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Nicomachean Ethics Book 3 Section 1-3

Aristotle tells us that an action is voluntary if it is done with a rational principle and thought. While there are grey areas most actions are done by some sort of preconceived principle or at least fully thought out. This means that we understand all our choices and are freely choosing to follow which ever one is determined to be the best. This does involve some internal deliberations which is where the principles and thinking really come into play.

One of the many reasons this matters for Aristotle is the voluntary aspect of our actions determine whether the action is done in accordance with virtue. It’s very important in determining object measures of a person’s virtuous actions to know if they did them through a free choice or through ignorance. There is a bit of a grey area involving critical influence like if someone put a gun to my head and said I had to punch my philosophy teacher then I would do so, but I don’t think someone would objectively use that as a measure of my virtuous actions.

Aristotle is focused on discovering when a person is flourishing and without voluntary actions there is no way to determine if they are. He believes that we can’t just luck into a flourishing life so we much make voluntary choices and have some measure. This allows Aristotle to have an objective way of calculating a person’s potential for flourishment, or their life trajectory.