates that he has a more sophisticated principle in mind. In differentiating the two kinds of actions, he states: "Everything that is done by reason of ignorance is *not* voluntary; it is only what produces pain and regret that is *involuntary*" (NE, 1110b18–19). This remark suggests that some non-voluntary actions are not involuntary; a non-voluntary action is only involuntary if the agent's performance of it leads to regret. This reveals a problem with (IV): if a pertinent sort of ignorance is a sufficient condition for involuntary action as stated in (IV), then an action stemming from ignorance can be involuntary even without involving a regret,<sup>8</sup> *contra* Aristotle.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> One might object here that regret does not work as a necessary condition for involuntariness but simply as its symptom. However, even if that were the case, it remains true that some non-voluntary actions are accompanied by regret while some non-voluntary actions are not. Since Aristotle clearly meant to equate involuntary

To address this complication, let us note that an action accompanied by regret can typically be characterized as one that the agent would not have performed if she had known some relevant facts. For instance, Mr. and Mrs. Perry would not have pushed their son Neil too harshly to send him to an Ivy League medical school if they had known that it would have ultimately caused him to take his own life. In this sense, they genuinely regret what they did: if they had known better, they would never have acted in the ways they actually did. If it is appropriate to understand the nature of regret-inducing actions in the manner previously described, then, to accommodate the notion of involuntary (as opposed to non-voluntary) action, we can revise (IV) as follows:

- (IV\*) If (i) S  $\Phi$ -s due to ignorance of relevant facts about  $\Phi$ -ing, and  
 (ii) S would not  $\Phi$  without such ignorance, then S  $\Phi$ -s involuntarily.

The newly added clause (ii) is meant to capture Aristotle's characterization of involuntary actions with regard to ignorance, which, unlike non-voluntary actions that are not also involuntary, involves the regret of the agent.<sup>9</sup>

Although (IV\*) seems more promising in accommodating an Aristotelian notion of ignorance and involuntary actions, it may be argued that (IV\*) is open to counterexamples. People commonly make decisions while experiencing epistemic limitations. For example, they may not fully understand the consequences of their actions or be aware of all available courses of action at the time of decision-making. In such circumstances, it is hard to say that their actions are involuntary. To illustrate this point, consider the following scenarios:

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actions with the former as opposed to the latter, it is important to distinguish involuntary actions from non-voluntary actions that are not involuntary.

<sup>9</sup> In formulating (IV\*), I characterize the role of regret in purely epistemic terms because this principle specifies how ignorance is related to volitional action. However, I do not mean to deny that there are other aspects of regret that can be highlighted with regard to voluntariness of an action. For instance, it may be argued that regret, as a kind of reactive attitude, can be used to self-assess the agent's actions. Here, I follow Audrey L. Anton (2020) in taking regret as a self-reactive attitude.

### Poisoning (II)

Someone slipped a deadly poison into my water bottle, which killed me after I drank the water. Since I was not suicidal, I drank it without knowing it had been poisoned. Had I known it had been poisoned, I would not have drunk it.

### Chess

While playing chess against Borgov, Beth made a particular move (moving the Knight to the F3 square) without realizing that there was another move (moving the Queen to the C7 square) that would have secured her the championship. Unfortunately, her actual move turned out to be a mistake, resulting in her defeat in the game.<sup>10</sup>

### Gas Station

Jill went to a gas station to fill up her car's gas tank. Unbeknownst to her, another gas station around the corner offered cheaper prices than the one she went to. Jill would not have filled up with gas there if she had known this fact.

These examples may seem straightforward. In each case, the agent acted out of ignorance, and she would not have done what she did if she had known better. Nevertheless, in each case, the action in question was performed in accordance with the agent's autonomous decision-making process. Hence, it may be argued that the agent acted voluntarily. For example, in the story of Poisoning (II), I willingly picked up the bottle and poured the water into my mouth, making my action of drinking seem voluntary. Similarly, in the story of Chess, Beth made a conscious decision to make her move and acted based on her own judgment. Thus, her action appears to be voluntary. Additionally, in the story of Gas Station, Jill freely stopped by the gas station and grabbed the gas pump handle of her own accord, indicating that she filled up with gas there voluntarily. These instances might be viewed as counterexamples to (IV\*).

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<sup>10</sup> I am indebted to the reviewer from *Organon F* for this example. This scenario demonstrates how one can seem to act voluntarily even without awareness of the available actions. I am grateful to the reviewer for inviting me to address it.

However, I think we can develop a strategy to save (IV\*) from this type of examples. The main tactic is to argue that the facts cited in the preceding examples—i.e., that the water had been poisoned, that the move Beth was making would cost her the match, and that the price at a nearby gas station was cheaper—are not really relevant to the voluntariness of the actions as they are currently described. Note that (i) in the antecedent of (IV\*) only refers to a *relevant* kind of fact with respect to the ignorance that gives rise to the agent's action. Hence, if an agent's action is guided by ignorance of a certain fact, but that fact is *not* relevant to the action in question, then (IV\*) is not applicable to this sort of case.

This approach naturally prompts an inquiry into the scope of relevant facts: what constitutes the appropriate range of relevant facts in applying (IV\*)? What criteria can be used to discern which facts are relevant and which are not? In this context, Aristotle identifies several potential candidates for relevant facts concerning ignorance and voluntariness:

A man may be ignorant, then, of who he is, what he is doing, what or whom he is acting on, and sometimes also what (e.g., what instrument) he is doing it with, and to what end (e.g., he may think his act will conduce to someone's safety), and how he is doing it (e.g., whether gently or violently). [...] The ignorance may relate [...] to any of these things, and the man who was ignorant of any of these is thought to have acted involuntarily, [...] especially if he was ignorant on the most important points; and these are thought to be the circumstances of the action and its end (NE, 1111a3–19).

The last statement highlights that the most important kinds of relevant facts pertaining to ignorance and voluntariness in performing an action have to do with the nature and the purpose of the action. More specifically, Aristotle seems to think that there are two paradigm examples of relevant facts with respect to ignorance: facts about what the agent is doing, and facts about what she is doing it for (or why she is doing it). In what follows, I will show that none of the preceding examples undermines (IV\*), while focusing on whether they cite a relevant fact with respect to what the agent is doing or why the agent is doing it.

It seems plain that when a person performs an action under a certain description (say, when S  $\Phi$ -s), the fact that she is  $\Phi$ -ing is a relevant fact with regard to her action of  $\Phi$ -ing. So, if an agent does not know what she is doing in performing an action, this should be a strong ground to think that she is not doing it voluntarily. In other words, we may plausibly hold that if S is ignorant of the fact that S is  $\Phi$ -ing, then S does not  $\Phi$  voluntarily. Then, it is crucial to ask whether each of the agents in the preceding examples knew what they were doing. In my view, the answer depends on how we describe their actions. An action can be described in more than one way.<sup>11</sup> For example, we could redescribe the story of Poisoning (II) in terms of *killing oneself* as opposed to *drinking water*. The result would be the following: I was (inadvertently) killing myself when I drank the water because I was ignorant of the fact that the water had been poisoned; had I known this fact, I would not have killed myself; therefore, my action of killing myself was involuntary. In this new description of the story, I did not know what I was doing (in the sense that I was unaware that I was killing myself). Here, the fact that the water had been poisoned is entirely relevant with respect to what I was doing, since my action of self-killing was only possible owing to this fact. After all, for a person to be killed by consuming some material, it is essential that the material is deadly. However, if we describe my action in terms of drinking water as originally stated, then I surely knew what I was doing (given that I was aware that I was drinking water). The fact that the water was poisoned is hardly relevant here, because whether or not one can successfully drink water has nothing

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<sup>11</sup> Here, I follow the standard view regarding the individuation of action, according to which a single “basic action,” which involves the immediate outcome of the agent’s bodily movements, can be instantiated in many different actions-under-a-description. In this view, it is possible that an action under a certain description is voluntary, while the same action under a different description is not. This may differ from Aristotle’s own view, according to which multiple distinct actions may occur at a time, as opposed to a single action occurring under many different descriptions. See Cooper (2013, 277–78). If we follow Aristotle’s view in assessing (IV\*), then each occurrence of ‘ $\Phi$ ’ should be taken to denote an action as opposed to an action-under-a-description.

to do with its toxicity.<sup>12</sup> In this case, some other facts—e.g., the fact that water is drinkable or that it was indeed water that was contained in my bottle—are relevant to my action of drinking water. But I was not ignorant of these facts (or so we can stipulate).

The preceding observation reveals that Poisoning (II) does not constitute a counterexample to (IV\*) in considering ignorance with respect to what the agent is doing. If we characterize the story while describing my action in terms of drinking water as originally stated, then the consequent of (IV\*) would indeed be instantiated as being false because I was voluntarily drinking the water. However, the antecedent would *not* be instantiated as being true because the fact of which I was ignorant (i.e., the fact that the water was poisoned) is not relevant to my action of drinking water. By contrast, I was not ignorant of the *relevant* facts with respect to what I was doing—e.g., I surely knew that water is a drinkable substance. On the other hand, if we characterize the story by describing my action in terms of another verb such as killing myself, then the antecedent of (IV\*) would be instantiated as being true, given that I killed myself due to ignorance of a relevant fact (that the water was poisoned), and I would not have done it had I known this fact; however, the consequent of (IV\*) would *not* be instantiated as being false, because I did not voluntarily kill myself. Therefore, neither description of the poisoning story refutes (IV\*) as we consider whether the agent was ignorant of a relevant fact with respect to what he was doing.

Could this example refute (IV\*) if we focus on the ignorance of relevant facts with respect to the purpose of the action (or why the agent did what she did)? Suppose that we redescribe the story in a way that underscores

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<sup>12</sup> It does not make a difference if the agent is faced with partial ignorance of the situation. Suppose the agent knew that what she was about to drink was water, but also knew, without knowing that this particular cup of water is poisoned, that in general water can be poisoned, and that one should take a risk in drinking a cup of water. (We can imagine that the agent was suffering from extreme thirst and was offered several cups of water after being informed that one of them was poisoned.) In this case, we can say that the agent was voluntarily taking a risk. Furthermore, the fact that the water in the chosen cup was poisoned appears to be relevant to her taking a risk. However, it is not *because of* ignorance of this fact that she took a risk. Rather, she took a risk because she was dying from thirst. Hence, this example does not falsify (IV\*).

the purpose of the action. The result would be as follows: I was quenching my thirst by drinking water because I was ignorant of the fact that the water had been poisoned; had I known this fact, I would not have done it. In this new version of the story, my action of quenching my thirst still seems voluntary. Therefore, the consequent of (IV\*) would be instantiated as being false. However, the antecedent of (IV\*) would *not* be instantiated as being true, since the fact of which I was ignorant (namely, that the water was poisoned) is not relevant to my action of quenching my thirst. In general, the toxicity of material is not pertinent to its quenching capacity. There are certain facts that are relevant to my action of quenching my thirst—e.g., the fact that water tends to quench one's thirst. However, I was not ignorant of this fact, and that is precisely why I drank the water. Once again, (IV\*) is not refuted by this version of the story.

So far, I have argued that Poisoning (II) does not undermine (IV\*) with respect to what the agent is doing and why the agent is doing it. This strategy equally applies to the Chess story. Let me first focus on relevant facts in terms of the nature of the action (or what the agent is doing). I would like to note that, although Beth was ignorant of the fact that moving the Queen would win her the game, this fact is barely relevant in terms of what she was doing. After all, whether there are alternative moves (such as moving the Queen) has no bearing on her successfully making her actual move (namely, moving the Knight). There are other facts that *are* relevant to her making the actual move, such as the fact that the piece she was about to pick up was indeed the Knight or the fact that the Knight was in the position to be moved to the F3 square. But these are not the facts of which Beth was ignorant, given that she understood the rules of chess and knew she was moving the Knight to the aforementioned position at the time she was doing it.

The preceding observation reveals that the original description of Chess does not falsify (IV\*). It is true that the consequent of (IV\*) would be instantiated as being false—Beth did not make the move involuntarily. However, the antecedent would *not* be instantiated as being true, because Beth was not ignorant of any facts *relevant* to her moving the Knight. What she did not know—the fact that there existed another move that would secure her victory—is not relevant to her making the actual move.

Let us now see whether the Chess story can threaten (IV\*) when we focus on the ignorance of some relevant facts with respect to the purpose of the action (or why the agent is doing the action). First, to redescribe what the agent is doing in terms of the purpose of the action, let us assume that Beth aimed to win the game by making her actual move. Then, to be germane to this aim, we can restate the story as follows: Beth was (inadvertently) incurring a defeat because she was ignorant of the fact that the move she was about to make was a mistake and there was a winning move available to her. Had she known this fact, she would not have incurred a defeat by making the actual move; therefore, her action of incurring a defeat was involuntary. In describing the story this way, we can say that Beth did not know what she was doing (in that she was unaware that she was incurring a defeat). The fact that she could win the game by making the alternative move is perfectly relevant to her action of incurring a defeat because, under the circumstances, she lost the game by failing to make the alternative move (or so we can stipulate).

However, even this version of the Chess story does not undermine (IV\*). Here, it is true that the antecedent of (IV\*) would be instantiated as being true since she incurred a defeat due to ignorance of a relevant fact. Had she known better (i.e., had she known that the move she was about to make would cost her the game or that she could win the game by making the alternative move), she would not have done it. However, in this case, the consequent of (IV\*) would *not* be instantiated as being false because Beth did not incur a defeat voluntarily.

The same conclusion follows as to the Gas Station story. To focus on relevant facts in terms of the nature of the action (or what the agent is doing), I would like to note that, although Jill was ignorant of the fact that the price at a nearby gas station was cheaper, this fact is not relevant to the nature of her action in the sense that the price of gas has no bearing on whether or not she could successfully fill up with gas. On the other hand, Jill was not ignorant of some other facts that *are* relevant to her filling up with gas, such as the fact that what was contained in the fuel tank is indeed gasoline or the fact that what was in the tank is not water, given that she understood that she was filling up with gas at the time she was doing it.



It is possible to imagine defeasible circumstances that lead to skepticism about Jill knowing what she was doing. For instance, suppose some of the fuel tanks in the station contained water instead of gasoline, although the particular tank Jill selected happened to contain gasoline. In this case, it is arguable that Jill did not know that she was filling up with gas at the time she was doing it because she did not *know* that her tank contained gasoline. However, it does not follow that (IV\*) is undermined by this skeptical scenario. The antecedent of (IV\*) requires that there be a causal connection between the agent's action and the ignorance of the relevant fact in the sense that the agent does what she does *because of* the ignorance.<sup>13</sup> However, in this skeptical scenario, Jill's ignorance did not play a causal role for her action at all: it is not because she did not know that some of the fuel tanks contained water that she filled up with gas. Hence, the antecedent of (IV\*) would be instantiated as being false in considering this skeptical version of the scenario.

Let us resume our discussion of the original description of Gas Station to see whether it causes a problem for (IV\*). Here, it is true that the consequent of (IV\*) would be instantiated as being false—Jill did not fill up with gas involuntarily. However, the antecedent would *not* be instantiated as being true, because Jill was not ignorant of any facts *relevant* to her filling up with gas, such as the fact that the fuel tank contained gasoline as opposed to some other material. The fact that the price at a nearby gas station was cheaper, which she did not know, is not relevant to her filling up with gas.

Finally, I want to explore if the Gas Station scenario might challenge (IV\*) concerning the purpose of the action (or why the agent is performing the action). Assume Jill intended to save money when buying gas. With this goal in mind, the story can be reframed as follows: Jill was (unintentionally) causing herself a financial loss because she did not realize that a nearby gas station had cheaper prices; had she known this, she would not have caused the loss (by buying gas there). Thus, her action of causing herself a loss was involuntary. By framing the story this way, we can argue

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<sup>13</sup> Susan Sauvé Meyer (2011, 176–79) emphasizes that, according to the Aristotelian conception of voluntariness, an agent, in acting involuntarily, must not only act *in ignorance* but also act *because of ignorance*.

that Jill was unaware of what she was doing (since she did not know that she was causing herself a loss). Furthermore, the fact that the nearby gas station had a lower price is highly relevant to her causing a loss, as the loss resulted from the price difference between the two gas stations.

Nevertheless, this version of the Gas Station story does not invalidate (IV\*). In this scenario, the antecedent of (IV\*) would indeed be satisfied because she caused herself a loss due to ignorance of a relevant fact; if she had known about the lower price at a nearby gas station, she would not have done it. However, in this case, the consequent of (IV\*) would *not* be falsified, because Jill did not voluntarily cause the loss to herself.

So far, I have focused on the ignorance of relevant facts in terms of what the agent is doing and why the agent is doing it to show that the preceding apparent counterexamples do not undermine (IV\*). What about the other candidates for relevant facts listed in the previously quoted passage in NE? In my view, they are either not unknown to the agent or not in fact pertinent to the examples. For instance, in accordance with the quoted passage, we may include what Aristotle would regard as legitimate relevant facts in the Gas Station story as follows:

The fact that it was Jill who was filling up with gas [who the agent is]

The fact that Jill was filling up with gas into the gas tank of her car [what or whom the agent is acting on]

The fact that Jill was using a particular gas pump nozzle of the fuel tank [what the agent is acting with]

The fact that Jill was gripping the nozzle firmly in filling up with gas [how the agent performs the act]

We can reasonably suppose that Jill was not ignorant of the first three facts. As for the fourth, Jill might be unaware of this fact; however, how hard she was gripping the nozzle is largely irrelevant to whether she could successfully carry out her action of filling up with gas.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, none of the

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<sup>14</sup> There may be other candidates regarding how the agent performs the act that could be considered relevant to the successful execution of Jill's act, such as her mood or level of distraction while performing the task. However, if we describe her act as simply filling up with gas, her lack of awareness of her psychological state or conditions is irrelevant to her performing the action. In contrast, if we describe the

listed facts causes a problem for (IV\*). A similar observation can be made regarding the other two examples.

The preceding discussion demonstrates the difficulty in describing the scenarios from the previous examples such that the antecedent of (IV\*) is instantiated as true while the consequent of (IV\*) is instantiated as false. Consequently, none of these examples provides a counterexample to (IV\*) when we consider possible candidates for relevant facts, including those pertaining to the nature of the action (i.e., what the agent is doing) or the purpose of the action (i.e., why the agent is doing it).

#### 4. Conclusion

I have examined the Aristotelian notions of compulsion and ignorance, which understand them as sufficient conditions for involuntary actions, and represented them in the form of two principles: (CV) and (IV). Cases such as Poisoning (I) and Robbery present potential counterexamples to (CV), based on the observation that in such cases, the agent can willingly and voluntarily perform an action they are coerced or compelled to do. To resolve this difficulty, I noted that in these cases, the driving force of the action does not stem from the threat or compulsion itself and proposed a revised principle (CV\*), which includes a clause specifying that the agent's action must originate from the compulsion. I also argued that (CV\*) successfully addresses a potential issue within the Aristotelian notion of a compulsory action, which requires that the action must stem from the external environment and not from the agent. Since (CV\*) makes no reference to the cause of the agent's action, the objection that what is compulsory in the sense envisaged by Aristotle cannot be an action is not applicable to (CV\*).

Regarding ignorance and involuntariness, I first observed that (IV) fails to accommodate Aristotle's distinction between non-voluntary and involuntary actions, wherein involuntary actions involve cases where the agent experiences regret. I then proposed a revised principle (IV\*) based on the

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situation as her spilling some gas, then her psychological condition becomes relevant. However, in that case, we cannot claim that she spilled the gas voluntarily. Therefore, in either scenario, these considerations do not pose a problem for (IV\*).

observation that cases where an agent regrets their actions are typically cases where they would not have acted as they did if they had known better. Subsequently, I discussed whether the scenarios of Poisoning (II), Chess, and Gas Station can undermine (IV\*). My contention is that (IV\*) can be defended against such apparent counterexamples by restricting the range of relevant facts incorporated in (IV\*) to particular types of facts, such as those pertaining to the nature or purpose of the action under the given description. Since (CV\*) and (IV\*) reflect the remarks in EE and NE while being immune to the complications previously discussed, I offer them as a plausible Aristotelian account of compulsion and ignorance related to the issue of involuntary actions.

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