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Chapter 11

Practical Reason

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Introduction

Over the past few decades "practical reason" has come to feature prominently in much philosophical discussion in ethics, political theory, and the philosophy of mind. Over this period, too, writers on education have been drawn to the same topic in attempts to clarify the kind of knowledge operative in good teaching, the orientation best fitted to programs of teacher education seeking to cultivate this knowledge and, more broadly, the contribution that education may properly be expected to make in helping students to become practically wise persons – especially in terms of the deliberative dispositions required for citizenship in democratic polities.

Practical knowledge has not always been highly regarded by philosophers. In the ancient world a lofty conception of theory – and of philosophy itself as theory's fullest realization – diminished its epistemic status and its relative significance in a flourishing human life. And in the modern period it fared no better, eclipsed by a kind of theory that, though all too clearly different from philosophy, much philosophy sought to canonize.

In section I of this essay Joseph Dunne first sets the scene for the recent recovery of robust notions of practical knowledge by showing how much the latter was occluded by a picture of knowledge accredited by the dominant outlook of modern epistemology – and seemingly sanctioned by the rise of science – so that what was needed in its regard was precisely a recovery. "Recovery" of course also implies that recent articulations of practical reason have had something to appeal to in an earlier philosophical tradition. And so the analysis of practical knowledge under the rubric of "judgement" offered in the next subsection is followed by an account of Aristotle's pioneering account of *phronesis*, a practical wisdom that he defended despite his esteem for the contemplative pursuits of a life of theory and his anticipation (through his conception of *techne*) of the kind of scientific-technical attitude that, in its later modern realization, would powerfully overshadow practical judgement.

Section I written by Joseph Dunne; Section II written by Shirley Pendlebury

Recognition of the enduring significance of Aristotelian *phronesis* has been helped by a revolution in twentieth-century philosophy that has brought a new appreciation of engaged agency as the irreducible mode of human being in the world. This larger philosophical background to recent preoccupation with practical reason is sketched in the following subsection, while section I concludes with some reflection on the question (heavy with consequence for educational studies and teacher education) of how theory is to be reconceived if it is to offer any illumination to practical knowledge.

Broad outline in section I is followed by closer analysis in section II. There Shirley Pendlebury shows how any contemporary reclamation of Aristotelian *phronesis* is challenged by the exigent standards of justification required by more critical, judicial conceptions of practical reason; she reveals the variety and complexity in the responses to this challenge of several different Aristotelian commentators; and she unpacks in more detail the implications of all this for central issues in education. How exactly practical reasoning relates to ends and means, whether it is primarily an individual ("I") or shared ("we") activity, and how it negotiates the boundaries between private and public: these questions, with their upshot for education, are outlined in the first subsection. Next, the contrast in various readings of Aristotle between an insistence on argumentative rectitude (via the "practical syllogism") and an emphasis on sensitive discernment of salient features of action-situations is analyzed. The merits of the latter – not least for understanding the requirements of good teaching – and its involvement with the kind of dispositions of character canvassed in a recent renaissance of "virtue theory" are analyzed in the following subsection. This analysis then extends to a consideration of the discursive and dispositional qualities required for (and hence falling within the remit of public schools as the reproductive agents of) democratic citizenship. The essay concludes with some reflections, in the light of the earlier analysis, of the kind of practical reasonableness exemplified in competent pedagogy.

I

The new science and the triumph of technical reason

A conception of reason that is quite inhospitable to practice arose within the purview of modern epistemology and became dominant on the basis of its seeming to articulate the defining features of the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century. It puts a premium on detachment and "objectivity," suppressing the contextdependence of first-person experience in favor of a third-person perspective which yields generalized findings in accordance with clearly formulated, publicly agreed procedures. The procedures insist on strict quantification, formulation in interpretationimmune language, replicability of operations and findings, and modes of testing that specify precisely what can count as

counterevidence. The aim of such procedures is to establish nomological knowledge: law-like explanations establishing correlations within the phenomenal field that hold reliably under conditions precisely specified in the laws. This knowledge then has predictive value: given conditions a, b, and c, it can be reliably predicted that x, y, and z will occur.

The success of the modern sciences and their superiority over their pre-Galilean, still largely Aristotelian, predecessors could be ascribed to a new experimentalism and to new ways of exploiting mathematics in the service of natural inquiry. The seal of this success was the *power* delivered by the new knowledge. From now on – and in strong contrast to the contemplative bias of earlier forms of inquiry – power was to be the defining criterion of knowledge; *scientia*, in Bacon's slogan, was now *propter potentiam*. This power, already inscribed in the new science, *qua* predictive knowledge, was to be realized through the *application* of the latter to the material environment – an application that has given us unimagined technological transformations of the natural world. But the object of this new kind of explanation and control was not to be limited to the material universe. It would include human behavior too, the new physics presaging a new psychology and politics – as early as the seventeenth century with Hobbes, for example, or with Holbach and La Mettrie in the full glare of eighteenth-century Enlightenment.

Conceived along these lines, scientific knowledge came to define the only kind of rigor that could claim *rational* status. And this rationality came to be translated into a new standard of effectiveness through the application of scientific knowledge in more and more domains of action. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this standard achieved enormous prestige, reinforced in complex combination by positivist philosophy, aspirations to social control and pursuit of economic interests (see Habermas, 1971c and "Overcoming epistemology" subsection below). It was against this standard – what can be called that of *technical rationality* – that older forms of practical knowledge came to seem hopelessly inadequate. The new paradigm seemed to confer objectivity (no distortion by merely subjective prejudices), generalizability (no confinement to merely local or particular contexts), replicability and control (no exceptions or unpredicted outcomes), transparency and publicity (no reliance on personal gifts or inarticulate intuitions), and clear-cut criteria for assessing success and establishing accountability (no ambiguous interpretations or interminable disputes). In the light of these attractions, merely practical knowledge was vulnerable to charges of being unreliable, makeshift, unaccountable, and elitist. It seemed reasonable then that it should be supplanted – or, in other words, that the practical should be absorbed into the *technical*.

It is in the face of this attempted absorption that the defense of practical reason, and the counterattempt to articulate its irreducible otherness, has become a striking leitmotif in recent philosophy. Two developments had given substance to the ascendancy of technical rationality. First was the emergence of a kind of knowledge with real productive efficacy: the new science yielded deep-structure explanations that informed and made possible a new harnessing and transforming of matter. Second, an attempt was made to extend this same kind of theory to the personal and cultural worlds, searching for the same kind of regularities in human functioning – and hence the same basis for prediction and control – that had been found in the material universe. The first of these developments may seem unproblematic: the huge discrepancy between later and earlier levels of technological advance is itself evidence enough of the power of the scientific knowledge that has brought it about. Still, *technical feasibility*, which can indeed be assured by scientific advance, does

not necessarily coincide with *practical desirability*. The latter weaves the former into a fabric of human purposes and needs, the fulfillment of which calls for a kind of deliberation that is neither identical with nor deliverable by scientifically certified knowledge. This fact can be accepted, however, while an attempt is made to retain primacy for nomological knowledge. A division is made between "means" and "ends" and, while ends are conceded to "deliberation," the organization and deployment of means to these ends is still claimed to fall exclusively within the competence of technical – or, as it now appears, *instrumental* – reason. "Deliberation," however, all too often turns out to be no more than an assertion of some personal but ultimately unjustifiable commitment, a positing of some brutely given preference, or a mere plumping for one of several imponderable options. This manifest absence of reason from the determination of ends (or "values" as they are now called) then leads to a strange inversion: the most rational calculation of means is made normative so that a combination of efficiency and economy becomes, in itself, the single overarching end. Technical reason is taken, by default, to be equivalent to reason *tout court*.

Even if this triumph of technical reason seems assured by the history of the past century – with the relentless and apparently irreversible replacement of older modes of production by newer, more powerful and efficient, ones – greater resistance may perhaps be expected with respect to the second development mentioned above. Here it is a question not of controlling matter but rather of directing human action and interaction in all the multifarious domains of "common sense" residing in family and community as well as in more specialized, increasingly professionalized, enclaves such as law, medicine, business management, psychotherapy, and education. But here too technical reason has exerted its fascination or, what amounts to the same thing, there has been a strong tendency to consider "practice" as "merely an expression of embarrassment at the deplorable but soon overcome condition of incomplete theory" (Bubner, 1981, p. 204). Theorizing a practice has tended to involve attempts to disembed the knowledge or skill implicit in the performance of its characteristic tasks from the immediacy and idiosyncrasy of the particular situations in which they are deployed, and from the experience and character of the practitioners in whom they reside. Through this disembedding it is supposed that what is essential in the knowledge and skill can be encapsulated in explicit, generalizable formulae, procedures, or rules. The latter then are to be applied to the various situations and circumstances that arise in the practice so as to meet the problems that they present. These problems are supposed to have nothing in them that has not been anticipated in the analysis that yielded the general formulae, and hence to be soluble by a straightforward application of the latter, without need for insight or discernment in the actual situation itself. Control – and efficiency – seems to be made possible here by the fact that the system is minimally dependent on the discretion or judgement of individual practitioners, with all the hazard and lack of standardization that this might entail. The ideal to which technical rationality aspires, one might say, is a practitioner-proof mode of practice.

Judgement and the texture of practical domains

In the face of all this, the philosophical defense of practitioner's knowledge has involved attempts to articulate some cognate of what may be called *judgement* (Smith, 1999). This is knowledge not as a possession (a kind of dead capital) but as invested in action. It is

knowledge brought into play in the concrete, dealing with this situation now, that may be perfectly standard and typical – that is to say, of a type that has often been met previously and for which there is an already established and well-rehearsed procedure – but that may *not* be exactly to type but rather may deviate in an indefinite number of respects from what is standard or conventional. Judgement, then, is in the first instance an ability to recognize situations, cases, or problems of this kind (which are precisely of *no* clearly specifiable kind) and to deal adequately with them. A person of judgement respects the particularity of the case – and thus does not impose on it a procrustean application of the general rule. At the same time, such a person will try to find a way of bringing this particularity into some relationship, albeit one yet to be determined, with established norms or procedures in the area. Thus a person of judgement is not a maverick with a nose for the unusual, who is indifferent to the body of general knowledge codified in rules, formulae, and procedures (without familiarity with these, how could she or he even recognize the atypicality of the present instance?). To the contrary, a person of judgement is a keen student of the general stock of knowledge, all the better to find a fit (perhaps of an unusual shape; see Aristotle on the Lesbian rule in *Nicomachean Ethics*, 5, 10) between it and the particular case. The adeptness of the person of judgement, then, lies neither in a knowledge of the general as such nor in an entirely unprincipled dealing with particulars. Rather, it lies precisely in the mediation between general and particular, in bringing both into illuminating connection with each other. This requires perceptiveness in one's reading of particular situations as much as flexibility in one's mode of "possessing" and "applying" the general knowledge (Schön, 1983).

The exercise of judgement, then, requires resourcefulness and a kind of fluency. It involves creative insight insofar as it has to prove itself afresh in being equal to the demands of each new situation. Outstripping what has been formulated, it exhibits ability to actuate knowledge with relevance, appropriateness, or sensitivity to context (Polanyi, 1964). Experience, and the intimate exposure to particulars that comes with it, seems to be a necessary condition for acquiring it. Still, raw experience is not a sufficient condition: crucially, one must learn from one's experience – perhaps especially from one's mistakes – so that one's experience is constantly reconstructed. Openness to learning brings in a reference beyond experience to character: personal qualities and not just cognitive abilities are in play. There are virtues such as patience in sticking with a problem, a sense of balance that keeps both details and "big picture" in focus, a sobriety that keeps one from being easily swayed by impulse or first impressions, a courage that enables one to persist in a truthful though otherwise unprofitable or unpopular direction. Something impersonal is involved here that frees one from traps of the "ego"; and yet it is quite personal in that one's judgement ramifies into the recesses of one's mind and being, expressing the kind of person one has become (for the convergence here between analyses of practical reason and "virtue theory" see subsection on action situations below).

While each practical field has a specific texture of its own, the need for judgement arises in each of them because of an intricacy and frailty, inherent in human affairs, that is rife in all of them. They often present us with a problematic situation where there is no discrete problem already clearly labeled as such; insofar as the issue is largely one of identifying just what the problem is, we might better speak of a "difficulty" or "predicament" rather than a "problem" (Dunne, 1999a). Here several lines of consideration and priority run in different directions, interwoven tightly in a complex web. Attempts to unravel any one of

these strands (the classic task of analysis) may only reinforce tangles in the others. Moreover, the material considerations may not all be internal to a particular discipline as a strictly circumscribed domain. In a business situation, for example, not only may production issues pull against financial ones but both may be curtailed by legal considerations; and at any point psychological or ethical factors may obtrude.

Attempts to resolve problematic situations of this kind, then, deviate from the standard instrumentalist paradigm. For the task is not one of calculating the efficiency of different possible means toward an already determined end. It often involves, rather, deliberation about the end itself – about what would count as a satisfactory, or at least not entirely unacceptable, outcome to a particular "case." And it may only be by action – and not, in the end, by any purely analytic process – that this deliberation can really be followed through. Strategically orientated action will provide new feedback but it can also set off its own chain of unintended consequences. And so one is involved in an experimental process. There is a significant difference, however, between the kind of experimentation that may occur in a practical field and that which goes on in a laboratory. Whereas in the latter case, a "negative" or disconfirming result may be celebrated by the skeptical spirit of the scientist as a step in the onward march of knowledge, in a practical field it may have to be regarded as an error that was simply too costly. And yet the situation may be such that to hazard no experimental probe is itself an error, if not an outright impossibility. It is in such situations that one needs the art of judgement.

An Aristotelian background

If this cardinal distinction between *technical* reason and judgement as the defining power of *practical* reason is intuitively recognizable to many practitioners, it has taken something of a revolution for it to find philosophical expression. This revolution has involved an attempt to move beyond the kind of canonization of natural science derived from the opposing but often mutually sustaining viewpoints of Cartesian rationalism and empiricism; and in one significant aspect it has been an attempt to get *behind* (or before) these viewpoints through a retrieval of Aristotle's "practical philosophy" (Dunne, 1997). Technical reason had in fact older and deeper roots in a tendency of classical Greek thinkers – pre-eminently Plato and Aristotle himself – to see in the act of fabrication (e.g., by housebuilder or cobbler) the most powerful resource against the capriciousness of nature and fate, and so to regard the kind of knowledge possessed by the master-fabricator as the privileged exemplar of rationality. This knowledge resided in *techne*, a concept they elaborated in terms of a set of related dualities that remain part of our linguistic stock-in-trade and still animate our conception of technical rationality: matter and form, means and end, planning and execution. Matter (e.g., stone or leather) is at the disposal of the producer, who can masterfully construct a design or blueprint (the "form"), which is then to be impressed on the matter to yield the finished product. This formed product is the end that the fabricator's productive activity is set to achieve; and the activity, together with the materials and whatever tools are needed, are the means that are used for its achievement. There is a clean separability here both between form and matter and between end and

means; and this is reflected in a further separation within the productive process itself between a planning phase and an implemention phase. Rationality here resides in the planning: it is just to the extent that this planning can be abstracted from the nitty-gritty of the actual productive activity (to the point of being independently formulable as the content of rules and procedures), while at the same time being capable of subordinating the latter to itself, that the whole activity qualifies as "rational."

As articulated by the philosophers, *techne* did not accurately reflect the reality of what actually went on in some arenas of fabrication – think, for example, of the amount of know-how in the hands of a potter that is irrecoverable in any explicit propositions. Moreover, there were other areas of activity that were also seen as falling within the competence of *techne* although, as nonfabricating – that is to say, as not issuing in a substantial, durable, product – they seem to run athwart the philosophical conception of *techne*. Familiar examples in the Greek world were military strategy, rhetoric, and politics or statecraft. Far from being stable or passive (awaiting the impress of an already devised form), the materials here include volatile constellations of human passions and motivations; and, lacking the clearly defined boundaries of the workshop or laboratory, sites of engagement are shifting and protean. Rather than imposing a design on materials to bring about a product, adepts here intervene in a field of forces or immerse themselves in a medium, in which they seek to bring about a propitious result; and insofar as the play of chance and the vagaries of timing are ineliminable, they need a kind of opportunism, or talent for improvisation, that responds to the dynamism in the materials themselves. Against the bright light of Reason, there remained something shady and discreditable about these areas for classical Greek thinkers; and the latter's heirs today, devotees of technical reason, find them and the kind of intelligence they entail no more acceptable. There is, for example, a good deal of sophisticated rational choiceand decision-theory now available – but still a striking mismatch between it and the kind of perceptions, insights, and deliberative judgements of a skilled manager, advocate, psychotherapist, or teacher.

I have implicated Aristotle in the formative Greek occlusion of irreducibly practical modes of knowledge. But the great significance of Aristotle lies in the fact that he also set limits to the sway of *techne* and, through his novel conception of *phronesis*, provided a rich analysis of the kind of knowledge that guides, and is well fitted to, characteristically human – and therefore inescapably ethical – activity (*praxis*). For him, the prestige of *method* does not override resistances in different *materials*: to the contrary, a kind of epistemological pluralism follows from differentiations brought to the fore through sensitive phenomenological reflection. The materials of human affairs, he believes, are subject to such variety and fluctuation that they do not lend themselves to exceptionless, universal formulation: true rigor entails due appreciation of the kinds of rigor that are and are not available in disparate domains (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1, 3). Arising from his understanding of the nature of *praxis*, then, Aristotle's treatment of *phronesis* incorporates the interrelated elements identified above under the rubric of "judgement": the open texture of the deliberation it sets in train; its need for fresh acts of perception or insight to meet the particularity of each actionsituation; its irreducibility to general propositions and its hence inextinguishably experiential character; its being not only directive of present action but also itself shaped by the history of one's previous actions as these have become layered in one's character (Wiggins, 1980; Nussbaum, 1985; MacDowell, 1996; Dunne, 1999b).

"Overcoming epistemology": the hermeneutical turn

The conspicuous revival of interest in Aristotle's ethical-political thought has both contributed to and itself been motivated by a more general revolution in philosophy. "Overcoming epistemology" (Taylor, 1995a) is perhaps the best characterization of the common project of a wide range of disparate thinkers whose work has accomplished this revolution. In the twentieth century the major figures have been Heidegger and Wittgenstein: Heidegger through his attack on disengaged subjectivity and his emphasis on the temporal forestructure of human understanding, and Wittgenstein through the emphasis (in his later work) on practical forms of life and already functioning "language games" as the unsurpassable background of all knowledge. Subsequent thinkers, variously influenced by these two masters, have developed these themes.

For Hannah Arendt (1958), for example, action (as distinct from behavior) discloses and realizes the agent in her uniqueness at the same time that it inserts her into a web of relations with others; unpredictable in the consequences it unleashes and the reactions it evokes, it enmeshes her in a story that can never be foretold by herself but only retold afterwards by others. Or Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975) shows how large is the role of *interpretation* (as distinct from explanation) in understanding human affairs; how "objectivity" in our interpretations is never possible, if it is taken to imply an unprejudiced standpoint outside the flux and turbulence of actions and events; how the interpreter is rather always already situated within a particular historical horizon that has to be acknowledged rather than suppressed; and how these "limitations" on our knowledge – pertaining both to our anticipation of the future and our understanding of the past – lie at the level of our ineluctably human mode of being-in-the-world, beyond the purchase of methodological strategy or prescription. Or again Alasdair MacIntyre (1981, chapters 7 and 8) offers a powerful set of arguments to show that managerial expertise in modern bureaucratic institutions trades on the fiction rather than the reality of scientific generalizations about human functioning, giving us "not scientifically managed social control, but a skilful dramatic imitation of such control" (p. 107). Counterposed to this masquerade (which can exercise power while concealing the interest it serves beneath the glamour of "science") MacIntyre provides an influential account of "practices." A practice is a specific set of coherent activities – say, teaching, farming, architecture, chess – embedded in a tradition of ongoing collaboration, with goods and standards of excellence that are internal to itself and can thus be properly achieved and furthered only by those who have become practitioners, that is to say, who have developed that combination of practical virtues, of intellect, and of character, that are quite specific to the texture and integrity of the particular practice.

"Overcoming epistemology" has entailed not a repudiation of science but rather a correction of a positivistic misconception of it. Influential accounts of the scientific enterprise (e.g., Kuhn, 1962; MacIntyre, 1977) have shown that it is itself traditionbound and endures crises that are resolved through commitments that cannot be justified in advance but only vindicated retrospectively through the place they find in a narrative of progress that trumps alternative rival narratives. Conversely, accounts of human agency and practical knowledge (e.g., Taylor, 1995a) show not only that the latter does not accord

with the technicist picture of it but that it *does* in significant respects resemble what goes on in the conduct of the sciences. Scientific inquiry *is itself a practice* – whose affinities, moreover, with the kind of inquiries conducted in a law court, for example, or in establishing the authenticity of an artwork, or indeed in resolving a practical difficulty in one's life, must be recognized. And so the "physics envy" of technicist attempts to enhance the status of practical domains appears as truly foolish when not only its mimeticism but its distorted perception of the object of its attempted emulation is exposed.

While this discussion has entered the philosophy of science still its main heartland lies in ethics, political philosophy, and the philosophy of education, where "practice" and "practical knowledge" have become central to critiques of instrumentalism and "managerialism" in the institutional culture of modernity. The resources for such critique identified above might be broadly characterized as "hermeneutical." But quite apart from marked differences among the thinkers mentioned, there are other philosophical perspectives which, while finding common ground with hermeneutics in opposition to instrumental reason, still differ from it in their conceptions of practical reason itself. On the one hand critical theorists, most influentially Jürgen Habermas, emphasize the properly emancipatory role of genuine praxis and the consequently critical intent of the knowledge that must inform it (see chapter 2 of this volume). On the other hand, and in contrast with the strong notion of rational justification espoused by Habermas, neopragmatists such as Richard Rorty reject any rational foundation for norms – to the point of replacing "truth" by "what works for us" – while post-structuralists such as Jacques Derrida argue that the unavoidability within discourse of "deferral" and "dissemination" destabilizes the knowing subject and imposes a certain "undecidability" on all his or her judgements (see chapters 1 and 3).

Practice and the right kind of theory

All of this has of course a very direct bearing on central issues in education, especially with respect to conceptions of teaching and the kind of knowledge that properly informs it. Recent work in philosophy of education has taken up these issues, exploring their implications for pedagogy, assessment, curriculum, teacher training, and research (e.g., W. Carr, 1995). Responding to political and economic pressures on education, much of this philosophical analysis has taken the form of advocacy and critique; its purpose has been to defend the integrity of educational practice while contesting the technicist bias of a great deal of government policy on education in industrialized societies and of officially sponsored attempts to export this policy to developing countries. Since it is not possible here to do justice to the full range of this work, I shall conclude by briefly addressing, from the hermeneutical perspective to which my own philosophical sympathies incline, one important question raised by the emphasis on practical knowledge in teaching: does it, as is sometimes suggested, have antitheoretical implications?

To be sure, the philosophy that provides such a strong defense of practical knowledge is itself a kind of theory. But does it impoverish practical knowledge by denying the relevance to it, and therefore the power to enlighten it, of any theory? There are of course patterns of recurrence and of reliable expectation and projection without which social life in general, as well as within a more specialized enclave such as teaching, would collapse into

incoherence. While some of these patterns are sedimented in our habitual stocks of tacit knowledge they may also be elucidated by social scientists as behavioral regularities. There are at least two important respects, however, in which these regularities need to be distinguished from law-like theories in natural science. First, they establish what is the case only "for the most part"; because of the open-textured character of action-situations already alluded to, they cannot reliably predict in individual cases. Second, whereas physical laws, for example, give us deep-structure knowledge that is radically discontinuous from the deliverances of common sense, thereby opening doors to previously unimaginable technical advances, the generalizations of educational (and indeed all social) science are rarely counterintuitive and so typically they corroborate rather than substantially reorientate the judgements of experienced practitioners.

The price that generalized empirical findings in the social sciences have to pay for their very generalizability, then, is a certain thinness of content. They can be complemented however – and here there is an opening for a different kind of "theory" – by thickly descriptive studies. The latter will embrace a variety of narrative modes and be strongly hermeneutical in character. In other words, they will tell stories about particular projects or episodes in the history of an individual teacher or school, and they will do so with the kind of interpretative skill that can bring out the nuances of plot and character; the dense meshing of insights and oversights, of convergent or contrary purposes, motivations, and interests; of anticipated or unanticipated responses from students and other relevant agents, all conspiring to bring relative success or failure. If these studies, with their deep embeddedness in a particular milieu, renounce the generalizing ambitions of wider-gauge research, they are not on that account condemned to a narcissism of the particular. To the contrary, when they are well done, they possess what might be called epiphanic power: they disclose an exemplary significance (Løvlie, 1997) in the setting they depict so that it proves capable of illuminating other settings – without need for rerouting through abstract generalities and, indeed, with greatest potential effect for those most deeply in the throes of the very particularity of another setting. (This is close to the power of all literary art which, as Aristotle suggests, can instruct and move us precisely because, in its depiction of individual cases and characters, it reveals – without necessarily stating or explaining – universal themes.) If our aim is to enlist theory in aid of the kind of practical knowledge outlined above in the analysis of judgement, it is to "theory" such as this that we must look.

II

Practical reason

Recent accounts of practical reason differ not only in their diagnosis of wise or rational action and in how they characterize the related agency stance. They differ, too, in their understanding of the relationship between an end and what pertains to an end, and in whether they take practical reason as primarily concerned with means or with ends, or both. Against instrumentalist accounts, which take practical reason to be primarily concerned

with choosing efficacious means to an end, David Wiggins (1980) argues that in hard cases the problem is less a matter of deciding on the best means than to see what really constitutes an appropriate end. Hard cases demand what might be called constituents-of-end reasoning rather than mere means-to-end reasoning. Teaching, like other complex human practices, depends crucially on constituents-of-end reasoning (see D. Carr, 2000; Pendlebury, 1990a).

Two further dimensions of difference are discernible in recent work on practical reason: one concerning the distinction between individual and shared or communal questions; another concerning the distinction and relationship between public and private or personal spheres. The practical question is commonly taken as one that arises for and is answered, explicitly or implicitly, by individuals – "What should *I* do?" But rich accounts of teaching as an ethical practice suggest that the individual question cannot properly be posed or answered outside of the community of practice in which the practical question arises (see, for example, Sockett, 1987; Pendlebury, 1990a). Not every conception of a community of practice takes the ethical dimension seriously. Alasdair MacIntyre's conception of a community of practice is intrinsically ethical; Lave and Wenger's conception is not (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Nonetheless both conceptions shift the emphasis in practical reason from strictly individual to communal concerns and criteria. In work on deliberative democracy and its enabling educational conditions, the communal question – "What should *we* do?" – is typically the more important, although questions about wise or appropriate individual action may also arise in public deliberative contexts.

While practical reason in the domain of deliberative democracy is largely concerned with public choice, it is not clear where to locate a teacher's practical reasoning, which is concerned neither with purely personal (or private) nor with purely public (or impersonal) choices, actions, or ends. Here the notions of role responsibility, vocation (Blum, 1993), community of practice (Pendlebury, 1990a), and epistemology of practice (Sockett, 1987) have been proposed as more illuminating and accurate ways both of locating and appraising teachers' practical reasoning.

Interpretations of Aristotle

Aristotle remains a primary source not only for those engaged in reclaiming *phronesis*, as Joe Dunne has argued, but also for those mining a narrower and analytically exacting justificatory vein. What different writers make of Aristotle is revealing. Some begin with the practical syllogism and from there develop an analytical account of how an agent chooses appropriate or effective means to an end. Others begin further back with the sort of character and characteristics required for seeing when an occasion calls for practical reasoning and for seeing what would constitute an appropriate set of ends in each case.

Writers working in a justificatory vein tend to be primarily interested in Aristotle's account of the process of practical reasoning and its relationship to the practical syllogism. Also, in addressing matters of appraisal, they are more concerned with how to judge the *reasoning* than the *reasoner*. Consider, for example, Robert Audi's reading of Aristotle: "A rational person characteristically answers a practical question by deliberation and, given sufficient knowledge, by producing a practical syllogism which yields a conclusion in favour of an action that is judged, in the light of the end governing deliberation, to be suitable" (Audi, 1989, p. 37). Working from interpretations of practical reasoning in Aristotle, Hume, and Kant, Audi proposes that practical reasoning is an inferential process with cognitive and motivational premises and which instantiates a basic schema

represented by the practical syllogism. At its simplest the schema consists of a major (motivational) premise, a minor (cognitive) premise, and a conclusion (the practical judgement about what should be done). A practical judgement is directive, in content and in causal potential, and so provides a reason for action. Agents do not, of course, always act on their practical reasoning – inability, incontinence, intervention, or a change of mind may halt action or turn it in a different direction. Nor is every intentional action based on explicit practical reasoning. Nonetheless an agent may reconstruct a run of practical reasoning as a partial explanation of, and prima facie justification for, any intentional action performed in order to further an end.

Like others working in a justificatory vein, Audi is interested in the appraisal of practical reasoning. How can we judge the quality of a piece of practical reasoning? Audi proposes four appraisal standards: inferential, logical, epistemic, and material. The first two rest on a distinction between inferential processes (what we do when we reason) and inferential content ("arguments as what reasoning instantiates"). Whereas logical standards concern relations of entailment between propositions, inferential standards concern the justificatory and psychological relations between beliefs of the premises on the one hand and beliefs of the conclusion on the other. Inferential standards depend partly but not entirely on logical standards. Even when the corresponding argument is logically unobjectionable, practical reasoning may be inferentially deficient. This is so in cases of rationalization, where an agent produces an argument that *corresponds* to, but does not *underlie*, a judgement in favor of some or other conclusion. One could say, although Audi does not, that the inferential criterion reminds us that good practical reasoning is not a resource for those rationalizing practices in which sound argument serves self-deception, incontinence, and other failures of character. The second two assessment standards relate to the notion of justified true belief: epistemic standards call for justified belief in each constituent proposition in the corresponding argument; material standards concern the truth of these propositions (that is, the premises and conclusion). In order to meet the epistemic conditions for cogent practical reasoning, a person must justifiably believe both premises and must on the basis of them conclude with a practical judgement warranted by those premises.

While full compliance with these standards may be the mark of a good piece of practical reasoning, it is no guarantee of success. As Audi reminds us, a run of practical reasoning may be *defeasible* even when it meets all four standards. In other words, even when a person's reasoning expresses a good underlying argument and the person holds the relevant related beliefs, that person may not on balance be justified in holding the conclusion. This is because the conclusion to follow a particular line of action may be *overridden* by considerations that make a different line of action preferable. Alternatively, it may be *undermined* by considerations that have yet to emerge or that lie in the background and so escape notice. So even when a teacher's practice is richly informed by cogent practical reasoning, it is vulnerable to defeats of one kind or another.

Writers engaged in reclaiming *phronesis* argue that a proper account of practical reason cannot begin, or end, with an analysis of the practical syllogism, largely on the grounds that to do so ignores or underplays the inseparability of practical reason and character (Sherman, 1989). In matters of appraisal, these writers attend as much, if not more, to the

character of the *reasoner* than to his or her *reasoning* as represented in a practical argument. Practical reasoning about a particular set of circumstances begins with our perception of the ethically salient features of those circumstances. An appropriate and discerning reaction to circumstances is itself part of a wise or virtuous response. Making choices is not simply a linear process of promoting efficient and effective means to single ends, but a process of promoting some ends in the light of others so as to integrate different interests and ends into a unified life over time. And this is not simply an individual matter: the ends of a good life are shared, as are the resources for promoting it. Accordingly, collaboration and a concern for the well-being of others mediate practical reason's perceptual and deliberative aspects.

Careful attention to the practical syllogism need not imply either an instrumentalist account of practical reason or a neglect of perception, character, and shared ends. For example, David Wiggins (1980) offers an interpretation of Aristotle's practical syllogism that is simultaneously a formal description of the practically wise person or *phronimos*. A person of the highest practical wisdom is one who brings to bear upon a situation a full range of authentically pertinent perceptions, concerns, and considerations commensurate with the deliberative context. The best practical syllogism is one whose minor premise arises from such discernment and it records what strikes such a person as the most salient features of the context calling for action. This activates a corresponding premise that spells out the general import of the relevant concerns. Competing syllogisms and their claims are not open to comparison or assessment according to some formal set of criteria. They cannot be, since the syllogism arises in a particular context and the major premise must thus be evaluated for its adequacy to the situation, not for its unconditional acceptability or for embracing a greater number of considerations than its rivals. Adequacy to the situation depends crucially upon the agent's situational appreciation or what other writers have called perception or discernment.

Action situations

For Wiggins (1980), Sherman (1989), A. Rorty (1988), Nussbaum (1986, 1990) and others working to reclaim the insights of an Aristotelian conception of practical reason, perception is perhaps the primary character mark of the practically wise person. Salient features of situations calling for practical reason do not spring to the eye already tagged for easy recognition, as Joe Dunne has already argued above. Rather we have to pick them out, and this involves the ability to see fine detail and nuance and the ability to discern the differences between this situation and others that to the inexperienced eye might seem the same. If we are wrong in our identification of the special features of a case, the result will be inappropriate action, no matter how tight the internal coherence of the arguments we give to justify what we do. Without finely tuned habits of salient focusing – and sometimes even with them – internally tight arguments can be used to rationalize inappropriate actions and so serve long-term projects of self-deception or weakness of will.

Herein lies the risk of too great a dependence on the practical argument as a device for helping teachers use defensible theory and good research to advance their pedagogical competence (see Fenstermacher, 1987; Fenstermacher and Richardson, 1993). Even if defensible theory and reliable, pertinent research do play an important part in good

teaching, they are not sufficient for vigorous, well-directed practice. If teachers have a distorted view of the goods (or ends) of the practice or lose sight of them, or if they misjudge the salient features of situations – regardless of how defensible the theory or how reliable the research they rely upon – their deliberations cannot result in wise practice. Teacher education, then, is at least as much a matter of developing an understanding of the goods or ends of teaching as it is about "the theory of education." And it is at least as much about developing such aspects of character as insight and discernment as it is about exposing teachers to relevant and reliable research.

Once character and practical reason are seen as mutually dependent – as they are in various efforts to reclaim the insights of *phronesis* – it comes as no surprise that so much contemporary writing on practical reason falls roughly within the category of virtue theory. Even writers like Amy Gutmann (1995) who are not committed to virtue theory use the language of virtues in connection with practical reason and democratic deliberation. Conceptions of virtue vary widely in their detail but share a common core. Few are likely to contest Zagzebski's definition of a virtue as "an acquired excellence of the person in a deep and lasting sense" (Zagzebski, 1996, p. 135). Virtues and vices, she suggests, are among the more enduring of a person's qualities, and "come closer to defining who the person is than any other category of qualities" (ibid.). In short, virtue is a quality of character. For Sherman (1989), one cannot talk about character without talking about practical reason. Practical reason integrates, refines, and assesses the different ends of character. A foray into virtue ethics would take us well beyond the limits of this chapter. Suffice it to remark that the virtues relevant to the exercise of practical reason are both virtues of intellect and virtues of character, and that reflective, critical habituation plays an important part in their formation.

Among the primary virtues for sound practical judgement and appropriate action is what Amelie Rorty (1988) calls the habit of salient focusing. The habit goes together with, and is partly constituted by, a set of tropic cognitive dispositions. They are tropic because they organize a person's perceptions of and emotional responses to situations so as to elicit appropriate actions. People of practical reason, as Rorty (1988) describes them, have habits of salient focusing "that are corrigible without being distractible, imaginative habits of association that elicit a wide range of relevant material without being volatile, thresholds that are sensitive without being hypersensitive" (p. 316).

What is involved in becoming a practical reasoner (or a person of practical wisdom) and what is the role of education in developing the relevant qualities and capacities? Views like Audi's suggest that one of education's tasks is to teach critical thinking, conceived primarily as argument analysis, tempered with an understanding of defeasibility and those features of the world and our own psychology which make rational action a precarious accomplishment. For educational writers who accept or advance a contemporary version of *phronesis*, the habituation of character and development of discernment are primary tasks of education, if not its definitive end.

Are there special dimensions of character, special virtues if you like, that are needed for citizenship in contemporary democracies? What forms of practical deliberation are most crucial for democratic practice? What role can and should education play in promoting them?

The recent surge of interest in deliberative democracy carries with it a renewed interest in practical reason in the public domain and in the role of education in nurturing deliberative citizens. Amy Gutmann (1995) argues that public schools are a democratic government's single most legitimate and powerful means for teaching democracy to young citizens and that they have a special obligation to do so. A central part of this obligation is to teach respect for reasonable public disagreement. Citizens also need an understanding of and capacity for the kinds of reasoning that underpin reasonable public disagreement (Gutmann, 1987, 1995). This is primarily moral reasoning of the practical kind – moral because it concerns questions of good and bad, right and wrong; practical because it ensues in action or in policies for action. It cannot be developed, Gutmann (1987) suggests, without attention to the character of deliberative democratic citizens.

What are the distinctive virtues of a deliberative character? An initial list might include reciprocity, mutual respect, openness, a willingness to give reasons and to listen to the reasons given by others in a deliberative interchange. The common thread here is the idea of give-and-take, an idea that runs through all current models of deliberative democracy but with a distinctive reach, range, and tenor in each different model. In some – for example, in Rawls's (1993) model of public reason – deliberative give-and-take operates within the parsimonious boundaries of conversational constraint and overlapping consensus. In others – for example, communicative democracy (Young, 1996, 1997) – deliberative give-and-take ranges wide in manner and matter to include a lively acceptance of dissent and difference.

The idea that difference and dissent in public deliberation are to be welcomed for their educative possibilities also lies at the heart of Martha Nussbaum's (1997) work on curriculum reform in liberal education. Her contemporary reading of the Stoics extends the range of public deliberation beyond the confines of a nation-state to global concerns. Accomplishing membership in the world community requires our willingness to doubt the goodness of our own ways and to participate in the giveand-take of critical argument about ethical and political choices. Increasingly refined exchanges of experience and argument enable participants gradually to acquire "the ability to distinguish, within their own traditions, what is parochial from what may be commended as a norm for others, what is arbitrary and unjustified from that which may be justified by reasoned argument" (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 60).

Like Young, Nussbaum (1997) regards the willingness to work with difference as a deliberative virtue with rich educational possibilities. The good citizen is a citizen of the world because thinking about humanity in its many manifestations is a valuable source of self-knowledge. Seeing our own ways in relation to those of other reasonable people enables us to see ourselves and our customs more clearly. Over and above its role in enabling self-knowledge, the awareness of the world citizen enables imaginative public deliberation, unconstrained by "cramped partisanship." Stories, and other art forms, cultivate the powers of imagination and those capacities of judgement and sensitivity that

are essential to citizens' exercise of practical reason. Nussbaum pursues a similar line of argument through her earlier work on Aristotle. People of practical wisdom, in public and in private life, "will cultivate emotion and imagination in themselves and in others, and will be very careful not to rely too heavily on a technical or purely intellectual theory that might stifle or impede these responses" (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 82). For both Young and Nussbaum, narrative has a crucial role in public deliberation. Young's work suggests that one of the tasks of education is to help young people learn how to supplement formal arguments with narratives presented as grounds for claims of entitlement or need (see Enslin et al., 2001).

Different models of deliberative democracy, together with Nussbaum's argument for a global perspective, suggest an expanding educational agenda. Working strictly within the limits of the model of public reason (for example, Rawls, 1993), the educational task is to develop a respect for and capacity to apply rules of evidence and principles of reasoning, with due regard for accepted general beliefs. A related task is to nurture forbearance, mutual respect, and the exercise of conversational constraint. While Seyla Benhabib's (1996b) discursive model builds on several of these educational imperatives, it expands the educational agenda to permit and encourage wide-ranging deliberative topics. Deliberation itself becomes the means of enabling students both to understand themselves better and, through guided critical reflection, to order their views coherently, and perhaps change them, in the light of the range of perspectives brought to bear in deliberative interchanges. Young's communicative model and Nussbaum's project of cultivating citizens' humanity expand the educational agenda even further to include the development of narrative imagination, emotional attunement, a sensitivity to the dialogical demands of different situations and situational moments, and the capacity to act in the light of these sensitivities. Here an education for practical reason in the public domain comes close to being an education of character.

Practical reasoning in pedagogic practice

Can an account of practical reasoning enhance our understanding of teaching as a practice and, if so, what kind of account and how? How can the quality of teachers' practical reasoning be appraised and improved and why, if at all, is it important to do this? What constitutes wise practice in teaching and what is the role and nature of ethical judgement in teaching?

During the 1980s and early 1990s, Gary Fenstermacher's work on practical rationality was largely responsible for putting the notions of practical reason and practical arguments back on the agenda for educational research and debate (Fenstermacher, 1986, 1987; Fenstermacher and Richardson, 1993). Much of the debate turns on the question of whether practical arguments can be used as a device for understanding and improving teaching. If practical arguments are taken to be restricted to means-to-end reasoning and so to represent what Schön (1983) calls technical rationality, then the practical argument is too barren and inappropriate a device for illuminating either teachers' thinking or the "reasonableness" of their classroom practice. Teaching is a moral practice that depends crucially on constituents-of-end reasoning, situational appreciation, and the capacity to respond to a

range of cognitive uncertainties that arise from three related features of the world of practice, namely mutability, indeterminacy, and particularity (see Nussbaum, 1986).

Practice is mutable because it changes over time, presenting us with new configurations which cannot be ignored if our deliberations are to result in wise action. For example, on a fairly large time scale, the practice of teaching and its special challenges and dilemmas change with the institutions that contain and support it. Practice is indeterminate because practical questions necessarily arise within particular contexts. Appropriate actions are thus context-relative. To give just one example: the choices that are available and fitting to a teacher in a well-equipped urban school with a long-standing academic tradition are seldom available or fitting to teachers in the ill-equipped, overcrowded rural schools in many parts of Africa. Under such circumstances, situationally attuned practice may require the adjustment not only of means but also of ends. For these reasons, and those mentioned by Joe Dunne, practical deliberation in teaching is not accessible to a set of general rules governing a procedure for selecting the most effective means to a neat and easily specifiable end. A wise and competent teacher is surely one who has a rich understanding of the internal goods and definitive ends of the practice and a realistic, clear-sighted perception of what is possible and fitting under different circumstances.

If practical argument elicitation can help teachers to see the richness and complexity of practical deliberation in their practice then perhaps, and only then, can it serve as a device for appraising and improving teaching. But improving teachers' practical reasoning cannot simply be a matter of improving their practical arguments. Good practical reasoning, as we have said several times and in several ways in this chapter, depends on the capacity for discernment. An important question for teacher education, then, is how to develop the capacity for discernment. The cultivation of imagination and finely tuned emotions have a role here (Nussbaum, 1990), but so too does the development of moral reasoning concerned with the pursuit of the good (Carr, 2000). Much recent work in teacher education fails to grasp the nature of discernment and its necessity in wise practice. As a result, the development of teachers' practical reasoning becomes little more than a training in the procedures and "skills" of reasoning and reflection. Even writers who recognize the relationship between discernment, imagination, and wise practice still tend to leave these central concerns at the periphery of their accounts of teacher education and wise practice.

Recommendations for Further Reading

Dunne, J. (1997) *Back to the Rough Ground: Practical Judgment and the Lure of Technique*, University of Notre Dame Press.

Fenstermacher, G. and Richardson, V. (1993) The elicitation and reconstruction of practical arguments in teaching, *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 25, pp. 101–14.

Pendlebury, S. (1990a) Practical reasoning and situational appreciation in teaching, *Educational Theory* 40, pp. 171–9.

Wiggins, D. (1980) Deliberation and practical reason, in A. O. Rorty (ed.) *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, University of California Press.