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# A MORAL RECONCILIATION WITH ARISTOTLE'S INTELLECTUALISM

by

ASHER REISMAN

Under the Direction of Peter Lindsay

## ABSTRACT

Aristotle's complete picture of human flourishing departs problematically from our commonplace conceptions of personal moral goodness when he draws rapid conclusions in Book X concerning the eudaimonic supremacy of *theoria*; a static comprehension of the timeless order of nature exemplified by the academic philosopher. I develop a sympathetic account of this anxiety as a philosophically legitimate ground of resistance to Aristotle, but go on to make a further case drawing on resources from Aristotle, particularly the relationship between *phronesis* and *theoria* and the role of friendship, which I believe can bring about significant if not total allayment of the worry and reconcile us to an Aristotelian approach for the justification of the ethical life.

INDEX WORDS: Aristotle, *Eudaimonia*, Morality, Political leadership, Friendship, Goodness

A MORAL RECONCILIATION WITH ARISTOTLE'S INTELLECTUALISM

by

ASHER REISMAN

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

In the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2015

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2015

A MORAL RECONCILIATION WITH ARISTOTLE'S INTELLECTUALISM

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## **DEDICATION**

To the memory of my grandfather, Frederick Walter Ochs, whose practical wisdom and love of the noble echo through my life and make possible what limited wisdom I have won.

And

To L.S.

Never far from my thinking and always dear to my thought

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Moral philosophers who hope to cultivate Aristotle need not be embarrassed by his promotion of the contemplative life in *Nicomachean Ethics* X. Such unease reflects important features of the method of moral philosophy, but in this case I hope to show that it can and should be overcome. I make this case through a conception of the work of moral philosophy derived chiefly from Bernard Williams and upon an exegesis of Aristotle, from their conjunction I contend that Aristotle generates an answer *prima facie* embarrassing to the moral philosophic enterprise but ultimately amenable to it. Briefly, I take Aristotle's project to be a principally conservational (rather than revisionary) description and rationalization of the convention morality of his time and place, taken as a more-rather-than-less accurate approximation of what morality genuinely is. Following Williams I argue such a project is also to be attributed to Kant and thus understood as a major type of moral philosophical research.

Once we see this task as the principle target for moral philosophy discomfort with Aristotle's intellectualist turn becomes immediately sensible. For it cuts against the grain of both ancient and modern moral thinking which tend to agree that the wellbeing of others and the larger community play a large role in the motivational economy of the good agent. This departure is especially jarring since, through the bulk of the *Ethics*, Aristotle describes and vindicates the choice-worthiness of such a life thus directed with remarkable subtlety and sensitivity.

There are, to be sure, important junctures in the *Ethics* prior to book X and elsewhere in Aristotle's corpus that suggest the special value of the contemplative life. However, in the concluding sections of the *Ethics*, Aristotle abruptly and dramatically elevates the maximization of *theoria* to the center of human flourishing, a remarkably static comprehension of the timeless

order of nature and its divine cause. This makes the academic philosopher the supremely choice-worthy life and threatens to reduce the significance of our more conventional ethical responsibilities to an inescapable nuisance contingent on our fragile socially dependent animality.

A main concern of my paper is to rehearse the progress of Aristotle's account in detail and from the resource of that exegesis to make the case that there is more moral wisdom and less departure from our commonplace moral commitments than is immediately apparent from his intellectualist conclusion. In short, I try to confirm the legitimacy of a certain kind of resistance that the *Ethics* can stir up, while ultimately reconciling with Aristotle we who so resist.

## **2 WHY MORAL PHILOSOPHERS HAVE REASON TO BE UNSATISFIED WITH ARISTOTLE**

In *Ethics and The Limits of Philosophy*, Bernard Williams appropriates Aristotle and Kant as paradigms of the two principle approaches for the provision of a theoretical foundation or "Archimedean point" for the ethical life.<sup>1</sup> Williams, it should be noted, while deeply respectful and sympathetic to both his interlocutors, ultimately advocates an explicitly anti-theoretical, anti-reductive and multi-disciplinary approach to the "description" of the "truth... about the ethical."<sup>2</sup> We need not follow him so far as that, however, to benefit from his exegesis and juxtaposition of these two monumental thinkers.

William's exegesis of the history of moral philosophy is useful to me in how it identifies the root of the project with the elucidation and justification of *a kind of life*; a way that the whole of a person's rational activity may be ordered, which is supposed by the philosopher to be, in

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<sup>1</sup> Williams, (1985). 28-29.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 17

large part, already substantively grasped. The challenge, as Williams puts it, is to show “that a good life is also the life of a good person.”<sup>3</sup> The total content of the ethical life may be difficult to articulate, but its core and the core of what is excluded from it are accessible to a rough-and-ready apprehension. It has been moral philosophy’s traditional task to show that this antecedently more-rather-than-less given pattern of life is supremely choice-worthy.

Kant and Aristotle’s enterprise is best contrasted with another vital enterprise among moral philosophers, what is usually called “applied ethics.” The latter enterprise (exemplified by Judith Jarvis Thompson’s<sup>4</sup> work on abortion rights or Peter Singer’s<sup>5</sup> on first world responsibility to the global poor) challenges prevailing moral beliefs and sentiments and, when they are found unsatisfactory, proposes revisions to them and correspondently to the socio-political institutions and conventions that reflect and sustain them. Frequently, as in the example mentioned, these projects employ an analogical argument to extend a moral intuition from a (putatively) uncontroversial case to the matter under dispute. Particular moral intuitions are enlisted to qualify or correct other (somehow) more marginal intuitions.

Applied ethics pursued in this manner, one which I believe contributes fruitfully to real moral progress, works by an appeal to a *moral commonplace*. Conversely the enterprise Williams attributes to Kant and Aristotle is best described as an effort to confirm *commonplace morality*: the imagined whole of our moral commonplaces. The confirmation of commonplace morality need not, and should not, be a slavish justification of contemporary customs and moral

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 5. In line with his anti-reductivism Williams maintains that it “does no harm that are notion of the ethical remain vague.” The ethical life seems, on Williams’ account, to be like an eternally new-discovered continent; he will say that its geography includes “obligations” and “virtues” and that “egoist” and “counterethical” considerations lie outside its border (7-14), but there remains a vast and indefinitely varied interior and we should not pretend to know in advance all the sorts of things it contains. The theorist’s hope is that some fairly determinate and reliable predictions can be made, as we could indeed predict if we suddenly found another Australia that it would have carbon-based life if any, water features matching a particular profile if any, and a climate consistent with its latitude and certain other factors.

<sup>4</sup> Thompson (1971).

<sup>5</sup> Singer (1972).

prejudice, although it can certainly collapse into that. Still, the genuine pursuit of this sort of monumental enterprise requires a minimum confidence in one's moral intuitions. Enough to believe that one can proceed by reason towards a more complete approximation of the truth about the ethical, and that one begins close enough to that truth to draw meaningful and reasonable conclusions about what unifies and underwrites that content and makes it supremely choice-worthy.

Kant's good faith in the content of the conventional morality of his time and place is expressed through his recurring insistence on the sufficiency for moral matters of a mind innocent of theoretical philosophy: "there is... no need of science and philosophy to know what one has to do in order to be honest and good, and even wise and virtuous," (*G* 4:404).<sup>6</sup> And elsewhere "[t]he most common understanding can distinguish without instruction what form in a maxim makes it fit for a giving of universal law and what does not," (*KpV* 5:27). While maintaining that his research has practical and pedagogical applications for the cultivation of a virtuous character, Kant shows throughout his writing a deep respect for popular morality along with a deep pessimism about actual run-of-the-mill human conduct. Kant's infamous condemnation of masturbation supplies a vivid instance of how such confidence can lead to embarrassment for philosophical successors, but also that such embarrassment need not sink the enterprise as a whole.

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<sup>6</sup> Notably, Kant claims to start the *Groundwork* with an analysis of "common rational moral cognition" the prime *datum* of which is the thought of the singular "goodness without limitation" of the "good will," (4:393). His analysis of this notion concludes with the rule "ask [your]self only: can you also will that your maxim become a universal law?" (4:403); a recognizable expression of the thought that is eventually expressed in the first formulation of the "categorical imperative" and in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Critique as the "Fundamental Law of Pure Practical Reason." This rule for the selection and rejection of maxims is identified as the principle of "the moral cognition of common human reason" although Kant admits that common reason "does not think [its principle] so abstractly in a universal form" but insists that "it actually has [it] always before its eyes and uses [it] as the norm for appraisals." He goes on to add that "with this compass in hand... [common reason] distinguishes in every case that comes up what is good and what is evil, what is in conformity with duty or contrary to duty, (4:404).

Kant held that the morality's choice-worthiness could only be validly secured with a warrant of unique purity, on account of what was supposed to be moral obligation's basic conceptual feature as what binds with "absolute necessity," (*G* 4:389, cf. *KpV* 5:19). Eudaimonist principles, he contended, fail catastrophically to provide this to the point that they actually threaten to "obliterate" or "ruin" morality in the individual agent (*G* 4:442, *KpV* 5:25). The appeal to an agent's own happiness as a justificatory or motivational ground for moral conduct enlists the agent's identity as a particular finite being and thus goes beyond the resources of a "pure practical reason" which alone could invest principles with a sufficiently inescapable stature to answer to the concept of moral obligation. Thus eudaimonist formulae that identify virtuous conduct with the agent's own best natural condition, what Kant calls "the perplexing speculation of the schools" (*KpV* 5:25), will rob outwardly upright conduct of its inner worth by preventing the recognition of moral obligation. Such recognition, Kant argued, was necessarily felt by the moral agent as "pain" and "humiliation" via the systematic abnegation of her idiosyncratic inclinations out of respect for the transcendent demands of the moral law (*Ibid.* 5:73-75).

Those of us who hope to find in Aristotle something good to think with for moral philosophy must believe that Kant somewhere goes wrong in all this. Nor is it hard to grasp in a general way how eudaimonism with its relative cheerfulness might provide a more promising path to the confirmation of moral goodness as we know it than Kant's somber ethics.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Williams makes a suggestion in this direction, saying that Kantian morality is unsuited for the diversity and complexity of the modern world being "governed by a dream of a community of reason that is too far removed... from social and historical reality and from any concrete sense of a particular ethical life." Robert Solomon in an essay on business ethics seems to have a similar thought in mind when he argues that Aristotle's orientation captures how "duties are defined by our roles in a community," achieving greater accuracy to the phenomenon of moral action as something undertaken by "a full-blooded person occupying a significant role," within a particular community. (320)

With that much supposed, Aristotle is at once a deeply inviting and a deeply problematic figure. Jonathan Lear concisely expresses this tension in the *Ethics* philosophical reception: “the bulk of the *Nicomachean Ethics* provides one of the great descriptions of all time of the life available to” the human being considered as the “earthly embodied animal we know so well,” against which “the end of the *Ethics* looks like an unworked-out appendage, perhaps (one hopes) tacked on by a witless editor.”<sup>8</sup> The more we find to appreciate in the “bulk” of Aristotle’s account the more troubling his denouement becomes. Thus this split rightly complicates our reading of the *Ethics* both prospectively as we anticipate the intellectualist turn, and retrospectively as we look back at the extensive treatment of topics that seem to have been formally marginalized in the treatise’s conclusion.

Lear is not alone in his low opinion of the *Ethics*’ coda. Jon Moline says that taken at face-value Aristotle’s move is “muddle-head[e]d,” and suggests that it should be understood as a joke on Aristotle’s part, an object lesson in the role “trivial amusements” play in *eudaimonia* as respite from the hard work of practical reason.<sup>9</sup> Less clever, though somewhat more plausible, is Julia Annas’ assertion that what we now know as *Nicomachean Ethics X* was originally a separate work that has been truncated and joined without warrant to the main text.<sup>10</sup> Moline and Annas assert what Lear expresses only as a “hope,” that Aristotle’s intellectualist turn can be effectively jettisoned from the principle movement of the *Ethics*.

These views are not meant to be exhaustive of the contemporary reception of Aristotle’s intellectualism; they only represent the strand of that reception to which I am most naturally sympathetic. There *is* something abrupt and asymmetrical in Aristotle’s elevation of *theoria* after the extended and psychologically deft marriage of the ethical and the flourishing life, what

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<sup>8</sup> Lear, 1994. 319.

<sup>9</sup> Moline, 1983. 37, 50.

<sup>10</sup> Annas, 1993. 216

Williams calls “an account of the self into which [the ethical] life fits.”<sup>11</sup> I want an interpretation that is as faithful as possible to Aristotle’s text as a whole, grappling with the asymmetry rather than abandoning it and so can go further than dismissing or explaining away Lear’s upset but make sense of it.

Before I sketch my program for this reconciliation, I want to try to sharpen our sense of why Aristotle’s intellectualism is morally problematic. To that end, consider what sorts of lives Aristotle’s position rules in and rules out as maximally choice-worthy.

If we take morality seriously then we would agree, I assume, that Martin Heidegger’s life would have been a better, more choice-worthy life had he not become a Nazi. Still Heidegger’s membership in the Nazi party was instrumentally beneficial for his academic career and thus plausibly to his freedom to develop and excel as a philosopher. If this isn’t historically true for Heidegger such a trajectory is at least possible for, as recent revelations of the extent of sexual harassment in philosophy departments should remind us, there is no dearth of examples of lives that are seemingly rich intellectually but certainly impoverished morally. To deny that any of these persons achieved *theoria* seems implausible bordering on the no-true-Scotsman fallacy.<sup>12</sup> Conversely the choice-worthiness of lives like Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King and Mohandas Ghandi seem troublingly undercut by Aristotle’s account. Would, for example, King

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<sup>11</sup>Williams, 32.

<sup>12</sup>This is the damning position that I contend Wei Liu’s “all-inclusive” interpretation must ultimately accept (2011). She claims that engagement in *theoria* necessarily entails that the theorist has *phronesis*. On the grounds that the theorist, as the person who shows the greatest wisdom in the organization of his time, must have the virtue that “determines what he should do at any particular moment in order to promote his happiness.” This is a truncated (and little argued for) definition of the role of *phronesis*, but more to the point it straightforwardly contradicts Aristotle’s claim that *sophia* can develop before *phronesis*. By an implausible inflation of what merits the title *sophia* from a complete knowledge of something or other to knowledge of “virtually everything” Liu tries to build in ethical virtue as necessary for the life of the (exceedingly rare) theorist. This elides a problem that Aristotle forthrightly acknowledges, there can be awful, or at least practically incompetent, persons who are nonetheless very good theoreticians and that is the uncomfortable fact if it turns out that *theoria* is the best thing for a person.

really have chosen the better portion if he had pursued the life of a scholarly theologian, rather than the highly public role that led to his martyrdom?

Against these, I think, quite legitimate grounds for moral resistance, I now hope to make the case for a moral reconciliation. The first element for this case is the explication of what I take to be the genuine, though subtle, ethical wisdom of Aristotle's intellectualism. Namely, the insistence on the primacy of *theoria* prevents a totalizing assimilation of the individual's good with the good of her community; it prevents the reduction of the virtuous agent into an ultimately interchangeable (albeit well-made) component of a larger whole. More speculatively, I contend that the identification of individual *eudaimonia* with *theoria* lays the ground for a revolutionary (even utopian) reorientation of human politics, further transcending and integrating human competition under a greater collaborative effort: the extension and dissemination of human knowledge. Second and more positively I will argue that the sort of motivation and activity characteristic of the life of practical excellence retains a central and lively role in Aristotle's complete conception of the life and character of the flourishing agent, such that the constituents of interpersonal and social morality remain supremely choice-worthy.

### **3 THE PSYCHOLOGICAL STRUCTURES OF *PRAXIS* AND *THEORIA***

In this section I review the psychological system within which Aristotle identifies *praxis* and *theoria* as apex exercise of reason. In the next, I make the case for *praxis*' ultimately political orientation and suggest the significance of its subordination to *theoria* on that basis and in light of a reading of Aristotle as a philosophical reception of a traditionally Homeric esteem for political leadership.



At *Ethics* I.7 Aristotle proposes the *ergon* argument as a strategy to determine the content of *eudaimonia*. The latter is given as the conventional name for the best human condition, what Aristotle conceives as the human *telos*, that for the sake of which we do everything and which we do entirely for its own sake and for nothing further (1095a15-20). Admitting that this is uninformative, Aristotle proposes to describe the human *ergon* or function, what our native endowment (or its apex) is fitted to pursue (1097b30). It is important to recognize the provisional character of Aristotle's proposal to pursue the *ergon* argument and how Aristotle avoids a straightforward identification between *ergon* and *telos*.

*Eudaimonia* is conceived as the human good in the sense of that condition or activity which is ultimately best for a human being. Something with an *ergon* that it fulfills well is said to be a good specimen of its kind, as a knife that cuts well is a good knife and a butcher who wields the knife well in cutting meat is a good butcher. The human *ergon* would be that in fulfillment of which we could say an individual is a good specimen of the kind *homo sapiens*. Since a criterion for judging the goodness of a knife or a swan dive needs to respond to details of what makes something a knife or a swan dive (rather than say a spoon or cannon ball), the judgment of whether or not a human life (as a total sequence of activity realized through a particular kind of animal existence) is good must respond to what makes it a human life, rather than say the life of a rosebush or a dinosaur. Reason is a dominant feature of human life, it is a necessary condition for many of the activities characteristic of a human life and something that richly inflects and distinguishes activities that we otherwise share in common with non-rational life.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> For example eating and coupling are common to human beings and most of the rest of the animal kingdom, but the human experience of those activities is deeply colored by our rational and reflective powers in ways that seem from all external evidence to be absent from the lives of most animals.

What Aristotle suggests is that the excellent exercise of reason may, but need not, be identical with all or a part of *eudaimonia*.<sup>14</sup> This move allows him to bring in material from his psychology to add to and to help draw together what he has already gleaned (and will continue to glean) from conceptual analysis of *eudaimonia* and the review of related *endoxa*, conventional wisdom such as might be expressed in a community's proverbs. I think there are other reasons to see the excellent exercise of reason as the operative core of human flourishing, but for the moment let us accept Aristotle's move as he himself presents it, as a plausible and interesting avenue for research.<sup>15</sup>

From the outset Aristotle distinguishes two ways that reason is active in human life. Describing the soul like a compound organ, he locates reason "in the strict sense and in itself" (1103a3) or simply as "thinking" (*dianoumenon*) (1098a4) but also as "a tendency to obey as one does one's father," (1103a3). Aristotle speaks of this latter also as an "irrational" (*alogon*) element that "shares in a rational principle" (1102b13-14) and later specifies that this is "the appetitive and in general the desiring element," (1102b31) Later, Aristotle distinguishes 'reason in itself' into *logistikon* "calculative intellect" and *epistemonikon* "scientific intellect" (1139a11).

With the former persons "contemplate variable things," things that could be otherwise then they are and with the latter they "contemplate things whose principles cannot be otherwise (1139a6-7). Finally, Aristotle distinguishes two modes of calculative thought: *poiesis* "making" and *praxis* "acting" or simply "doing" (1140a1-2). In accordance with this psychology Aristotle describes two major families of virtues, character and intellectual, with further sub-divisions in the intellectual virtues that correspond to the varieties of intellect.

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<sup>14</sup> This is more evident in the Greek text where the condition is expressed in the optative mood and with the particle phrase *taxa...an* emphasizing the speculative, non-indicative, nature of the suggestion.

<sup>15</sup> For a concise treatment of some of the objections raised to the validity of the *ergon* argument see Gavin, (2001).

The several character virtues together make up the excellence of the desiring element. These are identified as dispositions to feel the appetite or emotion endemic to certain archetypal practical circumstances (e.g. standing in the battle-line, receiving and giving money, responding to insults or praise), to the degree that inclines the agent to desire and correspondently attempt to do what is *kalon*, “noble” or “fine.” Typically the *kalon* is fixed to what would be conventionally approved by the Athenian citizen class, conventional morality for Aristotle; the virtuous agent is thus describe as a *philokalos*: a “lover of the noble.”

The intellectual virtues are conceived as states of the soul by which the thinker correctly confirms truth and rejects falsehood, in short to *think* rightly (1139a28). On the side of the scientific intellect this leads to a familiar if somewhat stilted picture; basically the excellent scientific thinker is the one who will say ‘yes’ and ‘no’ appropriately to statements about the world and make the right connections between fact and fact. Continuous successful engagement in scientific thought amounts to a syllogistic review of what the agent has learned, rehearsing the connections between the many atomic facts to bring what is the case vividly to the attention of the thinker.

Successful scientific thought is supposed to depend on three intellectual virtues: *episteme*, *nous* and *sophia*. Aristotle’s schema is meant to explain how we can know things about the mechanism of nature, how things must go or simply “necessity.” There are (Aristotle thinks) some indemonstrable truths that furnish the starting points for our more diversified knowledge of nature. Accordingly he distinguishes, on one hand, a virtue by which the mind grasps the indemonstrable “first principles” (1141a7), which is *nous*. And on the other the possession of the further chains of reasoning that make up concrete knowledge, *episteme*, of the diverse patterns of

that necessity, the separate laws that describe and unify the behavior of the various actual stars, salamanders and circles, (1139b19-35).

*Episteme* is thus conceived as a grasp of what happens necessarily that is conditioned, at least, by a lively familiarity with the first principles that lie at the start of those conclusions, as opposed to an isolated knowing-that something or other is a natural law. This presents a difficulty for *sophia*, advertised as a special union of *nous* and *episteme*, which seems like an obscurely justified multiplication of entities, it's not clear what *sophia* really has over *episteme*.

A clue to the solution, I contend, is Aristotle's emphasis in the description of *episteme* on education and the transmission of knowledge.<sup>16</sup> This underscores the contrast with the indemonstrable character of the "first principles" furnished by *nous* but it also points to a subtle and attractive way of distinguishing the exercises of *episteme* and *sophia*, one that dovetails with Aristotle's arguments for the superiority of the latter over all other movements of the human soul.

Good demonstration, as it is exhibited in successful pedagogy, depends upon a deeper understanding of the material on the side of the teacher than what she hopes to impart by the end of the lesson. An instructor needs to know her content both forwards and backwards in order to have a reasonable hope that her student will know even inert fragments coming out of instruction. Ultimately, Aristotle would maintain, all our knowledge depends upon a relatively small number of first principles which we do not have demonstrated to us and which we do not learn in a conventional sense. While these principles may be less restricted and unified than Aristotle believed we can still feel the plausibility of this idea if we consider, for instance, how the laws that describe such disparate physical phenomena as stars, harmonics and mitosis are

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<sup>16</sup> "every science is thought to be capable of being taught, and its object of being learned...*Episteme*, then is a state of capacity to demonstrate," this latter is Aristotle's concluding definition of *episteme*.

available to us ultimately by the common techniques of observation, hypothesis and controlled experiment.

Successful demonstration, however, depends also upon the accentuation of what is peculiar to the particular content being taught. My point is not simply that demonstrations about stars, harmonics and mitosis are experientially different one from another for the instructor and the learner, although they are and a system like Aristotle's needs some way of acknowledging that difference. It is rather that the mark of having learned something is a consciousness of that thing's peculiarity; to attribute knowledge of mitosis or the octave to someone is at a minimum to say that they will not confound it with meiosis or the third. Still there is a higher kind of comprehension that draws meaningful connections between the disparate phenomena not only mitosis and meiosis and octaves and thirds but ultimately mitosis and octaves, stars and salamanders.

This is a more complete comprehension, not only of the atomic facts but of their patterns and of what ultimately unifies them all as elements of the same cosmos and known through reasoning set in motion by a single set of first principles. It is consistent with *episteme*, the power to demonstrate more isolated chunks of knowledge, but they are not identical. Indeed, while some connection of discrete facts is invaluable for learning new material thoroughly, raising the curtain too quickly on the interconnections of a complex phenomenon is often a good way to permanently muddle understanding. This understanding is *sophia*, a comprehension of necessity that is in full and conscious possession of how it arrives at understanding through the limited resources of *nous* and what follows from then and can move with great agility between different strands and orders of *episteme*, as they necessarily connect within the single mechanism of

nature. This is *theoria*, the complete form of scientific thought, whereby the *sophos* reviews the order of nature and (for Aristotle at least) its supernatural cause.

For many enthusiasts of the life of the mind this may seem an implausibly static and narrow conception of intellectual excellence. Some philosophers have tried, almost parenthetically,<sup>17</sup> to broaden the scope of scientific intellect both procedurally to include activities like inquiry, teaching and collaboration and substantively to include more of the work we conventionally think admits of genius.

Aristotle's schema is not meant to provide an exhaustive account of what scientific and calculative reason do, but a description of their teleology. We should grant that there is space for disciplines like music, architecture or even military strategy to utilize content grasped by scientific reasoning, but Aristotle has put his finger on something quite particular in the life of the mind, that while not obviously divine or superior is worthy of attention.

We can fill out *theoria's* distinctive quality with material drawn from *On the Soul*, particularly the description of *nous* and *noein* (thinking). While Aristotle's terminologies do not exactly coincide between the two works, his emphasis on the "unmixed," "immortal and eternal" character of *nous* provides warrant to see how far materials from *On the Soul* can consistently strengthen the plausibility of the account in the *Ethics*.

Aristotle's chief claim about *nous* is that its exercise consists in a special participation with its objects that amounts to identification, as he says "actual knowledge is identical with its object," he has it follow from this that *nous* should be conceived as a "form-of-forms," (431a1, 431b16, 432a1) The significance of these claims can be clarified by connecting and contrasting *nous*, unique to the rational animal with *aisthesis* "sensation," common to all animals.

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<sup>17</sup>For example Sokolowski adds without argument the "cultural variations" of the theoretical life including "music, poetry and visual art," (368)

*Aisthesis* occurs not, as some of Aristotle's predecessors thought, by the reception of some of the perceived object's matter by the sense organ but through a responsive change in the material of the sense organ so that it is said to receive the 'perceptible form' of the object (424a18-25).

What Aristotle means to explain in discussion of *aesthesis* is how animals apprehend the world to be made up of discrete objects each a unique amalgam of properties evident in other things e.g. particular colors, sizes, densities and locations. The discussion of *noesis* is meant to explain how human beings can reflect on those individual properties and their possible relationships to one another semi-independently from any particular object of perception. As Aristotle puts it *noesis* engages not "a magnitude," say six feet as it is apprehended in a particular man or tree, but "what it is to be a magnitude," (429b10-12) what all things that are six feet or have extension in space at all, have in common.

The role of the obviously material sense organs in *aisthesis* allows Aristotle to distinguish my apprehension of a particular object as a sensible form from the underlying object, we need not conflate the stone on the ground and the representation of the stone in my perception. In the case of *nous*, however, because there is no discrete material body, nor an obvious material organ of thought, it becomes necessary to conclude that *nous* comes to correspond to the immaterial form by actually becoming the form full stop (430a20-22).

This can sound bizarre in the abstract but it is not so difficult to exemplify. What it is to be a circle is to be the figure enclosed by the set of points equidistant from a given point, the circle's center. This definition is consubstantial with a range of facts about circles, what necessarily follows from being such a figure, for example the figure's area is necessarily  $\pi r^2$ . When I think the relationship between a particular circle's radius and its area there is a sense in

which this thought is identical with your thought about the relationship between the radius and area of another circle. This identity between my thought and yours can be explained by both being identified with the antecedent fact of what it is to be a circle, which has reality not through anyone's thought but as an entailment of the nature of space itself. Aristotle asserts that the *nous* of particular persons is changed by its becoming different forms so that "then it can think by itself," (429b9).

The achievement of the theorist is most plausibly understood as such a species of learned *noesis*. It consists in a review of the systematically grasped and articulated relationships and patterns of necessity that unify all possible and actual phenomena that transpire in time, indifferent to any particular contingent instantiation of those laws. *Theoria* is not the astronomer's learned appreciation of the movement of a particular binary star, nor the mathematician's computation of a triple integral, but their coincident or retrospective comprehension of the physical or mathematical laws that can furnish a common explanation for those instances with all other cases of gravity or integration.

Thus understood *theoria* is not immediately intuitive as the essential constituent of human flourishing. It does, however, impress us as a definite and distinctive feature of human life *qua* rational reflective life; through it human beings at a particular time and out of a particular material existence participate in something timeless and remarkably transcendent of the circumstances of that existence.

The virtues of the calculative or deliberative intellect are also meant to equip the agent to arrive at truth; that is sound reasoning about how to use their bodies in order to realize their desires. Such truth is not necessarily apprehended in any sort of propositional form, but is principally instantiated just in the agent's meaning to do what is appropriate to her intention.



This commerce between calculative thought and desire suggests that the *logistikon* can be identified with the “rational principle” in which the soul’s desiring element is said to participate. The virtues of the *logistikon* make possible excellent deliberation and it is in the form of excellent deliberation that the agent wills whatever is truly correspondent with her reasonable desires or her productive objective.

Aristotle’s distinction between *poiesis*, exemplified by craftsmanship, and *praxis* turns on how the deliberative structure for successful production is determined by the nature of the product and is fundamentally *for* the product; the condition of the soul by which the agent adopts the prescribed procedure into her deliberation is straightforwardly called *techne*, “craft.”<sup>18</sup> Insofar that craftsmen make things in order to achieve some further end instances of *poiesis* nonetheless coincide or are embedded within larger movements of *praxis*; the exercises of the productive intellect are by necessity organized by exercises of the practical intellect.<sup>19</sup> Thus a potter practices her craft, generally to earn a livelihood and hence to support a household and hence to contribute to the stability of her community. She may also exercise it at times to win honor, to perform an act of charity, to increase her own command and confidence in her skills or to pass the time in a pleasant and temperate manner.

These latter sorts of ends provide paradigmatic objects of the practical intellect. For while support of one’s household or improving one’s skills may be valued primarily for their

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<sup>18</sup> Kant provides a useful point of comparison. “Imperatives of skill” are one class of hypothetical imperatives, possible maxims for the will that “necessitate” the will of a particular agent under the condition that she has a correspondent desire. If I desire to play a G-chord on the guitar, I must (to realize that desire) strum the first four strings while holding down the second fret on the second string and the third fret on the first and third string, if I do not mean to do this then I do not count as willing to play a G-chord. Both Aristotle and Kant are interested in accounting for the determined and unambiguous nature of actions that fall under a definite skill, which makes judging such actions’ executions well or poorly done comparatively unproblematic. Kant does this by focusing on the discrete and well-defined nature of such desires when made “objects of the will,” Aristotle instead focuses on how such actions are made objects of the will only within a larger story of the motivations of an agent to live better.

<sup>19</sup> “every one who makes makes for an end, and that which is made [e.g. cabinets, poems] is not an end (*telos*) in the unqualified sense (but only relative to something i.e. of something)-only that which is *done* is that; for good action (*eupraxia*) is an [unqualified] end.” (1139b1-3)

contribution to some further end they are not constitutionally subordinated to the production of something external to the agent, in the way that making a pot is. When the agent is a *philokalos* and so desires what is fine without the sort of external stimuli provide by legal incentives or punishments, then the capacity for correct deliberation is given the name *phronesis* “practical wisdom.”

While *praxis* can be used to describe any instance of the practical intellect, I have enlisted it here as a success term, to name, as a counterpart to scientific *theoria*, the apex ratiocination of the *logistikon*; the coordination of *phronesis* with the character virtues as an integrated complement. The character virtues being themselves the fluorescence of a kind of deliberative reasoning that suffuses the desires.

#### **4 THE POLITICAL ORIENTATION OF *PRAXIS* AND THE VALUE OF PHILOSOPHY**

The *phronimos* or ‘person of practical wisdom’ engages in patterns of service, cooperation, leadership and benefaction with and for the sake of her intimates, fellow citizens and political community. All this activity is driven by the hygienic order of her appetites and emotions (the character virtues as a whole) and effected through the deliberative savvy of the intellectual virtue *phronesis*.<sup>20</sup> Thus the agent takes continuous and robust pleasure in her upright conduct and brings to bear the integrated resources of her native endowment. The precise content of these patterns will vary depending upon the agent’s constitution and circumstances; the *praxis* of a soldier is different from the *praxis* of a banker is different from the *praxis* of a homemaker.

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<sup>20</sup> “the function of a man is achieved only in accordance with practical wisdom as well as with moral excellence; for excellence makes the aim right, and practical wisdom the things leading to it.” *NE*.VI.12.1144a7

Political leadership, however, emerges as an apex paradigm of *praxis* and service to the political community is an axis ultimately common to virtually all forms of *praxis*.

This characterization is perhaps best epitomized where Aristotle contrasts the contemplative life with the “secondary” happiness of the practical virtues exemplified in the “political or military affairs” that belong to the statesman (1177b7-12, 1178a9-10). Jiyuan Yu recognizes that this binary appears as early as I.5, when Aristotle considers traditional candidates for the good that principally informs the best life; pleasure, honor, knowledge and wealth. The first and especially the fourth candidate are straightforwardly rejected and on Yu’s reading “[t]he bulk of the *NE* is devoted to... the revision” of the second of these views into a philosophically plausible endorsement of the choice-worthiness of the political life. This revised conception is trained not on honor *per se* but on virtue, with honor pursued almost coincidentally as the characteristic concomitant of great virtue.<sup>21</sup> That revisionary effort is at last completed with a reconstruction of the true role of pleasure in the good life in the first five chapters of book X, the promotion of *theoria* follows correspondently as an investigation of the remaining plausible commonplace.<sup>22</sup>

We can fill out the structural details of this revision somewhat following Robert Sokolowski’s account.<sup>23</sup> Sokolowski schematizes the *Ethics* around four “crests,” magnanimity, justice, friendship and contemplation. The ultimately political orientation and context of the character virtues is expressed in the approach and course of the first two crests. Friendship too, as Aristotle clearly signals, has a political significance, but we will come to this somewhat later.

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<sup>21</sup> “[honor] seems too superficial to be what we are looking for, since it is thought to depend on those who bestow honor rather than on him who receives it, but *the good* we divine to be something of one’s own and not easily taken from one. Further, people seem to seek honor in order that they may believe that they are themselves good; at any rate it is... for their *arete* that they seek to be honored; so evidently in their view *arête* is best. One might even be inclined to suppose that *arete* rather than honor is the end pursued in public life.” *NE* I.5.1095b23ff.

<sup>22</sup> Yu, 2001. 117.

<sup>23</sup> Sokolowski, 2001, 357.

Further, justice and magnanimity are the dominant features of a goodness that while oriented outward is sustained by and dependent principally upon the psychology of the individual, while friendship consists essentially in a kind of harmony and collaboration between characters.

The magnanimous agent is a person of marked equanimity who, out of esteem and confidence in her own virtue, is steered toward the pursuit of political honor, which for Aristotle is linked to public office by definition as the “wages for ruling,” (*Politics* 1134b7). The magnanimous person is not motivated by honor after the manner of Agamemnon or Achilles, rather his respect for virtue as the object of supreme worth renders him disinterested in the pursuit of wealth or hedonic delicacies.

To adapt some material from Kant, every action must have some “object” or “matter,” the state-of-affairs the agent means to bring about. While I may dance as a form of therapy or even, somehow, because it is *kalon*, there remains an ontologically discrete item I must intend to produce in order to count as choosing to do the therapy or the *kalon*: namely, the movements that make up the dance. The magnanimous person can be said, in a sense, to be *resigned* to the pursuit of honor on account of her relative indifference to the more conventional dividends of human political-economy which could otherwise serve as external goods for her choice. The pursuit of political responsibility will thus be a characteristic objective of the virtuous agent, indeed, *ceteris paribus*, a principle organizing objective. The point is not that an orientation towards honor is necessarily indicative of a noble character, since vicious persons could also act to secure honor in political office, but to secure the traditional conviction that the pursuit of honor and the ambition to excel others is part of the character of the best persons.

Aristotle describes magnanimity as “a sort of crown of the virtues, because it enhances them and is never found apart from them,” (1124a2-3). It is unclear, though, how this especially

distinguishes magnanimity, since Aristotle elsewhere contends that no virtue, properly so-called, exists apart from the rest. What I believe Aristotle intends us to understand here is that magnanimity consists uniquely in a consciousness of the general shape of one's desires; it is how the virtuous person desires, not in the heat of any particular practical context, but in the cool hour she takes stock of her desires, that is her love of the noble, as a whole. Thus magnanimity names the desiderative component that informs the virtuous agent's most comprehensive decisions about the organization of her activity; when the agent chooses the noble in regards to her overarching projects she chooses it under the description of honor.

While magnanimity is active in the executive decisions that orient the agent towards political service and leadership, "justice" describes the realization of that orientation as a whole, comprehending the diverse patterns of activity that contribute ultimately to the regeneration of the *polis*. This is what Aristotle identifies calls justice in its primary "universal" sense, that is the virtues, thought as a unified whole, when actualized "in relation to others" (1129b27). It is thus "complete virtue in the fullest sense" because it is the actual exercise of the agent's reason-conditioned desires through the discharge of his interpersonal and social responsibilities. As Sokolowski writes, justice "goes beyond" the interior soundness defined by the character virtues and "relates them to our conduct towards other people."<sup>24</sup>

The second 'particular' sense of justice (which Aristotle suggests is closely conceptually linked with the universal form) has an even more overtly political importance. Sokolowski says that what "justice helps us overcome is the inclination we have to prefer our own advantage over that of other people." This does not mean that the just agent is a self-sacrificing Pollyanna. A central feature of the virtuous agent's activity is that it is robustly and continuously endorsed by the agent; the virtuous agent does precisely what she wants to do and thereby secures what is

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 355.

genuinely in her interest. What justice prevents is the influence of objectionable forms of what 18<sup>th</sup> century philosophers would call self-love. It secures the agent's practical indifference towards the fact that some outcome in a competitive or cooperative venture (like a distribution of profits) is in the interest of the party that happens to be the agent.

Such an attitude is crucial to the successful operation of a commonwealth. Justice enables the magistrate to recognize the public nature of the resources his office equips him to manage and so to treat them differently than his private holdings; justice makes this sort of rudimentary separation of public and private possible so that state largess does not collapse into nepotism and feudalism.

Moving past Sokolowski's schema, *phronesis*, which seems like it might reasonably constitute a crest in itself, is identified with political wisdom (1141b24). Statesmanship is simply *phronesis* exercised on the political scale.

What does it mean that *praxis* has political leadership as an apex form and that political service provides a general description for the same? Yu recognizes the conventional nature of the respect for political life and identifies Plato's *Republic* as a *comparandum*. Yu is right to make this connection between what he calls Aristotle's "hierarchy" of activities and Plato's "paradox" concerning the necessity and impracticability of philosopher kingship. However, to see the philosophical significance of this continuity we need to go further than Yu does in providing the intellectual context of this problem of the best life.

The Homeric poems are not a vehicle for the exposition of a unified ethical or metaphysical system, but they do make significant claims about the order of the cosmos and of human life within it. Two closely related commitments concern the predominant and defining role of the *polis* in human life and a regard for political leadership as one of the essential goods of

human life, alongside such things as hospitality, renown, friendship, material plenty and homecoming. Remarkably, Homer puts participation in deliberative assemblies on a par with martial valor as an epitome of heroic activity:

*Never now would he [Achilles] go to assemblies where men win glory  
never more into battle. Iliad 1.490-491*

*[you were] a mere child, who knew nothing yet of the joining of battle  
Nor of debate where men are made preeminent. Therefore  
He [Peleus] sent me along with you to teach you of all these matters  
To make you a speaker of words and one who accomplished in action. Iliad 9.440-443<sup>25</sup>*

After Telemachos receives Athena's blessing at the beginning of the *Odyssey*, the first episode that exhibits his new heroic stature is neither travel nor combat, but self-assertion before the Ithacan assembly (2.1-259).

Consistent with this esteem is a dread anxiety in the contemplation of the world outside the polis which is made the domain of monsters as in Odysseus' description of the Cyclopes:

*And [we] reached the country of the lawless, outrageous  
Cyclopes...  
These people have no institutions no meetings for counsels;  
...each one is the law  
For his own wives and children, and cares nothing about the others.  
Odyssey 9.112-115<sup>26</sup>*

The positive mirror for this anxiety is given its fullest expression in the imagery of the shield of Achilles. The shield, forged by Hephaestus, is commonly thought to represent the whole Homeric cosmos. In a prefatory summary it is said to join together "the earth...and the sky, and the sea's water" along with all the heavenly bodies (*Iliad* 18.483-489). In the concluding lines of the *ekphrasis* the shield's "outermost rim" is fashioned into the image of the "Ocean River" which encircles the world (606-608). The framing of the section explicitly purports to give a

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<sup>25</sup> Lattimore, (1965).

<sup>26</sup> Lattimore, (1967).

universal prospect. The textual space between these intimations of cosmic breadth, and by implication most of the shield's physical space, is filled with archetypal scenes of human life.

As J.V. Luce observes, the *polis* “dominates” as “the outstanding feature” of human existence.<sup>27</sup> In the world of the shield, the *polis* both integrates within itself a broad range of distinctive and important human activities (e.g. arbitrations, marriages, war) and provides a setting and purpose for other practices not directly identified with political life (e.g. agriculture). The *polis* is anthropologically preminent. The intuitions about the primacy and goodness of social and political existence that these passages suggest are part of the common heritage of the Hellenes and we can recognize diverse receptions of them throughout their subsequent intellectual history.

A natural feature of philosophical receptions of this view is some expression of the relationship between political leadership on the one hand and philosophical inquiry on the other. Outwardly philosophers and statesmen seem, and have always seemed, like rather different kinds of creature. Philosophy will consequently need to make some justification for its claims to the attention of Greeks particularly in the elite. Another task is to address the apparent predominance and naturalness of the *polis*.

Epicurus takes the simple but radical approach of comprehensively denying the traditional view. The great and petty anxieties of politics can only serve to disrupt the pursuit of tranquility through simple pleasure that true philosophy shows is the end to human life. Consequently, men should, as much as possible “live unnoticed.” As Geert Roskam writes this was at once “offensive, scandalous, outrageous and provocative,” but also “attractive, seductive, enticing and fascinating,”<sup>28</sup> as only a self-conscious rejection of prevailing orthodoxy can be.

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<sup>27</sup> Luce, (1978). 1

<sup>28</sup> Geert, 2007. 1



Similarly, Epicurus attempts to debunk the cosmological significance of the city, explaining justice and the familiar features of political life as a mere *modus vivendi* for the inevitably limited and reversal-prone character of the human condition, and one that could do with a thorough revision.

In contrast to Epicurus both Plato and Aristotle retain something of the inherited view, though in remarkably different ways. Plato achieves this first by the supposition of a highly moralized and spiritualized human psychology. The only real harm that human beings can suffer is the damage they do to their own souls through vicious action, and their true flourishing lies conversely in a virtuous character (cf. *Gorgias* 474d-475c). While the management and satisfaction of the appetites is a natural and valid concern, most persons are badly mistaken about what and how much they need and thus frequently harm themselves in pursuit of what they only think they want. Philosophy, which discloses these rather counter-intuitive circumstances of human existence, is subsequently identified with the “true political craft,” the principle arbiter for the organization of individual and collective human activity (521d-522a). An important aspect of this is the administration of legal punishment, which provide a corrective for the damage that the unjust soul does to himself (477a-479d). The philosopher knows what all people truly want, and it is thus in the true interest of everyone (except possibly the philosopher) to have their lives directed by philosophers.

The difficulty with Plato’s solution, as Plato himself recognized, is that the philosopher-king *qua* philosopher, the part of his identity by which his real flourishing comes, gains nothing by his kingship. It is only through the questionable device that philosophical training was provided to him under contract to rule that Plato thinks the Guardian can be brought back to administer *Kallipolis* (520a). The very knowledge of the Good that makes the Guardians most fit

to rule also leaves them radically indifferent to the economic ambitions that initially brought the city into being and an intensification of which provided the incentive for the founding of a warrior-philosophers class (369b, 372e, 374a-376c, 399e).

For Plato, I suspect, the irony is actually in the structure of our own lives. The world that Homer affirmed as full of good things and that we must leave all too soon is for him only the shadow of a dimension of genuine value. Philosophy allows us, or some of us, a limited transcendence, which as a practical matter pushes us towards a life markedly at odds with the one to which our natural sentiments and appetites on their own tend to lead. We remain, however, particular, limited and need creatures, and so any sort of final escape from the political setting, this side of the grave must be considered a delusion. Even Socrates, the philosophical saint, was steadfast in his identification with Athens and obedience to its laws.

Aristotle occupies what might be considered a middle position between Plato and Epicurus. Politics and philosophy are neither identified nor divorced, but linked as parallel and complementary exercises of reason. Aristotle consequently conserves more of the traditional view than either Plato or Epicurus does. In effect he encloses the traditional view, with some substantive revisions, within an enlarged account of human nature and what I contend is a heretofore largely unappreciated sensitivity to how that nature is experienced from the first-person perspective, it is this last that allows him to vindicate the value of philosophy.

## **5 THE CONDITIONS OF POSSIBILITY FOR *PRAXIS***

In this section and the next I bring together the foregoing exegetical material to make my own case for the moral philosophic significance of Aristotelian *praxis* and its subordination to *theoria*. The anxiety implicit in the ring of Gyges problem and in a less intense form in free rider

problems is that what is good for an individual, and particularly what Williams calls a “superior agent,” may cut against what is good for the development of humanity. That is to say for the foundation and upkeep of the sort of complex social arrangements that make cooperation possible on a large scale and from there all of the things we are accustomed to think good and to put under the heading of civilization.

Conversely there is a hope that these interests might agree. What I find in the *Ethics* is an exploration of what would have to be true about human beings in general and of any agent in particular for that to be the case. Or, to take another approach, how to show that contribution to that “finer and more godlike” thing, the historical growth and prosperity of cities and other political communities and generally the growth and sophistication of humanity in civilization, is good for the individual, and how an individual must be for him to thus participate in that activity as his good, to find it sufficiently choice-worthy on its own terms apart from any coordination of that life with the acquisition or loss of external goods.

This way of receiving the *Ethics* account of *praxis* can be made to follow Aristotle’s philosophical methodology, which is to proceed from what is “clearer and more knowable to us, to what is more knowable and clear by nature,” (*Physics* 184a17-18 Cf. *Ethics* 1095b2-3). That is to say from what is conspicuous in first-person experience to unifying explanations of the same at a more basic ontological level. *Praxis* can impress itself on philosophical attention as a formal explanation (or part of one) for the most basic patterns of human history, the rise and fall of political communities be they cities, nations or empires.

How do we account for cities’ coming into existence and for their subsequent regeneration or disintegration? At bottom we have to explain these patterns in terms of the conduct of the persons who constitute the states. Now, some degree of pro-social activity can be

coerced or incentivized by an established state. Yet at some point the monumental challenges that face communities and their occasional endurance in the face of such existential crises, particularly the task of getting a political project off the ground to start, will prompt us to posit the need for a comprehensive pro-social orientation that is chosen for itself, and we name this possible and seemingly historically necessary form of human activity *praxis*.

Thus conceived *praxis* will embrace a substantively diverse range of concrete actions, from the enthusiastic care-giving of a good nurse to the fortitude of a good soldier, under a formal pattern of choice made in consideration of a single unifying property, the *kalon* (1139b4). Following Aristotle's definition of "choice," the efficient cause of action and production, as "either a desiderative thought or intellectual desire," this explanation will include a statement about the condition of the desiring element and the *logistikon*. We find these respectively in the several character virtues and *phronesis*, which Aristotle claims always exist together (1145a1-2).

Aristotle's commitment to the unity or reciprocity of the virtues has puzzled some scholars, but if we understand the discourse of the *Ethics* as an investigation into the conditions of possibility for *praxis* it is not mysterious.<sup>29</sup> *Praxis* is conceived as comprehensive, freely chosen pro-sociality, thus it requires a complete sensitivity and attraction to what builds up and integrates the community.

The point can be made clearer when we consider the distinction Aristotle himself proposes to settle the argument between a character virtue *simpliciter* and a "natural" virtue. Virtues are defined formally as constituents of rational excellence that enable one of *praxis*, *poiesis*, or *theoria*. The character virtues as we have said are dispositions to feel the emotions endemic to a certain archetypal practical context, like standing in the battle line, so that one does

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<sup>29</sup> Thus for example Williams "we accept, indeed regard as a platitude, [a fact] that Aristotle rejected, that someone can have one virtue while lacking others," (36).

(or at least genuinely means to do) the pro-social thing. In any particular context, pro-social behavior could be explained from a merely congenital temperament, but such a disposition would not count as a constituent of *praxis* (and thus a human character virtue) because it would have no necessary relationship to the dispositions that furnish the incentive for pro-social action in other contexts. The survey of the several character virtues becomes a formally subordinate element of the movement of the *Ethics*, a specification of the appetitive economy of the virtuous agent that Aristotle summarizes under the label “love of the fine.”

I contend that love of the fine and *phronesis*, like the virtues of scientific reason, are distinguishable in thought but inseparable in their exercise. To rightly attribute someone the “love of the fine” implies that the choices she makes conform to a certain pattern and the same pattern of conduct is implied when we attribute someone *phronesis*.

Choice unifies the desiderative and intellectual element in such a way that Aristotle is happy to leave its definition a disjunction between “desiderative thought or intellectual desire” and to place both under the heading of “the human being” thought as an *arche* (origin or principle) of action. Human existence considered as a causal vector depends on a union of sentiment and thought, *eupraxia* designates a particular formal pattern of choice, and this must be accounted for by both an appetitive and a deliberative condition that will have to come up together in a human life, informed by common experiences of habituation through time.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> It is instructive to contrast Aristotle’s position with Kant’s claim that untutored reason is able to determine the truth in ethical matters. Aristotle is more skeptical about most persons’ ability to discern and pursue the *kalon*, but this is not because he understands *praxis* to be a cognitively intense enterprise in any familiar sense. Instead, the desiring element comes to participate in reason through habituation, generally this is understood to mean that desire ‘learns’ to be reasonable through the agent’s early upbringing. As M.F. Burnyeat (1981) argues Aristotle conceives ethical goodness to be importantly analogous to something like skiing insofar that ‘learning’ and ‘learning to enjoy’ cannot be neatly separated, rather “the growth of enjoyment goes hand in hand with the internalization of knowledge,” (76). While Burnyeat grants that “a spot of dialectic” may be valuable in the development of the embryonic virtuous agent what Aristotle has plausibly brought out is how we can arrive at a “general evaluative attitude” towards some activity or feature of the world from a “scattered range of particular cases,” (72). The agent achieves a sense of how the whole of the *kalon* hangs together that participates in reason but it is participation

A.O. Rorty similarly observes that the *phronimos*'

“general understanding of ends is expressed in particular choices, not by mechanically applying rules, or grinding out syllogisms. The ends are seen *in* the means-at-hand: such and such an action, done in a certain manner, is the specification, the instantiation of general human ends in this particular situation... the *phronimos* is not necessarily efficient at generating conclusions of a train of reasoning; that reasoning is the formal cause implicit in his action; it is logically prior to the action and only incidentally temporally prior... [t]he intellectual component of an action is its formulation...”<sup>31</sup>

*Phronesis* is an extraordinary achievement of the maturity of reason within a human individual, it is an intellectual achievement insofar that it underwrites an agent's participation in what is true, but it is not marked by the sort of cognitive fire-works as the labors of a great scientist or artist are. Aristotle admittedly suggests a more high-powered conception of *phronesis* when he makes the faculty “cleverness” a condition of *phronesis*, “to be able to do the things that tend towards the mark we have set before ourselves, and to hit it” (1144a24-27).

Still, I think we do Aristotle more charity if we follow Rorty and take a deflationary view of cleverness as marking a relatively low bar in terms of sheer brainpower. *Phronesis* does not require the sort of deliberative savvy we associate with a great organizer (although that is an apex application of it). Recall the distinction between *praxis* and *poiesis*. It seems that much of what goes into making a household or a state run are distinguishable as *technai*, construction, finance, even much of child-rearing can be sufficiently axiomatized relative to concrete outcomes. What remains for *phronesis* is something like the cognitive counterpart to magnanimity, to orient the agent in the choice of projects that organize the several instances of productive intellect.

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attained through practice(ing at *praxis*) which has “cognitive powers” akin but separate from more conspicuous channels like induction.

<sup>31</sup> Rorty (1978). 348.

## 6 THE VALUE OF *PRAXIS* AND THE LIMITS OF ITS VALUE

The problem remains to show why *praxis*, thus conceived, should be a candidate for the individual's final good. It is worth remembering at the outset of this part of the inquiry that Aristotle ultimately denies *praxis* this finality and yet, frustratingly for readers like Lear, he provides all the material for a robust conception of the ethical life as the supremely choice-worthy one. In what remains of this paper I articulate and defend an interpretation of Aristotle's delicate position.

The *Ethics* begins and ends with the search for the human *telos* which Aristotle, following convention, calls *eudaimonia*. The investigation then turns to the description of the human *ergon* as a plausible means to illuminate the content of *eudaimonia*. In VI.13, following the conclusion about the reciprocity of the virtues Aristotle states that the human *ergon* is "achieved only in accordance with practical wisdom" and the character virtues (1144a7).<sup>32</sup> Then in X.6 Aristotle presents himself as making a return "to discuss in outline the nature of happiness" and recalls its identification with the *telos* of human nature. The ultimately qualified case for *praxis* as human flourishing is delivered through the argument that it is the human *ergon*.

What it means to think *praxis* is the human *ergon* is to identify the construction and regeneration of human communities as what our several capacities are ultimately organized to achieve, so that the most comprehensive possible exercise of our natural endowment will be what contributes to the flourishing of the political community. Aristotle purports to have an

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<sup>32</sup> Aristotle's formal conclusion of the *ergon* argument has been largely neglected but is not to be elided.

empirically grounded account to this effect, it is alluded to in the *Ethics*<sup>33</sup>, but has its more complete development in the first book of the *Politics*.

Briefly, a human individual, even in the most primitive conditions, is implicated in two pairings, actual or aspirational, with one or more complementary human animals (1252a26-27). As a male or a female a human being suffers an “urge” to join in the conjugal relationship with the opposite sex, as a kind of hedge against death, and as a natural master or a natural slave a “common interest” for the preservation of both orders. The realization of these ties creates the household (1252b9-11), and their continued exercise in the conjugal relationship and the slave-master relationship peoples and economically improves the family. Eventually the continued regeneration and success of these relationships leads to the founding of new households, increasing again the complexity and density of interpersonal ties within what Aristotle calls the “village,” (*kome*) established as a colony from the initial household, and with the collocation of several such villages this development reaches its height in the *polis* (1152b15-30).

The lesson I think we are meant to take from this account of social origins is that *praxis* is self-compounding. It ‘thickens’ our ties with others and multiplies the number and density of such connections, both ‘horizontally,’ in the sense that the householder becomes also and simultaneously a neighbor and a citizen, and ‘vertically,’ some householders will become headmen and kings, others subjects of headmen and kings.

When Aristotle attributes a “political nature” to human beings and the correspondent claim that the *polis* exists by nature (1252b30, 1253a1-3), he claims that the drive or incentive to engage in these fundamental relationships (necessary for their survival and posterity) serves as the “principle” that organizes the patterns of change and resistance to change that distinguish

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<sup>33</sup> “Now by self-sufficient we do not mean that which is sufficient for a man by himself, for one who lives a solitary life, but also for parents, children, wife and in general for his friends and fellow citizens, since man is sociable by nature (*phusei politikon ho anthropos*)” 1097b8-11.



human beings as a particular kind of natural entity. This follows the definition of a “nature” given in the *Physics* “a source of change and staying unchanged,” (192b15) what makes something a member of a particular natural kind like pine, stone or dog.<sup>34</sup> The management of these relationships is the *natural* concern of our reason, the one that it has accrued in the course of our natural history and thus is aptly thought as the human *ergon*.

The related claim that the *polis* is “prior by nature” to human individuals might be taken in a few ways. Primarily it reflects Aristotle’s belief that the *polis* is the final natural form that human association takes, anything more is mere inorganic aggregation, the earlier relationships find their complete context in the *polis*. I think for a reasonably broad meaning of *polis*, this remains a plausible view of the trajectory of human association, though history and anthropology may need to be called in to provide considerable revision and qualification of the details.

In another sense, Aristotle is drawing attention to how the human animal with his rudimentary drive to association is transformed by his membership in more complex communities. The layering of the individual’s civic and neighborly ties over his primitive familial ones generates an exponentially more complicated identity that produces novel circumstances and challenges for practical reason. Consider how under some circumstances we believe an individual ought to prefer the interests of his family to those of his country but at other times we think the reverse holds.

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<sup>34</sup> Reproduction, of course, is the core of the conjugal tie and a fundamental power of all life. The tie between master and slave organizes diverse other activities necessary to the security and comfort of persons, it is a basic and all-purpose cooperative relationship (opposed to the singular purpose of the conjugal tie), whereby human beings pool their rational and physical powers to achieve the sundry ends that are beyond the causal power of an individual but still often necessary for individual survival. The pervasive need for cooperation and the competitive advantage it yields against a hostile environment and other human groups is a major theme of human life and history. The grain of anthropological truth to be gleaned from the otherwise odious distinction Aristotle makes between natural slaves and natural masters is that capability for reasoning comes in degree, and that disparity (and that we are almost all paupers left entirely to our own resources) sets the essential context that informs all our attempts at cooperation.

This is how I suggest we understand Aristotle's statement that the *polis* "comes to be for the sake of living and remains for the sake of living well," (1252b28-29). The claim is not primarily about the immediate security and then the material comfort that urban life provides but refers to how the seed of the city issues from the realization of two fundamental constituents of our identity that can only be fulfilled in relation to others. *Praxis*, in some minimal but important sense, being a reliable partner and manager, a good caretaker of one's children, an honest and industrious worker, makes possible the productive fulfillment of these ties, and can beyond that minimum greatly enrich the satisfaction their participants take from them, turning the conjugal tie into true marriage and grudging even compelled cooperation into fruitful collaboration. The same good fulfillment of our congenial ties makes possible more and more complex relationships including the sophistication of those basic connections when they are juxtaposed against new ones.

Thus *praxis* grows out of the most basic organization of our nature, our implication in biological and cooperative-economic relationships necessary to the individual's survival and posterity. Success in these relationships extends and sophisticates them into a complex interpersonal, social and ultimately recognizably political life. Participation in these networks may sometimes become necessary for survival, but in any case it is constitutive of a kind of life that is continuous with the primeval condition and can be thought to have grown, in some sense, organically out of it; it is human life-plus, life abundant or simply living well.

This is, I contend, Aristotle's principle case for *praxis* as the human *ergon* and thus a candidate for *eudaimonia*. It is meant, I suspect, to be strengthened by the sheer scope of the account of the character virtues and the mechanism of *praxis*. Aristotle finds a place within *praxis* for so much of what is natural and often difficult to navigate in human life, anger, fear, the

anxiety that attaches to money, physical pleasure, nothing in us need be extirpated and everything can be turned to some good and fulfilling purpose. Instead everything in us (and Aristotle seems to allow that even the nutritive power of the virtuous can be different from the vicious)<sup>35</sup> is brought into harmony under reason; the practical intellect is thus uncovered as a sort of hinge within the soul that, though of the *logon*, makes contact with and influence the *alogon*.

Aristotle's discussion of human language as a sign of our singularly political nature provides an attractive way to complete this argument and to concisely illustrate the strategy.

Language is supposed to allow the communication of and consequently shared commitments about what is "beneficial or harmful, and hence also what is just or unjust," instead of the merely idiosyncratic expression of pleasure and pain provided to us and the other animals by the mere voice (1253a7ff). To be in "community" about what is ethically or practically valuable is what our political and familial bonds actively consist in. *Phronesis* and the character virtues that help us fulfill the duties that respond to these bonds are, like speech, a rational sophistication of antecedent material that we share with the other animals, recognizably akin to a fully functional non-rational analog in them. Animals can have different dispositions to fear and anger, but for us that disposition can be informed and integrated into reason.

Speech is a *natural* resource in the development of moral deliberation and the common life it generates. We have this power in virtue of a natural history in which our antecedent animal capacities were transformed through the overlay of reason as communication, sociability and obligation proved to be adaptive; the character virtues, as rationally inflected dispositions to desire have an identical psychological structure. While Aristotle would have understood the development differently, we can share the thought that the exercise of this and other powers in

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<sup>35</sup> "perhaps to a small extent some of the movements [of good or bad appetite] actually penetrate [so that] the dreams of good men are better than those of ordinary people" (1102b9-10).

the creation, maintenance and regeneration of cities is a distinctly human good; something that we are constitutionally good at *doing*.

The twinned ideas of a human political nature and the priority by nature of the polis imbeds individual *praxis* within a larger progression of rational phenomena. As rivers flow into the ocean the successful fulfillment of human nature in virtuous living issues in a new composite phenomenon, the *polis*, identical in substance to its source yet qualitatively different by dint of how its ‘matter’ (rational activity) is organized and layered.<sup>36</sup> The *polis* transcends the individual both as a natural being and as a locus and object of rational concern. This transcendence both as a process and in its perfection, the establishment of the just order that is the true *polis*, is a worthy object of our awe, as Aristotle emphasizes at the outset of the *Ethics*.

Yet it is also impossible for an individual human agent to meaningfully identify the flourishing of her community as *her* good, for all that it consists in her and her compatriots virtuous activity. Precisely the same expansion of scope and complexity that makes it an object

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<sup>36</sup> I have been charged with doing violence to Aristotle’s political ontology here. It is fair to say that I go beyond it, but I believe my interpretation is reasonable and my diction here not incorrect, though perhaps in need of expansion. Aristotle glosses the “certain kind of life” that can fulfill the human function to be “an activity or actions of the soul implying a rational principal” (1098a13). A human being is alive in other senses, as an animal and as a thing that takes nutrition, but it is the life “in accordance with, or not without, rational principle” that makes him sensitive to the *kalon* and his action evaluable against such a standard. Now these other older registers of life are deeply implicated with the human animal’s personhood so that their disorder (particularly of the organ of the brain) can compromise the possibility of excellence in reason and the life of reason never exists on Earth apart from the animal and the nutritive.

The household, the village and the city likewise have their essential existence as rational activity and are distinguished as progressively more complex forms of *cooperative* rational activity. They exist, I contend, as a concert of several human agencies or personalities, as in the individual case that activity (life) is not found apart from the animal and nutritive life of the human agents but it is conceptually separable from them, for we can imagine a different kind of animal life organizing itself in something like a city. If the citizens of a city or the members of a family were all put into suspended animation or if they all chose individually and at once to stop acting all together and silently wait to starve, it would be right I think to say that the city or family in question had ceased to exist or at least had its existence interrupted. Certainly if the cooperative activity broke down so that the previously harmoniously related persons found themselves in the war of all against all we would seem justified in saying the city or family had been dissolved, but that case differs from the others insofar that a more conspicuously different kind of activity has been substituted for the political, suspended animation and total apathy are not different insofar that they constitute a termination of cooperative rational activity.

of awe makes it invalid for the agent to think it as her own. She has, we might say, a *share* in the goodness of the city, but correspondently she cannot thinker herself to have any unique title to it.

It is exactly on this point that the eudaimonic superiority of *theoria* becomes compelling. For all our deep implications in one another's lives there remains a sense in which each of us is essentially isolated for none of us can escape or share our subjectivity. I do not think this is a feature of human existence to be lamented, but even if it were, it is surely necessary for someone following Aristotle's plan to give an account of the human good that recognizes the fact of our isolation.

In line with this the main argument for the superiority of the contemplative life is its "self-sufficiency." Self-sufficiency is stipulated as a feature of *eudaimonia* just prior to the inauguration of the function argument (1097b7-21). There, however, Aristotle emphasizes that the archetypal human self is not that of a Robinson Caruso, but of a person engaged in several relationships as a political animal, the goodness that is *autarkes*, sufficed or sustained by the self, is for a self that is significantly determined by its association with several other selves. *Theoria*, while it has little to do with those interpersonal ties, when considered among the various possible human activities that do (the constituents of justice), is found to be exceptionally self-sufficient, and so in at least two broad senses.

First, it is self-sufficient in terms of what it requires. The exercise of the character virtues typically requires some external goods (1178a25ff) and more importantly other persons for one to do right by (1177a30ff). Second *theoria* is self-sufficient in the sense that it is that it can be thought as a more final end than *praxis*. *Theoria* is, we might say, explanatorily self-sufficient; it requires the supposition of no further concrete purpose beside its own continuance, which is why it is associated with leisure (1177b3-18 cf. 1144a5), but has its complete movement within the

individual theorist. On the other hand the character virtues are for the navigation of the concrete problems of private and political life. *Theoria* can even be posited as the ultimate end for *praxis* from the first-person perspective, insofar that the resolution of our practical responsibilities issues in leisure and *theoria* is supposed to be the best use of leisure.<sup>37</sup>

Aristotle's account of *praxis* as the human *ergon* supplies an initially plausible explanation for why an individual agent has a reason to contribute towards civic flourishing. Participation in the political project appears to be the most plausible explanation of our powers and drives insofar as we exist as an animal with a natural history. To take a share in sustaining a community can be called our *natural telos*.

When we consider things from the first-person perspective, however, *theoria* confronts us as a more final exercise of our powers. Now, our *living* contemplatively will still depend upon us getting enough to eat, staying warm and so on. In the pursuit of all that we will still need to get along with others and so there may remain a reliable place for *praxis*. But those ends, which are good in themselves when I think about myself principally as a natural organism, are subordinated to the status of instrumental goods when I consider myself principally as a being that can contemplate. I come to regard *theoria* as *my* higher good insofar that I see myself not primarily as a member of a particular natural kind that happens to be political and rational, but insofar as I

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<sup>37</sup>Aristotle suggests this line in VI.12. Up to this point Aristotle has made clear the superiority of *sophia* to *phronesis* but in identifying *phronesis* with political science also acknowledged a sense in which *phronesis* seems to govern or direct *sophia*, since political science is identified from the outset of the treatise as the science that organizes the pursuit and distribution of all human goods. Aristotle proposes to resolve what seems "strange" here that *phronesis* remains inferior to *sophia* although it is productive of it. The answer seems to be that "not as the art of medicine produces health... but as health produces health; so does wisdom produces happiness... by being possessed and by actualizing itself," (1144a4-6). Aristotle seems to say this chiefly to answer an objection that wisdom is not valuable because it does not help to achieve any concrete end, but it also addresses the wrinkle implicit in how *phronesis* governs *theoria* and suggests metaphorically that Aristotle understands this to be *the* purpose of *phronesis* in an individual life, as medicine is meant to produce health.

regard myself as a rational individual full stop. On this account we might designate contemplation our *transcendental telos*.

This is problematic insofar that it weakens the connection between happiness and other-regarding moral goodness beyond whatever minimum turns out to enable an agent to maximize her participation in *theoria*. However, there are some subtle but important ethical advantages it affords that we should not ignore.

However awesome the prosperity of a great city or an ancient family may be, it is not only a cognitive error for human individuals to directly identify themselves with their communities, but an error that has informed quite tremendous atrocities throughout our history. The promotion of *theoria* returns philosophical attention to the scale of the individual human life, where the ethical life for most of us has its principle relevance and which plays a vital pedagogical role even for those who govern. That it may go too far in this direction, restricting the scope of attention to only the individual, is not obviously more insidious than Plato's ambition to make the inhabitants of the city "as far as possible, feel pleasure and pain in unison" (*Rep.* 464d3). Such antipathy to the separateness of persons is both ultimately pointless (for what in the end can really be done about it) and frequently dangerous. It works at cross-purposes with what impresses us in our history as moral progress, which has required ever more sophisticated recognitions that human beings are at once interdependent *and* self-determining, recognizing the real diversity in our natural endowments alongside a fundamental equality.

Aristotle thus truncates certain unproductive and even dangerous utopian ambitions, but his thought also contains the seeds of what is, to my mind, an exceptionally exciting and, in some respects, plausible vision of the long-term end of the human political project. Recall that one advantage of *theoria* over *praxis* is its greater independence from material resources. For agents

whose choice is not informed by the “desire for the noble” this same fact, what economists call scarcity, rather than limiting virtuous action sets the stage for tremendous vicious activity, callousness towards others and, not uncommonly though not invariably, the enervation of one’s natural endowment as a consequence of over-indulgence. For each individual to conceive of *theoria* as her final good, an insight which does not seem to depend on the individual having the character virtues, could allow a reorganization of political economy towards sustainability and equality.

Despite these lines of suggestion, there remains a definite disappointment in Aristotle’s recalibration of happiness away from service to others and towards the interiority of *theoria*. Yu states the problem neatly when he connects Aristotle’s conclusion to Williams’ “Gauguin Problem.” Williams’ position is that there may be deep practical conflicts between morality and various non-moral goods and that there can be reason to give the non-ethical goods priority. Indeed, that the choice-worthiness of the non-moral good, Gauguin’s abandonment of his family to develop his artistic talents or a theorist’s negligence of his responsibilities to the *polis*, is not to be determined retrospectively in terms of “moral luck” but follows necessarily as “a matter of human rational nature.”<sup>38</sup> I contend, however, that Aristotle has resources to avoid this conclusion, I turn now to the development of two brief but I think quite promising arguments in this direction, *phronesis* as the royal road to *sophia*, and friendship as the distillation of politics.

## **7 PHRONESIS AS THE ROYAL ROAD TO SOPHIA**

There are many unproblematic respects in which the exercise of *phronesis* can support *theoria*. For most persons most of the time the virtuous course will tend to better organize their

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<sup>38</sup> Yu, 134.



dispositions, relationships and circumstances such that indulgence in *theoria* is a viable option. Evidence of this order can be found in the correlation between good governance and well-run households (archetypical achievements of *phronesis*) and the successful education of those who inhabit them. Still Aristotle seems appropriately conscious of possible counterexamples, where valuing comprehension of the truth above all else could justify neglect or even infringement of our ordinary moral responsibilities.

A solution to this problem as I see it lies in the elucidation of another kind of relationship between *phronesis* and *sophia*. As A.O. Rorty recognizes human nature itself is a suitable object of *theoria*. It is patterns of necessity, tendencies to change and stay the same that will always describe a single possible form of living being.<sup>39</sup> In that they are no different from the patterns of necessity that inform the growth and decay of stars, an unproblematic subject of *theoria*.

The *phronimos* has a privileged access to the material of this *episteme*, in the form of his own orderly motivational economy. In a reflective moment, as takes many of us at one time or another, he will find a stock of insights illuminative of what a human being is and needs *qua* rational and political animal, since his own dispositions provide the necessary “image” of what a human being is in the sense of a final cause; he is an instance of the human natural *telos*. His familiarity with other virtuous agents who nonetheless differ behaviorally from him will texture this insight, inviting hypotheses in line with Aristotle’s own doctrines about the virtues as justified mean states. To put it another way the *phronimos* need only come to pose to himself the right questions about human nature to find that he already has the answers.

Thus the life of virtuous activity through which the agent first realizes and then continues to exercise *phronesis* provides not only the most typically reliable means to secure external conditions favorable to the acquisition and exercise of *sophia* but also a uniquely truncated and

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<sup>39</sup> Rorty, 1978. 345-346

natural route to a particular content of the same; truncated because part of the work is done for the agent through his virtuous disposition and natural because the acquisition of that virtuous disposition is itself a realization of the human animal's native orientation towards virtue.

## 8 FRIENDSHIP AS THE DISTILLATION OF POLITICS

Aristotle's intellectualism is ultimately a problem because it deemphasizes the kinds of other-regarding activities and sentiments that we moderns tend to put at the center of the ethical life, in favor of a static contemplation that seems to bear little, if any, significance to it. However, we can describe the problem at a purely formal level as an implausible explanatory monism. The rich diversity of human life seems unlikely to be accounted for in anything as uniform as *theoria*; recalling Lear once more it compares especially poorly against *praxis*' catholicity. Aristotle's extended insistence on the divinity of *theoria* may make this monism more understandable but it can aggravate its overall plausibility if he turns out to depend chiefly upon strong and unsustainable metaphysical commitments.<sup>40</sup>

The introduction of friendship in VIII.1 marks it as uniquely suited to provide an antidote (or at least a palliative) for this monism, since Aristotle defines it as something choice-worthy apart and in addition to all other possible goods: "[n]obody would choose to live without friends even if he had all the other good things" (1155a7-8). The point is sufficiently important to Aristotle's view that he revisits it in more detail near the close of his discussion at IX.9 and it is here that he introduces his arresting but somewhat mysterious claim that the friend is "another self," (1169b8). The finality of friendship is further underscored by Aristotle's argument that

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. Wilkes, 1978. "[W]e may have no reason to accept the premiss that establishes for Aristotle the supremacy of the theoretic life, namely, that *theoria* is the sole divine activity and engenders a correspondingly divine kind of happiness," (566).

*theoria* is not qualitatively improved by collaboration (1177a35-1177b1). Though it may make inquiry easier and more pleasant, the real value of thought is caught up with the fact that it is done under the theorist's own power; correlatively friendship's value cannot be subordinated in our understanding into a mere means to extend *theoria*.

While these formal contours makes friendship a possible counterpart to *theoria*, its substantive description firmly connects it to *praxis*. Indeed Sokolowski identifies friendship, meaning virtue friendship, as the "highest moral condition." Virtue friendship has its existence principally in the friend's shared virtuous activity, which is to say their collaborative *praxis*. In that already we have a partial solution to the diminution of other-regard in *eudaimonia* threatened by the promotion of *theoria*. It is my hope that something more can be shown. Namely how virtue friendship complements and extends the political project of the human *ergon*, in a way that is notably resistant to the objections and ethical anxieties that underlie Aristotle's arguments on behalf of *theoria*.

Friendship, like *theoria*, operates on a scale that the individual can reasonably inhabit. The nearness of a person's friend allows her to reasonably conceive her good action (whether done for her friend's external benefit or merely in concert with him) as constituent to the good of her own life. Yet friendship is not a private much less a quietest enterprise, for Aristotle repeatedly connects friendship to politics.<sup>41</sup>

Every friendship coincides with an association of individuals, one that might counterfactually obtain between non-friends. These associations carry norms of justice that are independent of the friendship and inform what counts as a just acquittal of the relationship

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<sup>41</sup> "Friendship also seems to be the bond that holds communities together, and lawgivers seem to attach more importance to it than to justice...Between friends there is no need for justice, but people who are just still need the quality of friendship; and indeed friendliness is considered to be justice in the fullest sense." Cf. VII.9-11.

(1159b25-1160a8).<sup>42</sup> As such every friendship is circumscribed and partly constitutive of a community and so ultimately of the political community which is defined as what encloses and integrates all these historically older associations.<sup>43</sup>

The virtuous individual, particularly in a just *polis*, will engage in many diverse cooperative relationships that contribute to the regeneration of his household, neighborhood and state. With some of these persons the virtuous agent will make friends. Such friendships will typically lead to an expansion of the friends' collaborative activity, but what is essentially different about such shared activity is the structure of the friends' choice. In their interaction and collaboration virtue friends will make the same discrete choices that they would if they were not friends, they choose the *kalon*; but it is now chosen principally as the friend's good.

The other descriptions under which the virtuous agent could have made that choice (e.g. the just thing, the generous thing) still obtain and would be efficacious for action, but they are incorporated within the consideration that it is for the friend's good. This is in line with Aristotle's initial identification of friendship as "a virtue," a disposition of feeling that informs choice.

In this sense friendship can be conceived as something that exists 'after' politics; it depends upon and extends the work that politics does in bringing human beings into complex association with one another. Friendship is a way of valuing those associations and our doing right by them that is anchored in some of our actual relationships and their distinct collaborative activity, rather than the indefinite way that all *praxis* by definition contributes to the flourishing of the political community, with which we can identify only in an abstract and impersonal sense.

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<sup>42</sup> "Friendship and justice [are] exhibited in the same sphere of conduct and between the same persons; because in every community there is supposed to be some kind of justice and also some friendly feeling. ... [T]he term of the friendship is that of the association, for so also is the term of their form of justice. ... both [justice and friendship] involve the same persons and have an equal extension."

<sup>43</sup> "All communities are like parts of the political community," (1160a9).

Further an agent's particular virtue friendships can give her superior reason to commit to the political project as a whole, even to a leadership role, namely, that the just polity will tend to benefit and bring pleasure to her friends. This is a better and more consistent answer than Plato's for why a maximally actualized human being should choose to take up the burdens of political leadership.

Thus friendship involves a shift in how a virtuous agent feels about one of his collaborative associations that amounts to an intensification and personalization of the tie, so that the agent comes to identify himself with both collaborators, so that the friend becomes “another self.” This intensification provides a new grounds for the choice-worthiness of *praxis*, one which operates on the scale of the rational individual so that the agent can choose the *kalon* both in the context of the friendly collaboration and across all his cooperative enterprises (including the political project as a whole) for the sake of his friend and friendship. The vast and godlike end of establishing a prospering city is condensed but not diluted so that it can meaningfully motivate an individual, thus I call friendship the distillation of politics.

## 9 CONCLUSION

What I hope to have shown in the course of this paper is first, that resistance to Aristotle's intellectualist conclusion by philosophers who take Aristotle seriously, is plausibly grounded in a commitment to commonplace morality (which I believe we must share to genuinely engage in moral philosophy). And second that after careful reconstruction of Aristotle's account, that resistance can be given a satisfactory reason to become reconciled to Aristotle, at least in part. This is achieved on the one hand by attention to the subtle but important ethical advantages that come from preferring an intellectualist account to a straight

identification of the individual's flourishing with that of her community. And on the other by recognizing the complexity of *phronesis*' relationship to *theoria* and more importantly the singular value of friendship. In the end the human being can be said to have not one, but two transcendental *teloi* for which the natural *telos* lays the ground, the comprehension of the underlying archetypal nature of things and intimacy with the absolutely particular goodness of another person.

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