## Chapter Six

# The Discernment of Perception: an Aristotelian Conception of Private and Public Rationality

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What one acquires here is not a technique; one learns correct judgements. There are also rules, but they do not form a system, and only experienced people can apply them right. Unlike calculating-rules...What is most difficult here is to put this indefiniteness, correctly and unfalsified, into words.

L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* II.xi.

Of these States the poet is the equable man,...
He bestows on every object or quality its fit proportion,
neither more nor less...
He judges not as the judge judges, but as the sun falling
round a
helpless thing,...
He sees eternity in men and women, he does not see
men and women as
dreams or dots.

Walt Whitman, from *By Blue Ontario's Shore*

Is practical reasoning scientific?[1] If it is not, would it be a good thing if it were?[2] Much contemporary writing in ethics, and especially in social choice theory, gives either the first or the second question a vigorously affirmative answer. Aristotle's ethical and political writings present powerful negative arguments. "It is obvious," he writes, "that practical wisdom is not scientific understanding *(episteme)" (EN,* 1142a24). And this is not just an admission of a defect in contemporary theory. For he makes it clear elsewhere that it is in the very nature of truly rational practical choice that it cannot and should not be turned into a science. Instead, he tells us, the "discernment" of the correct choice rests with something that he calls "perception;"[3] this is evidently some sort of complex responsiveness to the concrete situation.

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[1] This is an interim report. It develops further some of the ideas sketched in *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge 1985), esp. ch. 10, which in turn continue and refine thought from essay 4 of *Aristotle's De Motu Animalium* (Princeton 1978); and it is itself an excerpt from a draft of a much longer project that will not be complete for some time. The longer draft includes an account of the political role of the Aristotelian norm of perception (in contemporary life, and also with reference to the Greek historical context); and an exemplification of Aristotelian perception via a long example from Henry James; the example prompts reflection about the relation between the Aristotelian ethical norm and the philosophical importance of works of literature. (For a related treatment of the issues about literature, see my "Flawed Crystals: James' *The Golden Bowl* and Literature as Moral Philosophy," *New Literary History* 15 (1983) 25-50, and also "Finely Aware and Richly Responsible: Moral Attention and the Moral Task of Literature," *Journal of Philosophy* 32 (1985). Because it has sometimes been suggested (falsely, in my view) that an ethical interest in "perception" is linked with relativism, I intend to unite this study with another piece of work in progress, on Aristotle's ideas of human function and capability as non-relative bases for political distribution, to be delivered at the Oberlin Philosophy Colloquium, April 1986. This paper on perception was delivered as a Matchette Lecture at Trinity College, San Antonio, Texas, as well as at Boston University. Because this is an interim draft and for reasons of space, I have included only a very brief discussion of many scholarly issues that either will receive more extensive discussion or (in most cases) have already received it in *Fragility* ch. 10.

[2] What I mean by "scientific," and what Aristotle means by it, will emerge from the detail of the contrast between his conception and the ones it opposes. But we can briefly say that he is thinking both of his own conception of *episteme,* a hierarchical deductive explanatory system concerned throughout with universals, and of related conceptions developed by Plato. *Fragility* ch. 4 argues that the words *techne* and *episteme* (both) are often used in a much broader sense, according to which Aristotle's ethics could claim to be a *techne;* this sense is continued in the Hellenistic division of the *technai,* which prominently includes a group of *stochastikai technai* (on *stochazesthai,* see below). This is not a problem for Aristotle's argument here, since he explains his meaning clearly in the context.

Aristotle's position is subtle and compelling. It seems to me to go further than any other account of practical rationality in capturing the sheer complexity and agonizing difficulty of choosing well. But whether we are persuaded by it or not, the need to study it is urgent. Even more in our day than in his, the power of "scientific" pictures of rationality affects every corner of our lives, through the influence of the social sciences and the more science-based parts of moral theory on the formation of public policy. We should not acquiesce in this situation without assessing the merits of such views against those of the most profound alternatives. If we do not finally accept Aristotle's conception, we will at least have found out more about ourselves.

I shall suggest that Aristotle's attack on a scientific, or pseudo-scientific, conception of rationality has three different dimensions, these being closely interwoven. These are: an attack on the commensurability of the values; an argument for the priority of particular judgements to universals; and a defense of the emotions and the imagination as essential to rational choice. Once we have understood these features separately and seen in a general way how they might go together, we shall confront the charge that this norm is empty of content.

## I. Plural Values and Non-Commensurability.

Aristotle knew of the view that a hallmark of rational choice is the measurement of all alternatives by a single quantitative standard of value. Such a "science of measurement,"[4] in his day as in ours, was motivated by the desire to simplify and render tractable the bewildering problem of choice among heterogeneous alternatives. Plato, for example, argues that only through such a science can human beings be rescued from an unendurable confusion in the face of the concrete situation of choice, with its qualitative indefiniteness and its variegated plurality of apparent values. Plato even believed, and argued with power, that many of the most troublesome sorts of human irrationality in action were caused by passions that would be eliminated or rendered innocuous by a thoroughgoing belief in the qualitative homogeneity of all the values. The weak (akratic) agent will be less tempted to deviate from the path of greater known good if he or she understands that the less good, but *prima facie* alluring, item simply contains a smaller quantity of the very same value that can be found by going towards the better item. The proposed "science" relies on the idea that some such single standard of value can be found and that all rational choice can be recast as a matter of maximizing our quantities of that value.

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[3] *EN* 1109b18-23, 1126b2-4 -- on which see below.

We can break the "science of measurement" down into four distinct constituent claims. First, we have the claim that in each situation of choice there is some one value, varying only in quantity, that is common to all the alternatives, and that the rational chooser weighs the alternatives using this single standard. Let us call this claim *Metricity.* Next, there is the claim of *Singleness;* that is, that in all situations of choice there is one and the same metric. Third is a claim about the end of rational choice: that choices and chosen actions have value not in themselves, but only as instrumental means to the good consequences that they produce. We call this *Consequentialism.* If we combine Consequentialism with Metricity, we have the idea of maximization: that the point of rational choice is to produce the greatest amount of the single value at work in each case. Combining both of these with Singleness, we have the idea that there is some one value that it is the point of rational choice, in every case, to maximize.[5] Finally, there are in Aristotle's opponents, as in modern utilitarian writers, various accounts of the content of the end that is to serve as the metric and the item to be maximized. Pleasure, for Aristotle as for us, is the most familiar candidate.[6] Aristotle rejects all four of these components of the "science of measurement," defending a picture of choice as a quality-based selection among goods that are plural and heterogeneous, each being chosen for its own distinctive value.

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[4] This phrase is taken from Plato, *Protagoras* 356. For a full discussion of the claims made in this paragraph, see *Fragility* ch. 4, and also "Plato on Commensurability and Desire," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* Supplementary Volume 58 (1984) 55-80. I do not believe that Plato is the only proponent of this "science" that Aristotle has in view; on some of the other relevant background, see my "Consequences and Character in Sophocles' *Philoctetes,*" *Philosophy and Literature* 1 (1976-7) 25-53.

Arguments against pleasure as a single end and standard of choice occupy considerable space in the ethical works. The other available candidate, the useful or advantageous, is criticized only implicitly, in many passages that treat it as a non-homogeneous, non-single item. Presumably this is because it had no prominent defenders. The popularity of hedonism as a theory of choice called, on the other hand, for detailed criticism. There are numerous well-known difficulties surrounding the interpretation of Aristotle's two accounts of pleasure.[7] What we can confidently say is that both accounts deny that pleasure is a single thing yielded in a qualitatively homogeneous way by many different types of activity. For *EN* VII, my pleasures just are identical with the activities that I do in a certain way: viz., the unimpeded activations of my natural state. Pleasures, then, are just as distinct and incommensurable as are the different kinds of natural activity: seeing, reasoning, acting justly, etc. (1153a14-

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[5] It is, of course, not necessary to accept all of these together. We could have Metricity without any of the others; Metricity and Singleness without Consequentialism (if a metric could be found, for example, in the actions themselves); Consequentialism without Metricity and Singleness.

[6] On the role of hedonism in Plato and its relationship to the historical context, see *Fragility* ch. 4, where there are full references to the secondary literature.

[7] These difficulties include the question whether the two accounts are answers to a single or to two different questions; whether they are compatible or incompatible; whether *EN* VII = *EE* VI belongs originally with the Nicomachean or the Eudemian work, and what difference this makes. The most pertinent items in the vast literature on these questions are discussed in *Fragility* ch. 10.

15, b9-12). For *EN* X, pleasure supervenes upon the activity to which it attaches, like the bloom on the cheek of a healthy young person, completing or perfecting it. Here pleasure is not identical with the activity; but it cannot be identified without reference to the activity (either empirically or conceptually)[8] and sought out on its own, any more than blooming cheeks can be cultivated in isolation from the health and bodily fitness with which they belong.[9] Still less could there be a single item, Pleasure, that is separable from *all* the activities and yielded up by all of them in differing quantities. To these criticisms, Aristotle adds the observation that pleasures "differ in kind" as the associated activities differ (1173b28 ff.). Some are choiceworthy and some are not, some are better and some are worse. Some, furthermore, are pleasures only for corrupt people, while some are pleasures for good people (1173b20 ff.). Thus the *way* in which pleasure is not single provides us with additional reasons not to set it up as the end of practical choice.

Pleasure does not fall short by lack of singleness alone. It fails, as well, in inclusiveness: that is, it does not cover or contain everything that we pursue as choiceworthy. For, Aristotle writes, "there are many things that we would eagerly pursue even if they brought no pleasure, such as seeing, remembering, knowing, having the excellences. And even if pleasures follow upon these of necessity, it makes no difference; for we *would* choose them even if no pleasure came from them" *(EN* 1174a4-8). Even if in fact pleasure is firmly linked to excellent action as a necessary consequence, it is not the end *for which* we act. We choose the action for its own sake alone. Deliberative imagination can inform us that we would do so even if the link with pleasure were broken. Elsewhere Aristotle shows us cases where the link is in fact broken: for example, a good person will sometimes choose to sacrifice life itself, and therefore all possibility of present and future pleasure, for the sake of helping a friend or acting courageously (1117b10 ff.). Aristotle shows us, then, that we do in fact pursue and value ends that are not reducible to pleasure; we shall later see that he makes an implicit arguement for the value and goodness of these plural commitments.

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[8] For one account of the relationship between the conceptual and the empirical in Aristotle, see *Fragility* ch. 8 (an earlier version of which appeared as "Saving Aristotle's Appearances," in *Language and Logos,* ed. M. Schofield and M. Nussbaum (Cambridge 1982) 267-93.

[9] The interpretation of this passage is controversial; one recent reinterpretation is discussed in *Fragility* ch. 10 n.12.

Argument against pleasure is strong argument against Singleness, since no other plausible candidate for a homogeneous single standard was being put forward, But it is plain that Aristotle's opposition to Singleness is quite general. In his attack on the Platonic notion of the single Good,[10] he insists that "the definitions of honor and practical wisdom and pleasure are separate and different *qua* goods" *(EN* 1096b23-5); from this he draws the conclusion that there can be no single common notion of good across these things. What he seems to be saying is that what we pursue or choose when we deem each of these items choiceworthy is something distinct and peculiar to the item in question; there is no single thing that belongs to all of them in such a way as to offer a plausible unitary account of their practical value. In the *Politics* he rejects even more explicitly the view that all goods are commensurable. In this important passage he has been describing a theory about the basis of political claims according to which any and all differences between persons are relevant to political distribution. If A is the same as B in all other respects but excels B in height, A is *eo ipso* entitled to a greater share of political goods than B; if A excels B in height and B excels A at playing the flute, we will have to decide which excels the other by more. And so on. Aristotle's first objection to this scheme is specific: it recognizes as relevant to political claims many features that are totally irrelevant to good political activity. But his second objection is quite general. The scheme is defective because is involves treating all goods as commensurable with one another: height and musicianship are measured against wealth and freedom. "But since this is impossible, it is obvious that in politics it is reasonable for men not to base their claim upon any and every inequality" (1283a9-11).[11]

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[10] See further discussion of this passage in *Fragility* ch.10, with references. I argue there that other interesting and deep arguments in this chapter of the *EN* are not really pertinent to the criticism of Plato on the notion of a unitary goodness of value in a life; this is the argument that seems to do the important work here.

Clearly this, like the *EN* argument, is an argument against Singleness: there is no one standard in terms of which all goods are commensurable *qua* goods. It looks like an argument against Metricity as well: for it suggests that there is something absurd in supposing that even in each single pairwise comparison of alternatives we will find a single relevant homogeneous measure. And in fact the *EN* remarks about definition, when linked to other observations about the intrinsic value of activity according to excellence, do yield arguments against Metricity, and Consequentialism as well, in favor of a picture in which the end or good consists of a number of distinct component activities (associated with the several excellences), each of these being an ultimate end and pursued for its own sake. The good life for a human being consists, Aristotle argues, in activity according to the excellences; repeatedly he insists that it is these activities, not either their consequences or the states of soul that produce them, which are the ultimate bearers of value, the ends for which we pursue everything else that we pursue. It is actually part of the definition of activity according to excellence that it should be chosen for its own sake and not for the sake of something else *(EN* 1105a28-33), so to choose good activity only for the sake of some further consequences will not only be to misunderstand the relative value of actions and consequences, it will actually be to fail to act well. If I eat healthy food simply in order to have my parents' approval, or act justly simply in order to be rewarded *(or,* we must add, simply in order to produce the best consequences for the city), my action fails to be virtuous at all. To act temperately or justly requires, evidently, an understanding of the intrinsic value of temperance and justice; I cannot treat them as tools and still act in accordance with them. But now if, in addition, each of the excellences is, as Aristotle has argued, a distinct item, different in its nature from each of the others, then the choice to act according to any one of them will require an appreciation of that distinct nature as an end in itself; choice among alternatives will involve weighing these distinct natures as distinct items, and choosing the one that gets chosen for the sake of what it itself is. Suppose that, offered a choice between playing music and helping a friend, I decide by selecting some single metric over these two cases and asking about quantities of that. Then either the metric will be identical with the nature of the distinctive value of one or the other of the alternatives, or it will be something distinct from them both -- let us say, for example, pleasure or efficiency. But in all three of these cases we will, according to Aristotle, be neglecting the nature of some genuine end or value: in the first two cases we will be neglecting one, in the third case both. By reducing music and friendship to matters of efficiency, for example, I will be failing to attend properly to what they themselves *are.* By assessing friendship in terms of artistic creativity, or artistic creativity in terms of other-regarding virtue alone, I still neglect some genuine value.

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[11] Unfortunately, Aristotle's examples do not make it clear how much and what sort of balancing he would consider politically appropriate. In practical terms there must inevitably be some balancing of different claims: but the important point seems to be that if they are heterogeneous and are both judged ethically relevant, then the legislator ought to respond to them both, as distinct items; or, if contingently he cannot, then he ought to acknowledge that wrong has been done -- see below.

At this point, the proponent of Metricity will press questions. First, how can non-metric choice really be rational? If in choosing between A and B I do not choose so as to maximize one single item, and do not even compare the two in terms of a single item, then how on earth *can* I rationally compare the diverse alternatives? Isn't choice without a common measure simply arbitrary, or guesswork? Second, suppose that Aristotle has correctly described the way in which most people do in fact make choices, seeing their values as plural and incommensurable. Why should we think this a particularly good way to choose? Why shouldn't this messy state of things motivate us to press for the development of Metricity, and even of Singleness, where these currently do not exist?[12] The questions are connected. For if we feel that choice without at least this limited commensurability is not rational, this will be a strong reason to favor the development of a superior technique.

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[12] On this ambition as a central theme in early Greek ethics, see *Fragility* ch. 3 (on Sophocles' *Antigone),* and ch. 4 (on Plato's *Protagoras).*

The Aristotelian position does not simply describe the *status quo.* It also makes a strong implicit case for the preservation of our current ways of deciding, as both genuinely rational and superior in richness of value. We begin to see this if we return to the idea of difference of definition. To value each of the separate types of excellent activity as a constituent of the good life is tantamount, in Aristotle's conception, to saying that a life that lacked this item would be deficient or seriously incomplete, in a way that could not be atoned for by the presence of other items, in however great a supply. To value friendship (for example) in this way is to say (as Aristotle explicitly does) that a life that lacked this one item, even though it had as much as you like of every other item, would fall short of full value or goodness in an important way.[13] Friendship does not supply a commodity that we can get elsewhere; it is that very thing, in its own peculiar nature, that is the bearer of value. This is what it means to judge that something is an end, not simply a means to an end: there are no trade-offs without loss.

To value each separate constituent of the good life for what it is in itself entails, then, recognizing its distinctness and separateness from each of the other constituents, each being an irreplaceable part of a composite whole. A rational Aristotelian adult will have a reasonably good understanding of what courage, justice, friendship, generosity, and many other values are. He or she will understand how, in our beliefs and practices, they differ from and are non-interchangeable with one another. Suppose now that a proponent of ethical progress suggests to him that things can be made neater by doing away with some or all of this heterogeneity. He or she will reply that to do away with this is to do away with the nature of these values as they are, and hence with their special contribution to the richness and fullness of the good life. The proposal threatens to impoverish our practical world: for we have said that each of these items makes its own distinctive contribution, one that we will not get by trading it in for something else. Can it be rational to deliberate in a way that effaces this distinctness? To purchase neatness at such a price appears irrational rather than rational. Would we want to be, or to have, friends who were able to deliberate efficiently about friendship because they could get themselves to conceive of it as a function of some other value? The really rational way to choose, says Aristotle with great plausiblity, is to reflect on and acknowledge the special contribution of each item, and to make the understanding of that heterogeneity a central part of the subject matter of deliberation. Evasiveness is not progress.

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[13] Book I's criterion of "sufficiency" suggests as a test for component membership in *eudaimonia* the question whether a life that was complete with respect to every other item, but lacked this one thing, was truly *complete* without it; the Book IX arguments for the component role of friendship work the same way; on these, see *Fragility*, ch. 12.

As for the first question: The Aristotelian should begin by objecting to the way it is posed; for the opponent suggests that deliberation must be either quantitative or a mere shot in the dark.[14] Why should we believe this? Experience shows us a further alternative: that it is qualitative and not quantitative, and rational just because it is qualitative, and based upon a grasp of the special nature of each of the items in question. We choose this way all the time; and there is no reason for us to let the rhetoric of weighing and measuring bully us into being on the defensive here, or supposing that we must, if we are rational, be proceeding according to some hidden metric.[15]

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[14] This is an extraordinarily deep and pervasive thought. For just one example, see Amartya Sen, "Plural Utility," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 83 (1982-3). Sen argues plausibly that utility cannot adequately be understood as a single metric, since not all qualitative distinctions can be reduced to quantitative distinctions. But he then comes to the conclusion that utility must be a plurality of vectors, along each of which there is full quantitative commensurability and between which there is total non-comparability. (Sen's most recent work, however, is more thoroughly Aristotelian in spirit. See especially the account of valuing in *Commodities and Capabilities*, a Hennipman Lecture (Amsterdam 1985), in which the valuation function is an incomplete partial ordering based on qualitative comparison and not on reduction to any single metric. See also Dewey Lectures, *Journal of Philosophy* 32 (1985).

I mean to speak later on of social choice. So I need to do more now to begin bringing out the contrast between the Aristotelian picture and some pictures of deliberation that are used in contemporary social choice theory.[16] We can readily see how Aristotelianism is at odds with the foundations of classical utilitarianism, and indeed any contemporary utilitarianism that relies on Singleness or even Metricity. But so far it looks perfectly compatible with a decision procedure that makes use of a purely ordinal ranking of preferences, where the alternatives ranked would prominently include situations in which the agent either does or does not perform some excellent action, or some combination of such actions.[17] Why should we not envisage the rational agent as proceeding according to some such ordering, and social rationality as the aggregation of such individual orderings?

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[15] I do not discuss here the apparent difficulties caused by the presence in translations of the phrase, "We deliberate not about the end, but about the means to the end." The mistranslation is discussed in *Fragility* ch. 10, with references. Deliberation about "what pertains to the end" (the correct translation) can and does include the further specification of what is to count as the end. Starting, for example, from the valued end of love and friendship, I can go on to ask for a further specification of what, more precisely, love and friendship *are,* together with an enumeration of their types, without implying that I regard these different relationships as commensurable on a single quantitative scale, either with one another or with other major values. And if I should ask of justice or of love whether both are constituent parts of *eudaimonia,* I surely do not imply that we are to hold them up to a single measuring standard, regarding them as productive of some further value. The question whether something is or is not to count as part of *eudaimonia* is just the question whether something is a valuable component in the best human life. (Something can be an end in itself and at the same time a valued constituent in this more inclusive end.) Since Aristotle holds that the best life must be inclusive of everything that is truly valuable for its own sake, this is equivalent to the question whether that item has intrinsic value. But Aristotle has argued that to choose it for *its own* sake not only does not require, but is actually incompatible with, viewing it as qualitatively commensurable with other valuable items. To view it in that way would not be to have the proper regard for the distinctness of *its* nature.

[16] In this paper, since I omit the section of the draft dealing with social choice, I barely begin this task. What I intend to do is to defend Aristotelian "perception" as a model for social as well as for personal choice, with extensive discussion of the contemporary literature.

We shall soon see how Aristotle objects to the idea of any antecedently fixed ordering or ranking of ends; I therefore defer discussion of the implications of these arguments for social choice. I am also unable to discuss at length two other ways in which Aristotle's entire ethical approach is at odds with models dominant in social choice theory. I mention them briefly. First, as we have begun to see, Aristotle does not make the sharp distinction between means and ends that is taken for granted in this literature; and above all he does not hold that ultimate ends cannot be objects of rational deliberation. We can ask concerning each ultimate end not only what the instrumental means to its realization are, but also what *counts as* realizing this end. Furthermore, against the background of our (evolving) pattern of ends, we can always ask of some putative constituent, for example friendship, whether or not it really belongs there as a constituent of the end: that is, whether life would be less rich and complete without it. All this is a part of rational deliberation; and by extending the sphere of practical rationality in this way, Aristotelianism certainly diverges from much that social choice theory and economic accounts of rationality either assume or explicitly state. I cannot enter further here into this highly important and complex subject.[18]

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[17] So far, too, it appears compatible with a single-valued ranking in terms of the strength of agents' desires, the view defended by J. Griffin in "Are There Incommensurable Values?" *Philosophy and Public Affairs, 7 (1977) 34-59,* and discussed by Dan Brock in his commentary. On Aristotle's likely attitude to this view, see below.

[18] See n. 15 for the beginning of a discussion; and *De Motu* Essay 4 and *Fragility* ch. 10 for related remarks. On this subject (both in Aristotle and generally) I have profited enormously from the work of David Wiggins, especially "Deliberation and Practical Reason," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 79 (1975-6) 29-51, repr. in A. Rorty, ed., *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (Berkeley 1980), 221-40; and "Claims of Need," in *Morality and Objectivity* (London 1985) 149-202. An excellent Ph. D. thesis on the topic of deliberation about ends is currently being written by Henry Richardson; it should shed further light on this topic (Harvard University, expected 1986).

Another evident difference between Aristotle and the theorist who proceeds by ordering preferences concerns the relationship between desire and value. Aristotle does not think that the bare fact that someone prefers something gives us any reason at all for ranking it as preferable. It all depends who the someone is and through what procedures the ranking has been effected. The rankings of the person of practical wisdom will be criterial of our norms, both personal and social; what the bad or mad or childish person prefers counts little or nothing. Value is anthropocentric, not fixed altogether independently of the desires and needs of human beings;[19] but to say this is very far from saying that every preference of every human being weighs (or even: weighs equally) for evaluative purposes. Aristotle would be even more strongly opposed, clearly, to the proposal Dan Brock brings forward, in which alternatives are ranked in terms of a metric of desire strength. If the fact that someone desires something gives us, all by itself, no good reason to value it, all the more does the strength or quantity of someone's actual desire give us no good reason for valuing it proportionally to that strength. Even if Aristotle should grant that desire strength *can* be measured and numbered in the unitary way required by this theory -- as he almost certainly would not -- he would surely view it as an even more perverse and less plausible version of commensurability than the one that locates commensurability in the object or alternative chosen. The Platonic thesis errs by making values commensurable; but at least it locates value in the right place, in objects and activities, not in our feelings about these. The Griffin proposal, by contrast, says something no more plausible, and locates value in the wrong place.[20]

But instead of pursuing this important subject further, I want to turn now to one of its offshoots, one that will focus the difference between Aristotelianism and some forms of social choice theory in a particularly interesting way. In the theory of ordered preferences, when there is a choice (personal or collective) to be made between A and B, only one question is typically asked and considered salient, namely, which alternative is preferred. (Sometimes, as in the Griffin proposal, questions of the weight or intensity of preference are raised, but this is notoriously difficult and controversial.) The agent works with the picture of a single line or scale, and the aim is simply to get as high up on this line as possible. Although the line does not imply, in this case, the presence of a unitary measure of value in terms of which all alternatives are seen as commensurable, there is still a single line, the ranking of actual preferences from among the available alternatives. All alternatives are arranged along this line,and the agent is to look to nothing else in choosing. Aristotelianism asks about overall preferability. But its rather different picture of the choice situation also encourages us to ask and to dwell upon a further question about A and B. We have said that the Aristotelian agent scrutinizes each valuable alternative, seeking out its distinct nature. She is determined to acknowledge the precise sort of value or goodness present in each of the competing alternatives, seeing each value as, so to speak, a separate jewel in the crown, valuable in its own right, which does not cease to be separately valuable just because the contingencies of the situation sever it from other goods and it loses out in an overall rational choice. This emphasis on the recognition of plural incommensurable goods leads directly and naturally to the perception of a possibility of irreconcilable contingent conflicts among them. For once we see that A and B have distinct intrinsically valuable goods to offer, we will also be prepared to see that a situation in which we are forced by contingencies beyond our control to choose between A and B is a situation in which we will be forced to forgo some genuine value. Where both A and B are types of virtuous action, the choice situation is one in which we will have to act in some respect deficiently; perhaps even to act unjustly or wrongly. In such situations, to decide that A is preferable to B is sometimes the least of our worries. Agamemnon saw that between the sacrifice of his daughter Iphigenia and an impiety that would bring in its wake the death of all concerned, there was hardly a question of *how* to choose, for a rational agent. But here the further problems have only begun. What can be done, thought, felt, about the deficiency or guilt involved in missing out on B? What actions, emotions, responses, are appropriate to the agent who is trapped in such a situation? What expressions of remorse, what reparative efforts, does morality require here? The individual cannot neglect these concerns without grave moral deficiency. Agamemnon neglected them, in the belief that the problem of preference was the only one to be solved by rationality. The chorus of elders regard this not as wisdom, but as madness.

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[19] On this anthropocentricity, see *Fragility* ch. 10, ch. 11.

[20] Nor would the Griffin view solve the difficulties that Plato wishes to solve by the introduction of metricity and singleness: on these, see "Plato on Commensurability." Sen's *Commodities and Capabilities* (above n.14) contains a very illuminating discussion of this issue.

I have written much more about these situations elsewhere.[21] They are the core of Greek tragedy; they are also a regular part of most human lives. Aristotelianism acknowledges them and treats them as salient; indeed, as inextricable from the richness and diversity of the positive commitments of a good person living in a world of uncontrolled happening. Social choice theory does not explicitly rule them out by definition, as does a great part of modern moral philosophy. But it treats them as irrelevant to what the theory is about, viz., choosing rationally.[22] We can go further. It may be an indirect and unnoticed consequence of one of the favorite axioms of the theory of social choice that we are not to recognize such situations. Consider the principle known as the Independence of Irrelevant Alternatives: "The social choice made from any environment depends only on the orderings of individuals with respect to the alternatives in that environment...It is never necessary to compare available alternatives with those which are not available at a given moment in order to arrive at a decision."[23] In a case of the type I have been considering, the social choice theorist must, apparently, then refuse to consider the relation of Agamemnon's situation to another situation in which he could have kept all of his commitments without atrocious wrongdoing. He must consider only the ordering of the options in the situation itself, and regard it as irrelevant that all the available options are hideous by comparison to what a good person would wish to choose. This is not the intent of the principle, clearly; but it does seem to be a result -- and one that is of a piece with the more general denial of the distinction between value and desire that I have described above. For the Aristotelian, "unavailable" does not imply "irrelevant" (these two words are used interchangeably in Arrow's formulation of this principle, with baneful effect). Aristotelianism fosters attention to the ways in which the world can impede our efforts to act well; it indicates that caring about many things will open us to the risk of these terrible situations. It asks us, as people committed to goodness, to notice it when none of our options is good.[24] It encourages us to develop appropriate ways of thinking and feeling about these possibilities, telling us that all this is a part of living well for a human being. Agamemnon's decision, even under these terrible constraints, will be better and more rationally made if he considers the relation of these constraints to his wishes and choices as a person of virtue. Social choice theory, however, insists that only his ordinal ranking of the actual possibilities is relevant; he can choose rationally and well without thinking that the sacrifice of a daughter is an absolutely bad thing.[25]

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[21] See *Fragility* ch. 2 (previously published as "Aeschylus on Practical Conflict," in *Ethics* 95 (1985) 233-67, and also in *Histoire et Structure: à la mémoire de Victor Goldschmidt,* ed. J. Brunschwig, C. Imbert, A. Roger (Paris 1985) 69-92. Also *De Motu,* Essay 4, and "Flawed Crystals" (above n. 1).

[22] *Fragility* ch. 2 contains discussion of the views of Kant, Hare, and Sartre, and extensive reference to the secondary literature.

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[23] This formulation is cited from K. Arrow, "Values and Collective Decision Making," from P. Laslett and W.G. Runciman, eds., *Philosophy, Politics and Society,* Third Series (Oxford 1967), repr. in E. Hahn and M. Hollis, eds., *Philosophy and Economic Theory* (Oxford 1979) 110-26, on pp. 113, 120. Arrow explicitly links the principle, thus stated, to a rejection of any cardinal measure of utility: "Any cardinal measure, any attempt to give a numerical representation of utility, depends basically on comparisons involving alternative actions which are not, or at least may not be, available, given the environment prevailing at the moment" (113). I think it fair to say, then, that at least he holds the principle in a form that would rule out the sort of proper recognition of moral dilemmas that I am describing here.

[24] If the agent is deliberating well about this situation, the negative utility he or she attaches to the two bad courses will show up in some way in his or her desires and preferences; *but,* first, since she is only allowed to compare possible alternatives, and not to compare all the possible ones against all the good and unavailable ones, the bad one that is the least bad will still show up as the top point on a free-floating (not cardinally anchored) line; second, if, like Agamemnon, he is deliberating evasively, the badness of the chosen courses won't be reflected in his desires and so, if the *selection* is correct, the presence of badness on both sides will have made no difference; third, this procedure does not allow us to distinguish between evasive and non-evasive deliberation, so long as the alternative selected remains the same.

Does this matter for a theory of public rationality? I would argue that it matters deeply. Frequently our leaders, like private citizens, will be confronted with unpalatable moral choices, choices in which there is no loss-free, and perhaps even no guilt-free course available. We want leaders who will be able to make tough necessary choices in such situations, preferring A to B or B to A. We do not want the presence of recognized dilemma to prevent them from evincing a preference. But we also want them to preserve and publicly display enough of the Aristotelian intuitions of the ordinary private person that they will say, here is a situation in which we are violating an important human value. Suppose, for example, we are in agreement that on balance Truman was correct in choosing to bomb Hiroshima; that this was the best available exit to the horrible dilemma in which he and the nation had been placed by factors beyond their control. Still, it matters deeply whether the bombing is to be treated simply as the winning alternative, or, in addition, as a course of action that overrides a genuine moral value. It matters whether Truman takes this course with unswerving confidence in his own powers of reason, or with reluctance, remorse, and the belief that he is obligated to make whatever reparations can be made. Whether all his attention is directed towards picking the top point on a single ordered line, or whether he attends, as well, to the intrinsic ethical character of the claim that on balance is not preferred.[26] The Aristotelian leader, cherishing each separate value and attaching to each the appropriate emotions and feeling of obligation, behaves in the second of these ways. What is more, he or she holds that it is good, in a more general way, to focus on these dilemmas and not to go beyond them, because to do so reaffirms and strengthens our attachment to the values in question, in such a way that we will be less likely to violate them in other circumstances. The leader who is brought up on social choice theory will not learn in that education that there is a salient difference between these two ways, and so he or she will be all too likely to prefer the former, as easier on the conscience. Nor is all this mere idle speculation, as we can see from the appalling callousness towards such moral dilemmas displayed by our leaders during the Vietnam War -- leaders vastly more sophisticated than Truman in their technical resources for social choice.[27] Their brutality seemed to be nourished by their confidence in these techniques, as if by social science they had surpassed the paltry rationality of the ordinary human being.

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[25] By "absolutely" I do not and cannot mean one that is never to be done; for part of my point is to insist that there are circumstances in which anything that one might do will be just this bad. I mean that whenever it is done, it is bad: though sometimes it may be the least bad thing available.

The British utilitarian philosopher R.M. Hare has recently invented two characters, whom he christens the Archangel and the Prole.[28] The Prole, stuck with ordinary daily intuitive rationality, sees moral dilemmas as real and indissoluble, requiring remorse and reparation. The archangel, well schooled in the techniques of utilitarian social choice, is able to see that from the exalted critical perspective of this theory such dilemmas vanish. She learns to get beyond them. She has contempt for those who continue to recognize them. I believe, with Aristotle, that we want more proles and fewer angels in public life. I harbor the suspicion that those who claim to be angels do so because they don't quite perceive how to be human beings. We shall return to this point.

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[26] For a good discussion of this topic, and this case, see M. Walzer, "Political Action and the Problem of Dirty Hands," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 2 (1973) 160-80. *Fragility* ch. 2 gives other references.

[27] There is an excellent discussion of this in S. Hampshire, "Public and Private Morality," in *Morality and Conflict* (Cambridge, MA 1983) 101-25, at 123; I discuss his position in the later (political) sections of the draft from which this paper is drawn.

[28] R.M. Hare, *Moral Thinking* (Oxford 1981).

## II. Priority of the Particular

"The discernment rests with perception." This phrase, from which my title is taken, is used by Aristotle in connection with his attack on another feature of formal pseudo-scientific pictures of rationality: the insistence that rational choice can be captured in a system of general rules or principles which can then simply be applied to each new case. Aristotle's defense of the priority of "perception," together with his insistence that practical wisdom cannot be a systematic science concerned throughout with universals, is evidently a defense of the priority of concrete situational judgements of a more informal and intuitive kind to any such formal system. Once again he is attacking an item that is generally taken to be criterial of rationality in our day, particularly in the public sphere. His attack on ethical generality is closely linked to the attack on commensurability, for the two notions are closely related, and both are seen by their defenders as progressive stratagems that we can use to extricate ourselves from certain sorts of painful ethical vulnerability that arise from the perception of qualitative heterogeneity. Too much heterogeneity leaves the agent who sees it open to the possibility of surprise and perplexity. For a new situation may strike her as unlike any other. A valuable item may seem altogether distinct and new. But if she tells herself either that there is only a single item in terms of which all values are commensurable -- or that there is a finite number of general values, repeatedly instantiated, under which all new cases are bound to fall as instances -- by either of these routes she will escape from the burden of the intractable and unexpected. She will come to each new situation prepared to see only those items about which she already knows how to deliberate.

The perception of heterogeneity brings another problem with it: vulnerability to loss. To view a beloved person (country, occupation) as not unique but an instance of a repeatable universal is to view it as potentially replaceable by another homogeneous instance, should the world take from us the one we now have. Plato's Diotima argues that making the general prior in this way to the particular brings a "relaxing" and "easing" of the strains involved in planning a life. With value-universality, as with commensurability's more radical reduction to a single value, if the world removes something you love there is bound to be a ready supply of other similarly valuable items. Many Greek thinkers, not unlike many modern theorists, sensed that a hallmark of a truly rational decision procedure would be that it should remove some of our ethical perplexity and vulnerability, putting us more securely in control of the most important things.

Aristotelian anti-commensurability does not imply the priority of the particular. The attack on commensurability relied on the picture of a plurality of distinct values, qualitatively heterogeneous, each generating its own distinct claims. But each of these items, though quite concrete, is still a universal, instantiable in any number of particular situations and actions. Each (e.g. courage, justice, friendship, generosity) has its own general definition; and Aristotle frequently ascribes ethical importance to such accounts. So the bare fact that they are, as universals, plural and distinct does little to support the priority of particular perceptions to systems of rules; on the contrary, our talk of definition suggests that Aristotle may have a strong interest in such a system. On the other hand, Aristotle does insist that practical wisdom is not *episteme,* that is, systematic scientific understanding. He defends this claim by arguing that it is concerned with ultimate particulars *(ta kath' hekasta)* and that these particulars cannot be subsumed under any *episteme* (which is concerned with universals only), but must be grasped with insight through experience *(EN* 1142a11 ff.). In praising perception, he is praising the grasping of particulars contained in this sort of experienced judgement. We need, then, to ask how the further move from concreteness to particularity is defended, and what role universal rules actually do play in Aristotelian rationality.[29]

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[29] Aristotle is not always clear about the distinction between the general and the universal in making these objections -- see below. A universal may be highly concrete; but still, if it is to cover a number of particulars, it will be too general for Aristotle, as we shall see. The universals against which he directs his attack (Plato's above all) are also, of course, highly general. (The *Symposium,* for example, argues that someone who correctly grasps the universal form of beauty will understand that it does not come in qualitatively heterogeneous kinds at all, but is one and the same wherever it occurs.)

We must notice first that rules could play an important role in practical reason without being prior to particular perceptions.[30] For they might be used not as normative for perception, the ultimate authorities against which the correctness of particular choices is assessed, but more as summaries or rules of thumb, highly useful for a variety of purposes, but valid only to the extent to which they correctly describe good concrete judgements, and to be assessed, ultimately, against these. On this second picture, there is still room for recognizing as ethically salient the new or surprising feature of the case before us, features that have not been anticipated in the rule, or even features that could not in principle be captured in any rule. If Aristotle's talk of rules is of this second kind, there need be no tension at all between his evident interest in rules and definitions, and his defense of the priority of perception. I shall now argue that this is, in fact, the situation, and explore his reasons for giving priority to the particular.

We can begin with the two passages in which our title phrase is introduced. In both he explicitly claims that priority in practical choice should be accorded not to principle, but to perception, a faculty of discrimination that is concerned with apprehending concrete particulars:

> The person who diverges only slightly from the correct is not blameworthy, whether he errs in the direction of the more or the less; but the person who diverges *more* is blamed: for this is evident. But to say to what point and how much someone is blameworthy is not easy to determine by a principle: nor in fact is this the case with any other perceptible item. For things of this sort are among the concrete particulars, and the discrimination lies in perception. *(EN* 1109b18-23)

Again, in a discussion of one of the specific virtues, mildness of temper, Aristotle writes: "What degree and type of divergence is blameworthy, it is not easy to express in any general principle: for the discrimination lies in the particulars and in perception" (1126b2-4). The subtleties of a complex ethical situation must be seized in a confrontation with the situation itself, by a faculty that is suited to address it as a complex whole. Prior universal formulations lack both the concreteness and the flexibility that is required. They do not contain the particularizing details of the matter at hand, with which decision must grapple; and they are not responsive to what is there, as good decision must be.

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[30] For a longer account of this point, see *Fragility* ch. 10.

These two related criticisms are pressed repeatedly, as Aristotle argues for the ethical priority of concrete description to universal statement, particular judgement to universal rule. "Among statements about conduct," he writes in an adjacent passage, "those that are universal are more general *(koinoteroi,* common to many things,)[31] but the particular are more true -- for action is concerned with particulars, and statements must harmonize with these" (1107a29-32). Principles are authoritative only insofar as they are correct; but they are correct only insofar as they do not err with regard to the particulars. And it is not possible for a universal formulation intended to cover many different particulars to achieve a high degree of correctness. Therefore, in his discussion of justice Aristotle insists that the experienced judgements of the agent must both correct and supplement the universal formulations of law:

> All law is universal; but about some things it is not possible for a universal statement to be correct. Then in those matters in which it is necessary to speak universally, but not possible to do so correctly, the law takes the usual case, though without ignoring the possibility of missing the mark...When, then, the law speaks universally, and something comes up that is not covered by the universal, then it is correct, insofar as the legislator has been deficient or gone wrong in speaking simply, to correct his omission, saying what he would have said himself had he been present and would have legislated if he had known. *(EN* 1137b13 ff.)

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[31] Note here the slide from universal to general: but the point here is that the moment it covers many particulars it gets too unspecific to be the best way of approaching a concrete context. A universal need not abstract from contextual features (see below pp. 177-78); but the sort of universal principle that can be fixed in advance and applied to many cases will have to do this too much for Aristotle.

The law is authoritative insofar as it is a summary of wise decisions. It is therefore appropriate to supplement it with new wise decisions made on the spot; and it is also appropriate to correct it where it diverges from what a good judge would do in this case. Here again, we find that particular judgement is superior both in correctness and in flexibility.

Aristotle illustrates the idea of ethical flexibility in a vivid and famous metaphor. He tells us that a person who makes each choice by appeal to some antecedent general principle held firm and inflexible for the occasion is like an architect who tries to use a straight ruler on the intricate curves of a fluted column. No real architect does this. Instead following the lead of the builders of Lesbos, he will measure with a flexible strip of metal, the Lesbian Rule, that "bends to the shape of the stone and is not fixed" (1137b30-32). This device is still in use, as one might expect (although now it is made of green plastic instead of metal). I have one. It is invaluable for measuring oddly-shaped parts of an old Victorian house. (The Utilitarian who recently wrote that "we" prefer ethical systems in the style of the Bauhaus[32] had fortunate architectural tastes, given his view of rules.) It is also of use in measuring the parts of the body, few of which are straight. We could anticipate our point, not too oddly, by saying that Aristotle's picture of ethical reality has the form of a human body or bodies rather than that of a mathematical construct. So it requires rules that fit it. Good deliberation, like the Lesbian Rule, accommodates itself to the shape that it finds, responsively and with respect for complexity.

But perhaps Aristotle is speaking here only of the defectiveness of actual systems of rules; perhaps he says nothing against the idea that an ethical science could come into being if its rules were made precise or complicated enough. The image of the Lesbian Rule does not encourage this thought. But we can go further in answering this objection, showing, first, that he believes that correct choice cannot, even in principle, be captured in a system of universal rules; then going on to point out three features of the "matter of the practical" that show why not.

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[32] J. Glover, quoted in D. Wiggins, "Deliberation and Practical Reason," above n.18.

In this same section of *EN* V, Aristotle tells us that practical matters are in their very nature indeterminate or indefinable *(aorista)* -- not just so far insufficiently defined. The universal account fails because no universal can adequately capture this matter. "The error is not in the law or in the legislator, but in the nature of the thing, since the matter of practical affairs is of this kind from the start" (1137b17-19). Again, in Book II, discussing the role of universal definitions and accounts in ethics (and preparing to put forward his own definitions of the virtues) he writes:

> Let this be agreed on from the start, that every statement about matters of practice ought to be said in outline and not with precision, as we said in the beginning that statements should be demanded in a way appropriate to the matter at hand. And matters of practice and questions of what is advantageous never stand fixed, any more than do matters of health. If the universal definition is like this, the definition concerning particulars is even more lacking in precision. For such cases do not fall under any science or under any precept, but the agents themselves must in each case look to what suits the occasion, as is also the case in medicine and navigation. (1103b34-1104a10)

The universal account *ought*[33] to be put forward as an outline only, and not the precise final word. It is not just that ethics has not yet attained the precision of science; it should not even try for such precision.

Three reasons for this are suggested in this brief passage. First, practical matters are mutable, or lacking in fixity. A system of rules set up in advance can encompass only what has been seen before-- as a medical treatise can give only the recognized pattern of a disease. But the world of change confronts us with ever new configurations, ever new situations for the determining of the virtuous course. What is more, since the virtues themselves are individuated and defined with reference to contingent circumstances that may themselves undergo change (for example, Aristotle himself points out that there will be no virtue of generosity in a city with communistic property institutions),[34] the good agent may need not only to locate the virtuous action among strange new events, but also to deal with an evolving and situation-relative list of virtues. Even natural justice for human beings, Aristotle says, is "all mutable," i.e. historically rooted, relative to circumstances of scarcity and also of personal separateness that are relatively stable, but still in the natural world.[35] A doctor whose only resource, confronted with a new configuration of symptoms, was to turn to the textbook would be a poor doctor; a pilot who steered his ship by rule in a storm of unanticipated direction or intensity would be incompetent. Even so, the person of practical wisdom must meet the new with responsiveness and imagination, cultivating the sort of flexibility and perceptiveness that will permit him, in the words of Thucydides (articulating an Athenian ideal of which Aristotle is the heir and defender) to "improvise what is required" (I.118). In several contexts, Aristotle speaks of practical wisdom as an ability concerned with *stochazesthai.* This word, which originally means "to take aim at a target," comes to be used of an improvisatory conjectural use of reason. He tells us that "the person who is good at deliberation without qualification is the one who takes aim *(stochastikos)* according to reason at the best for a human being in the sphere of things to be done" (1141b13-14); he associates this ideal closely with the observation that practical wisdom is concerned with particulars and not universals (1141b14-16).

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[33] This "ought to" is sometimes mistranslated as "will have to." On this, see *De Motu* essay 4, *Fragility* ch. 10.

In the *EN* V passage, and implicitly in the one from Book II, Aristotle alludes to a second feature of the practical, its indeterminate or indefinable character *(to aoriston).* It is difficult to interpret this feature; it seems to be connected with the variety of practical contexts and the situation-relativity of appropriate choice. One example is revealing. There is no definition *(horismos)* of good joke-telling, Aristotle writes, but it is *aoristos,* since it is so much a matter of pleasing the particular hearer, and "different things are repugnant and pleasant to different people" (1128a25 ff.). To extrapolate from this case, excellent choice cannot be captured in general rules, because it is a matter of fitting one's choice to the complex requirements of a concrete situation, taking all of its contextual features into account. A rule, like a manual of humor, would do both too little and too much: too little, because most of what really counts is in the response to the concrete; and this would be omitted. Too much, because the rule would imply that it was itself normative for response (as a joke manual would ask you to tailor your wit to the formulae it contains); and this would impinge too much on the flexibility of good practice. The Lesbian Rule is called *aoristos,* presumably because, unlike such precepts, it varies its own shape according to the shape of what is before it. In speaking of mutability Aristotle stresses change over time and the moral relevance of surprise; in speaking of the *aoriston* he stresses complexity and context. Both features call for responsiveness and yielding flexibility, a rightness of tone and a sureness of touch that no general account could adequately capture.

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[34] *Pol.* 1263b7-14. Here, however, Aristotle actually concludes that the Platonic scheme should be blamed for eliminating the virtue, a response that appears to run counter to his overall position (on which see *Fragility* ch. 10, 11). The remark is probably best understood as saying that Plato has not eliminated property itself, he has just eliminated individuals' control over property; thus there is still the conceptual space for the virtue, but there is no sphere of choice in which individuals can exercise the virtue.

[35] *EN* 1134b28-33; on Aristotle's arguments as to why laws should be made difficult to change, see *Fragility* ch. 10.

Finally, Aristotle suggests that the concrete ethical case may simply contain some ultimately particular and non-repeatable elements. This is one part of what he means when he says that they simply do not fall under any general science or precept. Complexity and variety already yield a high degree of situational particularity: for the occurrence of properties that are, taken singly, instantiated elsewhere in an endless variety of combinations can make the whole context a unique particular. But Aristotle also recognizes the ethical relevance of non-repeatable components. The moderate diet for Milo the wrestler is not the same as the moderate diet for Aristotle (indeed, for any other human being), because Milo's concrete, and presumably (in some cases) unique size, weight, needs, goals and activity are all relevant to determining the appropriate for him. This is a contingent limitation on the universal; we could try to say that we have here a universal principle with only a single instance, in that if anyone else should turn up with that precise size, weight, etc., the ethical prescription would be the same. Even so, this would not be the sort of universal principle that would satisfy most devotees of principles, since it is rooted in the particulars of Milo's historical context in such a way that it could not have been anticipated with precision in advance; and perhaps (indeed, very likely) will be of no further use in the future. An ethical science with "principles" this context-specific would have to have a vast and infinitely extensible series of principles; and this is not a science that will satisfy those who are looking for science. But Aristotle goes further still in some cases. The particularity of love and friendship seems to demand non-repeatability in yet a stronger sense. The good friend will attend to the particular needs and concerns of his or her friend, benefiting him or her for the sake of what he or she is in and of him or herself. Some of this "himself" or "herself" consists of repeatable character traits; but features of shared history and of family relationship that are not even in principle repeatable are allowed to bear serious ethical weight. Here the agent's own historical singularity (and/or the historical singularity of the relationship itself) enter into moral deliberation in a way that could not even in principle give rise to a universal principle, since what is ethically important (among other things) is to treat the friend *as* a unique non-replaceable being, a being not like anyone else in the world.[36] "Practical wisdom is not concerned with universals only; it must also recognize particulars, for it is practical, and practice concerns particulars" (1141b4-16).[37]

In all of these ways, universal rules, seen as normative for correctness of judgement, fail in their very nature to measure up to the challenge of practical choice. And Aristotle's arguments are strong not only against the normative use of a systematic hierarchy of rules, but in general against any general algorithm for correct choice. The defense of the Lesbian ruler and the account of the context-relativity of the mean imply not only that the good judge will not decide by subsuming a case under antecedently fixed rules, but also that there is no general procedure or algorithm for computing what to do in every case. The appropriate response is not arrived at mechanically; there is no general procedural descripton that can be given concerning how to find it. Or if there is, it is about as useful as a joke manual, and as potentially misleading. Here again, Aristotle's picture breaks sharply with the dominant emphasis of contemporary social choice theory, which is all on working out a general formulation or technique of choice which can then be applied to each new particular. Aristotle has no objection to the use of general guidelines of this sort for certain purposes. They have a useful role to play so long as they keep their place. Rules and general procedures can be aids in moral development, since people who do not yet have practical wisdom and insight need to follow rules that summarize the wise judgements of others. Then too, if there is not time to formulate a fully concrete decision in the case at hand, it is better to follow a good summary rule or a standardized decision procedure than to make a hasty and inadequate contextual choice. Again, if we are not confident of our judgement in a given case, if there is reason to believe that bias or interest might distort our particular judgement, rules give us a superior constancy and stability. (This is Aristotle's primary argument for preferring the rule of law to rule by decree.) Even for wise adults who are not short of time, the rule has a function, guiding them tentatively in their approach to the new particular, helping them to pick out its salient features. This function we shall later examine in more detail.

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[36] On the types of individuality recognized as relevant to love and friendship, see *Fragility* chs. 6, 7, 12. For some doubts as to whether the Artistotelian position really satisfies all our intuitions about this individuality, see my "Love and the Individual: Romantic Rightness and Platonic Aspiration," forthcoming in M. Sosna *et al.*, eds. *Reconstructing Individualism,* Stanford University Press, 1985.

[37] For a list of passages in which Aristotle speaks this way, see *Fragility* ch. 10 n. 29.

But Aristotle's point in all these cases is that the rule or algorithm represents a falling off from full practical rationality, not its flourishing or completion. A highly respected and respectable contemporary book on social choice theory writes, "The existence of a choice function is in some ways a condition of rational choice."[38] Aristotle would find this about as illuminating and true as to say that the existence of a navigation manual is a condition of good navigation. Either the choice function is simply the summary of what good judges do or have done in situations so far encountered -- in which case it will be true but posterior, and the more posterior the more it simplifies -- or it is an attempt to extract from that which they do and have done some more elegant and simple procedure that can from then on be normative for what they do -- in which case it will be false and even corrupting.

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[38] A. Sen, *Collective Choice and Social Welfare* (San Francisco 1970) p.16. For remarks about Sen's more Aristotelian recent work, see above nn.14, 20.

An important thing to remember, in assessing this claim, is that Aristotelian deliberation does not confine itself to means-end reasoning. It is, as we have insisted, concerned as well with the specification of ultimate ends. But this means that the contextual and non-repeatable material can enter into the agent's deliberation at a much more basic level than at the level of means-calculation and (for example) the reckoning up of probabilities in connection with this. A great part of *rational* deliberation will be concerned with questions about whether a certain course of action here and now really counts as realizing some important value (say, courage or friendship) that is a *prima facie* part of her idea of the good life; or even whether a certain way of acting (a certain relationship -- type *or* particular) really counts as the sort of thing she wants to include in her conception of a good life at all. Whether this friendship, this love, this courageous risk, really is something without which her life will be less valuable and less complete. For this sort of question, it seems obvious that there is no mathematical answer; and the only procedure to follow is (as we shall see) to imagine all the relevant features as well and fully and concretely as possible, holding them up against whatever intuitions and emotions and plans and imaginings we have brought into the situation or can construct in it. There is really no short cut at all; or none that is not corrupting. The most we have by way of a theory of correct procedure is the account of good deliberation given by Aristotle himself, which is deliberately thin on content and largely negative. It not only does not tell us how to compute the mean, it tells us that there is no general true answer to this question. Beyond this, the content of rational choice must be supplied by nothing less messy than experience and stories of experience. Among stories of conduct, the most true and informative will be works of literature, biography, and history; the more abstract the story gets, the less rational it is to use it as a guide. The idea of a general decision procedure cannot be refurbished simply by plugging in some subjective features; for it is the very idea that there *is* a general procedure that is claimed to be a mark of irrationality. Good deliberation is like theatrical or musical improvisation, where what counts is flexibility, responsiveness, and openness to the external; to rely on an algorithm here is not only insufficient, it is a sign of immaturity and weakness. It is possible to play a jazz solo from a score, making minor alterations for the particular nature of one's instrument. The question is, who would do this, and why?

If all this is so, Aristotle must also refrain from giving any formal or thick normative account of the properties of adult deliberative rationality. For like its subject matter it is too flexible to be pinned down in a general way. Instead, he stresses the importance of experience in giving content to practical wisdom, developing a contrast between practical insight and scientific or mathematical understanding:

> It is obvious that practical wisdom is not deductive scientific understanding *(episteme)*. For it is of the ultimate and particular, as has been said -- for the matter of action is like this. It is the analogue of theoretical insight *(nous):* for *nous* is of the ultimately first principles, for which there is no external justification; and practical wisdom is of the ultimate and particular, of which there is no scientific understanding, but a kind of perception -- not, I mean, ordinary sense-perception of the proper objects of each sense, but the sort of perception by which we grasp that a certain figure is composed in a certain way out of triangle. (1142a23)

Practical insight is like perceiving in the sense that it is non-inferential, non-deductive: it is an ability to recognize the salient features of a complex situation. And just as the theoretical *nous* comes only out of a long experience with first principles and a sense, gained gradually in and through experience, of the fundamental role played by these principles in discourse and explanation, so too practical perception, which Aristotle also calls *nous*, is gained only through a long process of living and choosing that develops the agent's resourcefulness and responsiveness:

> ...Young people can become mathematicians and geometers and wise in things of that sort; but they do not appear to become people of practical wisdom. The reason is that practical wisdom is of the particular, which becomes graspable through experience, but a young person is not experienced. For a quantitiy of time is required for experience. (1142a12-16)

and again:

> We credit the same people with possessing judgement and having reached the age of intuitive insight and being people of understanding and practical wisdom. For all of these abilities are concerned with the ultimate and the particular...and all practical matters are concerned with the particular and the ultimate. For the person of practical wisdom must recognize these, and understanding and judgement are also concerned with practical matters, i.e. with ultimates. And intuitive insight *(nous)* is concerned with ultimates in both directions...[There follows a development of the parallel between grasp of first principles and grasp of ultimate particulars.] ...This is why we should attend to the undemonstrated sayings of experienced and older people or people of practical wisdom not less than to demonstrations. For since experience has given them an eye they see correctly. (1143a25-b14)[39]

By now we are inclined to ask what experience can possibly contribute, if what practical wisdom sees is the idiosyncratic and the new. Our emphasis on flexibility should not, however, make us imagine that Aristotelian perception is rootless and *ad hoc,* rejecting all guidance from the past. The good navigator does not go by the rule book; and she is prepared to deal with what she has not seen before. But she knows, too, how to use what she has seen; she does not pretend that she has never been on a boat before. Experience is concrete and not exhaustively summarizable in a system of rules. Unlike mathematical wisdom it cannot be encompassed in a treatise. But it does offer guidance, and it does urge on us the recognition of repeated as well as unique features. We shall return to this important issue in section VII, working with a concrete example of Aristotelian deliberation. We turn now to the third feature of his conception, which will further illuminate the others.

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[39] See the excellent discussion of this passage in Wiggins, "Deliberation." I am to some extent indebted to his translation-cum-paraphrase here.

## III. The Rationality of Emotions and Imagination.

So far the Aristotelian picture has attacked two items that are commonly alleged to be criterial of rationality. His third target is even more broadly held: the idea that rational choice is not made under the influence of the emotions and the imagination. The idea that rational deliberation might draw on and even be guided by these elements has sometimes even been taken (in both ancient and modern times) to be a conceptual impossibility, the "rational" being defined by opposition to these "irrational" parts of the soul. (This is especially true of emotion, but important writers in both ancient and modern times have included imagination in their blame of the irrational. This is surprisingly so even of some philosophers, like Stuart Hampshire, who are otherwise sympathetic to Aristotle's conception of choice.)[40] Plato repudiated emotion and appetite as corrupting influences, insisting that correct practical judgements are reached only by encouraging the intellect to go off "itself by itself," free from their influence as far as possible. The condition of the person in which they lead or guide intellect is given the pejorative name of "madness," which is definitionally contrasted with rationality or soundness of judgement.[41] The two dominant moral theories of our own time, Kantianism and Utilitarianism, have been no less suspicious of the passions; indeed, this is one of the few things on which they whole-heartedly agree. For Kant, the passions are invariably selfish and aimed at one's own states of satisfaction. Even in the context of love and friendship, he urges us to avoid becoming subject to their influence; for an action will have genuine moral worth only if it is chosen for its own sake; and given his conception of the passions he cannot allow that an action only or primarily because of passion could be chosen for its own sake. The Utilitarian believes that the passions frequently impede rationality by being too parochial: they lead us to emphasize personal ties and to rank the nearer above the further, obstructing that fully impartial attitude towards the world that is the hallmark of Utilitarian rationality.

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[40] See for example Hampshire, *Morality and Conflict*, pp.130-1,135 -- where imagination is contrasted with the "rational' and said to be a faculty inappropriate for judgements about justice. (Here I should say, "sympathetic to the picture of choice that I have ascribed to Aristotle" -- since Hamphsire and I do not have altogether the same interpretation of Aristotle.)

[41] See *Fragility* chs. 5,7.

Imagination fares no better. Plato's rejection of the influence of sensuous cognition is part and parcel of his general rejection of the influence of the bodily. Without attempting to characterize Kant's own complex view of imagination, we may say that modern Kantians have shown considerable interest in curbing the flights of deliberative imagination as potential strong impediments to action in accordance with duty. Imagination is thought to be largely egoistic and self-indulgent, too concerned with particulars and with their relation to the self. One can be correctly motivated by duty without developing imagination; therefore its cultivation is at best a luxury, at worst a danger. Nor do utilitarians approve of imagination's vivid portrayal of alternatives in all their color and particularity; again this faculty is suspected of being wedded to particularity and the recognition of incommensurables, therefore a threat to the impartial assessment of facts and probabilities. Whatever the faults of Dickens' *Hard Times* as a portrait of Utilitarianism -- and they are many -- he is surely correct in depicting the Benthamite father as holding the view that "fancy" is a form of dangerous self-indulgence, and that reason (conceived of as that fact-storing and calculative power in virtue of which Mr. Gradgrind is always "ready to weigh and measure each parcel of human nature, and tell you exactly what it comes to") is the only faculty to which education is properly addressed, if we are to build a properly impartial society. (Concerning Louisa, from the cradle starved in fancy, he reflects with moral satisfaction, "would have been self-willed...but for her bringing-up.") Contemporary theorists follow these leads, either explicitly repudiating imagination and emotion as irrational or offering a picture of rationality in which they play no positive role.

I have sketched these motivations for the rejection of imagination and emotion in order to indicate that Aristotelian perception may have corresponding motives for their cultivation. If these faculties are indeed closely linked with our ability to grasp particulars in all of their richness and concreteness, then perception will disregard them at its peril. As we pursue this lead, we shall at the same time see how Aristotle answers the charges that these faculties are invariably distorting and self-serving.

Aristotle does not have a single concept that corresponds exactly to our "imagination." His *phantasia,* usually so translated, is a more inclusive human and animal capability, that of focussing on some concrete particular, either present or absent, in such a way as to see (or otherwise perceive) it *as* something, picking out its salient features, discerning its content.[42] In this function it is the active and selective aspect of perception. But *phantasia* also works closely in tandem with memory, enabling the creature to focus on absent experienced items in their concreteness, and even to form new combinations, not yet experienced, from items that have entered sense-experience. So it can do much of the work of our imagination, though it should be emphasized that Aristotle's emphasis is upon its selective and discriminatory character rather than upon its capability for free fantasy. Its job is more to focus on reality than to create unreality.

*Phantasia* appears to be a faculty well suited to the work of deliberation as Aristotle understands it, and it is no surprise to find him invoking it in connection with the minor premise of the "practical syllogism," i.e. the creature's perception of an item in the world *as* something that answers to one of his or her practical interests or concerns. Elsewhere he shows imagination working closely with an ethical conception of the good: our imaginative view of a situation "marks off" or "determines" it as presenting elements that correspond to our view of what is to be pursued and avoided.[43] It is also no surprise that he ascribes to human beings the capacity for a special sort of imagining, which is called "deliberative *phantasia,*" and which involves the ability to link several imaginings or perceptions together, "making a unity from many." All thought, for Aristotle, is of necessity (in finite creatures) accompanied by an imagining that is concrete, even where the thought itself is abstract. This is just a fact of human psychology. But whereas the mathematician can safely disregard the concrete features of his or her imagined triangle when she is proving a theorem about triangles, the person of practical wisdom will not neglect the concrete deliverances of imagination when thinking about virtue and goodness. Instead of ascending from particular to general, deliberative imagination links particulars without dispensing with their particularity.[44] It would involve, for example, the ability to recall past experience as one with, as relevant to, the case at hand, while still conceiving of both with rich and vivid concreteness. We are now prepared to understand that the Aristotelian will hold this concrete focussing to be not dangerously irrational, but an essential ingredient of responsible rationality, to be cultivated by educators.

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[42] See *De Motu* Essay 5, where I discuss all the relevant texts, and the secondary literature.

As for the passions and emotions, Aristotle notoriously restores them to the central place in morality from which Plato had banished them. He holds that the truly good person will not only act well but also feel the appropriate emotions about what he or she chooses. Not only correct motivation and motivational feelings but also correct reactive or responsive feelings are constitutive of this person's virtue or goodness. If I do the just thing from the wrong motives or desires (not for its own sake but, say, for the sake of gain), that will not count as virtuous action. This much even Kant could grant. More striking, I must do the just thing without reluctance or inner emotional tension. If my right choices always require struggle, if I must all the time be overcoming powerful feelings that go against virtue, then I am less virtuous than the person whose emotions are in harmony with her actions. I am assessible for my passions as well as for my calculations: all are parts of practical rationality.

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[43] See *De Anima* 431b2 ff., discussed at greater length in *Fragility* ch. 10. In "Changing Aristotle's Mind" (forthcoming), Hilary Putnam and I bring forward some evidence that Aristotle regards emotion, as well as imagination, as a selective form of cognitive awareness.

[44] This view of deliberative *phantasia* is not certain, but it has a long and venerable history; see for example Aquinas' fascinating discussions of why God equipped humans with *phantasia* for life in this world, and why an angel who lacked it would be confused and at a loss in a world of particulars. (The numerous references to the *Summa Theologica* on this topic are brought together and discussed in Putnam and Nussbaum.)

Lying behind this is a picture of the passions as responsive and selective elements of the personality. Not Platonic urges or pushes, they possess a high degree of educability and discrimination. Even appetitive desires are intentional and capable of making distinctions; they can inform the agent of the presence of a needed object, working in responsive interaction with perception and imagination.[45] Emotions are composites of belief and feeling, shaped by developing thought and highly discriminating in their reactions. They can lead or guide the perceiving agent, "marking off" in a concretely imagined situation the objects to be pursued and avoided. In short, Aristotle does not make a sharp split between the cognitive and the emotive. Emotion can play a cognitive role, and cognition, if it is to be properly informed, must draw on the work of the emotive elements.[46] It is no surprise that choice is defined as an ability that lies on the borderline between the intellectual and the passional, partaking of both natures: it can be described, says Aristotle, either as desiderative deliberation or as deliberative desire. *(EN* 1113a10-12, 1139b3-5).

Putting all this together, and allowing ourselves to extrapolate from the text in a way that appears to be consistent with its spirit, we might say that a person of practical insight will cultivate emotional openness and responsiveness in approaching a new situation. Frequently it will be her passional response, rather than detached thinking, that will guide her to the appropriate recognitions. "Here is a case where a friend needs my help": this will often be "seen" first by the feelings that are constituent parts of friendship, rather than by pure intellect. Intellect will often want to consult these feelings to get information about the true nature of the situation. Without them, its approach to a new situation would be blind and obtuse. And even where correct choice is reached in the absence of feeling and emotional response, Aristotle will insist that it is less virtuous than choice that is emotional. If I help a friend unfeelingly, I am less praiseworthy than if I do so with appropriate love and sympathy. Indeed my choice may not really be virtuous at all; for an action to be virtuous, it must not only have the same content as the virtuously disposed person's action, it must be done *in the same manner* as the manner in which a person whose passions love the good would do it. Without feeling, a part of correct perception is missing. I believe that such statements imply that perception is not merely aided by emotion but is also in part constituted by appropriate response. Good perception is a full recognition or acknowledgement of the nature of the practical situation; the whole personality sees it for what it is. The agent who discerns intellectually that a friend is in need or that a loved one has died, but who fails to respond to these facts with appropriate sympathy or grief, clearly lacks a part of Aristotelian virtue. It seems right to say, in addition, that a part of discernment or perception is lacking. This person doesn't really, or doesn't fully, *see* what has happened, doesn't recognize it in a full-blooded way or take it in. We want to say that she is merely saying the words, "He needs my help," or "she is dead," but really doesn't yet fully *know* it, because the emotional part of cognition is lacking. And it isn't just that sometimes we need the emotions to *get to* the right (intellectual) view of the situation; this is true but not the entire story. Neither is it just that the emotions supply extra praiseworthy elements external to cognition but without which virtue is incomplete. The emotions are themselves modes of vision. Their responses are part of what knowing, that is truly recognizing or acknowledging, *consists in.* To respond "at the right times with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right aim, and in the right way, is what is appropriate and best, and this is characteristic of excellence" *(EN* 1106b21-3).

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[45] See *Fragility* ch. 9 (an earlier version of which was published as "The 'Common' Explanation of Animal Motion," in P. Moraux and J. Wiesner, eds., *Zweifelhaftes im Corpus Aristotelicum* (Berlin 1983) 116-57.

[46] Aristotle's view of emotion as a composite of a belief and a feeling probably does not serve his well in defending the emotions' cognitive role. For we naturally will inquire which component performs the cognitive role; and the position then risks collapsing into the rationalism it tries to avoid. A more unified account of cognitive emotions can be found in Brentano.

To read Aristotle this way offers a surprising exegetical and philosophical dividend, which can here be only briefly described. It has long troubled interpreters that, just after rejecting Socrates' account of *akrasia,* according to which all action against ethical knowledge is produced by intellectual failure, Aristotle goes on to offer an account of his own that itself characterizes *akrasia* as an intellectual failure. The ordinary belief that it is possible to know the better and to do the worse because one is overcome by pleasure or passion was flouted in Socrates' account, which claimed that these failures were really due to ignorance. Aristotle, having set himself to preserve the ordinary belief, does indeed mention the motivating role of the desire for pleasure in akrasia, but says that this desire would not overpower knowledge but for a simultaneous intellectual failure, the failure of the agent to grasp the "minor premise" of the practical syllogism. He or she has general ethical knowledge, and uses it, but either lacks or fails to use the concrete perception of the nature of this particular case. How, then, has he escaped his own criticism?

Without becoming deeply entangled in the interpretative issues surrounding this difficult text, I want to suggest that this frequently scorned position makes far more sense if we take the inclusive view of perception that I have just outlined, according to which it has emotional and imaginative, as well as intellectual, components. The agent who is swayed by pleasure does not have to be dislodged from factual knowledge of his or her situation, i.e. that this is a case of infidelity, or overeating. There is a sense in which she can be said to know this throughout: for, as Aristotle in the same context says explicitly, she may say all the right things when questioned, and offer factually correct descriptions. She may, he adds, even correctly perform means-end deliberations in connection with her akratic action, which presumably she could not if she did not in a certain sense grasp, by intellect, its charac -

ter.[47] She is, however, evasive. She is not fully confronting or acknowledging the situation to herself, allowing herself to see vividly its implications for her life and the lives of others, and to have the responses that are appropriate to that vision. Her interest in short-term pleasure causes her to insulate herself from these responses and from the knowlege they help to constitute. So her intellectual grasp doesn't amount to perception, or to a real grasp and use of the minor premise. Even though she has the facts right, there is a perfectly good, though quite non-Socratic, sense in which she doesn't know what she is doing.

This reading offers a new insight into the phenomenon of *akrasia,* one that places the Aristotelian view in an illuminating relation both to its own tradition and to ours. Our Anglo-American tradition tends, like Plato, to think of *akrasia* as a problem of passion, whose solution lies either in some rational modification of the troublesome passions or in some technique of mastery and control. Like Plato again, we tend (influenced, certainly, by the modern moral theories I have mentioned) to think of the passions as dangerously selfish and self-indulgent items that will, given any latitude, swell up and lead us away from the good. On the Socratic view, it is ethical knowledge that stops *akrasia,* by transforming the beliefs on which complex passions are based; on the mature Platonic view, knowledge must be combined with suppression and "starvation." But the cause of the problem, in all these cases, is found in the so-called irrational part of the soul.

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[47] *EN* 1142b18, 20; see also 1147a18-24, where Aristotle compares the intellectual grasp of the akratic agent to the grasp of a principle that a student has when he or she is first learning it: "That they [sc. akratics] make the statements of a knowing person is no sign of anything. For people affected in this way can also recite demonstrations and quote the verses of Empedocles. And students who are learning something for the first time string statements together, but they don't yet understand; for the statements have to grow to be a part of them *(sumphuenai),* and this requires time. So we should suppose that akratics speak in about the way that actors do." Both the student and the actor comparison bear out my point. What the akratic has is factual (intellectual) knowledge; what she lacks is real recognition or understanding, the kind of grasp of what is really at stake that comes from somewhere deep within her, from something that is a part of her. The comparison to the actor makes it especially likely that deficiency of genuine feeling is in question, at least some of the time.

If I am right, the Aristotelian account quietly turns this picture on its head, pointing out that *akrasia* is frequently (though not always) caused by an excess of theory and a deficiency in passional response. The person who acts akratically against his or her general theoretical knowledge of the good is frequently quite capable of performing correctly in all the intellectual ways; what she lacks is the heart's confrontation with concrete ethical reality. We could express this by saying that knowledge needs responsiveness to be effective in action; we could also say that in the absence of correct response there is no, or no full, practical knowledge. The Aristotelian account, putting things in the second way, urges us to think of real practical insight and understanding as a complex matter involving the whole soul. The opposite of Platonic knowledge is ignorance; the opposite of Aristotelian perception can, in some cases, be ignorance; but it can also, in other cases, be denial or self-deceptive rationalization.

We can go further. Frequently a reliance upon the powers of the intellect can actually become an impediment to true ethical perception, by impeding or undermining these response. It frequently happens that theoretical people, proud of their intellectual abilities and confident in their possession of techniques for the solution of practical problems, are led by their theoretical commitments to become inattentive to the concrete responses of emotion and imagination that would be essential constituents of correct perception. It is an all too familiar problem. Sophocles' Creon, fascinated by his theoretical effort to define all human concerns in terms of their productivity of civic well-being, does not even perceive what at some level he knows, namely that Haemon is his son. He mouths the words; but he does not really acknowledge the tie -- until the pain of loss reveals it to him. Proust's narrator, after a systematic study of his heart using the methods of precise empirical psychology, concludes that he does not love Albertine. This false conclusion (which, again, he soon acknowledges as false in and through responses of suffering) is reached not in spite of the intellect, but in a way because of it: because he was encouraging it to go off "itself by itself," without the necessary companionship of response and feelings. Henry James' *The Sacred Fount* is a fascinating account of what the world looks like to a man who carries this separation all the way, allowing theoretical intellect to determine his relation to all concrete phenomena, refusing himself any other human relation to them, and yet at the same time priding himself on the fineness of his perception. What we discover as we read is that such a person cannot have *any* knowledge of the people and events around him. His sort of incomplete perception can never reach the subject matter or engage with it in a significant way. So the Aristotelian position does not simply inform us that theorizing needs to be completed with intuitive and emotional responses; it warns us of the ways in which theorizing can impede vision. The intellect is not only not all-sufficient, it is a dangerous master. Because of its overreaching, knowledge can be "dragged around like a slave."[48]

All this, once again, has clear implications for the contemporary theory of choice. We know that contemporary social choice theory, as taught and practiced in the academy and in public life, has a great deal in common with the policies of Mr. Gradgrind. That is, it makes every attempt to cultivate calculative intellect and none at all to cultivate "fancy" and emotion. It does not concern itself with the books (especially works of literature) that would cultivate those responses; indeed it implicitly denies their relevance to rationality. Aristotle tells us in no uncertain terms that the person of practical wisdom, both in public and in private life, will cultivate emotion and imagination in himself 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. He or she will prefer an education that cultivates fancy and feeling through works of literature and history, teaching appropriate occasions for and degrees of response. He will consider it childish and immature *not* to cry or be angry or otherwise to experience and display passion where the situation calls for it. In looking for private models and public leaders, we should desire to be assured of their sensitivity and emotional depth, as well as of their intellectual competence. And too much zeal for the intellectual (as is evident in so many of our technocrats and bureaucrats), should be a warning signal.

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[48] On all these issues, see *Fragility,* especially ch. 3, Interlude 2. Also my "Fictions of the Soul," *Philosophy and Literature* 7 (1983) 145-161, and "Love's Knowledge," forthcoming in *Self Deception,* ed. A. Rorty and B. McLaughlin (Berkeley 1986).

## IV. The Three Elements Together.

We have now identified three different parts of Aristotle's picture of perception and practical knowing. All of them appear to form part of his attack on the notion that practical reason is a form of scientific understanding, a view that is defended prominently by Plato. Plato's conception insists on the qualitative homogeneity of the values (at least at some periods); it argues that practical knowledge is completely summarized in a system of (timeless) universals; it also insists that intellect is both necessary and sufficient for correct choice. Plato is certainly not the only thinker in history who has linked these three ideas together. In this sense, Aristotle's conception already looks unified, as being directed against different elements of a single coherent position. But it is possible to say more about the internal coherence of this picture of perception; for its various elements support one another in more than a polemical way.

Non-commensurability, as we have said, is not sufficient for the priority of particular to universal. But commensurability in the strong form of Singleness is certainly sufficient for the priority of the universal to the particular: for the single measure will have to be some sort of universal, that is, one thing that turns up in qualitatively the same way in many different things. Even the limited commensurability of Metricity is sufficient for the rejection of unique non-repeatable properties from practical salience. And we can see that the general spirit of Aristotle's non-commensurability leads directly to and support his account of the priority of particulars. For his non-commensurability says, Look and see how rich and diverse the ultimate values in the world are. Do not fail to investigate each valuable item, cherishing it for its own specific nature and not reducing it to something else. These injunctions lead in the direction of a long and open-ended list -- for we would not want to rule out beforehand the possibility that some new item will turn up whose own separate nature is irreducibly distinct from those we have previously recognized. In the context of friendship and love, especially, these injunctions are virtually certain to guarantee that the list of ultimate values will include some non-repeatable particular items: for each friend is to be cherished for his or her own sake, not simply as an instantiation of the universal value, friendship. In this way, although Aristotle does have independent arguments for the priority of particulars (those having to do with indefiniteness and mutability), the first two elements certainly support each other well.

The account of emotion and imagination gives further support to and is supported by both elements. For it is in the nature of imagination, as we have said, to recognize highly concrete and frequently uniquely particular objects. And the objects to which we are most strongly attached by our passions are frequently like this as well. In the *Politics,* arguing against Plato, Aristotle says that the two things that above all make people love and care for something are the thought that it is all their own and the thought that it's the only one they have (1262b22-3); so our most intense feelings of love and fear and grief are likely to be directed at objects and persons who are seen as irreducibly particular in their nature and in their relationship to us. To argue that emotion and imagination are essential components of practical knowing and judging is to suggest very strongly that good judging will at least in part be a matter of focussing on the concrete and even the particular, which will be seen as incommensurable with other things. And in *EN* X.9 he indeed explicitly connects the loving relation between parent and child with an ethical knowledge that is superior to that of the public educator in its concrete particularity (1180b7-13). On the other hand, to defend non-commensurability is to reopen the space in which the emotions and imagination operate and have their force. A Platonist ethical position, Aristotle plausibly argues,undermines the strength of the emotions; and Plato himself would concede that belief in commensurabilty and universality at least cuts away many of the most common emotional reactions, since he, too, grants that these are based on perceptions of specialness. Again, to defend the priority of particulars is to inform us that imagination can play a role in deliberation that cannot be altogether replaced by the functioning of abstract thought. It would be possible to defend a flexible context-oriented perception of particulars without giving a prominent role to emotion and imagination; for one might try to describe a purely intellectual faculty that would by itself be adequate for seizing the relevant features. There is some precedent for this in some pre-Aristotelian Greek accounts of practical wisdom, which defend an improvisatory contextual use of reason that looks very cool, wily, and self-controlled.[49] Aristotle would feel, I think, that this sort of reason was insufficient for the sensitive task of deliberating about ends, though it might be all right for technical means-end reasoning. Here he is in agreement with an important tradition in Athenian political thought. For although Thucydides, as we have mentioned, praises the resourceful improvisational ability of Themistocles without mention of emotions, the funeral oration of Pericles makes it abundantly clear that full political rationality requires passion, and the sort of judgement that is made with and through love and vision. Athenians are to cultivate the ability to conceive in imagination of their city's greatness and still greater promise; and they are to "fall in love" with her when they see this greatness (II.43.1). He would probably conclude, not implausibly, that a citizen who didn't feel this love had in a certain way failed to perceive both Athens and his own place in her.

One final connection between this feature and the other two: if one believes, with Plato, that the strong emotions are sources of unbearable tension and strain in a human life, one will have good reason to cultivate a way of seeing and judging that limits and reduces their power. Both commensurability and universality do this, as Plato argues. Because the Aristotelian position accepts emotional attachment as an intrinsically valuable source of richness and goodness in human life, it lacks one of Plato's most prominent motivations for the transformations involved in the first two features.

The three elements fit together, then, to form a coherent picture of practical choice. I see no significant tensions among them, and numerous reasons why the defender of one will wish to defend the others as well. They seem to articulate different aspects of a single idea. We might characterize this central idea, borrowing a phrase from Henry James, as one of becoming "finely aware and richly responsible;" of being a person "on whom nothing is

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49. See M. Detienne and J. P. Vernant, *Les ruses de l'intelligence: la mètis des grecs* (Paris 1974), discussed in *Fragility,* esp. ch. 1, ch. 7.

lost."[50] Being responsibly committed to the world of value before her, the perceiving agent can be counted on to investigate and scrutinize the nature of each item and each situation; to respond to what is there before her with full sensitivity and imaginative vigor; not to fall short of what is there to be seen and felt because of evasiveness, scientific abstractness, or a love of simplification. The Aristotelian agent is a person whom we could trust to describe a complex situation with full concreteness of detail and emotional shading, missing nothing of practical relevance. As James writes, "The person capable of feeling in the given case more than another of what is to be felt for it, and so serving in the highest degree to record it dramatically and objectively, is the only sort of person on whom we can count not to betray, to cheapen, or, as we say, give away the value and beauty of the thing."[51] But this means that the person of practical wisdom lies surprisingly close to the artist and/or the perceiver of art: not in the sense that this conception reduces moral value to aesthetic value or makes moral judgement a matter of taste; but in the sense that we are asked to see morality as a high type of vision of and response to the particular, an ability that we seek and value in our greatest artists, and especially our novelists, whose value for us is above all practical and never detached from our questions about how to live. Fine conduct requires above all correct description; such description is itself a form of morally assessible conduct. "To 'put' things is very exactly and responsibly and interminably to do them." The novelist is a moral agent; and the moral agent, to the extent to which she is good, shares in the abilities of the novelist.[52]

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[50] H. James, *The Princess Casamassima* (Penguin edition, New York 1977), preface, p. 9 and text, p. 133.

[51] *Ibid.*, preface, pp. 13-14.

## VI. An Empty Situation Morality?

This ethical norm will be charged with being empty of content. In one sense this charge is correct. Because of the priority of the particular, we can give no overall account of deliberative priorities and also no account of the techniques and procedures of good deliberation that would suffice to discriminate good choice from bad in advance of a confrontation with the details of the case. Aristotle says this plainly: just as the agent's own decision rests with perception, so too does our decision as to whether he has chosen well: the demand to set up general criteria for correct perception must be resisted (1126b2-4). In Aristotle's city the people of practical wisdom do not go about with placards on their backs, any more than in life we can ever have a water-tight guarantee that perception has in a particular case been correctly exercised. There are no necessary and sufficient conditions; our decision rests with perception.

But the charge of emptiness has been made in a stronger and more troubling form. Hilary Putnam, commenting on a previous attempt of mine to elicit an Aristotelian picture of choice from *The Golden Bowl,* suggested that this view is in danger of collapsing into "an empty situation morality" in which everything is "a matter of trade-offs."[53] I take it that this amounts to a charge that the agent who puts so much weight on the concrete choice situation and judges primarily with a view to the demands of the situation, will be deficient in ethical continuity and commitment over time, lacking in firm principles and in a reliable general conception of the good life. So long as the agent agonizes enough over the material of the case, she can do anything she likes.

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[52] The quotation is from James, *The Golden Bowl* (Penguin edition, New York 1966), preface p. 25. This paragraph is a summary of the argument of my "'Finely Aware and Richly Responsible'"; the epigraph to this paper from Whitman expresses a closely related view and is discussed in the later, omitted portion of this draft. The draft at this point goes on to discuss in detail the example from James' *The Golden Bowl,* which serves both as an example of good deliberation in the Aristotelian way and as a place to press further some of these points about literature. Because I do not really think the example is eliminable in the overall argument of this paper, I retain the original section numbering -- though I omit certain backward references to the content of the example.

[53] Hilary Putnam, "Taking rules Seriously: a Response to Martha Nussbaum," in *New Literary History* 15 (1983) 193-200.

This charge can be answered. But it is worth our time; for it will permit us to give a fuller account than we have so far of the interplay of universals and particulars in Aristotelian choice.

We can begin by returning to the metaphor of theatrical improvisation, which is a favorite Jamesian as well as Aristotelian image for the activity of practical wisdom. Maggie Verver is an actress who has prepared and practiced, and now discovers that she must "quite heroically," "from moment to moment," improvise her role. Does she, in learning to improvise, adopt a way of choice in which there are no principles and everything is ad hoc? (Perhaps: in which everything is permitted?) The image of the actress suggests how inaccurate such an inference would be. The salient difference between acting from a script and improvising is that one has to be not less but far *more* keenly attentive to what is given by the other actors and by the situation. You cannot do anything by rote, you must be actively aware and responsive at every moment, so as not to let the others down. An improvising actress, if she is improvising well, does not feel that she can say just anything at all. She must suit her choice to the evolving story, which has its own form and continuity. Above all, she must preserve the commitments of her character to the other characters (of herself as actress to the other actors). More, not less, fidelity is required. Consider the analogous contrast between the symphony player and the jazz musician. For the former, all commitments and continuities are external; they come from the score and the conductor. He just reads them off like anyone else. The jazz player, actively forging continuity, must choose in full awareness of and responsibility to the historical traditions of the form, and actively honor at every moment his commitments to his fellow musicians, whom he had better know as well as possible as unique individuals. He will be more responsible than the score-reader, and not less, to the unfolding continuities and structures of the work. These two cases indicate to us, then, that the perceiver who improvises is doubly responsible: responsible to the history of commitment and to the ongoing structures that go to constitute her context; and especially responsible to these, in that her commitments are internalized, assimilated, perceived, rather than read off from an external script or score.

In ethical terms, what this means is that the perceiver brings into the new situation a whole history of general conceptions and attachments, and a host of past obligations, (some general, some particular) all of which contribute to and help to constitute her evolving conception of good living. The organized internalization of these commitments constitutes her character. She will see the situation as made up, in good part, out of these general items; her moral description of it will use (as we saw) universal terms such as "father" and "friend." It will also acknowledge obligations, both general and particular, that bear upon her responsibility in this situation. In fact, the perceiver's rejection of commensurability and her willingness to acknowlede value conflict make her more faithful to standing commitments than the agent who redefines them in terms of a single quantity, or decrees that at most one of them is genuine wherever they conflict. In good deliberation the general and the continuous are acknowledged even where they bring enormous pain; for this is a part of acknowledging this concrete situation for the situation it is.

Perception, we might say, is a process of loving conversation between rules and concrete responses, general conceptions and unique cases, in which the general articulates the particular and is in turn further articulated by it. The particular is constituted out of features both repeatable and non-repeatable; and it also contains the unique images of those we love. The general is dark, uncommunicative, if it is not realized in a concrete image; but a concrete image or description would be inarticulate, indeed mad, if it contained no universals. The particular is prior for the reasons and in the ways that we have said; there are non-repeatable properties, there is revisability. In the end the general is only as good as its role in the correct articulation of the concrete. But particular human contexts are never *sui generis* (if seen well), nor divorced from a past full of obligations; and fidelity to those, as a mark of humanity, is one of the most essential values of perception.

To take this further we would need to have an account of character and the training of character. We would need to ask whether there is more than one ethical content that is compatible with the use of these procedures, and how ethical content at a general level (the plan for a good life) is deliberated about, assessed, and justified. This would take us well beyond the scope of this paper. But two remarks can be made here. First, that the Aristotelian view will hold that the abilities and procedures of perception are most suitable not only for concrete choice of what to do here and now, but also for the assessment of our plans for the good life overall. In practice these two activities usually occur together, as the agent brings her evolving conception into the concrete situation and either revises it or does not, according to the demands and deliverances of the situation. The claim is that the best justification is a persistent confrontation with the real, and that no other form or procedure could have as much force. Second: the Aristotelian view does not imply subjectivism or even relativism. It is so far an open question whether there is one or more than one set of values that will satisfy, over time, the scrutiny of perception. If Putnam's worry is partly on this score, there is no reason why he should worry more about perceptions than about systems of rules.[54]

## VII. Improvising When to Improvise

Sometimes the perceiver holds to a standing commitment; sometimes the new situation causes her to alter her scheme of ends. Sometimes she recognizes an irresolvable conflict of values; sometimes she decides that one or more of the values does not in fact apply in this particular case. Sometimes she attends more to the general repeatable features and sometimes to the new and unique. How can we tell when to do each of these things? How can we be sure to improvise at the right and not the wrong time, with the right and not the wrong sort and amount of flexibility?

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[54] On this issue, see also "'Finely Aware and Richly Responsible'."

The answer shows another dimension of the priority of the particular in good deliberation. For it must be: there is no general rule for this, the discrimination rests with perception. The experienced navigator will know when to follow the rule book and when to leave it aside. The "right rule" in such matters is simply: do it the way an experienced navigator would do it. There is no safe guarantee at all, and no short cut. And yet this absence of rule and formula does not mean that we have laissez-faire, or that any choice you make is all right. There are many ways of wrecking a ship in a storm, and very few ways of sailing it well. As Aristotle says, "There are many ways of missing the target...and only one way of hitting it; so one is easy and the other is hard" (1106b28-32).

Has anything been said here? Does all this have any content? This question keeps on returning. (For our profession is fond of theories that fix things in advance. It seems shameful to have accomplished so little and to have left so much to the occasions of life.) The answer is: just as much content as the truth.[55]

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