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ΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΙΑ

ΕΠΕΤΗΡΙΣ ΤΟΥ ΚΕΝΤΡΟΥ ΕΡΕΥΝΗΣ ΤΗΣ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗΣ ΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΙΑΣ

ΑΝΑΤΥΠΟΝ



**REFUTING FORTENBAUGH:
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
ἨΘΙΚΗ ΑΡΕΤΗ AND ΦΡΟΝΗΣΙΣ IN ARISTOTLE**

In Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle describes the human soul as being composed of two elements: «οἷον τὸ μὲν ἄλογον αὐτῆς εἶναι, τὸ δὲ λόγον ἔχον» («one element in the soul is irrational and one has a rational principle»)¹. The ἄλογον (irrational) part of the soul is itself divided into two parts, τὸ θρεπτικόν (nutritive) and τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν (desiring). Τὸ θρεπτικόν is found in all living things; it is of a vegetative nature and concerned with nutrition and growth. For Aristotle, this nature and function prevents it from having a role in ἀνθρώπινη ἀρετή (human virtue)². On the other hand, τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν, though irrational, «μετέχουσα μέντοι πη λόγου» («shares in logos»)³. In ἐγκρατής (the content person), τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν οὐ ὀρεκτικὸν «πειθαρχεῖ γοῦν τῷ λόγῳ» («obeys logos») and, in particular, in the case of σώφρονας (the temperate) and ἀνδρείος (the brave man), «ὁμοφωνεῖ τῷ λόγῳ» («it is in accordance with logos»)⁴. While it is the rational part of the soul that has λόγος «κυρίως καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ» («in the strict sense and in itself»), the other part obeys λόγος in the same way as a child obeys its father⁵. However, there is also another non-rational element in ἐπιθυμητικόν which opposes and runs counter to λόγος.

Ἄρετή is also divided into two parts which conform to the division of the soul into a rational and an irrational part. Σοφία (philosophic wisdom), σύνεσις (understanding) and φρόνησις (practical wisdom) are διανοητικὲς ἀρετὲς (intellectual virtues); ἐλευθεριότητα (liberality) and σωφροσύνη (temperance) are ἠθικὲς ἀρετὲς (moral virtues). While διανοητικὴ ἀρετή is acquired by διδασκαλία (teaching) and, therefore, involves ἐμπειρία (experience) and χρόνος (time), ἠθικὴ ἀρετή is not conferred upon us by nature, but through human action: «τάς δ' ἀρετὰς λαμβάνομεν ἐνεργήσαντες πρότερον»⁶. It is through

1. ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 1102a29-30.

2. Cf. I, 1102b12.

3. I, 1102b14.

4. I, 1102b26-9.

5. Cf. I, 1103a1-3. As David Ross indicates in a footnote to his English translation of *Nicomachean Ethics*, when Aristotle states that the irrational part of the soul dealing with desire is «μετέχειν» or «ἔχειν λόγο», he means that it can obey a λόγος presented to it by the rational part of the soul. He does not mean that τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν can be the origin of a λόγος. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, tr. D. Ross, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980, p. 27.

6. II, 1103a31-2.

πράττοντες (doing) that a particular human action is undertaken, and an individual can be judged by the character and effect of this particular action. Hence, ἠθικὴ ἀρετὴ is concerned with πράξεις (acts). But since πράξεις are, according to Aristotle, associated with ἡδονή (pleasure) and λύπη (pain), then, ἠθικὴ ἀρετὴ must be also concerned with ἡδονή and λύπη. Κακία (vice) also has the same object as ἠθικὴ ἀρετὴ (i.e. ἡδονή and λύπη). Acting well is, therefore, associated with the experience of pleasure and acting badly with that of pain. For Aristotle, the correct comportment in relation to human action entails the avoidance of ὑπερβολή (excess) and ἔλλειψις (defect), and the pursuit of the τὸ μέσον (the intermediate). While ἠθικὴ ἀρετὴ is concerned with πράξεις, human action is not in itself sufficient to determine whether a person possesses ἠθικὴ ἀρετὴ or not. For Aristotle:

«The agent also must be in a certain condition when he does them; in the first place he must have knowledge, secondly he must choose the acts, and choose them for their own sakes, and thirdly his action must proceed from a firm and unchangeable character».⁷

A person, then, possesses ἠθικὴ ἀρετὴ when s/he acts not merely well, but in the manner in which a person who possesses ἠθικὴ ἀρετὴ would act. Aristotle ultimately defines ἠθικὴ ἀρετὴ as ἕξις (state of character) which is concerned with προαίρεσις (choice), which is itself informed both by λόγος and φρόνιμος.⁸ Aristotle insists that we must choose the acts we do, and choose them for their own sake.⁹ Προαίρεσις is manifestly a voluntary act, but not all voluntary acts are the result of προαίρεσις (e.g. children and animals are capable of voluntary action, but not of choice). Προαίρεσις is also to be distinguished from βούλησις (a wish), as, unlike βούλησις, it can only be related to the realm of possible human actions. Outside this realm of possible human actions lies the sphere encompassed by βούλησις which is directed towards things which are not possible to be brought about by one's own efforts (e.g. ἀθανασία (immortality)). For Aristotle, βούλησις «τοῦ τέλους ἐστὶ μᾶλλον» («relates to the end»), whereas προαίρεσις is related «τῶν πρὸς τὸ τέλος» («to the means»)¹⁰.

Προαίρεσις presupposes λόγον and δianoian (intellect). It involves choosing from a range of different possibilities and, therefore, it requires one to select in a reasonable way which of them might be the best choice. Hence, προαίρεσις requires βούλευσις (deliberation). Deliberation, however, is confined to those

7. II, 1105a31-4.

8. Cf. II, 1106b36-1107a2.

9. Cf. II, 1105a31-4.

10. III, 1111b26-7.

things which can be brought about only by one's own efforts. Βούλευσις is not concerned with ends in themselves, but with what is directed towards ends: «βουλευόμεθα δ' οὐ περὶ τῶν τελῶν ἀλλὰ περὶ τῶν πρὸς τὰ τέλη» («we deliberate not about ends but about means»)¹¹. We start by setting up the end, and then we consider how and by what means it is to be attained. The end, namely, the good or apparent good is the object of the true βούλευσις of the good person. Accordingly, the object of προαίρεσις is one of the things in our power which is desired as a result of βούλευσις. Προαίρεσις can also be termed βουλευτικὴ ὄρεξις (desire after deliberation), because when a judgment has been reached as a result of βούλευσις, we ὀρεγόμεθα (desire) in accordance with our βούλευσις¹². Hence, the exercise of ἠθικὴ ἀρετὴ is relevant to «τῶν πρὸς τὸ τέλος» and it is also, in accordance with ὀρθὸς λόγος (correct reasoning).

At the beginning of book VI, Aristotle repeats that through our possession of ἠθικὴ ἀρετὴ we choose the μέσον, not the ὑπερβολή nor the ἔλλειψις, and that the μέσον is determined by the dictates of ὀρθὸς λόγος. Ὀρθὸς λόγος is the λόγος possessed by φρόνιμος. Φρόνιμος is the person who has φρόνησις. Φρόνησις is a διανοητικὴ ἀρετὴ, and is found in the part of the soul which possesses λόγος. However, Aristotle distinguishes two different elements within that part of the soul which possesses λόγος. The first deals with things whose ἀρχαί (first principles) are invariable, and the other with things whose ἀρχαί are variable. The former is called τὸ ἐπιστημονικόν (scientific knowledge), the latter is called τὸ λογιστικόν (calculative). The ἐπιστημονικόν is engaged in ἐπιστήμη (science) which includes φιλοσοφία (philosophy) and μαθηματικά (mathematics). The role of the λογιστικόν is to deliberate upon how to change things. Βούλευσις belongs to the λογιστικόν because we never deliberate about the invariable.

The operation of these two parts of the soul is judged in accordance with their ἔργον (work). The ἔργον common to both parts of the intellect is that of ἀλήθεια (truth). However, these two parts are directed towards truth in a different way. Το ἐπιστημονικόν (scientific knowledge) is concerned exclusively with truth, while τὸ λογιστικόν concentrates upon «ἀλήθεια ὁμολόγως ἔχουσα τῇ ὀρέξει τῇ ὀρθῇ» («truth in agreement with right desire»)¹³. Hence, the judgment of τὸ λογιστικόν presupposes that the ὄρεξις must be ὀρθή, the λόγος must be ἀληθής and the ὄρεξις must aim at what the λόγος commands; this is a necessary presupposition if προαίρεσις is to be good. The person who deliberates well is held to possess ὀρθὸς λόγος, and is called φρόνημος. Φρόνιμος is, therefore, the person who has the ability to deliberate well about what is good and

11. III, 1112, 12-3.

12. Cf. III, 1113a10-4.

13. VI, 1139a31.

advantageous for him/herself, not in some particular respect but in relation to «ποῖα πρὸς τὸ εὖ ζῆν ὄλως» («what sorts of things are conducive to the good life in general»)¹⁴. Φρόνησις then, is «ἔξιν ἀληθῆ μετὰ λόγου πρακτικὴν περὶ τὰ ἀνθρώπων ἀγαθὰ καὶ κακὰ» («it is a true and reasoned state of a capacity to act with regard to the things that are good or bad for man»)¹⁵.

For Aristotle, ἐπιστήμη is concerned with things that are universal and necessary. Any episteme is derived from ἀρχαί (first principles). However, these ἀρχαί can be grasped neither by ἐπιστήμη nor φρόνησις nor σοφία. It is only νοῦς (intuitive reason) that grasps the ἀρχαί. Φρόνησις, which is to deliberate well, cannot place the ἀρχαί within this field of deliberation as they are invariable and, hence, are not subject to deliberation. As Aristotle states:

«From what has been said it is plain, then, that σοφία is ἐπιστήμη, combined with νοῦς, of the things that are highest by nature. This is why we say Anaxagoras, Thales, and men like them have σοφία but not φρόνησις, when we see them ignorant of what is to their own advantage, and why we say that they know things that are remarkable, admirable, difficult, and divine, but useless; viz. because it is not human goods that they seek»¹⁶.

Hence, φρόνησις is useful because it is concerned with the human good. Without it, we are not in a position to determine and secure what is good for the soul. It is the φρόνημος who embodies ὀρθὸς λόγος, and without a reference to ὀρθὸς λόγος we are unable to provide an account what ἠθικὴ ἀρετὴ is. In book III, ἠθικὴ ἀρετὴ is defined as the good state of the irrational part of the soul which is a matter of choosing in each particular situation what the μέσον is. The μέσον is determined by λόγος and, ἠθικὴ ἀρετὴ is, thereby, closely related to ὀρθὸς λόγος. Ὀρθὸς λόγος was designated as the λόγος possessed by φρόνημος, namely, the person who possesses φρόνησις. Thus, on the basis of book III, the account of ἠθικὴ ἀρετὴ is firmly linked to φρόνησις. However, this account seems to be placed into question, by Aristotle, in book VI, where the function of φρόνημος is held to be to deliberate well¹⁷. Since, in accordance with book III, the end cannot be the subject of deliberation, but only what is directed towards the end¹⁸. The divergence between book III and book IV is heightened further when Aristotle states that virtue makes us aim at the right σκοπός (mark) («ἀρετὴ τὸν σκοπὸν ποιεῖ ὀρθόν») and φρόνησις makes us take «τὰ πρὸς τοῦτον» («the right means»)¹⁹ or «ἢ μὲν γὰρ τὸ τέλος ἢ δὲ τὰ πρὸς τὸ τέλος ποιεῖ πράτ-

14. VI, 1140a26-8.

15. VI, 1140b6-7.

16. VI, 1141b1-7.

17. Cf. VI, 1141b10.

18. Cf. III, 1112b15-6.

19. VI, 1144a6-9.

τειν» («the one [ethike arete] determines the end and the other [phronesis] makes us do the things that lead to the end»)²⁰.

Hence, with the passage from book III to book IV one appears to be presented with a new different orientation which is founded upon the basis that the good end is given by ἔξις, namely, the state of character concerned with προαίρεσις. This confines φρόνησις to an operation which merely entails working out the best ways to attain this good end. For, if within the irrational part of the soul, ἠθικὴ ἀρετὴ, as ἔξις concerned with προαίρεσις, is sufficient to determine the goals by itself, then the rational part of the soul in general, and more specifically φρόνησις, seem to contribute nothing to the choice of goals.

It is this new orientation that forms the basis for W. Fortenbaugh's position in *Aristotle on Emotion*. His claim is that the good goal is given by one's ἔξις, and all that φρόνησις does is to work out the best way to achieve that goal. In order to reinforce the persuasiveness of this interpretation, Fortenbaugh turns to another of Aristotle's works the Rhetoric. In particular, Fortenbaugh concentrates upon those sections of the Rhetoric in which Aristotle, through a description of the nature of people's character according to their emotions, habits, ages and fortunes, identifies the characters typical of young, mature and old people. In the Rhetoric, young people are held to live more by ἦθος (character) than by calculations of λογισμὸς²¹. However, their failure to live by λογισμὸς does not prevent them from acting with a view to what is τὸ καλόν (noble). For Aristotle: «In their actions, they prefer τὰ καλὰ (the noble) to the useful; their life is guided by their ἦθος (character) rather than by λογισμὸς (calculation), for the latter aims at the useful, ἀρετὴ at τὸ καλόν (the noble)»²² However, in the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle claims that young people do not have ἠθικὴ ἀρετὴ in the strict sense, since ἀρετὴ is always found together with ὀρθὸς λόγος, namely, φρόνησις:

«For all men think that each type of character belongs to its possessors in some sense by nature; for from the very moment of birth we are just or fitted for self-control or brave or have the other moral qualities; but yet we seek something else as that which is good in the strict sense. We seek for the presence of such qualities in another way. For both children and brutes have the natural disposition to these qualities, but without reason these are really hurtful...»²³.

Nevertheless, this does not prevent Fortenbaugh from saying that according to

20. VI, 1145a4-6.

21. ARISTOTLE, *Rhetoric*, 1389a33-4.

22. IDEM, *Rhetoric*, 1389a33-4.

23. IDEM, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI, 1144b24-8.

Aristotle «their good behaviour is a matter of moral virtue and not of practical wisdom»²⁴.

On the basis of these passages from the Rhetoric, Fortenbaugh then proceeds to argue that *ἠθικὴ ἀρετὴ* has the capacity and competence to provide a correct assessment of a particular situation, and to offer laudable goals. This is made possible through a process of moral training in which Aristotle is held to associate the emergence of virtue with the moral training of youth. Virtues do not arise directly from nature, but are the product of adaptation in which nature is perfected through habituation. In the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle stresses that

«by doing the acts that we do in our transactions with other men we become just or unjust, and by doing the acts that we do in the presence of danger, and by being habituated to feel fear or confidence, we become brave or cowardly»²⁵.

According to Fortenbaugh, it is through moral training and habituation, and not necessarily through *λόγος*, that the irrational part of our soul becomes capable of judgment and the choice of a particular action for its own sake. Thus, he claims that we can state «without qualification that moral virtue makes correct the goal, because the moral virtues man has learned are moral principles which determine the goals of his particular actions»²⁶.

In what follows, I offer an alternative interpretation, which challenges Fortenbaugh's position, by focusing upon Aristotle's account of the relationship between *ἠθικὴ ἀρετὴ* and *φρόνησις*. In the passage taken from the Rhetoric, on which Fortenbaugh's position relies, Aristotle appears to state that *ἠθικὴ ἀρετὴ* is acquired before *διανοητικὴ ἀρετὴ*, as a result of moral training and habituation during the period prior to adulthood. It is through moral training and habituation, and not by calculation, that the young possessors of this incomplete virtue prefer *τὸ καλόν* to the useful. It is virtue, according to Aristotle, and not calculation, which aims at *τὸ καλόν*; calculation aims at the useful. In book VII of the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle defines the role of virtue as follows:

«For *ἀρετὴ* and *μοχθηρία* (vice) respectively preserve and destroy the *ἀρχή*, and in actions the final cause is the *ἀρχή*, as the hypotheses are in mathematics; neither in that case is it *λόγος* (argument) that teaches the *ἀρχή*, nor is it so here – *ἀρετὴ* either natural or produced by habituation is that what teaches right opinion about the *ἀρχή* (*ὀρθοδοξεῖν περὶ τὴν ἀρχήν*). Such a man as this, then, is *σώφρων* (temperate); the contrary type is *ἀκόλαστος* (self-indulgent)»²⁷.

24. W. FORTENBAUGH, *Aristotle on Emotion*, London, Duckworth, 1975, p. 71.

25. ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II, 1103b15-17.

26. W. FORTENBAUGH, *Aristotle on Emotion*, op. cit., p. 79ff.

27. ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII, 1151a16-19.

Or, in a passage from the Eudemian Ethics Aristotle also says:

«Therefore whereas the cowardly and the daring are mistaken owing to their characters, since the coward thinks things not formidable formidable, and things slightly formidable extremely formidable, and the daring man on the contrary thinks formidable things perfectly safe and extremely formidable things only slightly formidable, to the brave man on the other hand things seem exactly what they are»²⁸. (italics added)

So, it is virtue as a general motivation, as a modified desire, and not *λόγος*, that directs the choice of *τὸ καλόν*. *Τὸ καλόν* is the *ἀρχή*, the ultimate end. We reach the *ἀρχή* non-deliberatively, namely, simply through a process of moral training and habituation. We do not deliberate about the ultimate end as we do not deliberate about the hypotheses of a science. In both cases, we take those *ἀρχαί* for granted, as an a priori fact. This is exactly what Aristotle means when he says «*τὸ τέλος* cannot be a subject of deliberation, but only *τὰ πρὸς τὸ τέλος*»²⁹.

Hence, it is virtue that preserves the *ἀρχή*; it preserves what is laudable. It preserves our conception of *τὸ καλόν* while vice destroys that conception. This capacity of virtue to preserve the goal of *τὸ καλόν* is the result of virtue being a non-deliberative desire acquired through habituation. Virtue, therefore, includes both a conception of *τὸ καλόν* and a desire for it as co-originary.

Yet, in the Eudemian Ethics, Aristotle also maintains that non-intellectual virtue is incomplete without *λόγος*:

«but because every virtue is a matter of choice (*ἀλλ' ἐπειδὴ πᾶσα ἀρετὴ προαιρετική*) (and we said before what we mean by this, namely, that makes a man choose everything for the sake of some object, and that object is what is fine), it is clear that courage being a form of virtue will make a man face formidable things for some object, so that he does not do it through ignorance (for it makes him judge correctly) (*ὀρθῶς γὰρ μᾶλλον ποιεῖ κρίνειν*), nor yet for pleasure, but because it is fine, since in a case where it is not fine but insane he will not face them, for then it would be base to do so»³⁰ (italics added).

However, *προαίρεσις* (choice) requires *βούλευσις* (deliberation) and *βούλευσις* requires *λόγος*, therefore, since *προαίρεσις* is a rational thing, complete *ἠθικὴ ἀρετὴ* necessarily requires *λόγος* too. A virtuous man chooses everything on the basis of some rational desires tied to *deliberation* about what is conducive to what is laudable (*τὸ καλόν*). Our wish, for example, to be brave, courageous or

28. IDEM, *Eudemian Ethics*, III, 1229b23-26.

29. IDEM, *Nicomachean Ethics*, III, 1112b15-6.

30. IDEM, *Eudemian Ethics*, III, 1230a28-31.

temperate depends on some previous *βούλευσις* (deliberation) about what contributes to what is *τὸ καλόν*. This deliberation is always preceded by a non-deliberative desire for what is laudable, which is acquired through a process of habituation.

A possible objection to this interpretation could be raised that, according to Aristotle, we do not deliberate about ends, but only about things towards ends. This would be to ignore that by *τέλος*, or *ἀρχή*, Aristotle means the ultimate end, which is what is laudable (*τὸ καλόν*), and to contest this interpretation by saying that for a person to be noble, courageous or temperate is not a means but an end. However, as Aristotle says in the *Eudemian Ethics*:

«For courage is following reason, and reason bids us choose what is fine (*τὸ καλόν*). Hence he who endures formidable things not on account of reason is either out of his mind or daring, but only he who does so from motives of honor is fearless and brave»³¹.

In this passage, Aristotle clearly treats courage not as an end in itself but as something which is directed *towards the end*. He does not seem to hold a restricted notion of some sort of technical deliberation whose applicability is limited to instrumental means attached to non-deliberatively chosen ends. He commences his description of human action by initially introducing a vague non-deliberative notion of desire acquired by habituation and directed to «what is laudable». This is not the sole thing we desire. We also desire to know what sort of life will lead us towards what is laudable, or desire to know, in a determinate context, which of several possible courses of action displays the greatest degree of conformity to it. This is deliberative desire which is not a strict, technical deliberation about instrumental means, but concerns the *constituents* of what is laudable.

According to David Wiggins, the Aristotelian expression «*ta pros to telos*» can be formulated in two distinct, non-contradictory, compatible relations: (A) the relation *x* bears to *telos y* when *x* will bring about *p*, and (B) the relation *x* bears to *p* when the existence of *x* will itself help to constitute *p*. The first relation refers to the necessary means to bring about the end, and the second refers to things whose «existence counts in itself as the partial or total realization of the end»³². Both relations fall into «what is towards the end» in a non-contradictory, compatible manner. Hence, there is nothing obscure or objectionable when we argue that our deliberative desire to be noble, courageous or temperate does not constitute the *telos* of human action but *τὰ*

31. IDEM, *Eudemian Ethics*, III, 1229a1-5.

32. David WIGGINS, *Deliberation and Practical Reason in Amélie OKSENBERG RORTY* (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1980, p. 224.

πρὸς τὸ τέλος. The person chooses to do the virtuous act for its own sake, as demanded by *τὸ καλόν*, and not for the sake of a particular virtue, such as courage. As T. H. Irwing explains:

«A rational action is explained, on his [Aristotle's] view, by showing that it achieves some end sought by desire. But we do not explain an action in a way that shows its rationality simply by referring to some single goal or desire; we must also understand why the agent has that goal; we will understand that, on Aristotle's view, when we understand how that end contributes to some overall good, some systematic structure of ends that the agent pursues»³³.

Yet, we have to establish the manner in which *φρόνησις* operates. For Aristotle, *φρόνησις* enables us, on the basis of our apprehension of what is laudable (*τὸ καλόν*), to perceive which virtues (e.g. courage, temperance or justice), or even *τὸ καλόν* itself, requires in any particular case, and commands us to act accordingly. The young person who does not possess *φρόνησις*, but only a mere preference for the noble in comparison to the useful, is unable to determine what nobility requires of him in particular cases. For, it is *φρόνησις* which is concerned with particulars, and determines where the *μέσον* lies between excess and defect in any individual instance.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle invokes *αἴσθησις* (perception) to determine at which point one's action would become blameworthy³⁴. Perception seems to stem from experience. Referring to the opinions of experienced, elderly people and people of practical wisdom, Aristotle says that it is experience that «has given them an eye for things, and so they see correctly»³⁵. Experience is exactly what a young person lacks and, therefore, he does not possess *φρόνησις*. As Aristotle insists:

«The cause is that such wisdom is concerned not only with universals but with particulars, which become familiar from experience, but a young man has no experience, for it is length of time that gives experience; indeed one might ask this question too, why a boy may become a mathematician, but not a philosopher or a physicist»³⁶.

Yet, *φρόνησις* is not mere experience since it assists us to find what to do in a particular case with the view to something which is more universal. In the beginning of Book VI, we are told that there is a standard which determines the

33. T.H. IRWIN, *Aristotle on Reason, Desire and Virtue*, *The Journal of Philosophy*, 1975, p.575.

34. ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II, 1109b20, IV 1126b2.

35. VI, 1143b11-14.

36. VI, 1142a14-17.

modes of observing the mean between excess and defect, and this standard is a certain σκοπός (mark) at which we aim³⁷. The σκοπός is presumably what Aristotle calls the ἄριστον which is attainable by φρόνιμος through calculation. The ἄριστον is also, the place from where the reasoning of φρόνιμος seems to commence. For, particular cases require us to know what the ἄριστον (which is the superlative of τὸ καλόν) demands. It is by looking at the ultimate end that, as Aristotle says, we heighten or relax our activity accordingly³⁸.

Hence, φρόνησις in Aristotle is practical rationality in virtue of which one knows what the ultimate end of human action requires us to do, or, in other words, how to pursue this ultimate end. In this sense, φρόνησις is concerned both with the universal and particulars: «οὐδ' ἐστὶν ἡ φρόνησις τῶν καθόλου μόνον, ἀλλὰ δεῖ καὶ τὰ καθ' ἕκαστα γνωρίζειν» («Nor is practical wisdom concerned with universals only – it must also recognize the particulars»)³⁹. Φρόνησις is concerned with how to pursue the ultimate end in particular cases. We first start with a general conception of what a good life requires us to do, namely, whether, for example, justice, courage or temperance are good or not in the sense of whether they contribute towards τὸ καλόν or not. This is the ἀρχή of action and a sort of major premise⁴⁰. Then, we establish what, for example, courage or justice require of us to do, since not any and every means would be compatible with, for example courage or justice or even τὸ καλόν in general. Hence, we have determined, through deliberation, the means which would be in accordance with courage or justice, and this is a minor premise⁴¹. When we act, we combine these two premises together, and this is the final stage, which is termed ἔσχατον. It is the final stage in the course of our deliberation about a particular action which is immediately applicable. Ἐσχατον is what comes last and, therefore, it is particular.

Yet, Aristotle says, that «ἐκ τῶν καθ' ἕκαστα γὰρ τὰ καθόλου» («universals are reached from particulars»)⁴², namely, that judgments of particulars allow us, through induction, to grasp the universal. The process of induction is heavily dependent on νοῦς. It is νοῦς, as Aristotle says, that «is concerned with the ultimate in both directions; for both the first terms and the last are objects of νοῦς and not of argument»⁴³.

«[T]he nous which is presupposed by demonstration grasps the unchangeable and the first terms, while the nous involved in practical reasoning grasps the last and variable

37. Cf. VI, 1138b21-24.

38. Cf. VI, 1138b23

39. VI, 1141b15-7.

40. Cf. VI, 1144a32.

41. Cf. VI, 1143b3.

42. VI, 1143b4-5

43. VI, 1143a35-b1.

fact, i.e. the minor premise. For these variable facts are the starting-points for the apprehension of the end, since the universals are reached from the particulars»⁴⁴.

Hence, we start from the particulars or minor premises (e.g. this act will be just or courageous), and it is from that that we get a grasp of the end, i.e. the major premise that, for example, justice or courage is good. Therefore, Aristotelian φρόνησις is not a matter of determining how an action will contribute to an independently specifiable end, but it is rather a matter of perceiving that end in the action. The process of thinking about a particular action itself is primary, and it is only through concentration upon this particular action that the question can arise as to whether one can perceive an end in this action.

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This article has sought to challenge Fortenbaugh's argument that ἠθικὴ ἀρετὴ is sufficient to enable a choice of action to be made in particular cases. On the alternative interpretation offered here, the only thing that ἠθικὴ ἀρετὴ, isolated from φρόνησις, is capable of achieving is to direct one's desire towards what is τὸ καλόν. In other words, ἠθικὴ ἀρετὴ is engaged in the preservation of what is τὸ καλόν. Ἡθικὴ ἀρετὴ provides a type of understanding that enables the rejection of a choice of action which is, for example, pleasant simply because it is pleasant; and the preference for the noble instead of what is pleasant. However, this is all that ἠθικὴ ἀρετὴ is able to achieve without φρόνησις. The capacity to dissociate oneself from the constant satisfaction of one's own pleasure is an insufficient basis upon which to determine the type of action required in a particular situation. For Aristotle, ἠθικὴ ἀρετὴ without λόγος or φρόνησις is comparable to a «strong body which moves without sight»⁴⁵. Hence «it is not possible to be good in the strict sense without practical wisdom, or practically wise without moral virtue»^{46,47}.

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44. VI, 1143b1-3.

45. VI, 1144b11.

46. VI, 1145a2-4.

47. I would like to thank Dr. Peter Langford for his invaluable help.