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# Aristotle on Practical Reasoning: Perception, Reason and Action in Aristotle's Thought

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## Approval of the Dissertation Committee


This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Kyu-Been Chun as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science.



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# Abstract

Aristotle on Practical Reasoning: Perception, Reason and Action in Aristotle's Thought

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This study aims to clarify Aristotle's practical reason and how his flexible but, nonetheless nonarbitrary ethical teaching works. By doing so, I hope to provide an alternative way of understanding practical reason in contradistinction to a modern view of practical reason and its assumptions about thinking through moral and political issues. In this dissertation, I argue that Aristotle's discussion of practical reason shows that any attempts to formalize morality in the abstract are limited by the complexity of each particular situation, the variability in perception/cognition of the agent as well as a human longing that is inextricably linked to practical reasoning. While Aristotelian practical reasoning is not a rule-bound morality, it is neither simply relative for it is guided by the concern for the noble through the education of the citizens as well as by the natural longing towards human excellence and beauty. I also argue that practical reasoning in the political context is uniquely challenging because it must always presuppose the demands of justice. Lastly, I conclude with the limitations of practical reasoning and how philosophy is indispensable in not only sharpening practical reason but also transcending its limitations.

*To my mother Ilsoon Kim, my father Byung-Seong Chun, and my wife Heejin Kim*

Yet at what point and to what extent he is blameworthy is not easy to define by means of argument, for neither is anything else that is subject to perception; such things reside in the particulars involved, the relevant decision too residing in the perception [of the particulars] (τὰ δὲ τοιαῦτα ἐν τοῖς καθ᾽ ἕκαστα, καὶ ἐν τῇ αἰσθήσει ἡ κρίσις).

*Nicomachean Ethics* Book 2 Chapter 9 1109b20-23

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**Introduction**

This dissertation is a study of Aristotle's practical reason. I examine what Aristotle means by practical reason and outline the various characteristics and activities of practical reason throughout his works. One of the attractive aspects of Aristotle's practical teaching is that, while being flexible, it is not arbitrary. Yet, how such practical thought works is not entirely clear, and this dissertation hopes to clarify this question. Moreover, Aristotle's practical reason is particularly useful for it provides an alternative viewpoint to modern practical thinking.

Prominent in modern practical thinking is, what Stephen Salkever calls, "rule morality" in *Finding the Mean*. Rule morality takes its bearing primarily from various commands and imperatives. Salkever explains that rule morality is produced from the desire for increased certainty in the distribution of goods, and philosophy became a rule-maker for fair distribution. Modern philosophy does so through a "special and autonomous moral point of view…Such a perspective may be that of the purified will, or the perfectly sympathetic observer, or the Hobbesian state of nature, or the representative individual in Rawls's original position."[1] One of the reasons for preferring rule morality over agent morality is an attempt to replace personal and, therefore, a "subjective" rule to a more "scientific" and "objective" one. Discussing the difference between modern and premodern rhetoric, Bryan Garsten argues in *Saving Persuasion* that "when Hobbes made the alienation of judgment central to his notion of consent he was aiming to undermine the appeals to judgment that had been at the heart of Aristotelian and Ciceronian rhetoric."[2] Garsten's subject matter here is on rhetoric specifically but his argument shows the modern developments that move away from premodern agent-based practical

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[1] Salkever, *Finding the Mean* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 116.
[2] Garsten, Bryan. *Saving Persuasion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 31.

reasoning (which values prudence and statesmanship) and towards a more objective rule-based practical reasoning championed by the Enlightenment. Yet, there are several problems connected to rule morality. There is an ambiguity as to what the best rule is but, more importantly, in practice, such a rule has to be applied correctly which is insufficient with mere "knowledge" of the rules. Successful action depends on the agent to correctly identify the situation, the actions required, and perform them well. I believe Aristotle's understanding of practical reason can address this shortcoming of rule morality.

I argue that Aristotle's discussion of practical reason shows that any attempts to formalize morality in the abstract are limited by the complexity of each particular situation, the variability in perception/cognition of the agent as well as a human longing that is inextricably linked to practical reasoning. While Aristotelian practical reasoning is not a rule-bound morality, it is neither simply relative for it is guided by the concern for the noble through the education of the citizens as well as by the natural longing towards human excellence and beauty. I also argue that practical reasoning in the political context is uniquely challenging because it must always presuppose the demands of justice. Lastly, I conclude with the limitations of practical reasoning and how philosophy is indispensable in not only sharpening practical reason but also transcending its limitations.

In Chapter 1, I describe Aristotle's practical reason as a type of thinking which has its end as action and I emphasize the peculiar role that perception plays in the thinking process where perception in practical reasoning sees the particulars as an instance of a broader universal. Perception understood thus is never purely objective or uniform but differs according to the experience and character of the agent. In Chapter 2, I expand the observation of perception and further explain the role of intellect/*nous*. I show that neither intellect nor prudence, in general,

discover ends, and I do so via a short comparative study of Thomas Aquinas's practical reason

and by examining Aristotle's notion of correctness/*orthotēs*. Chapter 3 examines the role that

longing/*orexis* plays in practical reasoning. Insofar as an agent moves and wishes to accomplish

an action, I argue that every practical reason always accompanies longing. I find support for my

argument in the biology works of *On the Movement of Animals* and *On the Soul*. Having shown

the indispensable function of longing in practical reason, I turn to the objects of longing/*orekton*

in Chapter 4. I look at the properties of pleasure and the noble as the object of desire/*orekton.* I

argue that the education of the city plays a significant role in how one perceives ends as

pleasant/desirable and, therefore, a necessary connection of politics in practical reasoning. In

Chapter 5, I discuss practical reasoning in the political context. I show how prudence, on rare

occasions, does set the general ends of the city. I also argue that concern for justice is one of the

most visible issues of practical reasoning in the political context. Lastly, in Chapter 6, I argue

that practical reason is limited, as can be seen through the difficulties involved in Aristotle's best

regime and natural right. I further suggest how philosophy can transcend the limitations of

practical reason by fulfilling human longing as well as sharpening practical reason through a

comprehensive understanding of the best life.

**Chapter 1. "Doctrine of the Mean" and Practical Reasoning**

To understand the starting point of Aristotle's practical reason, I will briefly discuss his famous "doctrine of the mean" for it portrays most visibly his practical reasoning in action. His teaching about the mean makes the work of practical reason more apparent and also opens up questions about the nature of practical reason.

*Nicomachean Ethics* is a book dedicated to understanding human happiness. Every art, inquiry, action and choice is aimed at an end worthy of pursuit.[3] The highest end to which all other art, inquiry, action and choice aim at is said to be "happiness" (*eudaimonia*). Aristotle soon brings into question what happiness really is since there exist conflicting understandings of its definition.[4] He comes to an initial conclusion that that which is chosen for its sake and not on account of another is the "simply complete thing" and that happiness seems to be this. Happiness is said to be that which is "always chosen for itself and never on account of something else"[5] since no one chooses happiness for the sake of objects such as honor, pleasure, intellect and virtue while these latter objects are chosen for the sake of happiness.

Then what does happiness consist in? By *EN* 1.13, Aristotle narrows the defining traits of happiness to be "a certain activity of soul in accord with complete virtue."[6] He rules out chance/fortune as the source of happiness and states that it is a work (*ergon*) that belongs distinctly to human beings, a certain work of the soul since the work of the body is not unique to a human being. "We mean by 'virtue distinctive of a human being' not that of the body but that

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[3] The primary translation of the Nicomachean Ethics used in this dissertation is from Bartlett, Robert, and Susan D. Collins, trans. *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011). 1094a1
[4] 1095a19
[5] 1097a35
[6] 1102a5

of the soul, and by 'happiness' we mean an activity of soul."[7] By negating external

goods/fortunes beyond one's control as constituting happiness and emphasizing the goods that

are unique to a human being, Aristotle arrives at virtue as something inseparable from human

happiness and claims further that the virtues are divided between intellectual and moral. Aristotle

articulates the difference later in *EN* 6 but by moral virtues, I mean those excellences related to

passions and actions resulting from habit.[8] And while practical reasoning is part intellectual,

insofar as practical reasoning deals with passions and actions, I examine how moral aspect and

the mean/middle term (*meson*) relates to practical reasoning.

To visibly illustrate moral virtue, Aristotle discusses the famous "doctrine of the mean"

which states that virtue is found in a mean condition between two extremes of excess and

deficiency.

> …for [moral virtue] is concerned with passions and actions and it is in these that excess,
> deficiency, and the middle term reside. For example, it is possible to be afraid, to be
> confident, to desire, to be angry, to feel pity, and, in general, to feel pleasure and pain to a
> greater or lesser degree than one ought, and in both cases this is not good. But to feel
> them when one ought and at the things one ought, in relation to those people whom one
> ought, for the sake of what and as one ought—all these constitute the middle as well as
> what is best, which is in fact what belongs to virtue. Similarly, in the case of actions too,
> there is an excess, a deficiency, and the middle term…Virtue, therefore, is a certain
> mean, since it, at any rate, is skillful in aiming at the middle term.[9]

This passage points out that moral virtue takes passion and actions as its objects and that each of

these objects (such as a certain passion or action) has a range of possibilities or varying degrees

of expressing/acting. Such actions and passions can be deemed excessive or deficient and the

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[7] 1102a18

[8] "Both the coming-into-being and increase of intellectual virtue result mostly from teaching—hence it requires experience and time—whereas moral virtue is the result of habit…" 1103a15-17

[9] 1106b16-28

middle term/*meson* is what accords with virtue. The middle term is also described as actions and passions that one ought to do/feel in relation to various circumstantial factors involved such as the proper manner in which an action is done to a proper recipient etc. While describing virtue as the middle term is an effective way of showing that virtue requires a steering of action in a certain way that is not merely black and white, such view also raises several questions.

## 1.1 Perplexities Concerning the Middle Term/*meson*

The first question on moral virtue as a middle term is: what counts as an "ought," as mentioned in the above-quoted passage? One direct answer to this question is the choice that a prudent person would make. "Virtue, therefore, is a characteristic marked by choice, residing in the mean relative to us, a characteristic defined by reason and as the prudent person would define it."[10] Yet, this seems to replace a question with another question, for it is not certain what a prudent person would do, especially if one is not prudent to begin with. Some subsequent questions are: Why would the good be as a certain type of person defines it? Who is the prudent person/*phronimos* and how will one identify such a human being? Such perplexities arise more readily to us moderns who are more familiar with understanding morality as a set of objective rules, actions, or propositions rather than a flexible judgment made by an agent. Moreover, Aristotle is not addressing this book to a vacuum or even to all but to a certain type of audience. Aristide Tessitore explains that "the *Ethics* takes its bearings from and is addressed to morally serious persons."[11] Because Aristotle is addressing his teaching to the specific subset of people

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[10] 1107a1

[11] Tessitore, Aristide. *Reading Aristotle's Ethics: Virtue, Rhetoric and Political Philosophy*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 19. He continues to comment on the audience of the *Ethics*: "Moreover, it is simultaneously addressed to two distinct types of morally serous persons: those who are not and never will be philosophers *and* those who are potential philosophers."

who are serious about their moral development, they are most likely familiar with morally

serious exemplars whom Aristotle is alluding to. So when Aristotle discusses "the prudent

person," the audience may have some examples in mind. Having said this, the question of who a

truly prudent person is and why good moral judgments require such a high standard is still not

fully explained.[12]

Another difficulty of this "doctrine" is that the virtuous middle term was said to be a

"mean relative to us." Aristotle illustrated that there are two types of mean, the arithmetic mean

and mean relative to us. The arithmetic/numerical mean is a simple equidistant point between

two numbers, whereas the mean for us meant what is fitting for each person. Virtue is not an

arithmetic mean: "…one ought not to grasp in this way the middle term relative to us, for if

eating ten pounds is a lot but two pounds too little, the trainer will not prescribe six pounds since

perhaps even this is a lot or a little for him who will take it…"[13] The passage goes on to mention

that the right amount for Milo, a wrestler who was said to eat a whole ox,[14] cannot be compared

to a regular person's diet. This description compounds the difficulty of correct moral action since

what is right as a prudent person would do implies that what is correct is in relation to the needs

and capacities of a specific agent acting at the time.

A second difficulty has to do with the fact that understanding virtue as a mean is a

conditional one. As noted above, the middle term is not a formula for someone to input relevant

variables to derive a certain outcome. Having said that virtue is a mean, Aristotle continues and

states that in another sense, virtue is not a mean because "with respect to its being and the

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[12] "Further, while it is possible to be in error in many ways (for what is bad is unlimited [or indeterminate], as the Pythagoreans used to conjecture, what is good, limited [or determinate]), there is only one way to guide someone correctly. And thus the former is easy, the latter hard: it is easy to miss the target, hard to hit it." 1106b28-33
[13] 1106b 1-3
[14] Sachs, Joe. *Nicomachean Ethics* (Newburyport: Focus Publishing, 2002), 28. FN33 "Milo of Croton was the Olympic champion wrestler six times. Reports credited him with being able both to carry and to eat a whole ox."

definition that states what it is, virtue is a mean; but with respect to what is best and the doing of something well, it is an extreme."[15] Thus, the terms "mean" and "extremes" are relative terms. There is no definitive or objective point in which something is marked as a mean or an extreme. Mean is understood as a mean between the extremes, and extremes are understood as extremes because they are extremes from the mean.[16] There must be some prior grasp of extreme and thus the understanding of some general mean for this doctrine to be feasible. To those who have no conception of what counts as mean or extremes, an act of tactical retreat can be seen as an act of cowardice to some while the refusal to retreat in the name of courage can be seen as a rash act. Unless one already has a general sense of the mean, simply supplying this generalized rule of action to someone who cannot identify the extreme or the mean in a situation does not aid in which course of action to choose. Aristotle is aware of the difficulty involved in discovering the virtue. He says that "Hence it is, in fact, a task to be serious, for in each case it is a task to grasp what resides in the middle. For example, to grasp the middle of a circle belong not to everyone but to a knower."[17] Yet because of this difficulty, understanding virtue is even more perplexing.[18] The flexibility to adapt to circumstances and agents while not resorting to extreme relativism is both attractive and puzzling. The subsequent discussion attempts to answer the above questions by putting together the various ways in which practical reasoning is explained.

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[15] 1107a6-8

[16] Moreover there are actions that are said to have no mean or the extremes but undesirable to begin with such as adultery.

[17] 1109a28

[18] Ronna Burger points out that Aristotle is aware of this paradox and this is to, on one hand affirm conventional morality while on the other, invite others who may be puzzled to lead to a further investigation into the "why." Burger, Ronna. *Aristotle's Dialogue with Socrates* p.20-21

**1.2 Defining Practical Reason: The Difference between Practical and Theoretical Reason**

The term "practical reason" (*praktikē dianoia*) is a broad and general term I use to designate the type of thinking involved with action as its purpose. It is not a term (or activity) that is simply distinct and isolatable from other activities/parts of the human soul. Still, it can be observed as a distinguishable activity apart from the mere thoughtless action (or reaction) of the bodily and from theoretical thinking (*theorētikē dianoia*). In order to address the puzzles above, I look at various passages dealing with practical reasoning and categorize the characteristics and features unique to such thinking.

At the end of *EN* 1, Aristotle briefly differentiates the virtues into intellectual and moral.[19] From there, he proceeds to examine in detail the various moral virtues from *EN* 2 through *EN* 5. He, then, goes in detail the intellectual virtues in *EN* 6. Aristotle starts the discussion in *EN* 6 by addressing the very issues of the indeterminate character of the mean. He says that "For in all the characteristics mentioned (just as in the others as well), there is a certain target that he who possesses reason looks to and so tightens or loosens; and there is a certain defining boundary of the middle, which middle, we assert, is between the excess and the deficiency, since it is in accord with correct reason. But speaking in this way is, though truthful, not at all clear."[20] The discussion of moral virtue was primarily centered on proper action, and the middle term was the goal aimed by the moral agent. The emphasis on the middle is brought to question, and Aristotle starts the inquiry from a different perspective. In this chapter, the focus turns toward proper thinking, which allows the subsequent action to be successful. But simply equating the mean with correct reason comes across the same issue. It does not clarify how one

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[19] 1103a5
[20] 1138b 19-25

may come to the correct judgment or what correctness consist in. This insufficiency is analogized as if someone would ask what the good thing for the body would be and if another should answer that one should do what the "art of medicine commands." Therefore, to know what this "art of medicine" is, Aristotle suggests discovering the "defining boundary" of the correct reason.

Continuing with the examination of intellectual virtues, Aristotle adds a further differentiation of the soul from his previous division, which stated that the soul had a rational and nonrational part.[21] He expands the rational part and divides it into two:

> Let it be posited that the parts possessing reason are two: one part is that by which we contemplate all those sorts of beings whose principles do not admit of being otherwise, one part that by which we contemplate all those things that do admit of being otherwise. For when it comes to beings that differ in kind from one another, the part of the soul that naturally relates to each is different in kind, if in fact it is by dint of a certain similarity and kinship that knowledge is available [to the rational parts of the soul]. And let it be said that one of these is "the scientific," the other "the calculative."[22]

The first thing to note is that Aristotle "assumes" or "posits" (*hypokeisthō*) the distinction between the two parts of reason, which suggests a tentative treatment of the difference. In a glance, this passage seems to state that there is one separate faculty which contemplates things that do not admit of being otherwise and another which contemplate the things that admit of being otherwise. This difference seems especially so because Aristotle's immediately following statement is that "[f]or when it comes to beings that differ in kind from one another, the part of the soul that naturally relates to each is also different in kind…"[23] But, as I will show in

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[21] 1102a27
[22] 1139a6-12
[23] 1139a8-9

subsequent sections, Aristotle's distinction of the different functions of the mind cannot be demarcated as clearly as he illustrates here. However, they can be spoken of and understood as if they are separate.

The most apparent difference between practical and theoretical thinking lies in the objects with which they are concerned. The two different objects of thought are "those sorts of beings whose principles do not admit of being otherwise" and "all those things that do admit of being otherwise."[24] Thus, Aristotle divides the "part possessing reason," where one part is named the "scientific" (*to epistēmonikon*) and the other, "calculative" (*to logistikon*). Specifying what is meant by the abstract phrase "those things that admit of being otherwise," the calculative was identified as deliberating (*to bouleuesthai*) to indicate that the objects of the calculation are the objects of deliberation. Those things that one would deliberate about are those things within a human being's influence to shape and act.

Before moving on to *EN* 6.2, Aristotle invites the reader to "grasp what the best characteristic of each of these two parts is." As he moves on to the next chapter, he starts from a different approach, identifying three things that are authoritative over action: sense perception (*aisthēsis*), intellect (*nous*), and longing (*orexis*). Sense perception was ruled out since it is shared by animals that are not capable of moral action, and the two left are intellect and longing. Affirmation and denial are the activities of thinking, while pursuit and avoidance are the activities of longing/desire. Moral virtues are the result of choice and choice (*prohairesis*) is said to be a combination of longing and thinking. Therefore excellence of choice is excellence in affirming the truth and longing for the correct object. This is Aristotle's first fleshed out

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[24] 1139a8-9

description of practical reason: it is a combination of true reason and correct longing. The work

well done by its part is characterized as "when truth is in agreement with correct longing."[25]

Thus, practical reason is a composite activity in which the truth affirming act and correct longing

work together. In contrast, the contemplative thinking (*he theorētikē dianoia*) is said to be

concerned not with making or action but truth and falsity only: "thinking well or badly consists

in the true and the false respectively (for this is the work of the thinking part as a whole)…"[26]

Going back to the definition of practical reason, practical reason was said to contain both the

truth affirming part and the longing part.

Aristotle states that "Now, thinking itself moves nothing, but thinking that is for the sake

of something and concerned with action does, for it serves as the starting point also of an art

concerned with making…"[27] Mere thinking itself is said to move nothing. When discussing

contemplative thinking, thinking whether something is true or false is said to be the "work of the

thinking part as a whole." Thinking if something is true or false by itself cannot produce action.

Practical reason is not thinking in this way, nor is it about simply determining moral norms or

thinking about action in the abstract. It is a type of thinking infused with longing/orexis, which

moves thought in the direction of longing. Without longing/orexis, there is no action or

movement. Hence, Aristotle expands his explanation of the calculating/*logistikon* part of the

reason (which is concerned with things that can be otherwise) as marked by choice/*prohairesis*,

which is a combination of thought and longing. The description of practical reasoning is enlarged

from *EN* 6.1 to *EN* 6.2 by adding that practical reasoning is not a neutral or static activity but it

has a direction, a direction influenced (or determined) by longing.

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[25] 1139a31
[26] 1139a 28-29
[27] 1139a 37-38

**1.3 Prudence/*Phronēsis* and Practical Reason**

Aristotle's discussion of prudence (*phronēsis*) is crucial in understanding practical reason because it is the excellence of practical reasoning. Since practical reason itself is a broader term than prudence, some characteristics of practical reasoning falls outside of prudence. While all the aspects of practical reason are not identical with prudence, since prudence is the intellectual virtue most concerned with action, I discuss prudence as an integral part of discussing practical reasoning.

In the effort to clarify the virtue of the thinking part, Aristotle starts again from a new starting point. In *EN* 6.1, he divided the soul into rational and non-rational part and further divided the rational part into what is concerned with unchanging and changing things. In *EN* 6.2, practical reason was further fleshed out as involving longing/*orexis*. In *EN* 6.3, he starts "from a point further back" and suggests that "those things by which the soul attains the truth, by way of affirmation and denial, [are] five in number. These are art [*technē*], science [*epistēmē*], prudence [*phronēsis*], wisdom [*sophia*], and intellect [*nous*] (for through conviction and opinion, one can be mistaken)."[28] Earlier, thinking concerned with true and false was said to be the work of the thinking part as a whole and since the division into five parts in *EN* 6.3 is concerned with attaining truth, Aristotle brackets the role of longing/*orexis* for now.

From this five-fold division, the most obvious parts concerned with the "calculative" part of the reason are prudence(*phronēsis*) and art (*technē*) since action and art are both concerned with "what admits of being otherwise." In *EN* 6.4, Aristotle defines art as "certain characteristic

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[28] 1139b 15-18 One thing to note about this division is, Aristotle divides that part of the soul which attains the truth by affirming and denial and thus this subdivision does not apply to the "correct longing" aspect of practical reason mentioned in *EN* 2. From the five mentioned, only prudence actively involves longing but the longing aspect of the soul is what posits ends and not prudence or any of the intellectual virtues when one is engaged in practical reasoning.

bound up with making that is accompanied by true reason; and artlessness, to the contrary is a characteristic bound up with making, accompanied by false reason, and concerned with what admits of being otherwise." [29] When defining art, Aristotle does not simply say a "characteristic bound up with making" but adds that the difference between art and artlessness is true and false reason (*logos*). And, the objects of art cannot be said to be true or false since a shoe is a shoe while one can say it is a good shoe meaning a shoe that fits and serves well the needs of the wearer or a bad shoe which does the contrary. Both art and artlessness are said to have the characteristic bound up with making since they are both an active disposition to make something while what differentiates the two is the accompaniment of true or false reason. If successful artisans are distinguished from the artless by the fact that one can make well while the other cannot, then the meaning of "accompanied by true reason" can be interpreted as the role of reason to successfully bring about an end and thus has an instrumental sense. The difference between the two types of people (artful/artless) mentioned is not their analytical ability to distinguish "true shoes" from "false shoes." If someone fails to make a shoe, then the difference between him and a successful artisan is whether each had a correct understanding of *how* to make a good shoe.[30] Of course, this implies a certain understanding of what a shoe is, but the stress is not so much on the conceptual aspect and rather on employing reason to bring about an actual shoe. From this context, reason is understood as primarily occupied with finding the "how" or the means to a given end.

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[29] 1140a20-24

[30] While I simplify the example by uniformly talking about a shoe as if it is one thing, certain shoes are meant to keep the feet safe during construction while others can be meant for a fashion accessory. Then from this point of view, the usefulness, beauty, and "goodness" of a shoe depends on whether these different shoes attain the ends, both as intended by maker and experienced by the wearer.

Just as in the discussion of art/*technē*, subsequent usage of the word "reason" in discussing prudence also indicates its function as primarily an instrumental one. *EN* 6.5 is dedicated to the discussion of prudence/*phronēsis*. In this chapter, there are a few important points that Aristotle emphasizes. Prudence/*phronēsis* is first outlined as being able to "deliberate nobly about things good and advantageous for himself, not in a partial way…but about the sorts of things conducive to living well in general."[31] Thus, prudence as an intellectual virtue is the excellence in deliberation with regard to those objects related to living well. Aristotle is emphatic that such deliberation is not science/*epistēmē* because the objects of prudence "admit of being otherwise" and science deals with objects which cannot be otherwise and therefore are eternal. Prudence is also not art because the objects of prudence are sought for themselves while the objects of art have an end external to itself.[32] So far, prudence is outlined as a type of thinking where things do not occur out of necessity and the ends that are sought are good in and of themelves. Aristotle then discusses the characteristic of the type of objects that practical reason is concerned with. He states that:

> For it is not *every* conviction that the pleasant and painful ruin and distort—for example, that the triangle has or does not have [angles whose sum is equal to] two right angles— but rather those convictions concerning action. For the principles of actions are that [end] for the sake of which the actions are undertaken, but to someone who has been ruined on account of pleasure or pain, the principle immediately fails to appear—it is not manifest

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[31] 1140a 27

[32] T.H. Irwin notes that the difference between art and prudence is being concerned with the "unqualified end" of action. Otherwise, Aristotle would "face serious difficulties if he does not allow the same event to be both an action (insofar as it is done for its own sake) and a production (insofar as it is done for the sake of some end external to it). Many events that are virtuous actions, and as such decided on for themselves, are also productions…" Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. T. H. Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999), 242. I believe Irwin is thinking of something similar to the following: a courageous act is a virtuous action and an end in itself but also instrumental for producing victory and subsequent wealth that a city can gain from winning the war. An act can be both done for its sake while a "means" or "path" to producing something else. A general needs a courageous soldier willing to lay down one's life but in the end, the general aims at victory and not just courageous acts of self sacrifice. An end in itself for a soldier can be a means for another end for a general.

to him that he ought to choose all things and to act for the sake of this and on account of it. For vice is ruinous of the principle. As a result, prudence is necessarily a characteristic accompanied by reason, in possession of the truth, and bound up with action pertaining to the human good.[33]

According to this passage, there are certain instances of knowledge/thinking which are not influenced by pleasure/pain while there is also a  certain knowledge or thinking influenced by pleasure and pain -- and that prudence is a species of this type of knowledge. This is important because one may easily question why knowledge of human goods cannot be like knowledge of mathematics. Knowledge of mathematics is unaffected by how one feels at the moment, and similarly, one may question why moral knowledge cannot be a knowing of abstract propositions. If one looks at the Decalogue of the Bible, the commandments are propositions, and it is not the case that how one feels at the moment would suddenly change the meaning of the Ten Commandments or make it unintelligible. But Aristotle's discussion points to the important aspect that for the moral agent, the principles/end of actions *fails to appear* (*ou phainetai archē*). Thus, when it comes to thinking while acting, what one should do is somehow influenced or coeval with desire/longing as the ends "appear" to us.

The initial description of prudence as "deliberating nobly" concerning the general human goods has an added observation that the human good which prudence aims at is not a static entity and requires certain cooperation from pleasure/pain. But so far, the discussion of prudence is still silent as to what that human good is, regardless of how it appears to people. Moreover, another puzzle remains: why is it still the case that human goods would be destroyed by pleasure and pain? The moral dicta such as "be just" or "do not lie" do not change or fail to appear as ends

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[33] 1140b14-21

because one is in pain or pleasure. To better understand this, I turn to how particulars and general ideas appear to a moral agent. I show that general moral norms or objects of moral interest appear through grasping the universal in the particulars, but because those general ideas are grasped through particulars, there is indeterminacy present in practical reasoning. This, of course, does not mean that there is no consideration of universals in general. Thinking of broader issues of ends does occur, and Aristotle does not think that prudence is blind to it. But the current context of the discussion is to show how ordinary practical reasoning operates. I discuss the occasions in which broader ends are thought and what validates the ends themselves in chapter 4 of this dissertation.

## 1.4. Cognition of Particulars in Practical Reason

This section examines in detail how the perception of particulars works and how it relates to thinking in the practical context. I focus especially on those cases where knowledge fails at aiding one in practice. I find these examples particularly revealing because they show the dissonance between treating practical thinking as a matter of propositions versus how it is integrated with other non-discursive aspects of the soul's activity. Although propositional knowledge of good and bad (e.g. "one should not steal") is certainly knowledge about practical matters, such knowledge does not translate cleanly into practice, and it seems what Aristotle has in mind is not this general propositional type of knowledge when discussing practical reason. Examples in Book 6 reveals the concrete characteristics of practical reason through examining why errors occurred in each case. Specifically, those characteristics are knowing particulars (as opposed to knowing merely the universals), knowing from experience, and the difficulty involved in thinking correctly on practical matters.

The objects of practical reason are particular. The end of practical reason is action, and

the objects in action are never universal but always particular. Thus, ultimately, practical

reason's efficacy is based on being able to see in particular situations what the good is and to

pursue it successfully. This knowledge of practical reason involves *identifying* a particular as an

instance of the universal which the moral agent seeks. The successful identification of the

broader universal goal and knowledge of the particulars present here and now marks the

excellence and thus prudence of the thinker. The following examples in *EN* 6.8 show how the

relation between universals and particulars are understood in practical reason.


**1.4.1 Case of "Light Meat"**

In the everyday/ordinary conception of knowledge in practical matters, ignorance of

general principles/universals does not seem to be a problem. Rather, it is in the "application" of

that general norm in any given situation that an error occurs. That is because, according to

Aristotle, practical reasoning is not "applying" general principles/universals to here and now but

rather, it requires an immediate recognition or perception of the situation with relevant universals

connected to it. Thus, one of the main reasons for failure in practical reason is the failure of

knowing the particulars. Failure to know the particulars involves a failure to identify the

particulars present to an agent as a relevant factor in judgment.

Having made the initial distinctions between various types of intellectual virtues in *EN*

6.3, Aristotle describes the relative "uselessness" of scientific reasoning by mocking Anaxagoras

and Thales because they "do not investigate human goods."[34] As opposed to wisdom, prudence is

introduced as that excellence in thinking concerning human affairs. If practical reasoning

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[34]1141b 8

connotes broader thinking involved in practice/action, prudence would be the pinnacle or the most excellent form of practical reasoning. Prudence is "not concerned with the universals alone but must also be acquainted with the particulars: it is bound up with action and action concerns particulars."[35] While it is relatively clear what knowing the universal could mean, knowing the particular seems to involve a different mode of knowing than knowing a universal. Aristotle goes on to say that:

> For if someone should know that light meats are easily digestible and healthful, but is ignorant of what sorts are light, he will not produce health; rather, he who does know that poultry is light and healthful will to a greater degree produce health. Prudence is bound up with action. As a result, one ought to have [knowledge of] both [universals and particulars], but more so of the latter. But here too there would be a certain architectonic [art or knowledge].[36]

The cause of error in the example of light meat is the failure to know the particulars. The failure to know the particulars is not necessarily the failure to know the universals. One can know the general propositional knowledge that light meat is healthy and one can even know that poultry is a type of light meat. But the failure to act in this situation is not whether one knows the propositions themselves but whether one can identify the object and thus make action possible, in this case the consumption of light meat for the sake of health. The gap between propositional knowledge and practical reason is apparent when one tries to complete the action. Successful completion of action requires the ability to identify the object in a given situation. Thus, there is a sense of immediacy or direct comprehension present in the process of practical reason.

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[35] 1141b 15
[36] 1141b 20

**1.4.2 Case of Young and Old**

In *EN* 6.7 Aristotle claims that those who have experience are more skilled in acting than those who have knowledge. Aristotle paradoxically claims that "some who are without knowledge – those who have experience, among others – are more skilled in acting than are others who do have knowledge."[37] He spoke as if knowledge made almost no contribution to successful action. Yet one may wonder, would not experience count as "knowledge"? The characteristic of knowledge and knowledge derived from experience becomes more visible as he connects the relation of knowing particulars as a result of experience.

The following passages are examples that he uses to bring out the distinction between an immediate experiential type of knowledge in practical reason as opposed to universal knowledge. "[T]he young become skilled in geometry and mathematics, and are wise in such things, but a young person does not seem to be prudent. The cause is that prudence is also of particulars, which come to be known as a result of experience, but a young person is inexperienced: a long period of time creates experience."[38] Here the example is more concrete than the previous case of light meat since, in the latter example, only an application of the universal to the particular was concerned while in this case, experience seems to yield a different type of knowledge.

Aristotle inquires further why the young are capable of mathematical knowledge but not the type of knowledge prudence requires. Earlier the young were considered unlikely to have the knowledge that requires a long time to acquire. Mathematics is not considered that kind of knowledge.

And then someone might examine this as well: on account of what indeed might a boy become skilled in mathematics, but not wise or well versed in nature? Or is it because the

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[37] 1141b 15
[38] 1142a 12- 15

former subjects exist through abstraction, whereas the principles of the latter comes from experience? And do the young not have any settled convictions about these latter but [merely] speak of them, whereas, with mathematics and geometry, what they are is not unclear?"[39]

Here the first distinction is the difference between being skilled in mathematics and being wise in nature. The reason for the success of the former for an inexperienced person is because of abstraction. Joe Sachs, commenting on this passage, points to a discussion of abstraction in mathematics found in *Metaphysics* Book XI Chapter 3.[40] There, Aristotle explains that the "mathematician makes his study about things that result from taking something away (for he studies things after having stripped away everything perceptible. And this leaves behind only what is of some amount and continuous…"[41] One of the reasons the young can get a hold of mathematics easier than nature is because of abstraction where various qualities are left behind to examine only certain aspects such as "the amount" or "relative positions." The study of nature was contrasted with this type of knowledge, suggesting that the study of nature takes in the manifold qualities and complexities present in things. The consideration of these manifold qualities requires time in a way that mathematics does not. Thus, the young are capable of talking about nature and thus can "know," but they do not have a "settled conviction." The above discussion reveals an important characteristic in practical reason. Because the problems dealt with in practical affairs have diverse elements with complex relation with one another,

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[39] 1142a

[40] Sachs states that unlike mathematics, which is clear and distinct, study of nature requires a patient observation which discloses itself. I apply that same analogy to the understanding practical matters. Sachs, Joe, trans. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2002. p. 110 FN 159

[41] Sachs, Joe, trans. *Aristotle's Metaphysics*. Santa Fe, NM: Green Lion Press, 2002. 1061a 30-35

experience is necessary to develop that type of knowledge which can only be brought about through experience.

### 1.4.3 Case of Heavy Water: Ambiguity in Source of Error

The preceding cases of error focused on the failure to identify the particulars in a situation, an ability acquired through experience. Soon after, Aristotle gives another example that deals with the possibility of error not only to particulars but the general propositional idea as well. Aristotle says that "Further, error in deliberation concerns either the universal or the particular, for one can err in deliberating either about the fact that all heavy water is bad, or about the fact that this water here is heavy."[42] Unlike the earlier case of Aristotle's focus that practical reason's error occurs on the particulars, Aristotle claims that it can be either universal or the particular. Thus, any error concerning practical reason can occur on the propositional knowledge or the experiential knowledge, which compounds the difficulty of asserting the cause of error in practical reasoning.

While Aristotle's initial presentation seemed to show a simplistic view that experience is enough to produce a good result, Aristotle casts doubt on this idea. Those who are experienced are said to have "settled conviction"/*pisteuein* but, after all, it's not clear whether "settled conviction" corresponds to a true understanding/knowledge of the matter. Thus, there is ambiguity in the relationship present between a wealth of experience and a true understanding of matters.

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[42] 1142a 23

## 1.5 Perceiving Particulars and the role of *nous*

Having shown that practical thinking's main consideration is with particulars, this section

shows how universals are perceived within particulars through Aristotle's explanation of the

different parts of the truth-attaining part of our soul, especially the relationship between prudence

and the elusive faculty of intellect/*nous*. The faculty of intellect/*nous* is discussed thematically in

*EN* 6.6. First, science/*epistēmē* is defined as a certain knowledge of things that exist by necessity

accompanied by a demonstration. Aristotle continues to state that the principles/starting points

from which scientific demonstration follows are not a product of science itself nor are these

starting points given by wisdom/*sophia* because wisdom accompanies demonstration. Aristotle's

notion of science and wisdom suggests a certain ability to articulate the way things are through

logical reasoning, starting from some ultimate principles and coming to a conclusion about a

certain matter. It is these ultimate or first starting principles that the intellect/*nous* is concerned

with. Moreover, art and prudence are ruled out as knowledge of the principles of demonstration

since they deal with things that can be otherwise. In contrast, demonstrations are said to be of

necessary and, thus, eternal things. The intellect is thus left as the faculty which comprehends

starting principles.[43]

What, then, is the relation between intellect and prudence/practical reason? Intellect/*nous*

is defined as a capacity that grasps the indemonstrable beginning point of demonstrations. While

the relation between intellect and science or intellect and wisdom is apparent since science or

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[43] This is a very puzzling treatment of intellect. Aristotle is extremely brief about explaining the role of intellect (*nous*) in chapter 6 and instead of positively identifying what intellect is, he works through negation to explain what it is not. Perhaps the difficulty lies in explaining a highly technical and differentiated term, unfamiliar to the audience unaccustomed to Aristotle's science. His more scientific treatment of *nous* can be found in *De Anima* and *Metaphysics* where he employs a much more scientific approach, e.g. applying the potentiality/actuality distinction to the activity of the mind. As for the disputation of the ends in practical reasoning (which is, strictly speaking, not the work of intellect), that is a work of a specific type of prudence (namely, architectonic prudence) and philosophy's task. I elaborate this point further in chapter 4.

wisdom is intellect accompanied by demonstration, the relation between prudence (or practical thinking in general) and intellect is less clear. At first, the intellect seems far removed from practical thinking for intellect grasps the universals while prudence grasps the particulars. But observed from a different perspective, there is a similarity:

> And that prudence is not science is manifest: prudence concerns the ultimate particular thing, as was said, for the action performed is of this kind. Indeed, prudence corresponds to intellect, for intellect is concerned with the defining boundaries, of which there is no rational account; and prudence is concerned with the ultimate particular thing, of which there is not a science but rather a perception, and a perception not of things peculiar to one of the senses, but a perception of the sort by which we perceive that the ultimate particular thing, in mathematics, is a triangle. For here too there will be a stop. But this is perception rather more than prudence, though perception of a form different from that [of one of the senses].[44]

It seems that intellect is concerned with the highest defining boundary of universals, while the subject matter of prudence is the ultimate particular object here and now. Regarding the subject matter, one is universal and necessary at all times (or at least provides the starting point of such stable/eternal knowledge) while the other is constantly varying and thus seems to be at opposite ends of the spectrum.

Yet there is a similarity between the two; namely, that intellect and prudence are pointed at the ultimate in which there is no further articulation. Prudence is said to be concerned with the "ultimate particular thing" and insofar as it is concerned with the ultimate terms of "which there is no rational account" it is likened to "intellect." They are both alike in that they are a sort of "perceiving." (*aisthēsis*) A prudent person has the precision of experiential knowledge but the capacity to see the particulars is not a science. It is, "rather a perception, and a perception *not* of

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[44] 1142a24-30

things peculiar to one of the senses, *but a perception of the sort by which we perceive that the ultimate particular thing, in mathematics, is a triangle*" (emphasis added).[45] The term perception is fitting because, unlike the propositional knowledge (a statement or a fact that one knows abstractly), perception has the immediacy that is present about thinking in particular situations or particular objects.

The difference between simple sense perception and the perception involved in prudence is that the latter type is akin to seeing "triangle as the ultimate particular thing in mathematics." There are different commentaries on the meaning of a triangle as the ultimate particular thing but the common point among the commentaries is that somehow a triangle is a fundamental figure, and we see it as so without needing further explanations.[46] Such perception is not a sensory one but a recognition of the phenomenon present in front of the person *as* an instance of a triangle as an ultimate figure. The "perception" in practical reasoning is not a simple and neutral input of the senses but an input bound with intelligible content, cognized immediately at the moment of perception. Thus, the particular, through perception, is understood *as* an instance of some general idea or intelligible content.

In *EN* 6.8, intellect and prudence seemed to be at the opposite ends while sharing a similar characteristic, namely the immediacy of perception. Later in *EN* 6.12, Aristotle adjusts his earlier claim by stating that:

> intellect is concerned with the ultimate things in both directions, for [what grasps] both the first defining boundaries and the ultimate particulars is intellect and not reason. That is, on the one hand, intellect pertaining to demonstrations grasps the unchanging first defining boundaries; on the other hand, intellect in matters of action grasps also the ultimate particular thing that admits of being otherwise, that is, the minor premise. For

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[45] 1142a 23-30
[46] Bartlett FN 44 p.126

these ultimate particulars are the principles [or starting points] of that for the sake of which one acts: the universals arise from the particulars. Of these, then, *one must have a perception, and this perception is intellect*[47]…Hence intellect is both a beginning and an end, for the demonstrations arise from these and concern them. As a result, one ought to pay attention to the undemonstrated assertions and opinions of experienced and older people, or of the prudent, no less than to demonstrations, for because they have an experienced eye, they see correctly[48]

Here, the intellect is present and at work on both intuiting scientific principles as well as practical reasoning. While the earlier passage seems to suggest that particulars of practical reasoning and the starting point of demonstrative reasoning stand very far apart, I follow Joe Sachs's interpretation that intellect is the faculty that allows both activities.[49] Intellect is at work when it grasps the first principles of science but in practical thinking, its work is on grasping the ultimate particulars.

Going back to the earlier case studies, in the case of light meat, the success of one's health depends on the capacity to "see"/perceive (*aisthēsis*) poultry as an instance of light meat. The sharpening of the perception is caused by experience and not by "knowledge" in the propositional sense. Even if one understands propositionally that poultry is light meat, if one fails to identify and "see" poultry at any given situation, there is still an epistemic gap present. And this gap seems to be most noticeable in the context of action when one wants to connect the

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[47] Emphasis added (*toutōn oun echein dei aisthēsin, hautē de esti nous*)

[48] 1143a 36-1143b14

[49] Sachs comments on this passage at FN 168 that "It was said above, at 1142a 23-27, that intellect and practical judgment [Sachs's translation of *phronēsis*] stand at opposite extremes, directed at the unarticulated and indivisible terms of thought and the ultimate particulars of perception. The two extremes are now said to be united in the one faculty of intellect, that contemplates the universals contained in the ultimate particulars, which can be the only terms for a knowledge of truth. The same activity that holds a particular thing together is at work on the soul even in perception. Thus the claim that a single power stands at the root of theoretical and practical knowing rests on ultimate conclusions of the highest kind of philosophy, which are arrived at in Bk. III of *On the Soul* and Bk. XII of the *Metaphysics*. Here that claim asserts the unity of the human being." Sachs, Joe, trans. *Aristotle's Metaphysics* (Santa Fe: Green Lion Press, 2002), 114.

general propositional knowledge to one's given actual circumstances. Whenever one "knows" what to do but fails in acting, this gap is most visible. This epistemic gap is further elaborated as caused by inexperience exemplified by the difference between the young and the old where mathematics, an abstract and general knowledge, comes readily while the "eye" required for proper perception takes time.

The role of intellect is important to point out because of it function in the thinking process. Intellect itself is not the source of clear and certain knowledge. Rather it provides an intuitive grasp of the starting points or ultimate particulars in inquiry, and thus, it connects the sensory perceptions and their intelligible content. Intellect is a necessary condition of possibility for all subsequent thinking, both practical and theoretical, but intellect itself does not provide the conclusion of an inquiry. Inquiry requires discursive thinking in addition to intellect's grasp of the intelligibles in order to be made clear and "turned into" knowledge, which explains why science and wisdom are said to accompany demonstration in addition to intellect.

To briefly summarize, Aristotle's flexible yet non-arbitrary morality is based on a certain type of practical reasoning. This reasoning is concerned with objects that can be otherwise in contradistinction from objects that are always. One important aspect of Aristotle's practical reasoning is that perception involved in practical thinking is linked with an intelligible general/universal content. Practical reasoning is not simply discerning universal moral rules but involves an immediate perception of particulars that are cognized/identified as an instance of a broader idea (e.g., light meat *as* healthy or this thing here *as* light meat). The significance of this is to show how much practical reasoning is dependent upon a more immediate perception and less on abstract thinking. If practical reasoning is dependent largely on perception, how are ends determined? The next chapter examines the place and role of ends in practical reasoning.

**Chapter 2 The Problem of Discovering Ends**

In order to clarify how practical reason works, I have shown that it is not merely normative or thinking through general rules of action but is bound by a particular perception (*aisthēsis*), which occurs immediately. The significance of this interpretation is the disproportionate role that a more immediate cognition of particulars plays, rather than generalized "ideas" or rules of action in the process of practical reason. Moreover, how one grasps the ends that one aims at, and what faculty is responsible for the discovery is a contentious issue among scholars. The source of grasping the end requires clarification, for many commentators follow the interpretation that prudence or intellect provides the ends. Such interpretations not only go against Aristotle's text but also downplay the role that the city plays in shaping the agent's ends.

In this chapter, I clarify that neither intellect nor prudence discovers ends via 1) a short comparative study of Thomas Aquinas's practical reason 2) examining Aristotle's notion of "correctness" (*orthotēs*) and 3) surveying the scholarly contentions on this issue. This chapter leads to my next argument in chapter 3 that it is longing/*orexis* and pleasure that posit the end for us. In chapter 4, I show that longing and pleasure, in turn, are to a significant degree, a result of habituation by the laws and customs of a city. The city posits practical reason's ends, which allows moral/political actions to be possible by defining them.[50]

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[50] "Practical activities work within this larger context or way of life. It helps constitute the particular common sense horizons in terms of which we act and understand." Blitz, Mark. "The Common Sense of Practical Knowledge," *Journal of Law, Economics & Policy* 4, no. 1 (Fall 2007): 177-190. P. 187

## 2.1 The Role of *Nous* Revisited

Intellect/*nous* was said to grasp "the unchanging first defining boundaries; on the other hand, intellect in matters of action grasps also the ultimate particular thing that admits of being otherwise, that is the minor premise."[51] Repeating this crucial yet puzzling passage, one may wonder why the intellect grasps the first principles of scientific demonstrations but not for practice. Intellect was said to grasp the minor premise, so what grasps the major premise? For practical reason, the principles of action would denote general norms, such as "be courageous" or "be just." The relevant norms that an agent would have to follow are the major premise, while the minor premise would indicate that this situation here is an instance of the relevant norm. Here, I present a brief comparative study of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. This comparison is informative of the role of *nous* by looking at how another philosopher, who was deeply influenced by Aristotle, conceived of how the ends of practical reasoning can be discovered. This issue is also particularly relevant since some modern commentators interpret intellect as the source of providing ends.[52]

Aristotle states that intellect grasps the first principles of science, but he does not posit a faculty which grasps the universal starting points of practical thinking. In contrast, Thomas Aquinas does posit such a faculty called *synderesis,* and this contrast is useful for understanding the source of moral norms for both thinkers, especially given that Aristotle heavily influenced Aquinas. Synderesis is the "intellect-like" faculty that grasps the first principles of *practical* reasoning for Aquinas. Among the few places where he discusses *synderesis*, I quote *Summa*

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[51] *EN* 1143b 2

[52] Jessica Moss lists Greenwood 1909, Hardie1968, Cooper 1975, Dahl 1984, Reeve 1992. Moss, Jessica *Aristotle and the Apparent Good* (2012). P. 222

*Theologica* I-I Question 79 article 12. In this article, Aquinas addresses whether *synderesis* is a distinct power of the soul:

> Man's act of reasoning, since it is a kind of movement, proceeds from the understanding of certain things---namely, those which are naturally known without any investigation on the part of reason, as from an immovable principle---and ends also at the understanding, inasmuch as by means of those principles naturally known, we judge of those things which we have discovered by reasoning. Now it is clear that, as the speculative reason argues about speculative things, so that practical reason argues about practical things. Therefore we must have, bestowed on us by nature, not only speculative principles, but also practical principles. Now the first speculative principles bestowed on us by nature do not belong to a special power, but to a special habit, which is called "the understanding of principles," as the Philosopher explains (Ethic. vi, 6). Wherefore the first practical principles, bestowed on us by nature, do not belong to a special power, but to a special natural habit, which we call "*synderesis*." Whence "*synderesis*" is said to incite to good, and to murmur at evil, inasmuch as through first principles we proceed to discover, and judge of what we have discovered. It is therefore clear that "*synderesis*" is not a power, but a natural habit.[53]

*Summa Theologica* is a theological work, and it does not claim to be a continuation of Aristotelian philosophy. Still, it seems when Thomas Aquinas can add something of Aristotle that can be in harmony with the church teachings, he does so. Aquinas's broad point is that the principles of all knowledge are stable, certain, and knowable, for this ensures that the subsequent inquiry would be sound. This potentiality is latent in all humans. Just as humans are capable of precise scientific thinking (speculative sciences) which does not err, such as mathematics, Aquinas posits that there is something analogous for the thinking of practical things. Reasoning

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[53] Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica* I-I Q79 A12 (Benziger Bros. edition, 1947) Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. http://dhspriory.org/thomas/english/summa/index.html

as a movement requires an immovable principle, which is the beginning of the inquiry. For the speculative sciences, that seed is "understanding of principles" (*nous*). The visible influence of Aristotle is found in the discussion of this "habit,"[54] which deals with the principles of the speculative sciences. Making an argument from analogy, just as it is clear that speculative principles are the basis for reasoning about speculative things, Aquinas posits a habit to provide the principles for practical reasoning viz. *synderesis*. Thomas Aquinas does not state that it is the work of the intellect/*nous* to do the job of the *synderesis,* i.e., that it is the same faculty with differing functions. He also does not attribute to Aristotle the notion of *synderesis*. When he can buttress his point with Aristotle, Aquinas does not shy away from quoting him, but there are no references to Aristotle about the faculty of *synderesis* nor any faculty with the analogous function that fulfills the role of grasping a firm starting point from which subsequent practical reasoning can proceed.

Just as understanding/intellect/*nous* is unerring in its characteristic, so is *synderesis*. In *De Veritate* Question 16 Article 2, discussing *synderesis* as the subject matter, Aquinas proceeds to assert that all reasoning must be deduced from some first unchangeable principles for any subsequent certainty of knowledge. This absolute and certain beginning of knowledge is the "first general principles, in reference to which everything else which is known is examined and by reason of which every truth is approved and every falsehood rejected. If any error could take place in these, there would be no certainty in the whole of the knowledge which follows."[55] Since every reasoning requires a certain basis, there also has to be an unerring standpoint from

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[54] Habit is the translation for Aristotle's *hexis*. "If virtues are neither passions nor powers, it remains that they are habits according to the previously given divison. Thus he concludes that virtue with regard to its generic definition obviously is a habit." (102) St. Thomas Aquinas *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* trans. C.J. Litzinger, O.P.

[55] James V. McGlynn, S.J., trans., *Truth (De Veritate)*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. 1994.*De Veritate* Q 16 A 2 p. 309

which certain and true knowledge of the practical reasoning can proceed, and this unerring standpoint is *synderesis*. The positing of *synderesis* is to assure that there are clear right and wrong in practical reasoning, something that is not attributed to Aristotle because Aristotle is, as I will further show, much more ambiguous than Aquinas on this matter.

### 2.1.1 *Nous* as Grasping the Minor Premise

Another point to emphasize about the function of *nous* in Aristotle's description is that it detects the minor premise. He says, "intellect in matters of action grasps also the ultimate particular thing that admits of being otherwise, that is, the minor premise."[56] I have mentioned that intellect grasped the ultimate starting point of scientific principles in the scientific demonstration, but intellect in practical things is concerned with grasping the particular thing that is the minor premise. The minor premise here refers to a type of syllogism, often called a "practical syllogism," where one works through and comes to a practical conclusion similar to the syllogism discussed in Aristotle's logical works.[57] Aristotle does not use the term "practical syllogism" but an example of this syllogism can be found in *EN* 7, where Aristotle is illustrating a conflicting decision-making process. In this syllogism, the major/universal premise is said to be the general thing that one ought to do, the minor premise is the recognition that this thing/action here is the thing/action that one should do as suggested by the major premise and the conclusion is the undertaking of action. He says in *EN* 7.4: "For the universal premise is an opinion[*he men gar katholou doxa*]; the other premise concerns particulars, over which

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[56] 1143b 4

[57] T.H. Irwin notes that "When Aristotle mentions *sullogismsos* about action (1144a31) he cannot have in mind a syllogism in the full technical sense (since *sullogismos* about action, unlike a strict syllogism, has a particular premise); the translation 'inference' (cf. 1149a33) avoids assuming too much. 'Practical syllogism' is a term often used by critics, but not by Aristotle, for the type of inference described in 1147a15. Aristotle does indeed speak of the conclusion (1147a27) and of a premise (1147b9; cf. 1143b3)." Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. T. H. Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999), 335-336.

perception is authoritative from the start. And whenever one conclusion arises from the universal and particular premises, the soul must necessarily assert it, but in the case of a conclusion bound up with making [or doing] things, the soul must immediately act."[58] With this account of syllogism combined with the statement about intellect/*nous* earlier, we see that that intellect/*nous* as the faculty perceiving the universal within the particular is concerned with seeing the particular circumstances as instances of the universal/major premise. Unlike the sciences, it is not the task of intellect/*nous* to grasp the universal/major premise while it is emphatically the work of the *synderesis* to do so for Thomas Aquinas. Aristotle does not assign a faculty that grasps the unerring major premise of practical reasoning, unlike Thomas Aquinas.

### 2.2 Prudence, Correctness *orthotēs*, and Ends

If the role of intellect/*nous* is identifying particulars in the manner described above rather than discovering ends, then what does one make of Aristotle's statement that the mean is "in accord with correct reason [*orthos logos*]"? What makes practical reason or action "correct/*orthos*"? Correct reason is first discussed in the opening of *EN* 6 as synonymous with being in accord with the mean. The usage of the term "correct" is puzzling because to do the correct thing, to do what the mean dictates, is to do the thing that is best and excellent. And yet, examining the different instances of the term "correct" reveals very little about the correctness of the ends to pursue. The term "correct" in *EN* 6 is almost always spoken in the context of whether the means fulfill a given end and not whether a chosen end is correct. When Aristotle discusses the difference between practical and contemplative thinking, the latter's excellence is marked by

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[58] 1147a 25-30

truth and falsehood, while the former is said to be excellent when "the reasoning involved must be true and the longing correct."[59] Practical reasoning is not merely thinking about the truth involved in actions but requires a correct aligning of "longing" for practical thinking as a whole to be considered successful. Then if prudence is excellent practical thinking, it would seem that prudence should be concerned with figuring out the correct ends. Still, Aristotle's examination of prudence and correctness does not fully answer this question.

In the process of further clarifying prudence, Aristotle examines "good deliberation"/*euboulia* in *EN* 6.9. Deliberation is a part of practical thinking and closely resembles prudence in its operation. First, deliberation is a kind of investigation and calculation (*zetei kai logizetai*). In *EN* 6.1, "calculation" is mentioned as the description of practical thinking in contradistinction to scientific thinking where deliberation and calculation are considered "the same thing" insofar as it is thinking through things that admit of being otherwise. Deliberation resembles good guesswork/*eustochia* in that it "connects the dots" to a conclusion, but deliberation is not guesswork because guesswork is "both unaccompanied by reasoned argument and something swift."[60] A quality of good practical thinking presupposes the ability to articulate the thought process rationally. The second quality of good deliberation is said to be neither science nor opinion because one can meaningfully speak of good and bad deliberation, and bad deliberation is said to err while good deliberation is a certain correctness. Thus, deliberation itself is an activity in which one can be good or bad while science, by definition, does not admit of error, for if it is erroneous, then it is not science. Deliberation is also not opinion because 'opinion' was said to be "already determined," which shows that deliberation is an activity of

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[59] 1139a25
[60] 1142b2

thinking through towards a conclusion. In contrast, once that conclusion has been arrived at, it is not called deliberation, which is why good deliberation is a "correctness of thinking" that is "not yet an assertion."

So far, the discussion portrays deliberation and prudence as a form of rational activity that is not guesswork since guesswork is not fully rational.Nor is it opinion for opinion itself is not thinking through a problem but a state in which a conclusion has already been reached. One may conclude that if prudence, the excellence of practical reasoning, is a virtue whose activity is marked by good deliberation, then it would follow that prudence would be an activity of rational thinking-through that is distinguished from guesswork or determined assertion. This interpretation may suggest that prudence would also think through the ends since it does not seem plausible that good deliberation as rational activity would simply accept given ends.

Aristotle expands his discussion of the relationship between good deliberation, prudence and "correctness" (*orthotēs*) in the following section:

> Now, since *correctness* has various senses, it is clear that correctness of deliberation is not every kind of correctness; for the person lacking self-restraint or the base person will hit on, as a result of calculation, whatever he sets before himself as obligatory, with the result that he will have deliberated correctly but nonetheless have gotten hold of something very bad. But to have deliberated well seems to be something good, for such correctness of deliberation is good deliberation, which is apt to hit on what is good.

Here, correctness is said to have "various senses." There are two different "senses" in which deliberation can be correct. First is a deliberation that succeeds in attaining the end regardless of the goodness of the end. An example is the case of an agent lacking self-restraint or a base one where one rationally thinks through the means and attains the end successfully, but "ha[s] gotten hold of something very bad." The term "correct" in the first case is used as a successful hitting

upon what the agent has set himself as obligatory (or "proposes to see")[61] regardless of the

goodness of the end. The base agent can correctly deliberate, meaning that he can successfully

figure out the means while attaining a base end. Yet, this is problematic for this is to say that a

"correct" or good deliberation leads to "something very bad." Good deliberation should be

something that should lead to good results, which is why Aristotle states that correct deliberation

is good deliberation, a deliberation that is apt to hit upon the good. Then, good deliberation

would presuppose some end conceived as good. But there is no indication that such positing of

the end is a result of a rational investigation or that it is the task of deliberation to figure out the

proper ends. A prudent agent would undoubtedly know what the best end is, but the source of

that understanding is not explicitly clear.

Then, strictly speaking, good deliberation does not mean that deliberating determines

good ends. But, for something to be called good deliberation, it requires a correct means-seeking

towards a good end and not towards any given ends. Further on, deliberation is  said to take time,

as opposed to guesswork which is quick, but Aristotle revises this point and says that it is not the

time it took to deliberate which determines its goodness or badness but rather the "correctness

that accords with what is beneficial and aims at what one ought, in the right manner, and at the

right time."[62] Correct deliberation is the right way to attain the end, which is towards "what one

ought." The passage echoes *EN* 2.5's description of virtue: "But to feel them when one ought and

at the things one ought, in relation to those people whom one ought, for the sake of what and as

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[61] Bartlett and Collins follow the emendation of *dein* "obligatory" rather than majority of the MSS which is written as *idein*. (Bartlett and Collins p. 127 N47) Terrence Irwin follows *idein* and the translates the sentence as "For the incontinent or base person will use rational calculation to reach what he proposes to see…" (Irwin p. 94) I do not think either reading takes away from the argument that I am making since what is relevant is that that which is "proposed to see" or "set as obligatory" is not the outcome of deliberation itself but an end somehow set or given as important/relevant to the agent.
[62] 1142b 27

one ought---all these constitute the middle as well as what is best, which is in fact what belongs to virtue."[63] Correct deliberation in the best sense (as opposed to the example of a base agent) would not only hit the goal but also be towards what one ought. There is no additional explanation of "what one ought," but Aristotle also states in *EN* 1.3 that the political art "legislates what one ought to do and what to abstain from, its end would encompass those of the others, with the result that this would be the human good."[64] Then, correct deliberation may very well be figuring out the best way to attain the ends already set by the city. Of course, this does not mean that the regime's ends are necessarily good, but I limit my discussion here to the standpoint of the individual before I expand on the role that the city plays in practical reasoning.

A more general definition of good deliberation is formulated in the last section of *EN* 6.9. Good deliberation can be distinguished as towards a specific end or "simply" where "good deliberation simply is that which guides us correctly toward the end simply, but a specific sort of deliberation is what guides us correctly toward some particular end."[65] Once again, while deliberation is concerned with good ends, the text does not provide much support that one deliberates *about* the ends. Rather a moral agent does take note of the goodness of the end, but deliberation is mostly concerned with what "guides us correctly toward the end." While good deliberation must somehow encompass having good ends as well, Aristotle does not limit good deliberation to just virtuous ends and retains a certain ambiguity inherent in the term "correct" by maintaining that good deliberation simply is any thinking that aids in attaining any end generally.

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[63] 1106b21-24
[64] 1094b5-7
[65] 1142b 30

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## 2.2.1 Prudence and Cleverness/*deinotēs*

The support for prudence's concern with means can be additionally found in the treatment of cleverness (*deinotēs*). Cleverness is the capacity "of doing what is conducive to the target posited and so of hitting it. If, then, the target is a noble one, the cleverness is praiseworthy; but if base, it is mere cunning."[66] Prudence is said to have this capacity since a prudent agent is apt to hit the goal set for oneself. While cleverness, as such, is a neutral capacity, indifferent to ends, this capacity cannot be the characteristic of prudence "in the absence of virtue, as was said and is clear."[67] The connection between prudence as means-seeking excellence and its end is fleshed out in the continuing passage:

> For the syllogisms dealing with matters of action have a principle [or starting point], "since the end, that is, what is best, is of such-and-such a character;' whatever it may be (let it be, for the sake of argument, any chance thing), but this end does not appear to someone if he is not good. For corruption distorts and causes one to be mistaken about the principles bound up with action. As a result, it is manifest that it is impossible for someone who is not good to be prudent.[68]

Prudence, like cleverness, figures out the way to a successful action. Prudence, unlike mere cleverness, is always guided towards the good. But while the prudent agent aims at the good and thus presupposes a certain understanding of good, this end is not propositional knowledge for this end "appears" to someone if he is good and fails to appear if someone is corrupt.  Here, the appearance of the good would be, not the work of reason but character, since the corruption is not the corruption of reason. If it is the reasoning that is corrupted, then such an agent would not be clever. Therefore, if the character is not virtuous, the "end does not appear" to such an agent.

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[66] 1144a25-27
[67] 1144a32
[68] 1144a31-37

While prudence still figures out the best course of action, what provides a starting point of such action is determined by something different from prudence.

## 2.3 Aristotle, a Humean? Scholarly Contentions

The role that intellectual virtues have in determining practical ends in Aristotelian ethics has not found consensus in modern scholarship. Since the virtues of the mind encompass practical reason, an excellent practical reason must have an excellent end in sight. The alternative to this view would make Aristotle very un-Aristotelian. Many scholars find the intellectual virtues, especially prudence, as merely means-seeking objectionable. An example of this approach can be found in Anthony Price's essay "Aristotle on the Ends of Deliberation" which mostly follows the interpretation that Aristotle cannot have meant that prudence does not think about ends:

> Some of the things that Aristotle says do not lose their capacity to surprise us. Take the following remark within his discussion of *phronēsis* (practical wisdom) in AE B.12: 'Virtue [that's of character] makes the target (*skopos*) right, *phronēsis* the things towards it' (1144a7-9) …The modern reader is reminded of Hume's pronouncement: 'Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them' (*A Treatise of Human Nature,* II. iii.3). In *NE* 1.13, Aristotle introduced a distinction, that structures much of the *Ethics*, between a rational part of the soul whose virtues are intellectual, and a non-rational (or derivatively rational) part whose virtues are 'ethical' (*ēthikos*) in a sense that connects with passions and appetites…reason then calculates how those ends are to be achieved. Such calculation is neutral in that it assesses alternatives as more or less efficacious, but does not evaluate them ethically. Ends may be good or bad; means are effective or ineffective. Yet such a

conception cannot be what Aristotle intends, and has rarely (and never recently) been ascribed to him.[69]

Price rejects the interpretation that Aristotle's practical reasoning does not deal with ends. He likens such view to a Humean position and "such a conception cannot be what Aristotle intends…" The two quotes he uses to defend his reading is *EN* 2.6, where the virtue of character is "a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean relative to us this being defined by a *logos*, that is, by that which the *phronimos* would define it"[70] and a quote from *Metaphysics* 12.7: "Longing is grounded by opinion, rather than opinion by longing; for thinking is the starting point."[71]

I will briefly comment that the first quote on character-virtue does not reject the idea that the ends are given. What Aristotle does throughout the treatment of character-virtue is not an invention of ends via *logos* but rather a clarification of already given ends of the city. Aristotle does not question if courage should be an end but he is clearly defining what courage is. Also, the *phronimos* is not necessarily a philosopher, nor is his role necessarily to establish or figure out ends. The text suggests that proper virtue is that trait of character which the prudent agent would see as demanded by the situation in light of given ends.

Moreover, much of Aristotle's text states the contrary to Price's interpretation. Below is a partial list of quotations that suggests that *phronēsis* does not determine ends (the *Eudemian Ethics* passage is pointed out by Jessica Moss in her *Aristotle and the Apparent Good* p.157):

- *EN* 3.3: "We deliberate not about the ends but about things conducive to the ends. For a doctor does not deliberate about whether he is to make someone healthy, an orator

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[69] Price, Anthony. "Aristotle on the Ends of Deliberation." *Moral Psychology and Human Action in Aristotle.* Oxford University Press 2011 p. 135
[70] Price's translation ibid. p. 136
[71] Ibid. 136

whether he is to persuade, or a politician whether he is to produce good order—in fact, nobody else deliberates about the end either. Rather, having set down the end, they examine how and through what things it will exist."[72]

- *Eudemian Ethics (EE)* 2.11: "Does virtue make the aim right or what is for the aim? We lay down, then, that it is the aim, because there is of this neither calculation nor argument. But let this in fact be laid down as a principle, for neither does a doctor examine whether one should be healthy or not, but whether one should take walks or not; nor does the gymnastic expert examine whether one should have a good condition or not, but whether one should wrestle or not."[73]

- *EN* 6.2: "Hence there cannot be choice either in the absence of intellect and thinking or in the absence of a moral characteristic, for there cannot be acting well or its contrary in action in the absence of thinking and character."[74]

- *EN* 6.12: "For virtue makes the target correct, prudence the things conducive to that target."[75]

- *EN* 6.13: "It is clear too there will be no correct choice in the absence of prudence, nor in the absence of virtue; for the latter makes one carry out the end, the former the things conducive to the end."[76]

The passages all indicate that Aristotle seems to reject the role of determining ends for prudence. This assertion is challenging because not only does practical reason not consider ends, it is character virtue (*ēthikēs aretēs*) which supplies the end. The issue with character virtue supplying the end, however, is that while character virtues are not the products of mindless repetitions, the virtues themselves are not an act of reasoning, and they are more bound to the more bodily aspect of the person. So, to say that character virtues determine the end while reason

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[72] 1112b11-16

[73] 1227b23-27 Translation by Peter L.P. Simpson from *The Eudemian Ethics of Aristotle* trans Peter L.P. Simpson. (Routledge Taylor & Francis 2013), 46. There is no explicit mention of prudence since the discussion of prudence does not occur until *EE* 5 (*EN* 6).

[74] 1139a34-36
[75] 1114a7-9
[76] 1145a4-6

plays a seemingly more ministerial role of finding the means posited by a more bodily virtue

seems counter-intuitive. The notion that excellent practical reasoning could be blind to a deeper

understanding of ends while leaving that determination to the character/ethical virtues seems to

subordinate the "higher" rational part to a less rational part. Moreover, this view presupposes that

what appears desirable or pleasant is base, but this is not the case at all for Aristotle. Pleasures

are qualitatively different because different pleasures correspond to different activities, and it is

not irrational to choose a pleasure that comes from noble activities.

Jessica Moss comments that despite Aristotle's many passages on the relation of

reasoning and goals, much of scholarship rejects this idea:

> Nonetheless, a formidable array of interpreters have refused to accept it. Aristotle's claim
> that virtue makes the goal right is "misleading" (Cooper, Hardie); on the prima facie
> reading "absurd" (Broadie); it "risks obscuring" Aristotle's genuine view (McDowell); it
> "must be modified" (Greenwood), or "must be treated as a lapse on Aristotle's part"
> (Joachim); given his other commitments, Aristotle "is wrong to claim that there is no
> reasoning about ethical first principles" (Irwin). For despite what Aristotle seems to say
> in these passages, these interpreters insist, he must in fact hold that intellect plays a
> crucial role in identifying our ends: either (despite his apparent denials) we do after all
> reason about ends, or (despite his apparent silence on the point) we grasp them through
> some function of intellect distinct from reasoning –perhaps dialectic, or perhaps as in the
> theoretical case "intellectual intuition" (*nous*).[77]

The chief reason for many interpreters' aversion towards the notion that intellectual virtue does

not discover ends mostly follows Price's interpretation that it would turn Aristotle is into a crude

version of Hume. Yet, Moss says this is a problem that stems from a misunderstanding of

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[77] Moss, Jessica. Aristotle and the Apparent Good. P. 157

Aristotle's psychology, an error of equating the non-rational with non-cognitive and assuming that if that which grasped the ends were non-rational, the agent would be a slave to completely irrational forces: "If intellect does not supply our goals, the thought goes, then only longing and passion are left to do the job."[78] It is Price's thesis that acting well involves deliberation, which is a type of thinking that must, to a certain degree, evaluate the ends. In the broadest sense, as I will show, a certain type of practical reason can examine and choose ends, and Price's interpretation is not entirely implausible. But, I believe Moss's closer reading of Aristotle's text fits better with the context of the discussion. I hold that Aristotle does not think it is the chief concern of practical reason to consider ends.

I will expand on this reason in the next chapter, but I want to add that the context of practical reason in *EN* 6 deals primarily with individuals. Generally, most citizens do not deliberate about ends. There are few cases in which deliberation about ends is possible, and that is at the moment of founding/re-founding where there occurs a revision or serious reconsideration of the significant ends that a community holds.  Yet, such an opportunity is very rare, and to be in a situation to set down ends is allotted to the very few. The audience of Aristotle's text as a lecture would be an audience of committed citizens who, most likely, havw an interest in engaging in political affairs.[79] To such an audience, it seems unlikely that Aristotle would talk about abstractly establishing ends. Limiting practical reason to a fixed set of ends makes sense because radically questioning the ends of a city which the audience is part of would

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[78] Ibid. 158
[79] Tessitore, Aristide. *Reading Aristotle's Ethics* p. 19

go against the interest of promoting Aristotle's teaching. Moreover, such an act would be against "considering one's social responsibilities."[80]

Aristotle's own method of procedure helps buttress this point. He does not start from questioning the ends and then derives a "system of ethics" but starts from the opinions of the many such as popular opinions, or the wise few such as the philosophers/poets, and ascends dialectically. Radical questioning of ends "jumps" to a position that seems very uncharacteristic of Aristotle's procedure for he himself states that there is a distinction between the two approaches in *EN* 1.4: "But let it not escape our notice that there is a difference between the arguments that proceed *from* the principles and those that proceed *to* the principles."[81] From this, I conclude that it is unlikely that Aristotle's discussion on intellectual virtues would involve openly discussing a revision of ends.

This does not mean that Aristotle will refrain from discussing the questionable nature of practical ends entirely. The questioning of the ends of the city does occur but only after a general examination of given ends first. Aristotle does hint, at certain places, at the value of theoretical contemplation over excellent practical reasoning/prudence in *EN* 6.12 where wisdom/*sophia* is said to be superior to practical thinking. But even here, Aristotle does not yet defend the superiority of the contemplative life over practical life but limits himself to defending the superiority of wisdom over prudence. Wisdom versus prudence is limiting the discussion to the excellence of thinking about certain objects over other forms of excellent thinking. In contrast,

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[80] "An exoteric book contains then two teachings: a popular teaching of an edifying character, which is in the foreground; and a philosophic teaching concerning the most important subject, which is indicated only between the lines." Strauss, Leo. *Persecution and the Art of Writing*. P. 36 While this thesis cannot treat the exotericism of Aristotle's practical works in depth, scholars such as Aristide Tessitore, Ronna Burger, Robert Bartlett, and Thomas Pangle have argued in favor of such positions.

[81] 1095a33-34

the issue of contemplative life versus practical life is a difference in the way of life ordered towards very different ends. We only see the most open questioning of the value of practically virtuous life at *EN* 10 when the contemplative life is discussed, and even there, Aristotle is cautious in asserting the superiority of the philosophic life.

## 2.4 Conclusion

If the work of intellect is to grasp the minor premise, then what provides the major premise? If prudence examines means, how are ends grasped? I suggest that it is longing/*orexis* that supplies the end/major premise where what intellect perceives is the particular-as-an-instance-of-a-major-premise that makes one act or refrain from acting. As I show in the next two chapters, longing/*orexis* is not a single thing but encompasses different forms of desiring, including the desire for the basest object to the noblest. Some forms of longing are more rational than others. Longing has its object what is pleasant or what appears desirable, and what is pleasant/desirable differs greatly to different habituations.

For the morally virtuous agent, the longing is towards what appears noble to the agent, and intellect sees this particular situation here and now as an instance to act in accord with the agent's longing, namely, to act virtuously. For the morally virtuous agent, the ends that appear desirable are also noble objects. For the base, the ends that appear desirable are base. Both act to fulfill their longing, which is the major premise or ends while only for the virtuous, what is longed for and what is good coincides. The next chapter explores how longing works in providing the ends in practical reason by examining the case of unrestraint/*akrasia* in *EN* 7.

**Chapter 3 Desire and Practical Reasoning**

I have shown, so far, that prudence in the discussion of intellectual virtues in *EN* 6 is largely concerned with means, not ends. The reason is that the end of action is largely given by the city, and what one ultimately pursues is what appears desirable to the person, including the ends of the city. Practical reasoning has its objective, namely action, and action is not possible without *orexis*. "Longing" is the translation I use for the term *orexis* and "desire" for *epithumia* following Bartlett and Collins.[82] It is not that longing determines ends, but what one acts toward has to appear desirable for action to be possible. That which appears desirable can be in accordance with reason or not, but it must be desirable. The relevance of this chapter to my argument is that longing plays a disproportionate role in positing an end as opposed to "knowledge" or reason for ordinary practical reasoning. Much of failure to do what is right is because there is a competing end that seems more desirable. According to Aristotle's psychological account, it is longing that provides the major premise or end. A person struggling with competing ends is struggling with different longings that appear to the person at the moment of decision. The important observation is that we are not determined mechanically such that we are led by whatever longing posits. But whatever we seek in action is what appears most desirable or at least less aversive among the alternatives. The reason is that action is a fulfillment of longing, and without longing, there would be no action. Practical reasoning is not neutral or abstract thinking, but a type of thinking guided by an end, which is the same as to say it is guided by a longing. In this chapter, I show the role longing plays in setting ends through the examination of *akrasia* in *EN* 7 as well as the function of longing in his theoretical works

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[82] Terrence Irwin, Harris Rackham, Jonathan Barnes, and Joe Sachs translate *orexis* as "desire," while Peter Simpson translates it as "appetite."

*Movement of Animals* (*De Motu Animalium* abbreviated *MA*) and *On the Soul* (*De Anima* abbreviated *DA*).

### 3.1 Practical Syllogism in *On the Movement of Animals*

I have briefly touched upon practical syllogism in the previous chapter, and I expand the topic here, for it helps us understand Aristotle's discussion of the unrestrained/*akrasia*. As noted in the previous chapter, Aristotle's "practical syllogism" is his way of breaking down the process of practical thinking. It is a simplification of practical reasoning, but it is also useful in identifying the role of ends, particulars, norms, and perceptions. In *On the Movement of Animals/De Motu Animalium*, he provides an account of how practical reasoning works in the simplest form. In a practical syllogism, there is a major premise and a minor premise which, then, results in action where the major premise is a norm or an opinion/*doxa,* and the conclusion is an action. In *MA* Chapter 7, Aristotle writes about the difference between a theoretical syllogism and a practical syllogism as follows:

> But in that case [theoretical syllogism] the end is a speculative proposition (for whenever one thinks the two premises, one thinks and puts together the conclusion), whereas here the conclusion which results from the two premises is the action. For example, whenever someone thinks that every man should take walks, and that he is a man, at once he takes a walk. Or if he thinks that no man should take a walk now, and that he is a man, at once he remains at rest. And he does both of these things, if nothing prevents or compels him.[83]

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[83] *MA* 701a10-16 *On the Movement of Animals* translation by Martha Nussbaum from: Nussbaum, Martha. *Aristotle's De Motu Animalium*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1978.

The first example of a walking/resting man is a straightforward example of practical syllogism where the major premise is "every man should take walks" or "no man should take a walk now." The minor premise, (identified by intellect/*nous* as discussed in *EN* 6.11)*,* is "he is a man." As I have previously stated, the minor premise "he is a man" is not merely a neutral observation but a sense perception/*aisthēsis* of particulars seen as an instance of the major premise "every man should take walks."

Moreover, the conclusion of a practical syllogism is not one that leads to a statement about a moral norm. "Practical syllogism" is not a method to derive a more specific normative conclusion, waiting to be applied to a situation. The major premise above is "every man ought to walk," and the minor premise is "one is a man oneself." The conclusion of this syllogism is *not* "therefore this one ought to walk" for that itself is a normative statement that one still needs to implement in action. The conclusion is the person actually walking, and simultaneously, the thinking process ceases. The reasoning stops, and there is immediate action:

> For whenever a creature is actually using sense-perception or *phantasia* or thought towards the thing for-the-sake-of-which, he does at once what he desires.[84] For the activity of the desire takes the place of questioning or thinking. "I have to drink," says appetite. "Here's drink," says sense-perception or *phantasia* or thought. At once he drinks. This, then, is the way that animals are impelled to move and act: the proximate reason for movement is desire, and this comes to be either through sense-perception or through *phantasia* and thought. With creatures that desire to act, it is sometimes from appetite or spiritedness and sometimes from [desire or] wish that they make or act.[85]

> Similarly, here the major premise is "I have to drink," and the minor premise is "Here's drink" as dictated by sense-perception/*phantasia*/thought while the act of drinking is the

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[84] "Desire" is Nussbaum's translation of *orexis*. "Appetite" is her translation of *epithumia*.
[85] *MA* 701a30-701b1

conclusion. The major premise is posited by "appetite"/*epithumia*, a form of longing. Action is

born from appetite/*epithumia*, spiritedness/*thumos*, longing/*orexis*, or from wish/*boulēsis,* and

action is satisfying any one of these. Practical reasoning serves this purpose for "the activity of

the desire [longing/*orexis*] takes the place of questioning or thinking." It is a mode of thinking

that has its end in action, which is the same as actualizing longing. These preliminary

observations are helpful in Aristotle's description of how an unrestrained agent makes his choice.


**3.2 Akrasia and Practical Syllogism: How "Knowledge" Fails in Practical Reasoning**

The broad subject matter of *EN* 7 is pleasure. Specifically, the first eleven chapters deal

with how pleasure affects practical reasoning, and the last three chapters deal with pleasure in

general. The question of how pleasure affects practical reasoning is important because virtuous

agents are rare, and as Aristotle demonstrates, the vicious agents are not that common as well.

Many people fall in between the two realms of self-restrained and unrestrained agents. Aristotle

says that he "must make another beginning" and starts by subdividing bad characters as "vice,

lack of self-restraint, and brutishness." In contrast, the opposites are said to be "virtue, self-

restraint," and a "certain heroic and divine virtue." Brutishness describes the type of diseased or

defective character which resembles animals rather than a character formed by ineffective

choices. Heroic/divine virtue is ascribed to Hector of Troy and is a title given to persons greatly

admired among Spartans, although it is unclear what exactly this virtue is. It is stated in contrast

to brutishness, and both brutishness and heroic/divine virtue are a rare trait not found among

most human beings.[86]

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[86] "And since it is rare for a man to be divine…so also the brutish person is rare among human beings" 1145a28

From *EN* Books 1 through 5, Aristotle's focus is on clarifying virtues and vices of character. Virtue, as Aristotle defines it earlier, in *EN* 2.4, is excellence attained by a person who fulfills the following three conditions: "first, if he acts knowingly, second, if he acts by choosing and by choosing the actions in question for their own sake; and, third, if he acts while being in a steady and unwavering state."[87] One of the key characteristics of virtue is that it is a "steady and unwavering state," and this applies to vice as well. Virtuous and vicious characters are easier to find than the brutish or godlike characters. But both virtuous and vicious persons have steady characters who consistently act in the way they do, and given that virtuous persons are rare, such characters are not a commonly found trait either. Yet, experience shows us that it is a very common occurrence that someone "knows" what to do but fails to do it. Such a person is certainly not virtuous, but Aristotle does not label such persons, vicious. Many people would fall in the range between virtuous and vicious, and *EN* 7 account for this common group of people who mostly know what to do, yet somehow fail to act.

In *EN* 7, the difference between the pair of virtuous/vicious and the self-restraint/unrestraint reveals how the desiring part posits ends in practical reasoning. In *EN* 7.3, Aristotle inquires whether it is the object of pursuit that makes someone unrestrained as opposed to vicious/licentious or, rather, the manner in which one engages the end. The object which the unrestrained is concerned with is the same as the vicious/licentious person, namely pleasure. But even though the object of pursuit is pleasure for both, this does not make the unrestrained person the same as the licentious person. Aristotle explains that "the licentious person is led on by what he chooses, holding that he ought always to pursue the present pleasure, whereas the person

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[87] 1105a31-33

lacking self-restraint does not think that, but pursues the pleasure anyway."[88] The distinction

between the unrestrained and the licentious is that while both agents may think that this object is

desirable/pleasing, the licentious person sees this particular object as something that one "ought

always" to pursue. The unrestrained sees it as desirable but does not think that it is something

that should always be pursued. To put it differently, the unrestrained has a conflicting major

premise, which posits that this here should not be pursued while simultaneously holding that this

here should be pursued. Thus, the unrestrained sees the object under consideration both as an

instance of desire and as an instance of avoidance. The licentious lacks the presence of a contrary

norm.


### 3.2.1 How the Error of *akrasia* Occurs

Then, how does an unrestrained agent make his decisions? What causes the errors?

Aristotle shows how knowledge connects to action in *EN* 7.3. In practical reasoning, there is no

requirement that the major premise or propositional norm should be correct. "As for its being

true opinion but not science [or knowledge] against which those who lack self-restraint act, it

makes no difference to the argument. For some people, when they opine about something, are

without hesitation but think they know things precisely."[89] The failure of the unrestrained is not

caused by the truth or falsity of the moral norm. Moreover, whether the source of decision is

from science or opinion does not affect the certainty of the decision process. He continues to say

that "If, then, those who opine will act contrary to their conviction more than do those who

possess science, solely on account of their having a weak conviction, then [as a matter of fact]

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[88] 1146b21-23
[89] 1146b 25-27

science will not differ from opinion; for some are no less convinced of what they opine about than are other people of what they know…"[90] This observation is intended to give an account of how bad decision is possible while holding true propositional norms. As long as one has a strong sense of conviction, Aristotle suggests that it does not matter whether that "knowledge" is true. Therefore, in the realm of practice, a sense of conviction or a sense of certainty is more influential in dictating action. More importantly, knowledge may be "dormant" during the moment of action. One may "know" what the right thing to do is but that knowledge may not be under active consideration, "since we say 'to know' in two senses—both the person who has the science but is not using it and he who uses it are said to know – it will make a difference whether someone who does what he ought not to do has the relevant knowledge but is not actively contemplating it, or whether he is actively contemplating it."[91] An error in one's knowledge of the norm does not contribute to unrestrained actions. What contributes is a passive state where one fails to consider the relevant norms actively at the moment of decision and action. The following discussion specifies the thinking process using syllogistic terms:

> Further, since there are two kinds of premises, [namely, the universal and the particular,] nothing prevents someone who holds both from acting contrary to the science he possesses because he makes use of the universal premise but not the particular one, matters of action being of course particulars. There is also a relevant difference pertaining to the universal premise, for there is the universal relating to the person himself and the one relating to the matter of concern at hand: for example, that dry foods are advantageous for every human being and that he himself is a human being, or that this sort of thing here is dry. As to whether this particular food here is of a particular

character, however, the person lacking self-restraint either does not have that knowledge or is not exercising it.[92]

The example here is very similar to the earlier example of light meat. It is curious why Aristotle uses this example, for the failure to identify dry food, just like the earlier example of the light meat, does not seem to be an issue of restraining oneself. Yet, Aristotle's treatment of this issue as part of *akrasia* indicates that the various failures in practical reasoning can relate to this analysis and not just the cases on restraining oneself.

The subsequent section reintroduces the active/passive consideration of knowledge. While the earlier example simply spoke of not actively contemplating knowledge, Aristotle adds to the illustration by saying that "For in the case of having but not using science, we see that the 'having' is different, such that a person both has it in a way and does not have it – for example, someone who is asleep, mad, or drunk…. It is clear, then, that those lacking self-restraint must be said to be in a state similar to such people."[93] The significance of adding the description of a person who is asleep, mad, or drunk connects to the insight that the state of non-active mental engagement allows for the bodily part to take over and the desiring aspect to have more influence in action. In such a situation, an established norm is significantly weaker than the desiring part which is why self-restrained and unrestrained persons are defined by these measures.

Concluding from the above observations, there is a difference in the degree to which the affirming part of practical reasoning participates in action. Then, the success of an action is the proper connection between the norm and the perception of the particular as an instance of the norm. Moreover, a more detailed description of the desiring part's influence on choice is evident,

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[92] 1147a 1-8
[93] 1147a 12-15

which occurs in inverse proportion to one's active mental engagement of the situation. And given that action is always in a particular circumstance towards a particular object, if one does not have a proper perception of a particular, practical reasoning leads to error. Thus, if one merely "knows" the propositional norm without that norm being reflected in the particular object, it is meaningless: "for one must grow naturally into the knowledge, and that requires time. As a result, it must be supposed that those who lack self-restraint speak just as actors do."[94]

Combining the above sections from *EN* 7 and *MA*, *akrasia* occurs because instead of the norm that one normally holds or as reason dictates, at the moment captured by desire, it is desire which posits the major premise. This is why the unrestrained has two conflicting norms, one posited by opinion or reason and one posited by desire. The example that clearly shows this conflict is in the case of sweet things:

> Whenever, then, the universal premise is present that forbids us from tasting sweet things, and another universal is also present, to the effect that every sweet thing is pleasant, and this thing here is sweet (and this premise is active), and by chance the relevant desire is present in us, the one premise says to avoid this; but the desire for it leads the way, for it is able to set in motion each of the parts [of the body]. It turns out, as a result, that someone can come to be without self-restraint by a reasoned account [logos], in a way, and by opinion, an opinion that is not in itself but incidentally contrary to correct reason – for the desire involved, not the opinion, is contrary to correct reason.[95]

With the case of sweetness, one sees the particular thing and identifies it not only as an instance of a sweet thing but also as an instance of something one ought to taste since the agent in this scenario holds the proposition that "one ought to taste everything sweet." In addition, there is also the norm that one should not pursue it: "sweet thing is good" as a norm is present

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[94] 1147a 20-24
[95] 1147a32-1147b5

while simultaneously "pursuing this is not good" is present as well. The particular under consideration is both an instance of an object of pursuit and an object of avoidance. In this case, Aristotle adds that the opinion itself, viz. "sweet thing is pleasant" is not necessarily false or wrong, but the desire in this context is erroneous. The failure of choice, in this case, is a disorder of proportion or harmony between the affirming part and the desiring part. The desiring part takes the lead and pulls the agent as if the agent was drunk or asleep.

The difference between the unrestrained and the licentious lies here: the licentious both affirms and desires what is generally blameworthy but the unrestrained affirms the norm that one should avoid the base pleasures but nonetheless desires it. The licentious sees the particular as an instance of the propositional norm that 'one should pursue any pleasure' while the desiring part also affirms this particular as an instance of desirable. The unrestrained sees the particular as an instance of the general propositional norm that one should avoid this while the desiring part affirms this particular as an instance of desirable. To sum up, any particular is perceived as a combination of an instance of a propositional norm/opinion as well as an instance of an object with varying desirability.

The phenomenon of *akrasia* is spoken of only in the context of bodily pleasure, and Aristotle emphasizes that one can be "unrestrained" with objects such as "victory, honor, wealth, and the good and pleasant things,"[96] but such a person is not unrestrained simply, and the people we normally refer to as unrestrained are those concerned with bodily and base pleasures. What, then, of the self-restrained and the virtuous? They certainly choose what reason or the authoritative or correct opinion dictates over the base desire for pleasure. But I also argue that

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[96] 1147b30

they choose what they choose because they find some pleasure or desire toward them. The dichotomy is not reason versus desire but desire towards higher ends versus desire towards lower ends. I show in the next section that desire is always present in practical thinking, and the ends that any agent seeks accompany a form of desire towards that end.

### 3.3 Longing is Inseparable from Ends

In *EN* 6.2, Aristotle states that choice/*prohairesis* is the origin of action and choice is a combination of longing/*orexis* and reasoning/*logos*. The previous discussion was focused on the desire as *epithumia* since *akrasia* is conflict between desire/*epithumia* and reason. But desire/*epithumia* is a species of longing/*orexis* and although longing is not identical with desire, for the context of choosing ends, the distinction is not significant. For whether something is posited due to desire/*epithumia* as in the case of unrestrained or a more restrained agent who abides by reason, without some act of longing, action is not possible. The following examples from the biology texts of *On the Movement of Animals*/*De Motu Animalium* and in *On the Soul/De Anima* support that longing is always present in action.

### 3.3.1 Desire/Longing as a Cause of All Actions

Both *MA* and *DA* repeatedly state that movement, and therefore action, is not possible without some form of longing/*orexis*. In *MA* Chapter 6, Aristotle explains that various forms of desire converge or overlap in their role in imparting movement:

> For all animals both impart movement and are moved for the sake of something, so that this is the limit to all their movement: the thing for-the-sake-of-which. Now we see that

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the movers of the animal are reasoning [*dianoias*] and *phantasia* and choice [*prohairesis*] and wish [*boulēsis*] and appetite [*epithumia*]. And all of these can be reduced to thought [*nous*] and desire [longing/*orexis*]. For both *phantasia* and sense-perception [*aisthēsis*] hold the same place as thought, since all are concerned with making distinctions—though they differ from each other in ways we have discussed elsewhere. Wish [*boulēsis*] and spiritedness [*thumos*] and appetite [*epithumia*] are all desire [*orexis*], and choice [*prohairesis*] shares both in reasoning [*dianoias*] and in desire [*orexis*]. So that the first mover is the object of desire [*orekton*] and also of thought [*dianoēton*]; not, however, every object of thought, but the end in the sphere of things that can be done. So it is a good [*agathos*] of this sort that imparts movement, not everything noble [*kalos*]. For insofar as something else is done for the sake of this, and insofar as it is an end of things that are for the sake of something else, thus far it imparts movement. And we must suppose that the apparent good [*phainomenon agathon*] ranks as a good, and so does the pleasant [*hedu*] (since it is an apparent good).[97]

An important point from this passage is that movement is for the sake of some end and what moves a human being can be simplified to thought and longing/*orexis*. (I hold that Aristotle is talking about human beings, and not just any animals, since the faculties mentioned such as reasoning and "the noble" do not apply to non-human animals)[98]. Moreover, longing/*orexis* encompasses wish/*boulēsis*, spiritedness/*thumos*, and desire/*epithumia*. Desire/*epithumia* is a desire towards bodily things, but wish/*boulēsis* is thought to be a more rational desire,[99] and Aristotle frequently speaks of spiritedness as partially rational. Hence, desire is not necessarily devoid of reason. Thus, movement and action presuppose a desire towards an end, and the object

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[97] *MA* 700b17-29

[98] Moreover, *De Anima* states that "since many people follow their imaginings contrary to what they know, and in the other animals there is no intellectual or reasoning activity, except imagination." 433a13

[99] Terence Irwin defines a wish as "a rational desire for some good as an end in itself" citing *EN* 1111b26 and 1113a15. Irwin, Terrence *Nicomachean Ethics* ( Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999), 322.

of the end must be desirable to the agent for there to be action. Mere reason or thought alone does not move the person.

To further support this claim, Aristotle discusses the source of motion in man in *DA* Book 3. Here, Aristotle once again repeats that it is pleasure/pain and thus affirms the role of longing in setting off-motion in the soul. He says "for the contemplative intellect does not contemplate anything that has to do with action, and says nothing about what is to be fled from or pursued, while motion always belongs to a being that is fleeing something or pursuing something; and even when the thinking part does contemplate something of that sort, it still does not urge that one flee or pursue it"[100] for thinking alone does not create movement/action. Even if the thinking part does think about pursuing something, such thinking is contemplative in nature and only when longing is involved does the agent actually move: "And even when the intellect enjoins and the reasoning part declares that something is to be fled or pursued one does not necessarily move, but acts instead in accordance with desire[*epithumia*], as does one without self-restraint."[101] This is an echo of the discussion of *EN* 7.3 where the agent fails to follow what the reasoning part has established. But if this is the case, then the role of reason would be useless if it cannot influence action, and there is still a question of how a self-restrained agent or a virtuous agent would act if, ultimately, it is the longing (including desire) that moves the agent. Aristotle denies that desire governs authoritatively: "But neither is it desire that governs this sort of motion, since self-restrained people, even when they desire [*oregomenoi*] and yearn [*emithumountes*] for something, do not necessarily do those things for which they have the desire

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[100] The translation for *De Anima* is by Joe Sachs from Sachs, Joe *Aristotle's On the Soul and On Memory and Recollection.* (Santa Fe: Green Lion Press, 2004). *DA* 432b27-30
[101] *DA* 433a1-3

["*orexin*"], but follow the intellect."[102] If reason does not move and the self-restrained or virtuous agents do not always follow longing, then how is motion possible for such persons?

### 3.3.2 Object of Desire/*orekton* and imagination/*phantasia*

The answer to the question of the connection between reason and longing is that the object of desire/*orekton* is amendable to reason. Aristotle explains in *DA* 3.10 that when studying movement, three things require examination: "the thing causing motion, the second that by which it causes motion, and the third is the thing moved, while the thing causing motion is of two sorts, the one motionless and the other in motion as well as causing motion, the montionless cause of motion is the good sought by action, while the cause of motion that is in motion is the desiring part of the soul."[103] Aristotle divides the "thing causing the motion" into two parts: an unmoving cause and a cause in motion. The latter is the longing part of the soul, with its various forms, while the former is the 'object of desire or longing'/*orekton*. Thus, there are two ways to look at the cause of movement. On the one hand, the desiring faculty moves the animal, but, on the other hand, the object of desire moves the animal, which longing looks toward.

This 'object of desire or longing'/*orekton* is not necessarily external to the agent and can be posited by thought. Aristotle says "So it is reasonable that there seem to be two things causing the motion, desire [*orexis*] and practical thinking [*dianoia praktikē*], since the thing desired [*orekton*] causes motion, and on account of this, thinking causes motion, because it is the desired thing that starts it. Imagination too, when it causes motion does not do so without desire."[104]

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[102] *DA* 433a7-8
[103] *DA* 433b12
[104] *DA* 433a18-20

Here, Aristotle does not limit the thing longed strictly to something outside of the agent. His claim that *orekton* causes motion and "on account of this, thinking causes motion" suggests that an *orekton* can be an object in thought. Reason, insofar as it is part of thought, can influence that which is thought and therefore influence the object of desire "perceived" in thought.

Then, how does reason specifically influence or affect *orekton*? One example shows that it relates to thinking about future goods:

> But since desires come to be opposite to one another, which happens whenever reason and impulses are opposed, and comes about in beings that have perception of time (for the intellect urges one to resist impulses on account of the future, while the impulse urges one to resist reason on account of what is immediate, since what is immediately pleasant appears to be both simply pleasant and simply good, on account of not looking to the future), then while the thing that causes motion would be one in kind, the desiring part as desiring—or first of all the thing desired, since it causes motion without being in motion, by being thought or imagined—there come to be a number of things that cause motion.[105]

One of the reasons that desire or longing conflicts with reason is that humans are "beings that have perception of time." Having the perception of time implies that one can imagine and project what the future good will be and this allows choice between the desired object presented immediately rather than the one that is imagined in the future. This also explains how *akrasia* is possible from a more biological perspective than the syllogistic process illustrated in *EN* 7, for we can take into account that human beings can think of the future while those who fail to think of the future are lead by the immediate pleasures as good. Thus, the capacity to think through the future allows modifications to the *orekton* and how it appears in one's thoughts.

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[105] *DA* 433b10-13

One concrete example of thinking about a future good as a desired object/*orekton* can be found in imagination/*phantasia*. Imagination is a point of convergence of reason and longing. From the quote above in *MA* section, Aristotle broadly classified imagination as "thought" in so far as "thought" is that which makes distinctions. But imagination is also said to be present in the calculative part of both humans and other animals and longing always accompanies some imagination: "In general then, as was said, it is as having the potency of desire that an animal is capable of moving itself, but the potency of desire is not present without imagination, while all imagination is either rational or sensory, and of the latter the other animals have a share."[106] Imagination can be rational or sensory. Animals have sensory imagination which allows them to seek what is good for them even if that good is not immediately present to their senses and similarly, humans are also capable of imagining but unlike animals, humans are said to be capable of rational imagination.

Rational imagination differs from sensory imagination in that rational imagination uses images of future possibilities to figure out the best course of action to pursue. "So a sensory imagination, as was said, is present in the rest of the animals, while there is a deliberative imagination in those that can reason (for whether one will act this way or that way is already a job for reasoning, and has to be measured by one criterion, since one is looking for the greater good, and thus is able to make one thing out of a number of images)."[107] Humans are able to imagine different potential scenarios and measures, with their criterion being the best possible outcome to pursue. Not only are humans capable of doing so, but Aristotle also emphasizes that practical thinking necessarily accompanies images. He says, "for the soul that thinks things

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[106] *DA* 433b27-30
[107] *DA* 433b5-10

through [*dianotikē*], imaginings are present in the way perceptible things are, and when it asserts or denies that something is good or bad it flees or pursues; for this reason the soul never thinks without an image."[108] Joe Sachs notes that this phrase should be understood in the particular context of thinking in terms of pursuing and avoiding, i.e., in thinking about practical matters.[109] Never thinking without an image is not an unqualified statement about thinking in general, but imagination is indispensable in practical reasoning and a nexus between reason and longing. While some longings "override" reason, insofar as practical reason involves imagination, it involves both reason and longing.

## 3.4 Conclusion

So far, I tried to show that some form of longing is necessary for any action. The examples of the unrestrained/*akrasia* illustrate that more than knowledge or norms, longing is effective in setting the major premise at the moment of action. The self-restrained are not led by longing or desire, but this does not mean they lack longing in choosing the more reasonable end. The biology texts show that longing, whether mixed with reason or not, is indispensable for any action to occur. Even for the non-akratic agents, longing is present, but that longing is guided toward non-bodily ends. Ultimately, if longing does not find an end to be desirable, there will be no steps taken towards that end. From this point of view of motion and action, it is not the intellect/*nous* or prudence, which sets an end but, rather, longing, and that is why Aristotle speaks of reason as seeking means rather than setting ends.

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[108] *DA* 431a14-18
[109] Sachs, Joe. *On the Soul.* Footnote 17. P. 146

Does this mean, however, that there is no reasoning about ends? Are ends simply what longing dictates? What is the source of ends such as "one should be courageous"? As Aristotle posits in *EN* 3.4, "For with respect to each characteristic, there are noble and pleasant things peculiar to it; and the serious person is distinguished perhaps most of all by his seeing what is true in each case, just as if he were a rule and measure of them. But in the case of most people [or the many], a deception appears to occur on account of the pleasure involved, for what is not good appears to them as good."[110] If ends are not arbitrary, yet, what is sought is what longing finds pleasant, how does one evaluate ends?

I answer this question in the next chapter, arguing that the city provides the end and the city, through habituation of the citizens, molds the vision of what is desirable and pleasant. The habituation of pleasure does not mean that pleasure is simply a 'social construct' of the city, and there are natural pleasures connected to activities, but also such pleasures and activities are not evident to a person who has not been educated. The emphasis on the role of the city is worth noting since many commentators of Aristotle assume that Aristotle's practical reason is universal and thus not bound by the particularity of the political environment. This point will be made more apparent by looking at how Aristotle shifts his categorization of pleasure as something bodily and base to a phenomenon that encompasses noble activities as well. Moreover, I have shown that prudence is largely concerned with means but I will also argue in chapter 5 that prudence, in a very specific context, does indeed posits ends. Overall, chapter 4 looks at how the city shapes the ends and how reason and desire fit into the broader context of the political dimension.

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[110] 1113a30-1113b2

**Chapter 4 Pleasure, the Noble, and the City as the Source of Ends**

So far, I have shown how practical reasoning works in an ordinary context and from the standpoint of the individual. The importance of perception of particulars and the role that longing/*orexis* plays show that practical reasoning is not simply abstract thinking and that practical reasoning involves more of a desiring or longing aspect than simply forming a judgment or deriving principles of action. Thus, practical reasoning, most of the time, does not think of positing ends and is concerned mostly with means to achieve a given end. I have also shown that Aristotle's account of action presupposes longing and its corresponding object as the end.

In this chapter, I show that pleasure as the object of desire or longing/*orekton* is not a single thing but varies according to activities. Among them, one of the highest forms of activity that one can find pleasure in is noble activity. The noble/*to kalon* is not merely a set of actions, but it is also something that appears beautiful and hence desirable. It is the common goal of all the moral virtues, and it functions as an end in moral actions. Part of what makes noble objects appear desirable and beautiful is the education and habituation of the city. This is not to dismiss the role of nature in providing the condition of possibility for seeing and attaining what is noble. Unlike animals that do not act outside of nature, human beings require education and habituation for proper action to be actualized and this is not possible by reason alone or without the city. Thus, I show that it is the city that generally provides the ends and that practical reasoning is moved by desirable ends posited by the city.

**4.1 Different types of Pleasure**

So far, the discussion of pleasure has been within the context of moderation and restraint. Because an excess of desire for pleasure is a common failure of moral choice, one's attitude towards pleasure was seen as something that requires control. The discussion of pleasure in the *Ethics* up to *EN* 7.4 dealt with pleasure as something that requires moderation, i.e., as a potential object of reproach. But Aristotle's extended treatment of pleasure, especially in *EN* 7.11-14 and *EN* 10.1-5, reveals much more complex dimensions of pleasure, namely that pleasure can be good, and indeed, that all good activities are accompanied by pleasure.

In *EN* 7.4, Aristotle distinguishes the "necessary pleasures" such as the bodily ones from other objects of pleasure which are "not necessary but choiceworthy in themselves"[111] such as victory, honor, wealth and other goods which are still subject to excess but nonetheless a "higher" form of pleasant objects and not merely the bodily ones by which the licentious and the unrestrained are overwhelmed. One can act in an unrestrained manner toward choiceworthy pleasures, but this is said not to be strict *akrasia* for *akrasia* is concerned with the necessary pleasures. Unrestrained grasping of a higher object is said to be *akrasia* only in likeness.

Moreover, in *EN* 7.5, Aristotle delineates different forms of pleasure: "Now, some things are pleasant by nature—and of these, some are pleasant without qualification, others are such according to the various kinds of animals and human beings involved. Certain things, by contrast, are not pleasant by nature but do become pleasant, some on account of people's defects, others through habits, and still others on account of people's corrupt natures."[112] Some pleasures arise naturally, but there are also pleasures that arise from defects, corrupt natures, and habits.

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[111] 1147b30
[112] 1148b15

Concerning pleasure, then, there are different types, some more choiceworthy than others and therefore a "higher" or a "better" pleasure.

Reasons for dismissing the goodness of pleasure are found by observing opinions: 1) Pleasure is a "perceptible process of coming into its nature; but no coming-into-being belongs to the same class as the ends we pursue—for example, no house building belongs to the same class as a house." 2) A moderate person avoids pleasures. 3) Prudence pursues what is painless, not pleasure. 4) Pleasure hinders prudent thinking. 5) There is no art of pleasure, though everything good is the work of art. 6) That children and animals pursue pleasures implies that pleasures are not something that a serious person would pursue.[113] Except for the first and arguably the fifth reason, the argument against the goodness of pleasure is based on the fact that serious persons/activities do not focus on pleasure. This creates an impasse, for the understanding that pleasure is bad goes against the common assertion that "happiness is accompanied by pleasure."[114]

The more important reason for Aristotle's rejection of the "badness" of pleasure is found in his reply to the first opinion, which states that pleasure is perceived in the process of coming-into-being/*genesis* instead of in the final thing. Because the end is that which is sought and the process of coming-into-being is good insofar as it leads to the end, pleasure would then be defined as something incomplete. But Aristotle argues that this is to misunderstand the nature of pleasure. There are certain pleasures which arise naturally in accord with the proper activity of the human being: "But there is an activity, involving the desires, of our characteristic and our nature when these remain unimpaired, since there are also pleasures unaccompanied by pain and

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[113] 1152b13-18
[114] 1152b8

desire—for example, the activity bound up with contemplation when one's nature is not deficient."[115] The term "activity," (the translation of *energeia)* has a special significance for Aristotle. Sachs explains the meaning of activity/*energeia*[116] as the following:

> [*Energeia* is the] central notion in all of Aristotle's philosophy, the activity which anything is what it is…In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, everything depends upon the idea of an active condition (*hexis*) that can be formed by a deliberately repeated way of being-at-work [activity/*energeia*], and that can in turn set free the being-at-work of all the human powers for the act of choice (Bk. II, Chaps. 2-3). For example, actions that belong to courage must be performed before one can become courageous; after the active condition is formed, actions that belong to courage spring from it, not as dead habit but from the full and unimpeded presence of active thinking and desiring.[117]

An activity/*energeia* is the full and proper working of a natural faculty, and when engaged in activities that are proper to human beings, there is a proper pleasure that follows. Contrary to defining pleasure as that which is perceived in coming-into-being, Aristotle redefines pleasure as an activity/*energeia*: "For pleasures are not processes of coming-into-being; rather they are activities and an end, and they do not occur when there is a coming-into-being but when [our capacities] are put to use…Hence also it is not a noble thing to assert that pleasure is a perceptible process of coming-into-being; one ought rather to say that it is an activity of the characteristic that accords with nature, and instead of 'perceptible,' one ought to say 'unimpeded.'"[118] It is by connecting pleasure with activity that Aristotle can categorize higher pleasures and lower pleasures.

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[115] 1152b35-1153a1
[116] Sachs himself translates this term as "being-at-work." (202), but I have chosen to use Bartlett and Collins' more traditional translation, "activity."
[117] Sachs, Joe. *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*. P. 202
[118] 1153a9-15

Certain pleasures may arise incidentally, such as a pleasure that results from restoring the body from a sick or deficient state to a healthy state, but Aristotle does not count these as proper pleasures. Sick people were said to enjoy certain pleasures when they are "undergoing restoration," but once healthy, they no longer enjoy the same pleasure with the things that they enjoyed when they were sick.[119] These "pleasures" are a conditional phenomenon that arises from a particular state, and some such "pleasures" are "not even pleasures, but merely appear to be—all those that are accompanied by pain and for the sake of medical treatment, like those the sickly undergo, for example."[120] The pleasure that accompanies restoration to health is an example of "coming-into-being" and arises from a particular circumstance that is not "pleasant by nature" or "pleasant unqualifiedly." Unlike the conditional "pleasures," proper pleasures or pleasures "unaccompanied by pains do not have an excess, and these fall among the things pleasant by nature and not incidentally. I mean by 'things pleasant incidentally,' those that serve as cures: because it happens that people are cured when that which remains healthy in them acts, these cures seem to be pleasant. But things pleasant by nature are those that prompt an action belonging to healthy nature."[121] By categorizing pleasure as an activity, it allows distinctions between incidental pleasures and unqualified pleasure/pleasant by nature. This distinction also allows Aristotle to respond to the assertion that pleasure is a "bad" thing because following pleasure leads to bad results. Replying to the negative assessment of pleasure from popular opinions, pleasure now understood is not an impediment as such but only incidentally.

If, then, there are unqualified pleasures good for humans, why is it that the bodily pleasures are pursued in excess? The reason is because bodily pleasure is primarily used to expel

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[119] 1153a4
[120] 1152b33
[121] 1154b20

pain: "Because of excessive pain, people seek out excessive pleasure, and bodily pleasure in general, as though it were a cure."[122] Bodily pleasures "come to sight" as the most obvious path to counter pain. Moreover, "bodily pleasures are pursued on account of their intensity by those who are incapable of enjoying other pleasures…For such people do not have other things from which they derive enjoyment, and that which is neither painful nor pleasant is painful to many, given their nature."[123] Many people are most familiar with bodily pleasure, which is intense and easily accessible as opposed to the pleasure one derives from, for example, contemplation. Aristotle dismisses the idea that just because certain pleasures, especially the better or higher pleasures, are less evident means that such pleasures do not exist or should not be honored. As he says in *EN* 10.6: "And if they, who have not tasted pure and liberal pleasure, seek refuge in the bodily pleasures, one should not on this account suppose that such pleasures are the more choiceworthy ones. For children too suppose that what is honored among themselves is most excellent. So it is reasonable that, just as different things appear honorable to children and to men, so also do they to base human beings and to the decent."[124] The enjoyment of higher pleasures, devoid of pain, is not readily available or known because it requires education and experience, which is not easily accessible compared to the more intense and available bodily pleasure.

  This leads to the important point about pleasure, namely that the existence of different types of pleasure is tied to the different types of activity, for "in the case of each activity, there is a pleasure proper to it: the pleasure proper to a serious activity, then is decent; that to a base one, corrupt."[125] So not only are the pleasures differentiated from the incidental to the unqualified but

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[122]1154a28
[123] 1154a30
[124] 1176b20-25
[125] 1175b27

the rank of activities determines the rank of pleasure. The bodily activities are ranked lower than those of liberal activities and hence the pleasure stemming from the bodily is lower than that of the liberal one. The most pleasant, moreover, follows the most excellent condition as well as the most excellent activity:

> In each particular case, then, that activity is best that belongs to what is in the best condition with a view to the most excellent of the things falling under its purview; and this would be what is most complete and most pleasant. For in the case of every sense perception (and similarly also with thinking and contemplation), there exists a corresponding pleasure; but the most complete perception is most pleasant, and the most complete perception is the one belonging to what is in a good condition and directed toward what is most serious among the things in its purview.[126]

When the faculties are in good condition and they engage in serious ends, there is the fullest activity with the proper pleasure that arises with it. The pleasure arising from such a complete activity is not something that occurs after the act is done but rather something that "supervenes" over the activity: "And pleasure completes the activity, not in the manner of a characteristic that is already inherent in it, but as a certain end that supervenes on it—as, for example, the bloom of youth supervenes on those in the prime of life."[127]

To summarize, pleasures have different ranks, and this differentiation is possible on the understanding that pleasure is necessarily tied to activities. Proper pleasure arises when a faculty is in good condition and is engaged in the activity naturally suited to be the best activity for the corresponding faculty. Then what appears pleasant is what appears desirable to the person and this is the end posited in any movement or action. If a person is virtuous, the activity which

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[126] 1174b17-23
[127] 1174b33-34 Alternatively, Sachs translates "But the pleasure brings the activity to completion not as an active condition present within it all along, but as something that comes over it…" Instead of Bartlett and Collins' "supervenes," Sachs translates *epiginomenon* as "comes over it."

appears pleasant and desirable will be a noble one and if a person is vicious or base, that which appears pleasant will be a base activity. Aristotle has shown in the biology texts that there is no action without some form of longing/*orexis*. For the virtuous, the noble is the *orekton* and for the vicious, the base is the *orekton*.

## 4.2 Characteristics of the Noble

The most important of all the things longed for in practice/action is the noble/*kalon*. The term is broad, and its usage is complex, so the examination here is not a comprehensive description, but I present some of the key features as it relates to practical reasoning. I will show that the noble is present in all the moral virtues and serves as a guiding end. Such noble acts, in one way or another, serve the community's good as well as one's own personal goods. Lastly, the noble is pleasant and functions as a desired object/*orekton*, motivating the person to act virtuously by appealing to perception as an instance of the beautiful.

### 4.2.1 The Noble as the Guide of Moral Virtues

In *EN* 2.3, Aristotle states that there are three potential objects that moral virtue is concerned with: the noble, the advantageous, and the pleasant. The noble is contrasted with the advantageous and the pleasant, although the pleasant here discussed is limited to a base or bodily form of pleasure, not encompassing the higher activities mentioned above. The noble acts are said to be ends in themselves, for virtues do not expect bodily pleasure the utility/external benefit as its reward. Noble acts are ends in themselves requiring no further good sought, and they are present as the end in all moral virtues:

- Courage: "…the courageous man suffers and acts in accord with what is worthy and as reason would command. Moreover, the end of every activity is that which accords with the characteristic, and to the courageous man, courage is noble…For the sake of the noble, therefore, the courageous man endures and does what accords with courage."[128]

- Moderation: "Hence the desiring part of the moderate person ought thus to be in harmony with reason: the target for both is the noble, and the moderate person desires what he ought and in the way that he ought and when."[129]

- Liberality: "Actions that accord with virtue are noble and for the sake of the noble. The liberal person too, then, will give for the sake of the noble and correctly: he will give to whom he ought and as much as and when he ought, and anything else that accompanies correct giving."[130]

- Magnificence: "The magnificent person will make these sorts of expenditures for the sake of what is noble, for this is common to the virtues."[131]

- Great-Souled: "The great-souled man…deems himself worthy of great things, while being worthy of them, and especially of the greatest things, he would be concerned with one matter most of all. Worth is spoken of in relation to external goods, and we would posit as the greatest of these that which we assign to the gods, that at which people of worth aim, and that which is the prize conferred on the noblest people. Honor is such a thing, since it is indeed the greatest of the external goods. The great-souled man, then, is concerned with honor and dishonor in the way that he ought to be."[132]

- "Ambition": "…we blame the unambitious person, on the grounds that he chooses not to be honored even in the case of what is noble. But sometimes we praise the ambitious person as manly and a lover of what is noble."[133] Ambition is primarily concerned with honor but honor (or what is honored/considered honorable) is connected to what the community considers noble.

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[128] 1115b21-23
[129] 1119b15-16
[130] 1120a23-26
[131] 1122b6-7
[132] 1123b14-19 Moreover, the great-souled man is said to be possess all the moral virtues: "He who is truly great souled, therefore, must be good, and what is great in each virtue would seem to belong to the great souled man." (1123b29)
[133] 1125b13

- Friendliness: "It has been stated in general, then, that this [friendly] person will associate with others in the way he ought; and by referring to what is noble and advantageous he will aim either at not causing others pain or at contributing to their pleasure."[134]

- Truthfulness: "In itself, what is false is base and blameworthy, whereas what is true is noble and praiseworthy."[135]

- Witty: Although the term noble itself is not used, Aristotle makes a distinction between being a buffoon and a witty person, stating that the latter is more "refined/*charientes*"[136] to suggest a higher form of pleasure.

- Tact: "Tact too is proper to the middle characteristic, and it belongs to the tactful person to say and listen to the sorts of things suited to a decent and liberal person."[137] Decent/*epieikei* is connected to the equitable in the discussion of justice where equity/*epieikia* rectifies the shortcomings of written law. The "liberal/*eleutherios*" pleasures were also discussed earlier that distinguished higher pleasure from a lower pleasure.

The virtue of gentleness is less clear than other virtues. Aristotle does not attribute the term noble as its explicit goal but similar to temperance, virtue of gentleness pulls back anger and "wishes to be calm and not led by his passion, but rather as reason may command, and so to be harsh regarding the things he ought and for the requisite time."[138] The virtue of gentleness is a virtue that allows reason to take charge over anger. Overall, the noble is the guide and reference point of all the moral virtues and if the term noble/kalos is not used, Aristotle still indicates a higher form of desirable object such as "decent," "liberal," or "refined." Generally virtuous actions cannot be properly called virtue without the noble or some differentiating higher object of longing.

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[134] 1126b28-30
[135] 1127a28-30
[136] 1128a15
[137] 1128a18-19
[138] 1125b35

Another characteristic of noble acts is that they all aim towards benefitting the city and fellow citizens together with one's one good. A noble act is not an act aimed at mere self-satisfaction, nor is it a duty to a divine being, but it is a praiseworthy act. And such acts are praised in large part because of the benefit that such an act provides to the community. This fact is worth pointing out for what we moderns may think of as an instance of virtue is not always one for Aristotle. One example is his discussion of courage. Courage is said to be a mean condition with respect to fear. Aristotle elaborates that "One ought not to fear poverty, perhaps, or sickness, or, in general, anything that is not the result of vice or one's own doing. But he who is fearless concerning these things is not courageous either, though we do say that he too is fearless by dint of a certain similarity [to the truly courageous]."[139] Our broad understanding of courage encompasses various forms of dealing with fear, and a modern person can meaningfully speak of courage in contexts such as public speaking or overcoming cancer. But Aristotle rejects identifying courage with overcoming objects of fear such as poverty or sickness. For him, what counts as proper courage is overcoming the "greatest fear" which is death and not any death but "those that occur in war, for they happen amid the greatest and noblest danger. In agreement with these considerations are also the honors given in cities and by monarchs. In the authoritative sense, then, a courageous man could be said to be someone who is fearless when it comes to a noble death and to any situation that brings death suddenly to hand."[140] Courage is strictly defined in terms of war, one of the most political activities that a city can engage in and the most indispensable virtue necessary for the survival of the city.

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[139] 1115a16-19
[140] 1115a30-35

Moderation is the least "other-regarding" virtue for it is more focused on the individual over others since it deals with the necessary desires. For without mastering such desires, "the activity of the desire increases the innate desire, and if the desires are great and intense, they drive out calculation. Hence, they ought to be measured, and few, and in no way opposed to reason."[141] While moderation itself is not strictly concerned with benefitting the city, it does prepare one to be a better citizen by training oneself to live in accord with reason. Moreover, in the *Rhetoric*, moderation is also described as a "virtue through which people are disposed toward the bodily pleasures as the law commands; licentiousness is the opposite."[142] Moderation is not just for "self-development," but, in the classical context, it is a certain law abidingness since the law commands the virtues as well. Other virtues such as magnificence, liberality, justice, etc. are also clearly intended to work in relation to others. (Of course, the proper ordering of the virtues by law presupposes that the city ordering such laws is a good and just city with good and just laws.)

The passages in the *Rhetoric* further point out that the notion of noble indicates those praiseworthy deeds that put the greater good or the good of the community equally with or, sometimes above oneself:

- "The greatest virtues are necessarily the ones of most use for others, if in fact virtue is a capacity for benefaction. For this reason people honor especially those who are just and courageous: the latter in war and the former also in peace are useful for others."[143]

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[141] 1119b10-11
[142] *Rhet*. 1366b14 translation from Bartlett, Robert. *Aristotle's Art of Rhetoric*. The University of Chicago Press; Chicago, 2019.
[143] *Rhet*. 1366b5-6

- "And all such deeds as are for the sake of others, since they are less for one's own sake. And all such actions as benefit others, but not oneself, and as benefit benefactors—for that is just. And beneficent deeds, for they do not pertain to oneself."[144]

The *Rhetoric* is not a book that deals with the strict definition of virtue[145] like the *Ethics,* but not unlike the *Ethics*, it finds truth or partial truths in the opinions gathered. Specifically, in *Rhet* 1.9 where the subject matter is virtue and vice, noble and base, there is a recurring theme of doing good for others that is presented in multiple passages dealing with this topic that reflects a certain agreed-upon meaning of the term noble.

### 4.2.2 The Noble/*kalon* as Pleasant

I have previously mentioned that among the different types of pleasures, the higher pleasure and its corresponding activities coincided with the noble. I want to emphasize not only the action but also the aesthetic component of the noble that makes certain ends attractive and therefore motivates action. There is a perceptual component that is present that makes the noble appealing and desirable to the senses such that one would long for such a thing.

One way to make the noble ends appear desirable is through praise. The noble is that which is praised in cities for not only the actual beneficent deeds but also to provide a model to other citizens so that others can emulate and follow as Aristotle states in *Rhet.* 1.9: "What is noble, then, is what is choiceworthy for its own sake, and praiseworthy accordingly, or it is that which is good, it being pleasant because it is good. So if this is the noble, virtue is necessarily

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[144] *Rhet.* 1367a4-6
[145] For example, in *Rhet* 1.9, Aristotle speaks of "excess of virtue" but according to the *Ethics*, there is neither excess nor deficiency in the strict definition of virtue.

noble, since virtue, being good, is praised."[146] And if the noble acts alone are not enough to motivate the citizens, praise and honor may be more effective for "Both honor and good reputation are among the most pleasant things, because each person comes thereby to imagine himself to be such as the serious person is, and all the more so whenever this is asserted by those whom he supposes to be telling the truth."[147] To clarify, noble acts are not identical to what is honored (and the just city would come closest to honoring what is properly noble) but from the perspective of leading the citizens, it is by attaching honor and praise that the noble acts are made beautiful, and even if many people do not find the noble acts pleasant, more people certainly desire to be praised and honored.

Another aesthetic connection between the noble and the pleasant can be found in the difficulty of translating the Greek term *to kalon*. The term noble itself, as understood by the Greeks, already contains a certain aesthetic dimension in its meaning. In Sachs's translation of the *Ethics*, *to kalon* is translated as "the beautiful." He provides his justification as the following: "The word is usually translated elsewhere as "the noble" to avoid "aesthetic" implications, but the Greek uses the word in exactly the way we might say "that was a beautiful thing you did," and Aristotle is emphatic that such a thing can be recognized only by sense-perception (*aisthēsis*; 1109b 23, 1126b 4). The beautiful is what makes an action right, in the same sense in which a painting or poem or musical composition might get everything exactly right."[148] This interpretation is in line with practical reasoning's reliance on sense-perception as seeing certain particular situations or acts as an instance of the noble. Bartlett and Collins are aware of this dimension of the term but opted to translate it as "the noble" "since to say that courageous acts,

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[146] *Rhet*. 1366a34
[147] *Rhet*. 1371a8-10
[148] Sachs, Joe. *Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics* Glossary p.202

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for example, are done 'for the sake of the beautiful' not only gives to the argument an oddly 'aesthetic' character but also fails to capture the dimension of self-forgetting or self-sacrifice in courageous acts that, while not the whole of the virtuous act, contributes decisively to its being *kalos,* to its nobility."[149] Elsewhere in the correspondence between Bartlett and Diana Schaub in *Claremont Review of Books*, Bartlett and Collins defend their translation, stating that "to speak of doing the noble thing, as compared to the beautiful thing, more vividly captures that element of moral action and character that is self-sacrificing or self-forgetting. In this way, a reader is consistently reminded of the longing of the good human being—the morally virtuous person—to seek a good that is higher or more complete than his or her own… To make Aristotle say that courageous acts, for example, are undertaken "for the sake of the beautiful" is to give an oddly aesthetic cast to what is a matter of stern dedication or resolve that may well be painful."[150] Diana Schaub, replying to Bartlett, offers a view not unlike Sachs's translation of *to kalon* as "the beautiful":

> [Bartlett and Collins] prefer "the noble" because it shows that moral action is "self-sacrificing" and "self-forgetting." But Aristotle doesn't take a Puritan or Kantian path. He starts from our happiness and our good, and then shows how our virtues make us, as individuals (and as collectives too, as we learn in the *Politics*), good and happy. Of course, Aristotle doesn't deny that the cultivation and acquisition of the virtues is difficult; nonetheless, the exercise of the virtues by the virtuous is not a matter of self-abnegation. That rare and excellent creature, the virtuous individual, takes his pleasure in virtuous action. Accordingly, it might be better to speak of the self-enlarging and self-fulfilling character of moral action. As Bartlett and Collins note, there is a "longing" for completion here, but it seems to me that the longing that draws the soul upwards, away from the pleasures that are sordid and easy, is quite well captured by "the beautiful."

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[149]Bartlett and Collins, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* Glossary P.312
[150] Bartlett, Robert. "Translating Aristotle," *Claremont Review of Books* Vol. 13, no.1 (winter 2012/13)

Splitting a phenomenon that Aristotle understood as unified into two—what is beautiful in a physical sense we will call "beautiful," while what is beautiful in a moral sense we will call "noble"—risks distorting or interfering with the reader's imperative to understand Aristotle's intention.[151]

Similarly, here, Schaub opts for "the beautiful" since the ends that motivate a person to perform virtuous acts appear beautiful to such persons, and to claim that someone does a deed for a beautiful end does not diminish the seriousness of that act. Just like Sachs, Schaub states the importance of sense-perception involved in moral actions. She adds that "[t]he ethically beautiful, like the physically beautiful, is something that we behold, that we look upon, that we contemplate with the eyes and admire...Beautiful acts are refulgent; they shine brightly; they radiate. The model that Aristotle suggests for understanding right action is that of sense perception, a faculty with a natural foundation that nonetheless can be tutored."[152] Just as we look up to soldiers valiantly charging forth in battle, there is a sense of beauty and admirable quality that is involved in noble actions that make such acts desirable. I bring up the issue of translation to point out that the original Greek term retains that sense perceptive aspect. This view of ends connected to the pleasant, and as the *orekton*, is in line with the previously discussed parts of practical reason where the ends are not posited by reason but rather by virtuous characters. Persons of good characters look up to certain actions as beautiful, while the reasoning part of practical reason is largely left to figure out the means to achieve the noble/beautiful. Again, my assertion is based on the presupposition that the city posited the noble correctly. What is pleasant and beautiful by nature is not a "social construct" and the city does

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[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid.

not "create" what is noble but the noble acts require the city to guide, educate, and thus serve as the proper place to actualize.

## 4.3 Pleasure and Habit

Aristotle elevates the status of pleasure from something base or necessary to something that accompanies and completes the highest activities naturally suited to a human being, including contemplation and the moral virtues, but there are remaining difficulties. Even if noble acts are natural, what actions count as noble, and how the specifics manifest in a community are not evident. How does one determine or figure out which ends are noble? If there are proper pleasures connected to proper activity as Aristotle states, then how does one identify what the proper pleasures (and feel pleasure towards the proper activity as one should) and its corresponding activities are? Here I show that this is where the city is involved in the shaping of the ends. The following section addresses the question of the relativity of pleasure and how citizens can become oriented towards specific ends despite the relativity of pleasure.

## 4.3.1 Why Pleasure Differs

If pleasure is natural and there are proper activities in accord with nature, why is proper pleasure or its activities difficult to discern? This is due to the peculiar nature of human beings: enjoyment of pleasure is determined by various factors because human beings are complex and not simple beings. We are a being composed of different parts with different needs. Aristotle

explains that "the same thing is not always pleasant on account of our nature's not being simple. Rather, something else is present in us as well (hence we are subject to destruction) such that when the one part acts, this is contrary to nature with respect to the other nature; and when both are equally balanced, the action performed seems to be neither painful nor pleasant. For if someone's nature were simple, the same actions would always be most pleasant."[153] He contrasts such nature with the simplicity of the gods. Gods are simple beings and, therefore, not prone to destruction. Their simple, or singular, nature would allow them to enjoy singular pleasure, but because human beings are composed of different parts, the needs of the different parts and their respective activities allow different pleasures (e.g. pleasures of the body vs. pleasures of the mind) to arise and conflict.

Moreover, even if one is able to enjoy the highest pleasure that human nature can offer, there is a limit to its enjoyment, for pleasure follows the activity and no one can continuously engage in a single activity: "Pleasure too, then does not arise continuously, since it follows the activity...For at first our thinking is roused and active to the utmost degree regarding them—as is the case with sight, when people stare at something—but subsequently the activity involved is not of such intensity but has instead become relaxed. Hence the pleasure involved too is dimmed."[154] We cannot engage in activities continuously due to our nature, and this limits the enjoyment of any pleasure at a constant rate, for "nothing characteristically human has the capacity to engage in continuous activity."[155] Because our compound nature makes it difficult to enjoy a single pleasure for a long time, it makes it hard to distinguish among pleasures since

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[153] 1154b20-25
[154] 1175a5-11
[155] 1175a5

there are many different sources of pleasure, some more evident than others, in accordance with the different parts of the body and soul.

Due to the complexity of human parts, there are multiple pleasures, and that is why it is hard to measure the experience of pleasure in a "self-evident" manner independent of how each person has been brought up. How one developed one's character is essential to enjoying the correct pleasure:

> But the pleasures do vary to no small degree in the case of human beings, at any rate: the same things cause delight to some and pain to others, and things painful to and hated by some are pleasant to and loved by others…But in all such circumstances, what appears to a serious person seems to be the case in fact; and if this is nobly stated, as indeed it seems to be, and [if] virtue and the good human being, insofar as he is good, are the measure of each thing, then the pleasures that appear to him would be pleasures in fact, and the pleasant things would be those in which he delights.[156]

Pleasure is relative to the activity but what appears as desirable and pleasant to a particular person depends upon which pleasure they have been accustomed to enjoy. Pleasure is distinguishable according to the hierarchy of activities, and this is not arbitrary, but what appears pleasant to individuals varies because human beings' complex nature allows different types of pleasure, and when certain activities or objects are habituated to be pleasant then the prominent pleasure leads the agent.

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[156] 1176a10-20 Similar discussion is also found in *EN* 3.5: "For with respect to each characteristic, there are noble and pleasant things peculiar to it; and the serious person is distinguished perhaps most of all by his seeing what is true in each case, just as if he were a rule and measure of them. But in the case of most people [or the many], a deception appears to occur on account of the pleasure involved, for what is not good appears to them as good. They choose the pleasant, then, on the grounds that it is good, and they avoid pain on the grounds that it is bad." 1113a31-35

Looking for a pleasure that is same and agreed upon by all or most human beings does not make sense to Aristotle since what is experienced as pleasant depends upon the character of the person. And the person with the best character is the serious/*spoudaios* person. Because Aristotle is looking for the best and not the most common pleasure, proper pleasures are bound to be limited to the few who have such a character to enjoy them. This sounds dissonant to the modern ear because the modern approach looks for a commonly observable standard. To make a certain type of person viz. the serious person, the standard seems very subjective. Aristotle would reply that there are natural standards, but due to the complexity of the human being, what is good, or best will not be evident to everyone.

### 4.3.2 Pleasure Shaped by Habit

Although the pleasures have rank and are not arbitrary, perceiving the correct pleasures as pleasant belongs to persons of well-developed characters, which requires habit, and this is one of the major reasons that a city shapes the proper ends and activities for its constituents. The individuals do not always know what the best thing to pursue is and even if they intend well, the range of actions to take in any given situation is too broad without guidelines. The city does this not only by law and decree but, more importantly, through education and habit. Human beings do not have a rigid nature as other animals do, and habit forms a "second" nature, which shapes part of human nature. Just because the pleasures have natural rank does not mean that we naturally perceive them. In fact, Aristotle is emphatic that one does not naturally perceive the good ends correctly. He says for someone to become good by nature is possible "through certain

divine causes for those who are truly fortunate."[157] Even teaching and speech do not work in all cases "but the soul of the student must be prepared beforehand by means of habits so as to feel delight and hatred in a noble way, just as must land that will nourish the seed. For someone who lives according to passion would not listen to a speech meant to deter him, nor in turn would he even comprehend it… In general, passion seems to yield not to speech but to force. So there must first be an underlying character that is somehow appropriate for virtue, one that feels affection for the noble and disgust at the shameful."[158] For teaching and persuasion to be possible, one requires a sufficiently molded and settled character, directed to desire the noble and avoid the shameful. The process of molding character requires coercion as well as exhortation for "the many obey the governance of necessity more than of speech [*logos*]*,* and of punishments more than of what is noble."[159] The good city "makes" the noble, beautiful, and "makes" the shameful, ugly. In doing so, the city posits the end for the citizens and guides them on what to pursue. The city makes desirable the pursuit-worthy ends.

The importance of habituating the citizens towards certain ends is evident, for once the character is settled it becomes like nature "for the habitual happens just as if it is already nature: habit bears some similarity to nature, since what happens often is close to what happens always, and while nature is a matter of "always," habit is a matter of "often."[160] Human beings, unlike other animals, have a flexible nature that allows differentiation in the objects we choose to pursue. Through habit and training, we are capable of changing what was once pleasant to

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[157] 1179b24
[158] 1179b27-30
[159] 1180a5-6
[160] *Rhet*. 50

painful, desirable to aversive. Thus, our nature requires intentional shaping. It is natural for us to be shaped, in part, by convention:

> Now men become good and excellent through three things. These three are nature, habit, and reason. For one must first develop naturally as a human being and not some one of the other animals, and so also be of a certain quality in body and soul. But there is no benefit in certain qualities developing naturally, since habits make them alter: certain qualities are ambiguous in their nature, and through habits develop in the direction of worse or better. The other animals live by nature above all, but in some slight respects by habit as well, while man lives also by reason (for he alone has reason); so these things should be consonant with one another.[161]

A good convention would be the work of a wise legislator who has an accurate understanding of the noble things to be sought and who would attempt to bring citizens toward the desirable, goals of the city. Habit is a "secondary" nature that we take on and that once formed, guides our behavior just as nature would. The habits formed to seek the noble are then the ends "planted" in the citizens and, if we also take into account that the noble aims to benefit the city and others in addition to or sometimes over one's personal good, it is more apparent that the city is responsible for developing the ends of practical reason. Habit forms character and virtues of character posit the end while the role of reason, especially discussed in the context of intellectual virtues in *EN* 6 discovers the particulars of the given situation as an instance of the relevant ends as habituated by the city. This interpretation also leads to the view that reason's mere positing of the end is not enough to motivate action. If there is not enough desire or at least no presence of shame in failing to do what is required, there will simply be no action, which is why the mere presence of the nominal good is not enough to move the person As Aristotle says in *EN* 7.9, "For virtue

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[161] *Pol* 1332a40-1332b5

preserves and corruption destroys the principle; and in actions, that for the sake of which one acts is the principle, just as given hypotheses are in mathematics. So in neither case is reason [or argument] such as to teach the principles, but virtue—either natural or habitual—is apt to teach one to hold the correct opinion about the principle in question."[162] The role of habituating the citizens towards noble activities by making the citizens admire such activities is the key to positing correct ends. The role that politics play in practical reasoning is crucial, and one cannot fully examine practical reason without examining the city.

### 4.3.3 Family and Education

Before discussing the explicit role of the city, I want to remark on the place of family and education. Showing the difficulty of education towards virtue, Aristotle says that: "To obtain from childhood a correct upbringing with a view to virtue is difficult for someone not reared under laws of the requisite sort. For living in a moderate and controlled way is not pleasant to the many, especially the young. Hence, by means of laws, the rearing and the regular practices involved must have already been put into the proper order, for once these become habitual, they will not be painful."[163] Aristotle emphasizes the importance of correct upbringing, and the most effective time to do so is when the citizens are young. If education, especially from the time of childhood, is of utmost importance, then who is responsible for the education of the citizens? The answer to this question differs among the regimes:

Only in the city of the Lacedaimonians (or it together with a few others) is the legislator held to have taken care for the rearing and the regular practices of the citizens. But in

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[162] 1151a15-21
[163] 1179b32-35

most cities, what concerns such things has been utterly neglected, and each lives as he wishes, "laying down the sacred law for children and wife" in the manner of the Cyclops. The most excellent thing, then, is for the public care to be correct. But when cities utterly neglect the public care, it would seem appropriate for each individual to contribute to the virtue of his own offspring and friends, or at least to make the choice to do so.[164]

Cities such as Sparta are said to be set down by the legislator and enforced by the city as a whole. In most cities, education is largely done in the manner of the Cyclops in which the household is the primary caretaker. The reference to the Cyclops occurs again in *Pol* 1.2, where Aristotle discusses households and villages as "naturally" prior (in time) form of community in which, absence of overarching laws of the city, the household is the primary place of moral education. In other words, family is the de facto primary place of education for most citizens in most cities. Aristotle questions whether this is a good thing, for he does state that "the most excellent thing, then, is for the public care to be correct." But there is also ambiguity in whether public education is necessarily better than a more private education of the family. While the above passage indicates a positive assessment of Sparta's public education, Aristotle is generally ambiguous about the goodness of the Spartan way of life. As he criticizes in *Pol* 2.9, Sparta's laws are guided by an excessive concern for warfare and, consequently, do not fully utilize leisure in the proper or the best way. Thus, while a good public education is something to be praised, Aristotle is aware that if the legislator is mistaken about the aim of the education, what is simply public cannot equal simply good.

There are two benefits to the education of the household. The first is the effectiveness of familial education. "For just as it is the laws and customs that hold sway in cities, so also it is the speeches and habits of the father that do so in households-and these latter to a greater degree, on

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[164] 1180a25-33

account of the kinship and the benefactions involved, for from the outset household members

feel affection for one another and are readily obedient by nature."[165] Because there is a natural

kinship among the family members, the young are more likely to obey and, therefore, easier to

teach. Second, there is a certain benefit to private education versus public education, for private

education is a "custom" education that meets the individuals' needs: "Further, individual

educations also differ from public ones, just as the case of medicine suggests. For rest and fasting

are generally advantageous to someone with a fever but perhaps are not to a given person. And

the skilled boxer, in like manner, does not prescribe to all the same kind of fighting. So it might

seem that what pertains to each person would be more precise when there is a private care

involved, for in that case each attains what is suitable to a greater degree."[166] Private education

per se is not familial education, but a familial education is private and there are benefits to such

education that the public cannot fully provide.

The role of household education is important for it is here where the first instance of

being ruled occurs for the youth and the ruler's "function is in an absolute sense that of a master

craftsman, and reason is a master craftsman."[167] The education that the young receive in the

household is not the only or the final form of education, but just as there is ruling and ruled

element in nature, the household imitates the most natural form of ruling and ruled, unlike the

city, where the "naturally ruling" and "naturally ruled" are more ambiguous than in a household

and which thus requires institutions and legislations to address the issue. But human beings are

also naturally political beings, for household or village is insufficient in that they are not only

economically or militarily wanting, but the full development of a human being requires an

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[165] 1180b4-8
[166] 1180b8-13
[167] *Pol* 1260a18

examination of good and bad, just and unjust, noble and base, through speech, and the city/politics is one of the places in which such examination occurs in a comprehensive manner.

**4.4 Conclusion**

To summarize, practical reasoning is reasoning towards a certain action which involves cognizing particulars as an instance of ends as posited by the city and led by desire. The reliance of practical reasoning on the perceptual aspect of cognition is important, for practical reasoning is not merely thinking abstractly about general principles of action but also requires the ability to discern the particulars as an instance of an end to pursue or to avoid. This is one of the reasons practical reasoning is difficult, for the reliance on perceiving particulars is not universally objective and depends on the acting agent. While Aristotelian practical reason is not arbitrary, it is "subjective" (or "subject-dependent") in the sense that there is no arbiter other than a prudent and wise person who can form the best judgment given the specific situation.

So far, I have limited my examination to the standpoint of the individual. If what brings about the proper ends is the city, or cannot occur apart from the city, then the propriety of those ends can be changed in different cities. I have discussed "the city" as if it was a single thing, but cities differ and one major way cities differ from one another is the different ends that each cherishes and holds as noble over other ends. Good cities would do this well, and other cities would not. "There are two things that living well consists in for all: one of these is in correct positing of the aim and end of actions; the other, discovering the actions that bear on the end. These things can be consonant with one another or dissonant, for sometimes the aim is finely posited but in acting they miss achieving it, and sometimes they achieve everything with a view

to the end, but the end they posited was bad. And sometimes they miss both."[168]  A key concern

in practical reasoning from the standpoint of the city is the issue of justice and the proper

ordering of ends. The following sections of the dissertation address the unique challenges of

practical reasoning in the context of politics.

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[168] *Pol* 1331b26-30

**Chapter 5 Practical Reasoning and the City**

This chapter examines practical reasoning in the context of politics. Specifically, I examine two aspects of practical reason concerning the city. The first is how practical reason establishes the ends of the city, and the second is the role that justice plays in practical reason.

**5.1 Different Types of Prudence**

I have shown earlier that much of the discussion of prudence in *EN*6 is more accurately interpreted as discovering means rather than ends, while it is the moral virtues that posit the ends in action. But there are a few instances in which prudence takes as its subject matter establishing and defining the ends at which a citizen aims. I have also shown that practical reason's ends are an object of desire/*orekton* and that the noble/*kalon* as *orekton* was a result of education by the city. The noble, as such, is not a creation of the city. Still, it is the city's task to educate and legislate towards the noble, and establishing the *orekton* in the city does not arise spontaneously. The city, and specifically the architect/legislator/founder, do engage in practical reasoning qua establishing normative ends through a certain type of prudence.[169] This is the "architectonic" prudence that is concerned with the broad objectives of the city. Prudence is intellectual excellence in dealing with practical affairs, and while Aristotle spoke of prudence as if it was a singular thing, prudence can be differentiated by the object with which it is concerned. In *EN* 6.8 Aristotle distinguishes prudence as follows:

> And in fact the political art [or expertise] and prudence are the same characteristic [or state], though their being is not the same. Of the prudence that is concerned with a city, one part is an architectonic prudence, namely, the legislative art; the other, concerned

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[169]"Contemplating what concerns pleasure and pain belongs to him who philosophizes about the political art. For he is the architect of the end with a view to which we speak of each thing as being bad or good in an unqualified sense." 1152b1-3

with particulars, bears the name that is common to them, "the political art": and is bound up with action and deliberation. For a specific decree is a matter of action, as it is the last [or ultimate] thing [in the process of deliberation]. Thus people say that only those [who issue decrees] are engaged in political life, for they alone act, just as craftsmen do. In addition, the prudence that pertains to oneself---that is, the individual---is held to be prudence especially, and it is this that bears the common name "prudence." Of the other kinds of prudence, one part is household management, another legislation, another the political art; and of this last, one part is deliberative, the other judicial.[170]

First, prudence is said to be the same characteristic/*hexis*. *Hexis* is a term that applies to all moral virtues and it is explained as "characteristics, in this sense, display our character, the habits of body and mind that have been formed through habituation and that constitute a certain way of holding oneself toward the world, so to speak."[171] Both prudence and the political art/*hē politikē* are of the same *hexis,* and thus they stem from the same source in their capacity and ability to deal with action. The difference between the two terms is that "their being is not the same." (*to mentoi einai ou tauton hautais*) Sachs explains this phrase using an analogy that "the phrases 'morning star' and 'evening star' have different meanings, but both refer to Venus…"[172] Prudence and political art both refer to the same thing, but they are referred to differently in accord with the context of activity in which the *hexis* of prudence is working.

Another point of needed clarification is Aristotle's use of the term "the political art/*he politikē*," "architectonic prudence," and "legislative art/*nomothetikē*." Although these terms refer to the same characteristic/*hexis*, Aristotle provides additional clarification. The first is the differentiation between the prudence concerned with the city while the other form of prudence is concerned with the individual. The prudence concerned with the city is again divided into

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[170] 1141b23-33
[171] Bartlett and Collins "Glossary" *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* p. 306
[172] Sachs p.81 FN 103

"architectonic prudence" which is also said to be the "legislative art/ *nomothetikē*" and the prudence concerned with the particular tasks within the city, which is labeled "the political art/*politikē*." Then, how does the legislative art differ from political art? Among the subdivisions of "political art" dealing with the city, there is also "legislation/*nomothesia,*" which adds to the confusion of the terms.

First, architectonic prudence is, as the term suggests, the prudence that deals with the overarching goals of the city. In the very beginning of *Ethics*, every action is said to be aimed towards some end and different ends have different "levels." The ends that are more "architectonic ones are more choiceworthy than those that fall under them, for these latter are pursued for the sake of the former."[173] The architectonic ends are the general ends which theother ends aim towards, and the prudence dealing with such ends would involve discovering and crafting the general ends of the city. Also, when Aristotle discusses the connection of prudence with the particulars in question, he says, "Prudence is bound up with action. As a result, one ought to have [knowledge of] both [universals and particulars], but more so of the latter. But here too there would be a certain architectonic [art or knowledge]."[174] While the point here is that prudence is concerned with particulars since its aim is the proper execution of actions, there is still a need for an architectonic knowledge/art that is involved, and there is some art dealing with the architectonic.

How, then, does the architectonic prudence relate to the legislative art or the political art? From the above quote in *EN* 6.8, the architectonic prudence is identified with the legislative art, but the term "architectonic" does not necessarily equal legislative art, for in other parts of the

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[173] 1094a16
[174] 1141b 22-24

text, it is also described as the "political art/*politikē*." In *EN* 1.2, Aristotle speaks of the political art as the following:

> But it might be held to belong to the most authoritative and most architectonic one, and such appears to be the political art. For it ordains what sciences there must be in cities and what kinds each person in turn must learn and up to what point. We also see that even the most honored capacities---for example, generalship, household management, rhetoric---fall under the political art. Because it makes use of the remaining sciences and, further, because it legislates what one ought to do and what to abstain from, its end would encompass those of the others, with the result that this would be the human good.[175]

The political art is the most authoritative and architectonic art because, as the art that deals with the matters of the city in general, it orders subordinate ends such as generalship, household management, education and even science which we moderns usually assume as something autonomous from the city. Also, in this passage, legislation is subsumed under political art, since political art aims at the human good and not just any good for any individual but a good that applies to everyone in the city, for "even if [the human good] is the same thing for an individual and a city, to secure and preserve the good of the city appears to be something greater and more compete: the good of the individual by himself is certainly desirable enough, but that of a nation and of cities is nobler and more divine."[176] Political art aims at the happiness of its members and its primary task is to "make the citizens of a specific sort---namely, good and apt to do the noble things."[177] The description so far posits a very comprehensive role of political art and Aristotle ranks it only second to wisdom ("For it is strange if someone supposes the political art or prudence to be most serious, if a human being is not the best of things in the cosmos"[178]).

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[175] 1094a27-1094b8
[176] 1094b6-7
[177] 1099b30
[178] 1141a21

Additionally, in *EN* 10.9 there is a question of how one can become a skilled legislator and Aristotle subsumes the legislative skill under the political art as he asks: "Is it necessary, then, after this, to examine from what source, or how, someone might become a skilled legislator? Or is it (just as in other cases) from those who are skilled politicians? For this legislative skill seemed to be a part of political art."[179] A more explicit mention of the legislative art and its activity is found in the discussion of justice where the "matters defined by the legislative art are lawful, and each of these we declare to be just."[180] The legislative art defines the virtues by establishing laws and "things productive of the whole of virtue are all those legislative acts pertaining to the education to the common [good]."[181] Thus the activity of the legislative art is broad in the sense that it provides and educates the general ends that the city strives to attain.

Judging from these passages, then, it seems that the legislative art is part of the political art, where political art deals with all things practical, including minor affairs. Legislative art is architectonic in the sense that its primary task is to set down the laws which guide and educate its citizens towards excellence. It sets the general guidelines of the city, but nonetheless, insofar as it is an art dealing with action, it is part of political art. If we examine the *EN* 6.8 passage once more, Aristotle repeats the term "political art." It first appears when it is equated with prudence as the same *hexis*. Then he follows by saying, "prudence that is concerned with a city" is political art. Since prudence and political art are the same *hexis* and thus the same in substance but different in the context in which they are spoken of and operate, the prudence that is concerned with a city is still prudence, which is the same as the political art. When examining

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[179] 1180b31
[180] 1129b14
[181] 1130b25

prudence *as* dealing with the city, one can subdivide such prudence into the legislative art that focuses on the general laws and "the political art" such as household management, deliberative political art, judicial political art and legislation. This categorization makes clear that the term "legislation" deals with particular laws rather than the architectonic laws productive of the whole of virtue that is the legislative art/*nomothetikē* which, for example, educates citizens to become just. The "political art" in contradistinction to the legislative art is "concerned with particulars" and deals with decrees, which are the "last thing." To summarize, both legislative art and "the political art" are part of the broad political art, for this broad political art is prudence concerned with a city. Carnes Lord explains this difference as the following:

> In the passage of the *Nicomachean Ethics* just referred to, Aristotle suggests a further articulation of the content of political science which is of particular importance for understanding the scope and character of the discussion in the *Politics*. He distinguishes between an "architectonic" sort of prudence to which he gives the term "legislative" (*nomothetikē*), and a prudence concerned with particulars, of an "active and deliberative" sort, which he calls "political" in yet another sense of that term. In the narrowest sense, it seems, *politikē* is the "political expertise" men acquire and manifest in dealing with the deliberative issues that are the stuff of everyday politics.[182]

The repetition of the term "political art" is the confusing point, but it seems Aristotle wanted to show that the legislative art is the general end-setting function through laws and that this is part of the work of prudence. Moreover, prudence is usually/ordinarily thought to be a concern for one's own good: "In fact, he who knows about and spends his time on things that concern himself is held to be prudent, whereas the politicians are held to be busybodies… For people seek out their own good, and they suppose that this is what they ought to do. From this

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[182] Lord, Carnes. *Aristotle's Politics* Introduction p.xxx

opinion, then, has arisen the view that these people are prudent."[183] But this view of prudence is incomplete since even doing well for oneself still requires some knowledge of household management and the regime in which one is living under. A truly prudent person must have knowledge of things beyond oneself, and the most comprehensive prudence is not only the issues dealt with by "busybodies" but also the legislative art and the broadest political art whose subject matter is happiness: "since all knowledge and every choice have some good as the object of their longing—let us state what it is that we say the political art aims at and what the highest of all the goods related to action is. As for its name, then, it is pretty much agreed on by most people; for both the many and the refined say that it is happiness."[184] Then, prudence, as excellent practical reason, deals with the ends of the human being and specifically the ends of the city. Ordinary practical reason seeks ends as habituated by the city, but a certain architectonic prudence does discover and lay down ends for the city. Of course, such an occurrence would be an extra-ordinary circumstance, but there are rare occasions on which practical reason is explicitly concerned with the ends of the city. While my discussion on practical reason emphasized the perceptive (*aisthēsis*) aspect, practical reason seen from this point also engages in forming views about the ends that a person should pursue.

**5.2 Practical Reason and Justice**

Practical reason's connection to the city does not only concern the issue of ends. One other peculiar challenge of practical reasoning in the context of the city is to preserve and maintain the city. What guides practical reasoning is not simply the best but also the necessary.

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[183] 1142a1-10
[184] 1095a17-18

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At the heart of necessity is the need for justice, a virtue that is the most "other-regarding" and is aimed at benefitting the common good. Justice is noble by providing good to others and keeping the city together. Thus, a better regime would be more just and thus better able to maintain itself. And practical reasoning, especially from a broader political standpoint, requires insight as to how one's judgment impacts the city and especially whether it meets the demand of justice. Any action aiming at some practical good, insofar as it affects others, must be just in order to be fully good.

Moreover, just as the virtue of courage is both noble but also necessary for the preservation of the community, justice is both noble while also keeping the city together. The problem of preserving the city is most visibly found in the problem of justice. Here, I address perceiving equality as the central issue of difficulty. The biggest internal threat to maintaining the city is that what one perceives as just is different among different persons. This is significant, for what breaks the city is civil strife/*stasis,* which is a result of inequality, whether perceived or real. To emphasize the earlier point, the challenge for practical reason involves perception/*aisthēsis* of particulars, not as the sense-perception but as the intelligible perception of a broader universal, and an analogous problem is found in perceiving this particular instance or person as an instance of what is equal and thus, ultimately, deserving rule/money/honor. This section thus examines how the considerations of justice affect practical reasoning. I first examine some characteristics of justice and later show how the perception of particulars as instances of justice/injustice steers practical reasoning.

### 5.2.1 Characteristics of Justice

I turn towards a brief survey of Aristotle's description of justice. One central element of the importance of virtue and correct practical reasoning lies in fulfilling the requirements of the virtue of justice. (The other role of practical reason is to discover and actualize the virtues that elevate the individual to his/her nobility/excellence.) How one proceeds to fulfill virtue matters because virtues have the characteristic of benefitting the city and one cannot do so without being just, i.e. giving the due that is owed to the city and its members.

### Law Commands Virtue

It was said that the legislative art/*nomothetikē*, and more broadly the political art/*politikē*, command the citizens to be virtuous. Book 5 of the *Ethics* is dedicated to the thematic treatment of justice and here Aristotle says that to be law-abiding is just, for the laws command the common good and it is just to aim at the common good:

> Since, as noted before, he who is a lawbreaker is unjust and he who is lawful just, it is
> clear that all lawful things are somehow just. For matters defined by the legislative art are
> lawful, and each of these we declare to be just. The laws pronounce on *all* things, in their
> aiming at the common advantage, either for all persons or for the best or for those who
> have authority, either in accord with virtue or in some other such way. As a result, we say
> that those things apt to produce and preserve happiness and its parts for the political
> community are in a manner just.[185]

Here Aristotle very nearly equates what is lawful with what is just. The justice of the law is that it is based on the fact that it aims at the benefit of all and moral virtues have the specific aim of benefitting the community over one's own interest. Then, a good practical reason or the architectonic practical reason should be just. The above description of justice is broader than the

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[185] 1129b13-19

conventional view of justice as fairness in transactions or a restorative justice for crimes. Justice as "those things apt to produce and preserve happiness and its parts for the political community" makes all moral virtues, including the likes of magnificence and greatness of soul, just. Justice is broadly understood as "aiming at the common advantage" so all the moral virtues are essentially just in this sense. Aristotle further explains the character of law as enforcing virtue on all the citizens:

> law orders us to do the deeds of the courage person (for example, not to leave the order of battle or to flee or to throw down our weapons), and those of the moderate person (for example, not to commit adultery or outrage), and those of the gentle person (for example, not to strike or to slander someone), and similarly also in the case of the other virtues and corruptions; the law commands the ones and forbids the others—correctly, in the case of the law laid down correctly, and in a worse way, in the case of the law laid down haphazardly.[186]

To be lawful is to be virtuous and law forbids vice and commands virtue. Virtue is not up to the citizens to freely choose (or not) but compels them and demands that one's actions align with the best interests of the community, where the best interests are likely to be actualized in a community that has correct laws that promote the right virtues.

The virtue as the law prescribes to its citizens cannot be virtue in its highest form since such virtue requires prudence, a  certain excellence of the intellect which can determine what to do, to whom, when, in the right manner and for the right reasons. But the laws *can* force an imperfect form of virtue. One example would be what Aristotle calls "political courage/*andreia politikē*" or "courage found in the citizen."

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[186] 1129b19-27

First is the courage found in the citizen, since it seems most like courage properly speaking. For citizens seem to endure dangers on account of the legal penalties and reproaches involved, as well as on account of the honors at stake. For this reason too people seem to be most courageous wherever cowards are dishonored and the courageous honored. And such are those whom Homer depicts-for example, Diomedes and Hector…This most closely resembles the courage spoken of before, because it arises through virtue, that is, through a sense of shame and longing for what is noble (since it is for honor) and through avoiding reproach, since it is shameful.[187]

The courage here is not the noblest form of courage that Aristotle formulates since it is not done for its own sake. The act of courage is largely coerced by the city through honor and shame. Since the truest form of virtue requires the full understanding of the situation as well as the understanding of goods at stake which cannot be present through coercion, laws can command virtue, not in its highest form, but an imitation of it.

**Partial Injustice and Injustice as a Whole**

So far, I have pointed out that there is an account of justice as what is lawful. But there is another form of justice that Aristotle points out. First, all vices are unjust in a way, but they are not necessarily acts of injustice as "grasping for more" than one's proper share. Vices such as adultery and cowardice are unjust because they are unlawful but they are also spoken in different names of licentiousness or cowardice. But concerning gain, there are no other words but to designate it as injustice. So concerning injustice, there is a distinction that is made between injustice as vice since what is virtuous is what is sanctioned by law and thus just, which is different from justice and injustice understood as taking more than one's share, which is closer to the conventional understanding. Aristotle calls this conventional understanding of justice "partial

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[187] 1116a17-29

injustice" as distinguished from the whole of injustice, which is vice. The partial injustice "pertains to honor, money, or preservation—or to some one thing if we were able to encompass all these by a single name—and arises on account of the pleasure associated with gain. The other injustice pertains to *all* the things which a serious person is concerned."[188] The act of partial injustice, motivated by "pleasure associated with gain," is found in "the distributions of honor or money or any of the other things divisible among those who are in the regime (for in these things it is possible for one person to have a share that is either unequal or equal to another's)."[189] There is also the corrective justice that involves restoring various harm done in voluntary transactions such as a breach in contracts or involuntary transactions such as theft and murder.

### Justice as a Virtue Relating to Others

Another characteristic of justice is that it is a virtue that is concerned with others. Virtue such as moderation deals with a measured way of satisfying desires. Justice, on the other hand, looks outward to others. Aristotle says that "This justice, then is complete virtue, though not unqualifiedly but in relation to another person. And on account of this, justice is often held to be the greatest of the virtues…And, speaking in proverbs, we assert that "in justice, every virtue is summed up."[190] And he also points out that "it is always necessary for the just and the unjust to involve more than one person."[191]

Justice as exclusively relating, and requiring, others is most visible in Aristotle's insistence that one cannot commit injustice to oneself. One cannot do so because justice/injustice requires others. Examining whether one can do injustice to oneself, Aristotle concludes that there

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[188] 1130b2-5
[189] 1130b32-35
[190] 1129b26-28
[191] 1138a20

is no voluntary suffering of injustice. The agent may act against one's own wish and suffer

injustice as a separate consequence, but the agent does not desire injustice as a consequence. In

the end, Aristotle does refer to one possibility in which injustice is done to oneself, and that is

not to a person as a whole but to a particular part of a person. He says that doing injustice to

oneself can make sense in a metaphorically: "the part of the soul possessing reason is set apart

from the nonrational; hence to those who look to these considerations, there does in fact seem to

be injustice in relation to oneself, because in these parts of the soul, it is possible to suffer

something contrary to their respective longings."[192] Thus, insofar as a single individual is

counted as "one," there is no justice or injustice because justice always requires that there is

more than one which constitutes some other whole.

If practical reasoning is merely thinking about attaining ends without concern for justice,

that would be mere cleverness/*deinotēs*.[193] The complexity of practical reasoning in the context

of the city stems from the fact that good practical reasoning must also be or bring about what is

just. But just as there is ambiguity present in perceiving particulars in practical reasoning, there

are difficulties in perceiving particulars as just, because to perceive particulars as just is to see

them as "equal" in a sense.

### 5.2.2 Justice as Equality

The problem of justice is most visible with the issue of the distribution of money and honor. It is

particularly visible because this is where much of "fights and accusations" occur, and thus, it is

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[192] 1138b6-13

[193] Cleverness/*deinotēs* and prudence were differentiated by the nobility of the goal. The noble, as discussed in the previous chapter, has a self-forgetting characteristic that benefits others over oneself. Cleverness is indifferent to the nobility of the end.

useful to clarify justice regarding such objects. In the distribution of honor and money and other

divisible things, there can be a more and less and "whatever sort of action in which there are

degrees, the more and the less, there is also the equal. If, then, the unjust is unequal, the just is

equal, which is in fact what is held to be the case by everyone, even without argument."[194] Yet

this equality is not simple arithmetic equality. Just as with the discussion of the mean, Aristotle

explains that equality is not "simple" equality but a sort of proportion. He explains this idea

through a mathematical formulation of equal ratios. Briefly, if the ratio among the persons

should be equal, the ratio among the things divided should be equal as well. If the ratio among

the persons is unequal, so should the things be divided according to that ratio. This ratio is called

the "geometric proportion" and what is just is proportionate, while the unjust is contrary to the

proportion. And, the middle term for this just proportion is also called "equal," because it is

neither too much nor too less than the proportion. Similarly, in corrective justice, a judge tries to

restore equality to those who have been done an injustice by inflicting a loss on the offender,

"thereby taking away the gain."[195] Proportional equality discussed in *EN* 5 focuses primarily on

economic exchange, where proportional equality is applied to the valuation of things. I will first

discuss this notion and then follow with proportional equality in the realm of politics which

involves the merit of the persons.

Aristotle examines the notion of reciprocity as still another way to understand justice.

Justice as reciprocity is a commonsensical understanding of justice as well as something cited by

authoritative figures such as the Pythagoreans and Rhadamanthus. Yet here, Aristotle points out

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[194] 1131a 10
[195] 1132a 10

that the problem with the eye-for-an-eye view of justice is that this does not take into account the complexity of the city but relies on simple arithmetic equality.

The importance of proportional equality lies in its function of perpetuating any community. Aristotle explains that:

> But in communities concerned with exchange, the just in this sense—reciprocity in accord with proportion and not in accord with equality—holds them together, for the city stays together by means of proportional reciprocity. For either people seek to reciprocate harm for harm—if they do not, that is held to be slavish—or they seek to reciprocate good for good. And if they do not do this, there is no mutual exchange, and people stay together through mutual exchange.[196]

The most basic condition for a community to survive is reciprocity but it is not a simple one-to-one reciprocal exchange but in "accord with proportion." Any community requires reciprocity, whether it is for harm or for good but this reciprocity must be according to proportion. The work of each person should correspond to merit and worth. "If, then, there is first proportional equality and then reciprocal exchange occurs, the proportional reciprocity spoken of will take place. If not, the exchange is not equal and does not endure. For nothing prevents the work of the one person from being superior to that of the other."[197] The notion of "proportional equality"/*analogia isē* indicates that prior to exchange, there is some valuation of the work by each other, and this requires a judgment that is equal in terms of value. This recognition of equality by the members of the community is what makes the basis for a stable community. If equality is recognized, there is justice, and if it is not, then there is unrest.[198]

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[196] 1132b32-1133a2

[197] 1133a10-12

[198] As mentioned above, the proportional equality discussed here is within the context of economic exchange which is different from, but not unconnected to, proportional equality in politics.

While Aristotle's initial presentation of the subject of justice as proportional equality seems to show a clean and certain mathematical rule, he also remarks on the difficulty of "applying" this idea in practice. The obvious yet the biggest challenge is what constitutes merit and its proportional desert. In *EN* 5.3, Aristotle says:

> For if the people are not equal, they will not have equal things. Rather, from this arise fights and accusations, either when people who are equal have or are distributed unequal things, or when people who are unequal have or are distributed equal things. Further, this is clear from what accords with merit, for all agree that what is just in distributions ought to accord with a certain merit. Nevertheless, all do not mean the same thing by *merit*; rather, democrats say it is freedom; oligarchs, wealth; others, good birth; aristocrats, virtue.[199]

The challenge is to have a common understanding of what counts as merit in the community for this allows proper division of honor and property, which does not result in "fights and accusations." The emphasis on proportional equality stems from the fact that human beings need different things to function for "no community comes into existence out of two doctors but rather out of a doctor and a farmer and, in general, out of those who are different and not equal."[200] Proportional equality is a way to keep the different elements of the city, such as doctors and farmers in a balance according to needs.

One way proportional equality is measured and balanced is through money. Aristotle explains that money "measures everything—both excess and deficiency—so that it measures however many sandals are equal to a house or to food. Accordingly, as a house builder stands in relation to a shoemaker, so a given number of sandals must stand in relation to a house or food. For if this is not the case, then there will be no exchange or community, and this will not be the

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[199] 1131a23-29
[200] 1133a17

case if the terms should not be somehow equal."[201] Thus, money is necessary to keep the

community together because it measures excess and deficiencies. Money is the "middle term"

which serves as a standard to judge excess and deficiency. In an approximate and abstract way,

money is analogous to virtue for, in the realm of moral action, virtue is the measure of excess

and deficiency while in the value of things, it is money. Money is an artificial standard, but it

serves the natural need for proportional equality. Proportional equality is a natural need because

the community's needs are various, and those various objects cannot be arithmetically equal.

Hence, he says that "all things ought have a value assigned to them; for in this way there will

always be exchange, and if there is exchange, then there will be community. Hence by making

things commensurate, money, just like a measure, equalizes them."[202] The challenge is how to

measure the value of something so that there can be a balance between the needs. While

ascribing monetary value is one way to perceive proportional equality in the most visible

manner, there is much more ambiguity in the case of ruling.


**5.2.3 Equality in *Politics***

Aristotle's earlier discussion of equality, especially proportional equality, was spoken in

the context of the most basic necessary requirements for a community to sustain itself. It was

spoken in abstract terms with mathematical examples. He briefly mentions the range of the word

"merit" in the political context, but he does not explore it in-depth in the *Ethics*. In *EN* 5.3,

Aristotle used the example of house, housebuilder, shoes and shoemaker as an example to show

the need for proportional equality. Largely, these are examples of economic exchange and

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[201] 1133a21-25
[202] 1133b14-15

describe proportional reciprocity in a non-political setting, but when Aristotle revisits the notion

of equality in the *Politics*, he specifies the usage of equality in the context of rule. In Book 2

Chapter 2 of *Politics*, Aristotle states that:

> It is thus reciprocal equality that preserves cities, as was said in the [discourses on] ethics. This is necessarily the case even among persons who are free and equal, for all cannot rule at the same time, but each rules for a year or according to some other arrangement or period of time. In this way, then, it results that all rule, just as if shoemakers and carpenters were to exchange places rather than the same persons always being shoemakers and carpenters. But since that condition is better also with respect to the political community, it is clear that it is better if the same always rule, where this is possible; but in cases where it is not possible because all are equal in their nature, and it is at the same time just for all to have a share in ruling (regardless of whether ruling is something good or something mean), there is at least an imitation of this.[203]

Just as with the earlier assertion about equality, a regime requires reciprocal equality for its

preservation. But the emphasis is now on ruling. While Aristotle's earlier example of shoemaker

and housebuilder was used to explain the difference of value that each contributed to exchange,

here he examines to what degree a person can legitimately rule over the other. Ruling is

analogized to the artisans: if different artisans practice each other's art, taking turns, and make

good products, then in this way, different persons can legitimately rule one another, taking turns.

If it is better for the shoemaker or carpenter to stick to their art for the best result, then so should

the rulers and the ruled. The example of artisans is relatively straightforward since it makes little

sense to switch their arts, so the obvious suggestion would be to have someone who is an expert

in politics to rule everyone legitimately. Yet unlike the arts, politics involve an additional

consideration. Aristotle says, "it is clear that it is better if the same always rule, where this is

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[203] 1261a31-1261b4

possible; but in cases where it is not possible because all are equal in their nature, and it is at the same time just for all to have a share in ruling…" (emphasis added). In general, the rule of the same person doing the same task is better analogously to the sense in which each artisan can practice their expertise. Yet such a rule is not possible when their natures are is equal. It is not merely the skill but certain equality or inequality of nature which allows legitimate or illegitimate rule. This equality/inequality of nature is important because, just as the proportional equality of value is what keeps exchange possible, without the acknowledgment of the community of the status of each other's "nature," there is conflict. This is based on the fundamental observation that "the city is made up not only of a number of human beings, but also of those differing in kind: a city does not arise from persons who are similar."[204] While the "difference" of human beings can be elaborated in different ways, one way is to see the different contributions to the city. What each contributes to the city is unequal, and therefore there is a similar issue of perceiving the proportional desert to rule. Thus, in *Politics*, there is a shift of focus from a more abstract/mathematical and economical view of equality to equality related to ruling.

### 5.2.4 Perception of Equality and Factional Conflict

I now turn to Aristotle's discussion of factional conflict to show that conflict occurs due to the perception of inequality. True equality or inequality for Aristotle, I will argue, is not evident but is a result of certain perception. Some of the pertinent observations about equality occur in *Pol* 3.9, 3.12 and *Pol* 5.1. In Book 5, the topic of discussion is factional conflict.

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[204] 1261a24

Aristotle tries to show how and why a change of regime occurs. He enumerates four different ways factional conflict occurs and he summarizes by saying that:

> Factional conflict is everywhere the result of inequality, at any rate where there is no proportion among those who are unequal (a permanent kingship is unequal if it exists among equal persons); in general it is equality they seek when they engage in factional conflict. Equality is twofold: one sort is numerical, the other according to merit. By numerical I mean being the same and equal in number or size; by according to merit, being equal in respect to a ratio.[205]

Here, Aristotle posits a general cause of factional conflict, which is a result of inequality. Just as Aristotle's previous discussion of the equality of the mean required a further qualification that the mean is not a simple arithmetic mean but a mean dependent upon the situation and the agent, here too, there is a differentiation of equality as numerical and according to merit. Numerical equality considers simple equality in number, but equality with respect to merit is proportionate equality. The first equality depicts the quantitative view of equality, while the latter is qualitative. Aristotle adds that there is a general agreement that "justice in an unqualified sense is according to merit"[206] therefore, no regime is based on simple numerical equality. The problem is how a community understands the meaning of merit.

> At the beginning of Book 5, the origin of the regimes are explained as follows:

> It is necessary first to take as a beginning point the fact that many sorts of regimes have arisen because, while all agree regarding justice and proportionate equality, they err about this, as was also said earlier. Rule of the people arose as a result of those who are equal in any respect supposing they are equal simply, for because all alike are free persons, they consider themselves to be equal simply; and oligarchy arose as a result of those who are unequal in some one respect conceiving themselves to be wholly unequal, for as they are

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[205] 1301b 26-32
[206] 1301b 36

unequal in regard to property they conceive themselves to be unequal simply. Then the former claim to merit taking part in all things equally on the grounds that they are equal, while the latter seek to aggrandize themselves on the grounds that they are unequal, since "greater" is something unequal.[207]

This passage shows the problem of perceiving merit. The democrats see one aspect of the merit, namely that each one is equally free, and assumes equality in all aspects. The oligarchs see the difference in property and assume fundamental inequality of themselves from those who have less. Aristotle does say that not every aspect of human attributes is worthy of the claim to rule just as height is not a serious standard that deserves a claim to rule. But even if freedom or wealth is, most people focus on a single aspect of merit and overlook other aspects of a human being, which deserves attention and merit.

One example that shows the difficulty of deserving to rule can be found in Aristotle's discussion of aristocracy and oligarchy. Throughout *Pol* 4, Aristotle differentiates aristocracy from oligarchy, with oligarchy being a deviant version of aristocracy. Yet when talking about factional conflict, aristocracies are just as prone to attacks from the democrats as oligarchies.

In aristocracies factional conflicts arise on the one hand on account of there being few who partake of the prerogatives, which was said to be what effects change in oligarchies as well; this is because aristocracy too is in some sense an oligarchy. In both, the rulers are few, and though it is not on account of the same thing that they are few, aristocracy too is at any rate held to be a sort of oligarchy on account of these things.[208]

The reason these two regimes are both vulnerable to attack by the democrats is not whether it is rule by few through virtue or few through property but the fact that those who partake of the prerogatives are few. In practice, both oligarchy and aristocracy can equally be attacked by the

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[207] 1301a 26-34
[208] 1306b 23-26

many because of the fact that the few rules, regardless of how the few are constituted. This shows that the virtue of the rulers, and therefore their merit, is not a guarantee of peaceful coexistence. What is perceived is the fact the "few rule" and not "the virtuous rule." Because the merit of the aristocrats is not evident, factions start from those who do not share in the prerogatives but think they deserve them.

The important observation is that when a certain perception of equality/inequality is established, then all other aspects of that person are assumed to be equal/unequal. This description depicts how certain characteristics overtake and sets up a standard where other characteristics are minimized or reduced from priority. Thus, if one sees the other as fundamentally equal/unequal, other differences will not merit rule. But because both democrats and oligarchs only see a part of the merit to rule, they are in error.

> All regimes of this kind have, then, a certain sort of justice, but in an unqualified sense they are in error. And it is for this reason that, when either group does not take part in the regime on the basis of the conception it happens to have, they engage in factional conflict. Those who are outstanding in virtue would engage in factional conflict most justifiably, yet they do it the least of all; for it is most reasonable for these only to be unequal in an unqualified sense. There are also certain persons who are preeminent on the basis of family and claim not to merit equal things on account of this inequality: they are held to be well-born persons, to whom belong the virtue and wealth of their ancestors. These, then, are in a manner of speaking the beginning points and springs of factional conflicts.[209]

All regimes are said to have a certain sort of justice. Each community sets up a sort of "currency" to measure the contributions of the citizens and their right to rule. But because each regime is limited to prefer and value certain goods over others, it is bound to be unjust in certain

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[209] 1301a37-1301b5

respects. Therefore, factional conflict is a perennial problem in politics, for the city cannot establish a completely and flawlessly just regime, for there is a particular measure (e.g. virtue, property, freedom, basis of family etc.) that does not fully measure other contributions of the members of the city or does not allow for certain people's contribution to enter the city thereby limiting their recognition. And just as Aristotle claimed in *EN* 5: when proportional equality, i.e., justice in the strict sense, is not present, there is no community.

## 5.3 Conclusion: Ambiguity in Perception

So far, I have shown that practical reason in the political context does engage in end-setting, and the particular challenge to practical reason in the political context is the perception of proportional equality/justice. Equality is not an evident fact about human beings but greatly dependent on the perception of merit, which is variable. The most common judgments that people cast are twofold: people are generally equal because they are free and people are generally unequal because of inequality in property. Once a certain perception of equality or inequality is formed, all the other features of that person are subsumed under it, for the purpose of the justication to rule politically. Now, to see a propertied person as propertied is not the relevant perception involved in political practical reasoning, but rather that such a particular person is seen *as an instance of meriting rule.* Of course, one can come to a judgment after reflection, that property may not be the best measure to merit rule. But once a person holds the universal/opinion that holding property is a just claim to rule, the particulars that such an agent perceives of a non-propertied person is that such a person is an instance of someone who does not merit rule. But because each claim to rule is incomplete in one way or another, the perception involved is flawed with the exception of those "who are outstanding in virtue." Those in the

position to rule must take into account that different groups of citizens will see each other as an instance of what is in fact questionable merit. And without providing a way to compromise, the city will fall. It is the challenge of practical reasoning from the context of the city that the ruler must somehow make the citizens see each other as receiving their just desert. One way to achieve this is to have offices mixed with different elements of the city. For example, Aristotle's suggestion for creating a more stable oligarchy is to establish "preliminary councilors" elected from the multitude that cannot overturn the regime but allow participation in deliberations of public matters or to give the multitude veto measures but limit their ability to introduce legislation.[210] Practical reasoning, in this sense, is not identical to perception but is a reasoning that thinks through concrete ways to change, correct or limit the city's understanding of justice informed by how the different parts of the city perceive each other's merit. Aristotle's suggestions for mixed offices are a way to counter the ill effects of incorrect perception of justice that sees one group as meriting absolute rule over the other group. Mixing different elements in office limits such injustice and also the perception that presupposes it. To do this well is the task of excellent practical reasoning i.e., prudence.

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[210] 1298b30-35

**Chapter 6 Limits of Practical Reason**

In this chapter, I explore the limits of practical reasoning by examining the "best regime" in *Pol* 7, the question of natural right, and the relation between practical reason and philosophy/theoretical reasoning. The examination of the best regime reveals to what degree practical reason in the political setting can be successful. The examination of natural right points to the incompleteness of practical reasoning without an understanding of nature and lastly, I show how practical reasoning's limitation transforms into philosophy.

**6.1 Question of the Best Regime**

Practical reason's challenge in the political setting is most visible in the issue of justice and the distribution of wealth and honor. The perception involved in judging the merit of others is not a neutral observation, and the threat of discord is ever-present. This problem is not avoidable, even in the best regime. The problem of justice is coeval with the existence of any city, including the "best regime" in *Pol* 7.

In *Pol* 7, Aristotle devises a hypothetical city based on the following supposition: "The best regime was speculated upon the premise that "the best way of life both separately for each individual and in common for cities is that accompanied by virtue—virtue that is equipped to such an extent as to allow them to take part in the actions that accord with virtue."[211] Aristotle was criticial of certain hypothetical cities suggested by Plato, Phaleas and Hippodamus in *Pol* 2 and attempts to provide a best city that is more "realistic" and actualizeable. But it is unclear whether Aristotle's "best regime" is truly best and whether he intended this city to be something

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[211] 1323b40-41

that can be established in reality. Scholars such as Richard Kraut takes *Pol* 7's city as the ideal city and accepts it as fact. "[Aristotle] asks his audience to wait a long time before he comes to the destination for which he has been preparing them…It is in Books VII and VIII that we find Aristotle's fullest and most detailed account of how a city is best organized. The material that precedes these books tells us much about what is bad, but little about what is good."[212] But there are reasons to suspect that Aristotle's best regime may not be "best" or at least not best in every respect.

One noticeably questionable aspect of the best regime of *Pol* 7 is the issue of slavery. Slavery in *Pol* 7 is problematic because, even if, as Aristotle suggests, servile and docile men and women are chosen for this task, if they are not natural slaves or if they are foreigners, they would eventually demand recognition for their labor and contribution to the city. The farming element are not citizens of this city, and they have no say in the governing of the city in which they are subjugated. But as Aristotle clearly shows in his criticism of Sparta, he is well aware of the problem of not only the injustice of the slavery but also the practical effects of issues of having slaves such as the example of helots, their revolts and the Spartans' constant need to attend to the rebellion. If the slaves of the city according to prayer are kept in check by force, it is certainly the citizens who must do so. If the task is "outsourced" to mercenaries, Aristotle is also aware of how mercenaries can take over the city.[213] If the citizens are tasked to rule the slaves, and if the slaves are productive because they are not natural slaves or because they are foreigners, the citizens must be accustomed to using force to keep the slaves in check. Not only

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[212] Kraut, Richard. *Aristotle Political Philosophy*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) P. 190

[213] "In peacetime, on account of their distrust of one another, they hand over their defense to mercenaries and to a neutral official—who sometimes gains authority over both groups. This happened at Larisa in the case of the rule of Simus and his followers among the Aleuads, and at Abydus at the time of the clubs, one of which was that of Iphiades." 1306a25

would this take away time from leisure, but it also potentially shapes the citizens to value force, a character that does not quite align with Aristotle's intended end for the citizens in this city.

Robert Bartlett, in "The Realism of Classical Political Science," points out that even in the best regime, there is an arbitrariness present in the ordering of office. Bartlett points to the argument of natural slavery in *Pol* 1. The position of natural slaves was justified on the basis of their nature, but in *Pol* 7, those of menial labor were later awarded freedom, something unfit for their nature. Either freedom is given to natural slaves unjustly, or the farmers are enslaved unjustly. Therefore, there is a certain arbitrariness, and this arbitrariness is something that inevitably stems from the limitedness of justice in all regimes, to which Aristotle points us. Bartlett states that every community holds fast to opposed opinions of what the common good is, and even if one group saw the true human good, the "group in question would then be compelled either to yield to the conflicting claims that always threaten to erupt into civil war…or to resort to violence to enforce it." The ever-present conflict is also present in the best city for "the necessary exclusion of some human beings from office (VII.8-9) has nothing to do with their potential to be virtuous and is therefore arbitrary according to Aristotle's own standard."[214] Moreover, Bartlett points out that the aim of the best city is leisure but leisure itself is not the highest end of human life simply. "The noble appreciation of beautiful things that is evidently to be the focus of the leisured conduct of one's life in the best regime is informed by the philosophic preference for rest over occupation, but it does not share the same goal as the philosophic life, namely, wisdom or a discursive understanding of the whole in terms of necessity…Leisure is a step in the direction of philosophy, but it is not philosophy…The fact that

[214] Bartlett, Robert. "The Realism of Classical Political Science," *American Journal of Political Sicence*. (Vol. 38, No.2: May 1994): 390

the best regime is otherwise deeply flawed does not constitute a criticism of Aristotle's politics; all to the contrary, that fact constitutes Aristotle's criticism of politics."[215] Bartlett holds that the depiction of the best regime with all its flaws points beyond itself to the philosophic life as the genuinely satisfactory end of life.

Similarly, Stephen Salkever states the "best regime" in *Pol* 7 is not Aristotle's best regime but a "best regime" of a politically committed "man/*aner*" The regime is said to be "according to prayer (*kat'euchen*)" but this is *not* Aristotle's prayer but "The likely agent of this prayer is a man (that is, in Aristotle's Greek, an *aner*, a male—or, better, a "real man"—rather than an *anthropos*, a human being) fully committed to the political life, someone for whom nothing more beautiful can be imagined than a beautiful polis. Such a person understands human virtue quite differently from Aristotle, who, like Plato, is consistently and explicitly critical of what he sees as the powerful and misguided Greek tendency to equate virility or manliness and virtue."[216] Salkever points out that the regime closest to what Aristotle would pray for would be a "clearly fictional isolated polis" resembling Aristotle's god where the regime's activity is entirely dedicated inward, which is briefly mentioned in *Pol* 7.2 and 7.3:

- But even a single city in isolation could be happy—which is to say, obviously engage in politics in a fine manner, if indeed it is possible for a city to be settled in isolation somewhere using excellent laws—and the organization of its regime will not be with a view to war and the conquest of enemies; for this is assumed not to exist. (7.2 1324b41-1325a5)
- Indeed, not even cities that are situated by themselves and intentionally choose to live in this way are necessarily inactive. For activity can come about relative to a city's parts: there are many sorts of shared activities undertaken by the parts of the city in relation to

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[215] Ibid. 393-394
[216] Salkever, Stephen. "Whose Prayer? The best Regime of Book 7 and the Lessons of Aristotle's *Politics*," *Political Theory* (Volume 35 No.1, Feb. 2007) P. 32

one another. This is possible in a similar way for any individual human being as well. For otherwise the god and the entire universe could hardly be in a fine condition, since they have no external actions beyond those that are proper to themselves.(7.3 1325b23-30)

The ideal city would be a godlike city where all the activities are internal with no influence or concern for the external conditions. Salkever points out that these hypothetical assertions reflect Aristotle's truly ideal but unactualizeable city.

The problematic character of the city according to prayer, which starts from *Pol* 7.4, is explained in four ways. First, the city needs slavery to allow more leisure for the citizens, but unlike *Pol* 1 and the ambiguous attitude towards slavery, there is a lack of any discussion addressing such problematic character of slavery in *Pol* 7. Salkever says that "What is notable here is not so much the likelihood that slavery in this city of prayer will be unjust, but the utter absence of any consideration of its justice."[217] There is also an elevation of the military virtue in this city for those who partake in bearing arms are guaranteed a political office. "The premise of this regime is that the highest aspiration of any real man (*aner*) is participation in ruling, and the only reward that insures the loyalty of those who bear arms is the prospect of achieving high political office."[218] Thirdly, Salkever states that the Aristotelian god, a continuously actualized unmoved mover, which plays a central role in the defense of theoretical life, is wholly absent and replaced with conventional Greek piety which enforces civic morality "rather than serving as a way of problematizing [conventional] morality…"[219] Lastly, the city according to prayer resembles a household more than a city. "There is nothing about the political institutions of the regime about how the citizens would engage in making new laws and changing old ones, in

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[217] Ibid. 35
[218] Ibid. 36
[219] Ibid. 37

settling lawsuits, and in auditing the performance of officeholders. Perhaps one of the built-in limits of the *kat' euchen* regime as a model is that it eliminates the permanent problems of political life, much as Socrates' cities in speech in the *Republic* eliminate the problem of justice by assuming away the tension between individual interest and common good."[220] From these observations, Salkever concludes that the city in *Pol* 7 is the best if the common good and the human good is identical but not if "the best polis is composed of citizens who entertain serious doubts about the coincidence of the political good and the human good simply."[221] Salkever similarly concludes with Bartlett that "the best city" is not the best city simply but it is Aristotle's attempt to show us what a city would like if the common good and human good are identical and therefore, to show the limits of such a city. Salkever does not think that Aristotle urges us to abandon the political life for the theoretical life, but if the good citizen and the good human being are ultimately different, that awareness informs us about the range of possible directions one can take to better the city.

Before moving on, I would like to point out a puzzle for there is a question of to what degree god as a self-sufficient being can be a model for human life. While Aristotle does emphasize the goodness of the self-sufficient inward turning life over relying on external equipment, how that would translate to human life is not entirely clear. In the case of individuals, the life of philosophic contemplation is analogous to a self-sufficient divine being. But there are also some hints as to the practicability of such life. In *EE* 7.12, when discussing friendship, Aristotle questions thus, "For it is clear that as [god] is in no further need of anything, neither

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[220] Ibid. 38
[221] Ibid. 41

will he be in need of a friend, nor will he have one, who also has nothing characteristic of master."[222] But human beings are not gods:

> That there is in fact need, then, to live together, that everyone most wants this, and that the happiest and best man is most of all such, is clear. But that it was not clear in the argument, though it was speaking truth, was reasonable too. For the solution is how the comparison, though true, was put together, that it is because the god is not that sort of thing, for example to need a friend and a friend worthy in respect of his like. However, according to the argument in question, the virtuous man will not even think, for it is not thus the god has well-being but in a way better than to think something else besides self-thinking himself; reason is that for us well-being is by relation to another, but for him he is himself his own well-being.[223]

Peter Simpson explains this passage as follows: "It also shows, as Aristotle was intending from the beginning, how the comparison with God is leading us astray about the need of friends. For the good life, which is available to God all by himself, is only available to us through sharing with friends. Thus the self-sufficient man (as opposed to the self-sufficient God) will need friends as constitutive of the happy and self-sufficient life, and not as an extrinsic extra."[224] That happiness necessarily involves friends is also pointed out by Ronna Burger's *Aristotle's Dialogue with Socrates.* Burger expands on the idea that philosophic contemplation is the happiest life and turns our focus to Aristotle's deeds, namely, his engaging in dialogue with the readers and also with the Platonic Socrates/Socratic Plato who, according to Burger, serves as an imaginary interlocutor that Aristotle is responding to throughout the *EN*. "There is an *energeia* of *theōria* that takes place through the activity of sharing speeches and thoughts, which is, as the discussion of friendship established, what living together means for human beings; it is in that

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[222] *EE* 1244b8-9
[223] *EE* 1245b9-18
[224] Simpson, Peter. *The Eudemian Ethics of Aristotle.* Commentary p. 371

way a realization at once of our political and our rational nature, which the dichotomy of political action and contemplation hold apart."[225] Now, the above need for friendship as a more self-sufficient life makes sense for an individual, but it is harder to translate this idea to the city.

Returning to the discussion of the best regime, Mary Nichols also points out the precarious situation of even the best city which is largely isolated and attends to its own matters. "The conditions necessary for political rule make its full flourishing impossible. However much hostility toward others may be blunted by Aristotle's teaching about spiritedness, the city must still make the distinction between citizens and foreigners. However generous masters may be in offering their slaves freedom, they are still masters. Limits to citizenship place limits on statesmanship. While it is true that Aristotle's attempt to replace despotism with politics indicates that he did not think that tragedy must inevitably characterize political life, he did not go so far as to think that it could be eliminated entirely."[226] The necessity of not only maintaining a city simply but a political rule where one rules and is ruled in turn, is a difficult task that must always navigate and steer clear of the pitfalls of despotism. "[The citizens] must walk a fine line between mastery and slavery: to avoid being enslaved they incline toward despotism; to avoid enslaving others, they risk being enslaved. Politics is constantly refounding, or reestablishing this fine line in response to changing circumstances."[227] The arduous task of constant refounding is necessary to maintain good political rule.

Much of the scholarship thus points to the questionable character of the best regime. It is best insofar as it is devoted to moral virtue and leisured life as its goal, but the best city is still a

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[225] Burger, Ronna. *Aristotle's Dialogue with Socrates* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). P. 214
[226] Nichols, Mary. *Citizens And Statesman: A Study of Aristotle's Politics.* Savage, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1992. P. 164
[227] Ibid. 165

city and a city requires necessities that cannot be fully done away with except in fictitious scenarios. And even Aristotle's best city requires external conditions that are up to chance, such as the relatively isolated location of the city. Because of the necessities required to maintain a city, the best regime cannot be best in all respects. Even at its height, the city must attend to necessity, especially the demand for justice. Practical reason from this standpoint must be aware of the very limits of the city, even in its best form, in order to best guide the city.

## 6.2 The Question of Natural Right

Another difficulty of Aristotle's practical reasoning is reconciling the non-arbitrary aspect of Aristotle's morality with his claim that virtuous action is what is fitting in each situation. Especially troubling is his challenging remark that "something that is just by nature" is "altogether changeable." I suggest here reading just (or right) by nature as "the best" and such an act cannot be a singular act or particular acts which can be valid everywhere.

Throughout *EN* 5, Aristotle discussed justice in its political setting but in *EN* 5.7, Aristotle pivots to discuss, in an enigmatic matter, natural justice. He starts with dividing "just in the political sense" into two: the natural and the other, conventional. "The natural [part of political justice] is that which has the same capacity everywhere and is not dependent on being held to exist or not, whereas the conventional part is that which at the beginning makes no difference whether it is thus or otherwise, but once people have set it down, it does make a difference."[228] It is important to point out that for Aristotle, natural justice is part of this "just in the political sense." So the general context in which natural and conventional justice should be

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[228] 1134b19-23

understood is justice within a particular political community where one rules and is ruled in turn. Now, the "just in the political sense" contains *both* the natural and the conventional. The conventional part is, as stated above, that which makes no difference in the beginning but only makes a difference once it is set down. The examples that follow are the amount of money offered for ransom or the type and quantity of animals used for sacrifice.

Aristotle, then, proceeds to criticize the conventionalist view that all of justice is a result of whatever people have decided to set down. They think so because the conventionalist understand nature as having "the same capacity everywhere, just as fire burns both here and in Persia, whereas they see the just things being changed."[229] Aristotle criticizes this view of understanding justice. He first denies this is how justice should be understood, but he qualifies the denial by stating that the conventionalist understanding of natural justice may be true for the gods, but "among us there is in fact something that is [just] by nature, though it is altogether changeable. Nevertheless, in one respect it is by nature, in another it is not by nature."[230] Aristotle continues to say that by nature, the right hand is stronger, although it is possible for all to become ambidextrous. This example is ambiguous in its point for one way to read it is to suggest that nature is something incomplete and that it can be made complete by conventional effort if we take ambidexterity to be a better thing than just a strong right hand. This view of natural right seems to suggest that whatever is naturally right requires a conventional effort to make it "more complete." Sachs offers a similar reading where "human beings are involved, choice can combine with nature to produce something nature alone would not provide; the ambidextrous person mentioned below is an example of this kind, and so are clothes and

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[229] 1134b25-26
[230] 1134b 29-31

houses."[231] So this view of natural right sees nature as providing the general direction and convention helps complete this natural tendency. But the above reading would seem to collapse all natural right into conventional right. For one cannot then distinguish those right by nature from right by convention since all right by convention is an extension of what is right by nature.

The example of the right hand is supposed to illustrate further the earlier claim that states: "It is clear what sort of thing is by nature, among the things that admit of being otherewise, and what sort is not by nature but is conventional and by agreement, if indeed both are similarly changeable."[232] The point is that there are things by nature and things by convention and both are changeable, although the two are of different kinds. The right hand is by nature strong for the most part, although the strength of the hand is changeable. On the other hand, a green light does not by nature indicate "go" or a red light, "stop;" these are changeable and are made by convention. Then a right by nature is different in kind from right by convention, although right by nature is changeable and not immutable like the qualities of fire which burns the same everywhere. The case against reading natural right as "clothes and houses" can be made more clear in the following example of what is "just by agreement." Aristotle gives the example of measures for wine and corn and says that measures change from place to place and are not the same. But every community needs measures of some kind. So if we apply the distinction above, then we will say that the need for measures is natural but specific arrangements are conventional. But if this is the case, then why did Aristotle use this as an example of just by convention and not another example for things by nature? So I interpret that things by nature here indicate the

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[231] Sachs, Joe. *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*. FN p. 93
[232] 1134b31-33

changeable quality of things by nature for humans, which is separable and different from things by convention and agreement.

Terrence Irwin suggests a different reading: "Natural facts about a human being make it easier and more beneficial, Aristotle thinks, to use the right hand more than the left, though it is possible to disregard this natural advantange and to use both hands equally. Analogously, human communities can survive under many sorts of laws and conceptions of justice, but it remains true that human nature and the human good make one conception of justice the correct one."[233] Irwin sees the usage of right hand as the natural advantage so natural right would be a naturally proper rule but just as ambidexterity is a possibility for a human being, even though it is not natural, we are capable of living under less than naturally just community. In so far as Irwin distinguishes right by nature from right by convention in this example, I believe he is closer to Aristotle's intention.

The most challenging passage in this section is Aristotle's assertion that "the just things that are not natural but human are not everywhere the same, since the regimes are not either; but everywhere there is only one regime that is in accord with nature, the best regime."[234] Here, I suggest that Aristotle provides a different sense of the term nature. The right hand example shows how things are naturally i.e. without human interference. But here, the regime that is "in accord with nature" is nature understood as that which is the best. Also, discussing regimes, Aristotle states that the regimes are not everywhere the same but there is only one regime that is the best regime. Regimes are human-made so all regimes in this sense can be called conventional. But Aristotle further hints at what "only one" means in the subsequent passage:

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[233] Irwin, Terrence. *Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics* Notes p. 234
[234] 1135a3-5

"For whereas there are many particular acts, each of the just and lawful things is one, since it is universal." While there are many particular just acts, those just acts are "one" in the sense that just acts are particular instances of the one universal, namely justice. Analogously, there are multiple regimes, but there is only one regime that is the best, which is the one universal "best regime." Thus I suggest reading "only one regime that is in accord with nature, the best regime" as meaning that the best regime is not a particular instantiated regime but the universal "best regime" in the sense that "each of the just and lawful things is one, since it is universal."

If the best regime is the "one regime that is in accord with nature," then the term "in accord with nature" would correspond to the one best universal. Subsequently, that which is right by nature would be right in accord with what is best. And because what is best is interpreted not as one particular but as the one universal, what is by nature just could be interpreted as by nature belonging to the universal of "justice," and hence the best among the particular just acts. This is also why the particular just acts among gods may be singular unchanging acts because gods are singular unchanging beings as opposed to human beings whose needs and wants are composed of different parts, thus requiring different acts for different circumstances.

The problem with the example of fire is that it is a particular natural object which has the same power everywhere. Aristotle says what is just by nature is "not the way it is—or rather, it is this way in a sense." A naturally just act would be an act that accords with the one universal justice, and such an act would not be a singular action that is applicable everywhere. Since what is best depends on the situation, not unlike determining the mean/*meson*, a just act by nature cannot be a singular action that behaves identically like fire. There are certain actions that do make a difference regardless of how people have set it down but this does not necessarily point

to a specific/singular and unchanging act. Then an act that is just by nature is an act that is an instance of one universal justice.

Leo Strauss provides an interpretation of this troubling passage as follows: "There is a universally valid hierarchy of ends, but there are no universally valid rules of action. Not to repeat what has been indicated before, when deciding what ought to be done, i.e., what ought to be done by this individual (or this individual group) here and now, one has to consider not only which of the various competing objectives is higher in rank but also which is most urgent in the circumstances."[235] What is naturally right or what is best could mean both that which maintains the city as well as the highest aspirations of the city. What is considered best should be understood as what is best *for the city*, since right by nature is a *part* of "just in the political sense" which presupposes a city. It cannot simply mean what is best for an individual. In this sense, the best is guided by the concerns of the city and what is most needed in the city. Of course, there is an ambiguity on the meaning of what is best for the city. For it can mean what is most urgent but it can also mean the highest actualization of the citizens. As Strauss continues, "But one cannot make a universal rule that urgency is a higher consideration than rank. For it is our duty to make the highest activity, as much as we can, the most urgent or the most needful thing."[236] But because the naturally just is one universal and not a particular act, there is no particular decree that is valid everywhere and anytime. The best course of action (whether it is the urgent or the loftiest goal) depends on the particular and ever-changing circumstances in which actions take place. What makes an act just by nature is the degree such an act is an

[235] Strauss, Leo. *Natural Right and History*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953). P. 162
[236] Ibid., p. 163

instance of the one universal. This interpretation is also coherent with Aristotle's subsequent

discussion on the difference between performing unjust acts and being unjust.

Connecting back to the discussion in *Pol* 7, the discussion of the best regime can serve as

one illustration of the rule of the best. In *Pol* 7.2, Aristotle questions that it "would be odd if

there did not exist by nature that which exercises mastery and that which does not exercise

mastery, so that if matters stand in this manner, one should not try to exercise mastery over all

things but only over those that are to be mastered…"[237] Aristotle is generally critical of most

forms of mastery because it is an unjust form of rule. It is unjust because those who rule and

those ruled are more equal than not. But if one is not equal, then it is also against nature for there

not to be a mastery. Thus, Aristotle's account of justice, especially natural right as the rule of the

natural best can be seen in this following passage:

> Among similar persons nobility and justice are found in ruling and being ruled in turn, for
> this is something equal and similar: to assign what is not equal to equal persons and what
> is not similar to similar persons is contrary to nature, and nothing contrary to nature is
> noble. Hence when another person is superior on the basis of virtue and of the capacity
> that acts to achieve the best things, it is noble to follow this person and just to obey
> him.[238]

Here, Aristotle defends political rule by emphasizing the equal or similar nature of those who

rule and are ruled. But just as the passage above on natural mastery, there is a case to be made

for those who are unequal or dissimilar in nature.

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[237] 1324b36-38
[238] 1325b6-13

While my discussion of the best regime showed how the best regime falls short concerning the requirements of justice in one sense, the principle which guides the illustration of the best regime is based on, and consistent with, the just by nature discussed in *EN* 5.7 where just by nature is equal to the "best." The rule by the best in *Pol* 7 is possible by maximizing the actualization of the moral and political virtues of the citizens. But actualizing virtue requires "equipment," for "living nobly requires a certain equipment too—less of it for those in a better state, more for those in a worse one."[239] Every other consideration such as the relatively isolated geography to the usage of slaves is an attempt to put in the center the actualization of citizens' moral virtue. From the perspective of natural right, it is an attempt to show what a city would look like if the ruling citizens were excellent.[240]

Aristotelian natural right is not egalitarian and just by nature as pursuing what is best can mean the natural justice of the rule of the best. Of course, the great difficulty, as discussed in the section of equality, is in showing that one group of persons is truly unequal than others and thus merits just rule over the others. Such a regime can only sustain itself *if* the city can show that the rulers truly deserve to rule because they are truly unequal than those ruled. Otherwise, the ambiguity in assessing who is equal and who is not always lead to faction and a good regime is one that is bot correct and capable of lasting a long time: "But instituting [a regime] is not the greatest or the only task of the legislator or of those wanting to constitute some regime of this sort, but rather to see that it is preserved; for it is not difficult to be governed in one fashion or another for one, two, or three days."[241] There is a tension between the requirement of longevity,

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[239] 1332a1-2
[240] Aristotle clearly brackets the philosophic life as the other alternative to the best life in this discussion and focuses exclusively on moral virtue.
[241] 1319b34-37

the necessities of maintaining the city, and right by nature, the justice of the rule of the better over the inferior.

### 6.2.1 Question of Equity

Certain scholars have pointed to equity/*epieikeia* as something that is right by nature. Ann Ward, in *Contemplating Friendship in Aristotle's Ethics*, suggests just this. She says, "Aristotle's analysis of equity leads us to question on what basis, if not law, the equitable person or judge decides what is fair in any given case. This question points to Aristotle's distinction between natural justice and conventional justice…Natural justice is thus distinct from human law and in a certain sense relativizes the latter; it allows one to say that some laws are unjust or that there is a distinction between the legal and the just."[242] Ward asserts that it is equity that is natural justice at work. She states that "It would appear that the judge looks away from one universal, the positive law of the city, toward another universal, natural justice beyond the regime, to adjust or accommodate his or her ruling to the particular circumstances at hand. This would explain why natural justice, although having the same force everywhere, is also changeable. What is naturally just in any given circumstance would change with the particular situations into which it is called to adjudicate; its application and therefore manifestation would change with the changing particulars of each separate case."[243] Ward understands equity as the higher and natural justice that is "consulted" to rectify the shortcomings of conventional justice.

The perplexity of equity lies in the fact that equity is qualified justice. Aristotle says, "For the equitable, though it is better than the just in a certain sense, is just, and it is not because it

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[242] Ward, Ann. *Contemplating Friendship in Aristotle's Ethics*. State University of New York Press: Albany, 2016. P. 78-79
[243] Ibid. p. 79

belongs to a different class of things that it is better than the just."[244] He does not simply state that the equitable is unqualifiedly higher than the unqualifiedly just. The equitable is the "correction of the legally just" because "concerning some matters it is not possible to speak correctly in a general way."[245]: law, specifically written law, always speaks in generality and action is particular. Although the written law may work most of the time, it requires adjudication for a more just application of the law. John Koristansky suggests that the equity which is appealed to as a greater justice, is not a separate justice above the just as the community established it. He explains equity as being true to the original intent of the lawgiver by mitigating the shortcomings of written law:

> It is important that we realize that equity is not a standard that is beyond legal justice, in the sense of being better than justice or more fundamental. This in fact is a principal thrust of the chapter under consideration and we understand why it is the next subject we have to discuss following what we learned from what preceded immediately. Equity is not a higher standard than legal justice (if it were, justice in that ordinary sense would not be good!); on the contrary, it is the same standard. A judgment according to equity rectifies the mistakes that may occur under the law, in a way that corresponds to what the lawgiver would have said if he were present. Equity functions, so to speak, within the context of a legal system and when we are driven to refer to it we are still obliged to operate within the parameters and the aims of the law. In this respect, Aristotle's argument provides more support for what in contemporary juridical parlance is termed "originalism" than it does the opposite. Equity requires that we be as originalist as possible.[246]

Koritansky's understanding of equity is not justice above the justice of the city but still works within the law and the lawgiver's intent. This is not strictly identical with modern constitutional

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[244] 1137b7-9
[245] 1137b13-14
[246] Koritansky, John. "Natural Justice and the Nature of Justice in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*," *Interpretation* Volume 44, Issue 2 (Winter 2018): 254

interpretation of "orginialism" but I believe it is Koritansky's point that equity is not a justice above justice but an extension of the original justice that the lawgiver had in mind. The flaw is not in the law as such but in the inflexible nature of written law.

If we understand what is just as broadly aiming at the common good, and equity is a species of the genus of justice, then equity is, broadly conceived, promoting the common good. Aristotle says "Hence equity is just and better than what is just in a certain sense—not what is just unqualifiedly but the error that arises through its being stated unqualifiedly."[247] Equity promotes the common good so it is just and it is better than "just in a certain sense" i.e., written law, which is also a form of justice. Aristotle stops his discussion of the equitable person here, but a similar discussion of equity appears once again in *EN* 6.11. There, Aristotle describes the characteristics of a prudent person, and one of the characteristics is sympathetic judgment/*gnome*. The equitable person is "especially characterized by sympathetic judgment and that having sympathy in some matters is an equitable thing."[248] The goal of the equitable person is emphasized as pointing to the same object of what is just (as the common good). "For the equitable things are common to *all* good human beings in their being directed toward another, and *all* matters of action fall among things particular and ultimate…"[249] The equitable person aims at the good of another and is concerned with the community involved. Such a person also possesses correct judgment of the particular action under consideration, which is why the equitable person sees the failures of the written law *in this particular circumstance* and thus can rectify it.

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[247] 1137b24-25
[248] 1143a23
[249] 1143a31-32

Moreover, the equitable person was said to take less than one's just share. Such a person chooses "to do these sorts of things and is not exacting to a fault about justice, but is instead disposed to take less for himself even though he has the law on his side…"[250] By being equitable e.g. taking less than one's share, equity is just by contributing to the common good. An equitable person contributes to the common good by not creating conflict through excessively correcting wrongs. By not exacting justice, the equitable person promotes friendship, which is another force that binds any community together. I have spoken earlier about the necessity of justice, especially in the distribution of honor and wealth, as an indispensable component of keeping the city together. But even when the exact distribution of honor and money is not actualized, the city can maintain its cohesiveness if a form of friendship is present.[251] Then from the consideration above, equity is still justice which aims to correct the legal shortcomings but it does not seem that equity is synonymous with right by nature strictly.

I have shown in different places Aristotle's emphasis that practical reasoning works with the particulars of the situation. Aristotle's discussion of right by nature is not an exception to this Because the specific actions that are right by nature change from situation to situation. In addition, the fact that moral actions are not simply or radically conventional but also that some decisions are "better" because they accord with nature is still a difficult statement because what is "in accord with nature" or "what is best" is unclear. There is a twofold difficulty from the viewpoint of practical reasoning: the first is choosing the best/natural course of action in this specific situation and second, understanding what "the best simply" is or what Strauss calls the

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[250] 1137b36-1138a2
[251] Even so, friendship is based on a certain equality so once this sense of equality is disregarded for a considerable time, conflict will be inevitable.

"universally valid hierarchy of ends." The difficulty of practical reasoning is summed up as the following:

> Similarly too, people suppose that to know the just and unjust things is in no way to be wise, because it is not difficult to comprehend what the laws say (but these are not the just things, except incidentally). But how the just things are done and how they are distributed—this is indeed a greater task than to know what is conducive to health, since even here to know about honey, wine, hellebore, cauterizing, and cutting is easy, but to know how one must administer them with a view to health, and to whom and when, is as great a task as to be a physician.[252]

With a view to health, excellent practical reason must correctly identify and perceive the particulars involved in a situation and choose the right tools to administer with a view to health, but excellent practical reason must also know the best simply, or in this case, health. From the point of ethical virtue, noble is analogous to "health" that a person strives to attain. Individual noble actions appropriate to each circumstance would be akin to the medical art applied to specific situations. The noble is what is beautiful that benefits both the individual and the community marked by the excellence and practical reason is incomplete without this understanding of the best or what is in accord with nature.


**6.3 Task of Philosophy in Practice**

In the previous chapter, I discussedthe  proportional equality involved in political practical reasoning. There, Aristotle used a formulation of ratio to show the equality of two things of differing value. This apparent certainty gives way to the ambiguity of equality, as I

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[252] 1137a10-16

have discussed it. Judging equality, far from applying an abstract principle, is better described as involving perception where a person immediately sees and feels the equality/inequality of the situation.[253] Such initial perception becomes the salient perspective where other characteristics are overshadowed and deemphasized. When a person sees another as fundamentally equal, the differences which make a person "unequal" do not seem different to the point that they merit superiority. Inversely, if a person "sees" the other as inferior, they will always see them as inferiors regardless of other equal qualities. Aristotle criticizes this as an incomplete understanding of justice, for he says that "For all fasten on a certain sort of justice, but proceed only to a certain point, and do not speak of the whole of justice in its authoritative sense."[254] Each city has a sense of justice which the city operates under but no city has a perfect or the highest sense of justice because justice and equality are complex and their natures not readily evident. In 3.12 of the *Politics*, Aristotle says that:

> The political good is justice, and this is the common advantage. Justice is held by all to be a certain equality, and up to a certain point they agree with the discourses based on philosophy in which ethics has been discussed; for they assert that justice is a certain thing for certain persons, and should be equal for equal persons. But equality in what sort of things and inequality in what sort of things—this should not be overlooked. For this involves a question, and political philosophy.[255]

This passage contains the only occurrence of the phrase "political philosophy" throughout this work and suggests the unique subject matter of political philosophy, namely, to investigate the equality and inequality of things and persons. He then follows with the discussion of the different claims to rule and shows that not each characteristic of a person is worthy of merit. The problem

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[253] Of course, one is capable of changing or educating or criticizing this initial perception to arrive at a more accurate understanding of the equality in the situation.
[254] 1280a 9-10
[255] 1282b 19-23

of discerning equality is the problem of discerning the merit to rule over others, and because human life is composed of various needs such as the need to preserve oneself and one's community as well as the need to attain higher ends, it requires an insight into the order of ends/goods as well as their potential coexistence. The complex nature of equality is the reason why Aristotle posits a need for political philosophy and seeks to persuade his audience that equality is not a simple phenomenon.

One example of political philosophy rectifying the notion of equality is found in *Pol* 2.7, where Aristotle criticizes Phaleas who proposed a simplified design for a city. Phaleas emphasized equal property for all citizens in the hopes of curbing factional conflict. Aristotle says this proposal is problematic not only because equal property can mean equal luxury (which is impossible to actualize) or equal penury but moreover, that desire for property is not the only source of conflict, but desire for honor is as well. Aristotle notes that "… factional conflict occurs not only because of inequality of property, but also because of inequality of honors, though in an opposite way in each case; for the many engage in factional conflict because possessions are unequal, but the refined do if honors are equal—hence the verse 'in single honor whether vile or worthy.'"[256] What is needed is not only a proper distribution of materials; the justice of a regime requires proportional equality not only of property but also of honors. Property is relatively easier to distribute by measuring its quantity but honor is much less tangible than property. Thus, bestowing and distributing honor is a task that requires making fine distinctions of the merit of persons and things, a task of philosophy that takes politics as its subject matter.

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[256] 1266b39 -1267a1

Moreover, not only is evaluating equality a problem, but what counts as political goods subject to equal/unequal distinction in the first place is a difficult discern. One way to answer this question is turning towards Aristotle's description of the different parts of the city, for "cities are composed not of one but of many parts, as we have often said."[257] Farmers, artisans, marketing element, laboring element, warrior element. Both the free many and the rich few contributes to different parts. Because the few are rich, they contribute to the overall wealth of the city just as the farmers, artisans and the laboring element does. Both the many and the few contribute to war for the wealthy few can offer cavalry, which is crucial to war[258] but horse breeding is not possible for the poor. Also, the few rich can provide ships and the many provide the bulk of the soldiers and sailors. Both the many and the few contribute to the overall wealth of the city: the many by providing various labors and the few through property and inherited wealth. The difference between the many and the few is the most visible parts of a city but the proper assessment of the contribution of each requires an additional part. *Pol* 4.4 states that there are parts that relate closer to the soul than of the body which is "the element sharing in justice as it relates to adjudication, and in addition the deliberative element, which is the work of political understanding—must be regarded as more a part of cities than things relating to necessary needs."[259] Both the few and the many contribute to the city but who ultimately gets to rule is the role of the deliberative and adjudicative part of the city. The emphasis here is the need for "persons who partake of the virtue of political rulers (*aretēs tēs tōn politikōn*)"[260] One way to divide the political goods is provision (materially and militarily) and distribution (deliberation and adjudication). The provisions can be from both the rich and the poor but there also needs to

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[257] 1290b39
[258] 1289b35
[259] 1291a26-28
[260] Sachs translates it as "virtue of citizens."

be a leading element that suggests who does what as well as distribute the goods produced by the parts of the city in accordance with justice. That element that is responsible for ruling and adjudication is particularly important for the regime "is the arrangement of offices, and all distribute these either on the basis of the power of those taking part in the regime or on the basis of some equality common to them—I mean, [the power of] the poor or the well off, or some [equality] common to both."[261] The regime is what distinguishes one city from another and who rules and how the necessities are distributed in accord with the city's understanding of justice. Not all goods deserve equal consideration for Ethiopians are said to distribute office based on size[262] but Aristotle does not seem to take that as a serious political good. The parts that make up a city is those who provide the necessary, including defense, and those who rule by deliberation and adjudication where virtue/prudence is most required.

One of the unique requirements of thinking about practical reasoning in the political context is that one cannot simply seek the good but must keep in mind the common good. In doing so, one has to understand the various parts of the city and how each interacts with one another. For example, Aristotle frequently describes the broadest parts of the city as the poor many and the rich few. The dynamic between the two always harbors a seed of conflict because of the perception of equality each has. Moreover, because equality primarily appears through perception, the predominant way of "seeing" equality/inequality emphasizes certain characteristics over others. This does not mean that no further judgment about what is equal or unequal is possible but that the particulars are predominantly seen as an instance of something or someone equal/unequal, which affects subsequent judgments and actions. But because the

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[261] 1290a8-11
[262] 1290b5

prevalent perception of equality is not fully correct, philosophy, specifically political philosophy, has the task of clarifying true equality and inequality.

### 6.3.1 Aristotle's Task in the Practical Works and Philosophy

Practical reasoning is difficult because practical reasoning aims at action, and action is particular and successful practical reasoning requires an "eye" for particulars as well as the universal premise connected to it. Moreover, in the context of politics, practical reasoning must be able to discern that this particular circumstance here must meet the demand of the necessity of the city, especially the demand of justice. This includes not only the correct assessment of honor and wealth but also virtue. Because practical reason must balance and coordinate these different factors and formulate a judgment, it is complex and cannot be reduced to a singular repeatable rule. This is a contrast to "rule morality" which formulates generalized rules of action that should be applied most of the time. Aristotle would argue that for such an act to be correct, one would not only need to have the correct rules of action to begin with but also be able to discern in each circumstance the relevant particulars as an instance of the rule, something that cannot be taught like mathematics but requires experience and long time. Therefore, Aristotelian practical teaching shows a certain deference to prudent statesmanship and resists simplifying morality to a set of rules to follow.

A particular act can be seen as an instance of courage but one can ask, as Aristotle himself does, whether that particular act is an instance of courage or not and thereby question whether this particular is an instance of a different universal premise (which Aristotle states as opinions/*doxa* and held with conviction/*pistis*). The quest to clarify and sharpen action leads to

the questioning of the *doxa* and therefore weakens the conviction and opens a path to further

exploration via reason. Of course, this is not an inevitable outcome, for people may easily hold

on to their opinions as is (which is perhaps a more common occurrence), but once one's

conviction is shaken, one will not be satisfied, and to satisfy this longing, there is a possibility of

the beginning of philosophizing. Further evaluation and judgment are possible only when there is

some doubt about one's view or opinion or perception. If one is absolutely certain, there will be

no subsequent thinking. Because practical reason aims at action, the success and failure of one's

action is the measure by which one's prior reasoning's accuracy can be evaluated.

Practical reasoning itself does not normally examine the most comprehensive

understanding of a human being because its primary end is to act here and now.[263] Yet, to truly

understand the most practically successful way of life i.e. a life that tends towards true happiness,

examination of the human being and the world around us becomes necessary. The desire for

genuine practical good leads to the desire for the knowledge of the genuine good. The result of

the philosophic investigation may certainly benefit practical reason as in the case of political

philosophy, and that seems to be one of Aristotle's primary tasks in the practical works of *Ethics*

and *Politics*. Aristotle leads the readers from conflicting common opinions to a plane of higher

understanding that resolves the apparent conflict or clarifies the meaning of authoritative

opinions. Specifically, in the *Politics*, Lord comments that:

> It is clear from these passages that the inquiry contained in the *Politics* does not
> correspond to the full range of subjects belonging to political science or political
> expertise…Political science or political expertise in what may be called its operational
> sense must include some knowledge of (to substitute modern terminology for Aristotle's

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[263] In practice/action the question of the highest end is made most visible at the moment of founding or in refounding although such a moment is not a requirement.

expressions) trade, finance, defense, and foreign policy; but it is not this knowledge that the *Politics* undertakes to provide. The science or expertise that Aristotle teaches in the *Politics* is limited to that category of political knowledge he calls legislation or legislative expertise."[264]

As discussed in the previous chapter, the legislative expertise or *nomothetikē* deals with the broad arrangements of the city and its goals. Aristotle's teaching of these broad goals shows that although Aristotle himself is not actively legislating, he teaches future legislators. On one hand, he teaches through prescription by suggesting specific arrangement of the offices to mitigate conflict or to better an existing regime. On the other hand, he provides a dialectical ascent to a truer and a more comprehensive understanding of the human good by showing the limitations of various authoritative opinions. Since the best practice would be grounded upon what is true, the theoretical description is pertinent for effective action. But practical reasoning is always incomplete in the sense that one must cease thought in order to act, including even the best actions.. For the readers who are not satisfied with mere action, it pushes their longing towards greater fulfillment in theoretical reasoning as an activity. Aristotle does so not only by suggesting that greater pleasure is to be found in such activity but also by pointing out the necessary limitations found in action, even in the best regime.

In *Pol* 2.7, Aristotle remarks that in addition to desire for honor being a source of conflict, he also states that desire itself is a problem. On the nature of desire, he states that "… the nature of desire is without limit, and it is with a view to satisfying this that many live."[265] He proposes an interesting set of remedies to this problem. "For the one, a minimum of property and work; for the other, moderation. As for the third, if certain persons should want enjoyment

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[264] Lord, Carnes. Introduction p. XXX
[265] 1267b4-8

through themselves alone, they should not seek a remedy except in connection with philosophy; for the other [pleasures] require human beings."[266] The first two remedies are moral while the most self-sufficient form of pleasure is said to be philosophy which is in accord with his discussion in the *Ethics*. Aristotle's suggestion of philosophy as the remedy echoes the assertion that philosophic contemplation is the activity/*energeia* that accompanies the highest pleasure. It is also the most readily actualizable activity since it relies less than do other activities on other human beings and  external circumstances.

Setting aside the byproduct of pleasure, philosophy is required for a more accurate political art. Philosophy can radically and comprehensively examine human ends and therefore broaden and inform the range of best ends and activities. In doing so, philosophy provides a transformative understanding of things (e.g. desire, equality, ends, and happiness) which helps one see a broader array of possibilities and a clarification of the matter at hand. Aristotle does give practical suggestions for dealing with moral and political predicaments, but he also shows philosophy at work through his dialectical process on the path towards a better understanding of things. Philosophy alters and changes how things are cognized/perceived by viewing the old objectives/ends or the given world in light of new understanding. It leads to the actualization of the rational capacity of a human being, which is happiness as Aristotle defines it. Humans live largely to satisfy their longing (where desire/*epithumia* is a kind of longing/*orexis*), whether that longing is for something high or low. There will be no action if there is no longing, and actions are the ways in which we attempt to satisfy our longings. The longing towards good action pushes one to seek a more accurate understanding of the world. Longing towards attaining the

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[266] 1267a12

good transforms itself into an attempt to understand the good. Practical reasoning pushed to its limits transforms into theoretical reasoning.

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