PRUDENCE IN ARISTOTLE AND ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

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Dedicated to the memory of Margaret Roche, my mother, who died on Sunday, 25th January, 2004.

In iothlainn Dé go dtugtar sinn.

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this project represents my own work and has not been submitted, in whole or in part, by me or by another person, for the purpose of obtaining any credit/grade. I agree that this project may be made available to future students of the College.

Signature: Donal Roche, OP

Date: 11th November, 2005.

ABSTRACT

For Aristotle, prudence or practical wisdom is a virtue of thought that is practical rather than theoretical and deliberative rather than intuitive. It is the intellectual virtue that perfects reasoning in regard to decision making in the realm of human action. To have this virtue is to be good at thinking about how to live a fulfilled life as a whole, and to be successful in so doing. The prudent person is the only one who is truly just, courageous and temperate, and the good person is truly good only if he is prudent. According to Aristotle, there is a fundamental connection between prudence and moral virtue. This connection depends on the pre-existence of certain natural qualities. Although Aristotle stresses the importance of prudence and the ethical life, he holds that the human person – endowed as he is with the divine element of reason – is capable of an even higher way of life. This is the life of contemplation, the life dedicated to the appreciation of truth, the life that is closest to the way of life of the gods.

For St. Thomas Aquinas, Aristotle is *the Philosopher*. In treating of prudence, Aquinas follows Aristotle very closely especially in his *Commentary on Aristotle's 'Nicomachean Ethics'*. He teaches that prudence is a virtue of the practical intellect that is related in a particularly close way to the moral virtues. In order to be morally good, a person needs the moral virtues, and these in turn need the judgment of prudence. Aquinas's interpretations of Aristotle's notion of prudence are more accurate than, and indeed represent improvements on, those advanced by other leading authorities of his

time, including St. Albert the Great in his *Super Ethica*. In ways that are significant, he changes and develops some of Aristotle's teachings on prudence in both his *Commentary on Aristotle's 'Nicomachean Ethics'* and in some of his more theological works, e.g., his *Summa Theologiae*. For example, Aquinas holds that Aristotle's conception of ultimate end or human flourishing – by Aristotle's own statement – can only be realized in an imperfect way in this life.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary western culture, people who are considered prudent are thought of as careful and cautious, circumspect and discreet. They are regarded as having a thought for the future and an aversion to risk, especially in relation to financial matters. Although they might be clever and energetic in the matter of furthering their own interests, they are sometimes judged as not being particularly admirable from a moral point of view. Writing almost fifty years ago, Josef Pieper stated that 'to the contemporary mind, prudence seems less a prerequisite to goodness than an evasion of it'.[1] Pieper went on to consider prudence in the context of the other cardinal virtues, i.e., justice, fortitude and temperance. His reflection on the relationship between prudence and fortitude or courage is illustrative. That courage is an important virtue is regarded as self-evident nowadays. However, prudence is sometimes thought of as almost the opposite of morality.

> Certainly, the common mind regards prudence and fortitude as virtually contradictory ideas. A 'prudent' man is thought to be one who avoids the embarrassing situation of having to be brave. The 'prudent' man is the 'clever tactician' who contrives to escape personal commitment. Those who shun danger are wont to account for their attitude by appealing to the necessity for 'prudence'. (Pieper, p. 11)

Although Pieper's observations were made in the late 1950s, they are as true today as they were then. Because of its connotations of extreme cautiousness and selfish calculation, prudence – to the extent that it is perceived as a virtue at all in our time – is regarded as having only a limited importance.

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[1] Josef Pieper, *Prudence*, trans. by Richard and Clara Winston (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), pp. 10-11.

The contemporary understanding of prudence would strike both Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas as being very peculiar. For them, prudence or practical wisdom is the virtue of thought concerned with action in the world of contingency, i.e., the world as unpredictable and variable. It is the intellectual virtue that perfects reasoning in regard to decision making in the realm of human action. According to Aristotle and Aquinas, the person who is prudent is the only one who can be truly just, courageous and temperate, and the good person is truly good only if he is prudent. 'What is prudent and what is good are substantially one and the same; they differ only in their place in the logical succession of realization. For whatever is good must first have been prudent' (Pieper, p. 15). For both Aristotle and Aquinas, the virtue of prudence is of central importance. Pieper goes so far as to say that 'the structural framework of Occidental Christian metaphysics as a whole stands revealed, perhaps more plainly than in any other single ethical dictum, in the proposition that prudence is the foremost of the virtues' (p. 10). This thesis is largely an attempt to present Aristotle's teachings on prudence. It seeks to situate his understanding of the notion of prudence within the context of his general understanding of the ethical life and how to live well. It tries to face and to tease out some of the more important philosophical and exegetical problems that are encountered by any attempt to engage seriously with Aristotle's views in this area. To a lesser extent, this thesis is an attempt to show how successful Aquinas was in penetrating Aristotle's teachings on prudence, even though he was separated from Aristotle by more than 1,500 years and did not know Greek. In addition, all of Aristotle's works had only become available in Latin translation in Aquinas's own lifetime. This thesis also tries to indicate how Aquinas was not afraid on occasion to change and develop some of Aristotle's views in this area. These two great thinkers, by their engagement with such issues as the relationship between the rational and the

emotional in human psychology, the relationship between the human and the divine, the community and the individual, the universal and the particular, intelligence and character, developed an understanding of prudence that far exceeds in scope and in depth the popular understanding of prudence in our culture. As Pieper indicates, the great gap between the teachings of Aristotle and Aquinas on prudence and the contemporary understanding of the concept may have a deeper significance. It may indicate that people 'no longer feel the binding force of the Christian Occidental view of man. It may denote the beginning of an incomprehension of the fundamentals of Christian teaching in regard to the nature of reality' (Pieper, p.10). In my view, something very like the notion of prudence taught by Aristotle and Aquinas needs to be retrieved and given priority if individuals and communities are going to be successful in acting wisely and living well in our time.

Chapter Two of this thesis is an attempt to outline Aristotle's understanding of prudence. After listing and considering various sources, the focus is put on Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Various methodological issues are then addressed, e.g., Aristotle's understanding of dialectic and the nature of moral knowledge. When Aristotle considers prudence explicitly, perhaps the most distinctive aspect of his teaching is the fundamental connection that he sees as existing between prudence and the virtues of character. This connection and some of its implications are considered at some length. For example, Aristotle denies that a person who is truly courageous can be unjust. This is because he thinks that courage and justice – like all the virtues of character – depend on prudence, which he regards as a unifying virtue. With the help of prudence, the virtues of character or the moral virtues make it possible for a person to bring the various non-rational elements in his make-up into harmony with reason, so

that he fulfils his function well and flourishes as a human being. For Aristotle, the person who fulfils his function well and who flourishes as a human being is one who attains *eudaimonia* or happiness. The role of prudence as the virtue of good decision making in this context is then examined.

Chapter Two also tries to explore some of the issues that the distinctions between prudence and craft, and action and production, give rise to – issues on which some leading contemporary interpreters of Aristotle are divided. A fundamental concern for Aristotle is to distinguish prudence from the other practical virtue of thought, i.e., craft or technical expertise, which is concerned with production rather than action. Although there are senses in which the two virtues are similar, Aristotle is clear that the person who exercises the virtue of prudence is not to be identified with the person who exercises a skill or a technique in a field such as building construction or medicine.

Another fundamental concern for Aristotle is the comparison and the contrast that can be made between prudence and theoretical wisdom. The virtues of thought that are theoretical are crucial in helping a person to acquire genuine knowledge of what constitutes *eudaimonia*. Theoretical wisdom involves trying to look beyond the human. It seeks to understand the first causes of the universe, i.e., the unmoved mover and the various other intelligences that move the planets. Aristotle places himself very deliberately in a tradition according to which the cosmos is controlled by divine beings. The extent to which his conception of ethics is religious is considered. Also, the implications for prudence and the ethical life of Aristotle's elevation of theoretical wisdom to a position of pre-eminence among the virtues are examined at some length. This is an issue on which there appears to be a decided lack of consensus in

contemporary Aristotelian scholarship. In this context, the attractiveness of the intellectualist interpretation that has been put forward by Richard Kraut is highlighted.

Lastly, in this chapter an attempt is made to show how Aristotle also develops his account of prudence by exploring its various relations to such matters as deliberation, decision and a special kind of perception. These complex relations, which go to the heart of Aristotle's theory of action, serve to underline the holistic nature of his understanding of practical rationality.

Chapter Three of this thesis is an attempt to outline Thomas Aquinas's interpretation of Aristotle's doctrine of prudence as set out in his *Sententia libri Ethicorum* (usually abbreviated *SLE*) or *Commentary on Aristotle's 'Nicomachean Ethics'*. The *Nicomachean Ethics* as a whole, and in particular Book VI on the intellectual virtues, were not translated into Latin until the middle of the thirteenth century. By 1252, Albert the Great had written his *Super Ethica* – the first full Latin commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*. At this time, Aquinas was studying as a Dominican under Albert at Cologne. It was about twenty years after this that he wrote his own commentary, i.e., the *SLE*. Although Aquinas's commentary is a *sententia* and not an *expositio* or in-depth study, the accuracy and profundity of the grasp of Aristotle's teachings on prudence that it reveals is immediately apparent. Much of Chapter Three is concerned with the appraisal of Aquinas's interpretations of Aristotle's notion of prudence. It seems reasonable to conclude that his interpretations are more accurate than, and indeed represent improvements on, those advanced by other leading authorities of his time, including Albert the Great in his *Super Ethica*. When this is recognized, it is possible to discern Aquinas's own views, and to appreciate their place in the mature development

of his thought. When some aspects of his treatment of prudence in the *Summa Theologiae* and in some of his other works are considered, the suggestion that the *SLE* is not just an interpretation of Aristotle but also an expression of Aquinas's own views – and a developed and a mature expression at that – gains further credence.

Having identified some aspects of Aquinas's notion of prudence – with particular reference to his *SLE* – in Chapter Three, Chapter Four tries to compare and contrast the teachings on prudence of these two great thinkers separated by more than a millennium and a half. At a first glance, they might appear as almost identical. However, this appearance is somewhat deceptive. One important difference is that Aquinas considers that Aristotle's conception of ultimate end or *eudaimonia* cannot be realized perfectly in this life, and that this can be established from Aristotle's own argument. Whether or not Aquinas's concepts of *synderesis* and the will represent major innovations in his account as compared to that of Aristotle are not at all the straightforward issues that they were thought to have been in certain circles not so long ago. It is in his more theological works when Aquinas discusses prudence explicitly in the context of grace, God's providence, and the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity – thus going beyond Aristotle's philosophical scope – that he separates himself more significantly from the one he honours with the title, *Philosophus*. Any reappraisal of the significance of the traditional virtue of prudence has to begin from a careful study of the concept as conceived and developed by these two great thinkers. Hopefully, this thesis is a small step in this direction, preparing the way perhaps for a more extensive study in the area.

CHAPTER TWO

PRACTICAL WISDOM

OR

PRUDENCE (*PHRONĒSIS*)

IN

ARISTOTLE

2.1 SOURCES

2.1.1 The Ethical Treatises

The text of Aristotle on which most classic discussions of practical wisdom or prudence are based is Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which is usually taken to correspond to Book V of the *Eudemian Ethics*. There is general agreement among scholars that Aristotle's two major ethical treatises, the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Eudemian Ethics*, have three books in common, Books V-VII of the former work (usually abbreviated *NE*) being taken to correspond to Books IV–VI of the latter work (usually abbreviated *EE*). Traditionally, the *Nicomachean Ethics* has been regarded as the definitive statement of Aristotle's ethical theory, and the *Eudemian Ethics* has been viewed in comparison as an earlier, less important work. In recent decades, the traditional view has been strongly challenged, most notably by Anthony Kenny in his book, *The Aristotelian Ethics.*[1] This work, which is a study of the relationship between Aristotle's two great ethical treatises, sets out to undermine the traditional view concerning 'the priority and inferiority of the *Eudemian Ethics*' (ibid., p. 3). Nowadays, many scholars accept that the stylistic and doctrinal evidence linking the three common books with the *Eudemian Ethics* is strong. Christopher Rowe, in the historical introduction to his recently published translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, acknowledges that 'if the balance of opinion, and of the evidence, makes the *Eudemian* earlier than the *Nicomachean*, there is also something like the same balance in favour of an Eudemian origin for the "common" books'.[2] This is a very striking statement

[1] Anthony J. P. Kenny, *The Aristotelian Ethics*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).
[2] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by Christopher Rowe (with Historical Introduction), and Philosophical Introduction and Commentary by Sarah Broadie, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 4.

considering that Christopher Rowe has been identified by Anthony Kenny as a principal and very able defender of the traditional view (Kenny, p. vi).

The other important ethical treatise traditionally attributed to Aristotle, the *Great Ethics* or *Magna Moralia*, is nowadays regarded as probably the work of one of his students. Nevertheless, it is taken to be authentically Aristotelian. Of Aristotle's other works, the *Rhetoric* and the *Politics* are also considered particularly significant in the context of his moral philosophy. Indeed, Aristotle sees the inquiry in his ethical treatises as part of the inquiry continued in the *Politics*. Already, in Chapter 2 of Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he makes it clear that he sees this whole work as a kind of political science.

> For while it is satisfactory to acquire and preserve the good even for an individual, it is finer and more divine to acquire and preserve it for a people and for cities. And so, since our line of inquiry seeks these [goods, for an individual and for a community], it is a sort of political science.[3]

Thus Aristotle does not make a sharp distinction between ethics and politics. The kind of political science that he investigates in the *Nicomachean Ethics* takes for granted the overall identification of the moral and civic virtues in the good city-state or *polis*. For Aristotle as for Plato, the main purpose of political power is to help realize the good in the lives of free citizens. Although achieving it requires a context that is political and social, the good itself is realized only in individual lives and through the active involvement of individual citizens. Because the human good is Aristotle's fundamental concept in this context, it can be stated that he views politics as a discipline that is continuous with ethics.

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[3] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* trans. by Terence Irwin, 2nd edn (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1999), 1094b10-11. Further references to this edition of the *Nicomachean Ethics* are given after quotations in the text following Bekker's page and line system.

2.1.2 Book VI of the *NE*

In this study of Aristotle's treatment of the virtue of practical wisdom or prudence (*phronēsis*), the main focus will be on Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. From the outset, it is important to be clear that the style of the book is rather casual. It does not attempt to treat of all matters related to practical wisdom in a structured or systematic way. Indeed, throughout the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle does not see himself as someone theorizing about practical knowledge, but rather as someone demonstrating it. In Book VI, Aristotle is particularly concerned 'to complete the account of moral excellence offered earlier'.[4] He understands moral excellence as relating to a mean that accords with right reason (*orthos logos*); it is the nature of this right reason in the context of moral decision making that he now seeks to clarify. It is the truly prudent person who embodies this right reason that is specifically ethical.

2.2 METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

2.2.1 The Dialectical Argument

In order 'to grasp what prudence is' (1140a25), Aristotle encourages his readers to study carefully the kinds of people who are regarded as prudent. We come to understand *phronēsis* by watching closely the *phronomoi*, the people who are judged to be practically wise in the way they live their lives. It is very typical of Aristotle to begin an inquiry by discussing some commonly accepted beliefs and opinions (*ta endoxa*) about the subject, and to treat these very seriously, though not uncritically. *Endoxa* can be beliefs and opinions held by all or most people, or they can be beliefs and opinions held by some or most of the wise, i.e., by philosophers. According to

[4] Sarah Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle*, (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 186.

Aristotle, beliefs and opinions supported by either of these kinds of authority are never completely wrong. 'It is reasonable for each group not to be completely wrong, but to be correct on one point at least, or even on most points' (1098b28-29). Frequently, Aristotle proceeds by investigating difficulties and puzzles (*aporiai*) concerning these commonly accepted beliefs and opinions; this method of proceeding is normally referred to as the dialectical argument. For Aristotle, dialectic is any rational inference based on probable premises. At the end of the process, he arrives at first principles, which are sometimes a refined and systematized version of the commonly accepted beliefs and opinions.

According to W.F.R. Hardie, the extent to which Aristotle makes use of dialectical argument in the *Nicomachean Ethics* should not be overstated.[5] For the most part, he develops his arguments from premises that express his own beliefs and opinions, or beliefs and opinions that he has made his own. C.D.C. Reeve suggests that Hardie is mistaken in thinking that Aristotle's own beliefs and opinions are not to be regarded as *endoxa*, and that they are not to be understood as coming under the umbrella of dialectic.[6] 'Arguments that begin from Aristotle's own views [...] should not, for that reason alone, be characterized as not employing dialectical methods' (Reeve, p. 36, n. 58). Hardie seems to be on firmer ground when he suggests that Aristotle's declared respect for commonly accepted beliefs and opinions needs to be considered in the light of his view that most people do not have a true conception of the kind of life that is best and make the life of pleasure their standard ideal (p. 38). 'The many [...] would seem

[5] W. F. R. Hardie, *Aristotle's Ethical Theory*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 39. Hardie goes on to contrast the positions of Burnet and Greenwood on this issue. Burnet held that the *Nicomachean Ethics* was 'dialectical throughout'; Greenwood regarded this view as an exaggeration.
[6] C. D. C. Reeve, *Practices of Reason: Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 35-36.

to conceive the good and happiness as pleasure, and hence they also like the life of gratification. In this they appear completely slavish, since the life they decide on is a life for grazing animals' (1095b19-21). In contrast to W.F.R. Hardie, John M. Cooper regards Aristotle's moral philosophy as being very dialectical in character.[7]

> Even where the 'opinions of the wise', what we all say or think, and the other hallmarks of dialectic are not emphasized in the text, there seems no doubt that Aristotle conceives of his procedure as for the most part dialectical. (Cooper, p. 69)

In general, Cooper refers to dialectic as involving a kind of reasoning that is less formal than demonstration, which produces scientific proofs. Demonstration proceeds by the making of deductions from first principles that may be unfamiliar to most people. Unlike demonstration, dialectic takes as a starting point commonly accepted beliefs and reputable opinions, as has already been stated, and again, unlike demonstration, a dialectical argument often proceeds by asking questions. However, one of the fundamental characteristics of dialectical arguments as Aristotle understands them is that they are supposed to be valid. In a dialectical deduction just as much as in a demonstration, the conclusion necessarily follows from the premises. In a famous passage in Chapter 1 of Book VII, where Aristotle takes up the question of incontinence, he makes it clear that he regards dialectic as an important tool in philosophical inquiries in ethics.

> As in the other cases, we must set out the appearances, and first of all go through the puzzles. In this way we must prove the common beliefs [...] – ideally, all the

[7] John M. Cooper, *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle*, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1986), pp. 69-70.

common beliefs, but if not all, most of them, and the most important. For if the objections are solved, and the common beliefs are left, it will be an adequate proof. (1145b4-8)

2.2.2 Examples of Prudent People

As examples of people who are regarded as prudent, Aristotle gives Pericles, and, in general, household managers and politicians (1140b8-10). Richard Kraut warns against reading too much into such a reference.[8] At this point, Aristotle is trying to distinguish prudence from other intellectual states such as craft or theoretical wisdom by paying attention to the people who are characterized as having prudence or practical wisdom. He should not be understood as committing himself to the thesis that Pericles in particular exemplified practical wisdom.

> The point of his remark about Pericles is not that whatever practical wisdom is, it is something Pericles had but, rather, that this virtue is ascribed to people on the basis of the breadth of their concern: they try to achieve what is good in general and not this or that more specific good. (Kraut, *Grand End*, p. 370, n. 4)

Kraut's point is supported by the fact that Aristotle seems to qualify his position as regards politicians at a later stage by making a contrast between them and people who are regarded as prudent. Prudent people mind their own business whereas politicians tend to be too active, he suggests (1142a1-2). However, he goes on to acknowledge that being in a position to mind one's own business presupposes a political system (1142a9). In directing our attention to the kinds of people who are regarded as prudent, Aristotle continues an approach he adopts earlier in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. For example, in

[8] Richard Kraut, 'In Defense of the Grand End', *Ethics*, Vol. 103, No. 2 (Jan., 1993), 361-374 (p. 370, n. 4).

Book III, he refers to the excellent or virtuous person as one who 'sees what is true in each case, being himself a sort of standard and measure' (1113a33-34). He can be trusted to approve of the things that are genuinely good. Thus it can be argued that Aristotelian ethics is a practical enterprise that includes studying closely the kinds of people who are regarded as prudent and virtuous, and learning from them.

2.2.3 The Challenge of Dealing Adequately with the Complexity of Ethical Issues

As early as Chapter 3 of Book I, Aristotle warns us against expecting that the discussion of ethical issues will be characterized by the degree of precision that is found in other forms of discourse. 'The educated person seeks exactness in each area to the extent that the nature of the subject allows; for apparently it is just as mistaken to demand demonstrations from a rhetorician as to accept [merely] persuasive arguments from a mathematician' (1094b24-27). In Chapter 2 of Book II, Aristotle affirms his belief that 'every account of the actions we must do has to be stated in outline, not exactly' (1104a1-2). This applies to both a general account of actions and any account of a particular case. A general account is unable to do justice to the variations in obligation that arise from the widely differing circumstances that attend the performance of any action. Similarly, an account of a particular case has to include so many details and qualifications - if it is to fit the actual case - that it inevitably lacks simplicity, a quality Aristotle regards as essential for precision. In this context, Martha Nussbaum interprets Aristotle as suggesting that the specific ethical case can contain some elements that are non-repeatable or a particular that is ultimate or unique in some way.[9]

[9] Martha C. Nussbaum, 'The Discernment of Perception: An Aristotelian Conception of Private and Public Rationality', in *Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. by Nancy Sherman (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999), pp. 145-181 (pp. 162-163).

> 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 unique combination of size, weight, needs, goals and activity are all relevant to determining the appropriate for him. (Nussbaum, *Discernment*, p. 162)

The particularity of love and friendship illustrates this point even more clearly. Aspects of shared history or a family relationship that are not even in principle repeatable are permitted to carry serious ethical weight. A particular situation might demand that a family member or friend be treated 'as a unique non-replaceable being, a being not like anyone else in the world' (ibid., p. 163). For Aristotle, to live a good life is to be involved in a dynamic project in which all the answers are not given in advance.

2.2.4 Knowledge and Right Reason in Aristotle's Ethics

These difficulties regarding measurement and precision in ethical matters must not be taken to mean that there is no genuine knowledge of principles and of how to apply them in Aristotle's understanding of ethics. Despite his many caveats about the lack of precision in ethics, Aristotle also makes statements that are quite definite – if not absolute – in character.

> Now not every action or feeling admits of the mean. For the names of some automatically include baseness – for instance, spite, shamelessness, envy [among feelings], and adultery, theft, murder, among actions. For all of these and similar things are called by these names because they themselves, not their excesses or deficiencies, are base. Hence in doing these things we can never be correct, but must invariably be in error. We cannot do them well or not well – by committing adultery, for instance, with the right woman at the right time in the right way. On

the contrary, it is true without qualification that to do any of them is to be in error. (1107a9-17)

Aristotle is convinced that there is in every kind of situation a correct answer to the question of how one should act, and that the person who acts in accord with right reason attains it. 'First, then, actions should accord with the correct reason. That is a common [belief], and let us assume it' (1103b32-33). The phrase – in accord with correct or right reason (*kata ton orthon logon*) – occurs repeatedly in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and it always involves prudence either implicitly or explicitly.

> Whenever people now define virtue, they all say what state it is and what it is related to, and then add that it is the state in accord with the correct reason. Now the correct reason is the reason in accord with prudence; it would seem, then, that they all in a way intuitively believe that the state in accord with prudence is virtue. (1144b23-26)

2.2.5 Purpose and Audience

The importance of two other features of Aristotle's conception of method in the *Nicomachean Ethics* needs to be underlined. Firstly, he does not see himself as a theoretician. For him, the aim of ethics is not so much to know as to do. The objective of the discussion is not to instruct us on the nature of virtue, but to show us how to live well. 'The purpose of our examination is not to know what virtue is, but to become good, since otherwise the inquiry would be of no benefit to us' (1103b28-30). Secondly, it is important to keep in mind the audience that Aristotle is addressing in his discussion. Consisting of men who have a certain experience and maturity, it is quite specific. 'A youth is not a suitable student of political science; for he lacks experience of the actions in life [...] Moreover, since he tends to follow his feelings, his study will

be futile and useless' (1095a2-5). Aristotle's students have to be ready to listen to reason in ethical matters, and they must not be unduly influenced by their emotions. 'For those who accord with reason in forming their desires and in their actions, knowledge of political science will be of great benefit' (1095a10-11). Also, it is assumed that Aristotle's students have been well brought up and that they have acquired – or are not far from acquiring – the starting points of the subject. 'Someone who is well brought up has the beginnings, or can easily acquire them' (1095a8-9).

2.3 PRUDENCE AND CHARACTER VIRTUE

2.3.1 *Ergon*, Virtue and Reason

In Aristotle's account of action, a key role is played by the concept of the *ergon*, a term that can be translated as the characteristic activity or function or work of a thing. A thing's *ergon* is bound up with its essence and its virtue. In the case of beings that are animate, the *ergon* corresponds to the type of soul the being has. A good knife is one that performs its *ergon* or function of cutting well. Knives are good in virtue of their possessing certain properties such as sharpness, rigidity, etc.. Those properties, which enable a thing to perform its *ergon* well, can be termed its virtues. A good human being is one who performs his *ergon* well, the human *ergon* being the 'activity of the soul in accord with reason or requiring reason' (1098a7-8). The virtues for a human being are those states, which, when they are activated, either express reason or require reason. Although Aristotle sees all the human virtues as reason-based, he makes a division between virtues of thought and virtues of character. The virtues of thought are those that express reason, and they correspond to the rational part of the soul. They are 'craft, scientific knowledge, prudence, wisdom, and understanding' (1139b16-17). In Greek,

the respective terms are *technē*, *epistēmē*, *phronēsis*, *sophia* and *nous*, and these intellectual virtues are discussed in Book VI. The virtues of character are those that require reason, and they correspond to the non-rational part of the soul. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle gives no definite listing of the character virtues. They are discussed in Books II-V, and among those included are courage (*andreia*), temperance (*sōphrosunē*), justice (*dikaiosunē*), generosity (*eleutheriotēs*), magnificence (*megaloprepeia*), magnanimity (*megalopsuchia*), mildness (*praotēs*), wit (*eutrapelia*) and some virtues for which he claims there are no names.

The rational part and the non-rational or emotional part are different aspects of the one human soul. Although Aristotle sees the non-rational part as sharing in reason and as responsive to it, he does not regard the virtues of the two parts as overlapping. However, he makes one important exception here, and that is prudence. Although prudence is an intellectual virtue, it is closely associated with the character or moral virtues. The examination of the character virtues in Books 11-V shows that 'each of them is a mode of emotional receptivity to the rule of reason' (Kraut, *Grand End*, p. 373). The role of prudence is crucial in enabling the moral virtues 'to promote the domination of reason over every other aspect of human life' (ibid., p. 374). Also, many Aristotelian commentators stress that it is important to consider the human *ergon* as a form of activity rather than as a distinctive kind of activity. According to this interpretation, Aristotle does not see the human *ergon* as being exclusively intellectual. 'He does not mean that a human being does or should concentrate on rational thinking

rather than action; he means that a human being characteristically guides his actions by practical reason'.[10]

2.3.2 The Interdependence of Prudence and Character Virtue

The distinction between virtues of thought and virtues of character is misleading if it gives the impression that the two kinds can occur independently. Virtues or excellences of character are impossible without prudence, the most important of the virtues of thought for ethics. Virtues of character need the guidance of prudence to avoid the extremes of excess and deficiency, and to ensure that feelings and actions occur at the right time, concerning the right things, in respect of the right people, for the right reason, and in the right way (1106b16-24). Also, prudence is impossible without excellence of character (1144a29ff.). Virtues are developed from natural capacities, which have to be turned in the right direction. Cleverness in action is not sufficient for prudence. The right ends have to be pursued. The prudent person (*phronimos*) needs the virtues of character, 'for vice perverts us and produces false views about the principles of actions' (1144b34-35). 'A prudent person must also at the same time be excellent in character' (1152a10).

Aristotle makes an important distinction between natural virtue (*phusikē aretē*) and full or perfect virtue (*kuria aretē*). For example, courage can occur as a natural character virtue arising from a person's natural dispositions or from his moral training. However, this kind of courage needs to be developed into a state necessarily including prudence (1144b10-14). Courage as a full character virtue requires the agent to decide freely to

[10] Terence Irwin, 'The metaphysical and psychological basis of Aristotle's *Ethics*', in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. by A.O. Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 35-53 (p. 49).

perform the actions that develop the character state that is courage. The agent has to deliberate and freely choose the actions for their own sake, i.e., because they are truly good. 'Full virtue cannot be acquired without prudence' (1144b17). Resulting from actions that are freely chosen and directed by prudence, it is the kind of virtue that makes a person 'good without qualification' (1145a1). The form of choice involved here is more than simple choice (*hairesis*), i.e., choice without deliberation or decision. According to Aristotle, children and even animals are capable of simple choice. What is needed for full virtue is decision or rational choice (*prohairesis*), which always requires deliberation or rational calculation. *Prohairesis* literally means choosing before, the *before* having a preferential or a temporal meaning. *Prohairesis* is sometimes rendered preferential choice. As Aristotle himself points out, 'decision involves reason and thought, and even the name itself would seem to indicate that [what is decided, *prohaireton*] is chosen [*haireton*] before [*pro*] other things' (1112a17-18). Because 'the virtues are decisions of some kind, or [rather] require decision' (1106a4-5), and because prudence is the virtue of good decision making, it can be stated that prudence is the source of full character virtue.

2.3.3 The Reciprocity of the Virtues

Although Aristotle accepts that the natural virtues are separable, he insists that the full or perfect virtues are inseparable (1144b32-1145a2). In rejecting the Socratic belief in the unity and identity of all the virtues, he does not argue directly. He maintains that since each virtue is inseparable from prudence, and since prudence requires all the virtues, the virtues require one another. In other words, they are connected in the sense that they all need prudence. 'One has all the virtues if and only if one has prudence, which is a single state' (1145a2). Full character virtue is acquired only by repeated

decisions made 'in accord with the correct reason. Now the correct reason is the reason in accord with prudence' (1144b23-25). Because of the crucial role of prudence in ethical decision making, it can be argued that it is the decisive and most important virtue in Aristotle's understanding of what living the good life involves.

2.3.4 Interpreting 'the state in accord with the correct reason, (and) [...] the state involving the correct reason' (1144b26-28)

Aristotle proceeds to point out that 'in accord with the correct reason' needs to be understood in an active sense. It is insufficient for the agent's action to happen to be in accord with the correct reason or prudence; the agent must actually decide that the action to be done is virtuous. 'For it is not merely the state in accord with the correct reason, but the state involving the correct reason, that is virtue. And it is prudence that is the correct reason in this area' (1144b26-28). The agent has to engage personally in the process of deliberating or rationally calculating that leads to the decision. In the notes he provides to his translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Terence Irwin offers a different interpretation of these lines.

> In distinguishing (a) 'in accord with (*kata*) the correct reason' from (b) 'involving (*meta*) the correct reason', Aristotle probably means to distinguish (a) actions on the virtuous person's decision from (b) actions, based on instinctive reactions and feelings, that are not actions on decision, but still would not be what they are without his rational reflection and decision (cf. 1117a22). (Irwin, p. 254)

While accepting that the traditional interpretation of 1144b26-28 may be accurate, W. F. R. Hardie seems to lend some support to the kind of interpretation suggested by Irwin. He refers to an argument made by J. A. Smith in the *Classical Quarterly* in 1920. Smith's argument was based on a grammatical point.

> According to the usual interpretation Aristotle is saying that virtue is a disposition not merely in accordance with (*kata*) reason but accompanying (*meta*) reason. This makes virtue the subject of the sentence; but in the Greek text it is the predicate. (Hardie, p. 238)

Hardie proceeds to point out that, according to Smith, translating these lines literally would result in *meta* expressing a looser, and not a tighter, connection between virtue and wisdom compared to that expressed by *kata*. Smith reverses the generally accepted interpretation by arguing that '*kata* may convey not an external or accidental connection but an intimate and causal connection [...] Again he argues that *meta* (with), or *ouk aneu* (not without), does not naturally suggest immanence or an intimate necessary connection' (ibid.). While Hardie is very sympathetic to Smith's argument, he acknowledges that, in general, students of the *Nicomachean Ethics* have not been persuaded to abandon the generally accepted interpretation of 1144b26-28. His final word is that Aristotle 'has left this important part of his doctrine without adequate elucidation' (ibid., p. 239). In her commentary on Christopher Rowe's translation of these lines, Sarah Broadie takes up a position close to the traditional interpretation. 'The disposition [to act] according to the correct prescription [*kata ton orthon logon*] [...] fits a condition of simple readiness to obey the right prescription' (Broadie and Rowe, p. 383), she suggests. She goes on to state that 'the disposition [to act] *accompanied by* the correct prescription [*meta tou orthou logou*]' simply adds an element of '*self*-directedness' (ibid.).

2.4 PRUDENCE AND *EUDAIMONIA*

2.4.1 Reason and *Eudaimonia*

In general, Aristotle describes prudent people as people who have the capacity to 'deliberate finely' (1140a26) about things that can contribute to their own fulfilment or happiness or well-being. Thus being practically wise or prudent is intimately bound up with *eudaimonia* or human well-being as the final goal of human beings. People who are prudent have a basic grasp of what constitutes the ideal of human fulfilment. For Aristotle, the things that are fine or just or right are actually determined by how they are related to *eudaimonia* or human well-being. In particular situations, people who are prudent are able to choose the action or actions that in practice best contribute to the realization of *eudaimonia*. 'Prudence is a state grasping the truth, involving reason, concerned with action about things that are good or bad for a human being' (1140b7). 'Actions are in every way right if they express the reason that the actions of the *phronimos* express (1107a1-2). And that reason is itself determined by what best promotes *eudaimonia*' (Reeve, p. 29). Reeve goes on to refer to *eudaimonia* as not just a first principle of ethics, but as 'the quintessentially ethical first principle of ethics' (ibid.). As interpreted by many scholars, Aristotle sees the virtues as being the major components of *eudaimonia* or human well-being. Other components include health, material resources, and a stable political framework. When Aristotle states that 'happiness is activity in accord with virtue' (1177a12), he means the fulfilment of a person's total potential, not just his actions. Activity (*energia*), which can also be rendered actualization, includes contemplative study (*theōria*), something that he sharply distinguishes from action (*praxis*).

2.4.2 Practical Reason, Decision and Deliberation

For Aristotle, deliberating finely is an exercise in practical reasoning. Such reasoning is termed practical because it results in action. Practical reason itself has two aspects: the rational choice or decision (*prohairesis*) on which an agent acts, and the process of deliberation by which such a choice or decision is made. Choices are made and actions are done for reasons. The underlying assumption here is that the link between intellect and action is a causal one. When a choice is of X for the sake of Y, establishing Y as the reason shows more clearly what choice the agent is making in choosing X and what he is doing when he acts on his choice. As Joseph Raz puts it in the book, *Practical Reasoning*, of which he is the editor, 'Reasons are the corner-stone of all explanation of human actions, indeed of the very notion of human action itself'.[11] An agent's rational choice can be evaluated in two complementary ways. If his choice is of X for the sake of Y, Y may or may not be an appropriate end, and X may or may not be an appropriate means. Giving Y as the reason might be the beginning of an argument to show that X is a good action as compared with other possibilities. For Aristotle, the end or reason of a rational choice is an integral part of it and not just an additional fact about it.

Aristotle is keenly aware of the uniqueness of human beings as rational animals. In his view, an action that is done from the kind of impulse that sees no further than its immediate physical expression, leading to instant satisfaction, is not a truly human action. The desire-perception-action scheme that he uses to describe animal behaviour is not able to do justice to the experience of human action. Much more is involved in the link between the intellect of the human agent and his action than the making of a simple connection between perception by the intellect of something good and the

[11] *Practical Reasoning*, ed. by Joseph Raz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 2.

activation of appetite resulting in action. Among other things, Aristotle's account has to make room for whatever it is that enables a human agent to be held accountable for his actions. In order to differentiate human action from animal behaviour, he introduces three elements between desire and action. These three elements are deliberation, perception and choice. Thus the entire process can be represented as a desire-deliberation-perception-choice-action scheme.

2.4.3 The Nature of Deliberation

Deliberation is reasoning in a practical way about what the human agent can do. Although it presupposes a determinate end and considers how this can be attained, deliberation is basically concerned with means rather than ends. Like the mathematician who works back from the problem to be solved to an easier problem whose solution would help him to solve the other, and so on until he reaches one he is able to solve with the knowledge he already has, the deliberating agent works back from the end to the means and continues back further to the means to the means and keeps going until he reaches a means that can be adopted here and now.

> We deliberate not about ends, but about what promotes ends [...] we lay down the end, and then examine the ways and means to achieve it. If it appears that any of several [possible] means will reach it, we examine which of them will reach it most easily and finely; and if only one [possible] means reaches it, we examine how that means will reach it, and how the means itself is reached, until we come to the first cause, the last thing to be discovered. For a deliberator would seem to inquire and analyze in the way described, as though analyzing a diagram [...]. And the last thing [found] in the analysis would seem to be the first that comes into being. (1112b12-24)

Thus the last step in the process becomes the first to be taken in fact. The deliberation phase yields to the perception phase. The agent sees that X can be done here and now. The process is brought to completion by the choice to do X followed by the action.

> We have found, then, that what we decide to do is whatever action, among those up to us, we deliberate about and [consequently] desire to do. Hence also decision will be deliberative desire to do an action that is up to us; for when we have judged [that it is right] as a result of deliberation, we desire to do it in accord with our wish. (1113a10-14)

Thus rational choice or decision is the culmination of deliberation and the starting point of action. As such, it is both pre-eminently rational and inescapably practical.

2.4.4 Ends and Means

In Aristotle's understanding, the end that is sought is posited by 'deliberative desire' (1139a23). The role of the character virtues is crucial in determining that the right end is desired. The calculation of the means to the right end is supplied by deliberative or practical reasoning. However, Aristotle's saying that deliberation is 'not about ends, but about what promotes ends' (1112b11-12), should not be interpreted too narrowly. What is an end in one context, and so not deliberated about there, is a means in another, where it is subject to deliberation. Thus an end can be deliberated about and chosen as the means to a higher end. Also, two ends can be in conflict. The conflict can be either partial or total. The agent can only resolve the conflict satisfactorily by deliberating about both ends to see which is higher. Ultimately, all ends, except an agent's highest end, are means to that end. The highest or ultimate end is the agent's conception of what kind of life is best. According to Aristotle, this is beyond deliberation and so

cannot be attained by deliberative reasoning. In his book, *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle*, John M. Cooper strongly supports this interpretation.

> In the Nicomachean Ethics Aristotle held that the practically intelligent person knows by some kind of intellectual intuition what the correct ultimate end is. This is something he *knows*, but he does not know it either by having worked it out by deliberation or by having deduced it from the first principles of any theoretical science. (Cooper, p. 64)

Thus although the desire for the right end is dependent on the character virtues and the calculation of the means to that end is supplied by deliberative or practical reasoning, the agent's ultimate end is the object of what might be called a practical intuition.

In her book, *The Fabric of Character*, Nancy Sherman challenges Cooper's view that the deliberative process works towards an ultimate end established by the virtuous person through intuition.[12] She argues 'that the process of dialectically arriving at such an end is continuous with the process of determinately constructing, through deliberative choice, a conception of the good life' (ibid., p. 10). In other words, the ultimate end is shaped to some extent by the deliberative process. A large part of the work of reasoning about ends involves reconstituting and revising ends through action. It is not so much a question of the agent deciding at the start that something like health or alleviating suffering matters to him, but rather a question of his being able to work out, through a whole series of encounters with the world, how it concerns him, to what extent, when, and towards whom. It is issues such as these that the agent addresses when he acts, and it is such issues that give content to an end. 'To deliberate about what contributes to an end includes specification and qualification of the end'

[12] Nancy Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

(Sherman, p. 88). Aristotle states that the prudent person knows how to deliberate 'about what sorts of things promote living well in general' (1140a28). His concern is with the whole of good living, and not just its parts. Sherman interprets this as providing explicit evidence that for Aristotle 'the concerns of deliberation span widely enough to include the overall ends of character' (p. 88). She goes on to acknowledge that at least a preliminary conception of the end is needed to get deliberation started. At 1142a14-15, Aristotle points out that 'particulars become known from experience, but a young person lacks experience, since some length of time is needed to produce it'. An important part of gaining that necessary experience 'consists precisely in making deliberative choices. Through such choices, an agent comes to qualify and refine ends as they find their place beside other ends in a life' (Sherman, p. 89). Her remark in the very next sentence 'that this comprehensive understanding is in part the achievement of *nous* or practical insight' (ibid.) suggests to me that her position is really not very far removed from that put forward by Cooper.

2.4.5 Decision, Deliberation and the Ultimate End

According to Aristotle, the human agent who chooses rationally is one who keeps the ultimate end in view. There has to be a sense in which he is aiming at the best. For Aristotle, this is a *sine qua non* for rational choice or decision. The fact that the agent might engage in practical reflection and calculate carefully the means to a goal is not in itself sufficient for the formation of a rational choice. Thus Aristotle distinguishes between excellence in deliberation in an unqualified sense and excellence in deliberation in a particular case. Strictly speaking, the human agent acting for the best without qualification is the one who exercises rational choice or decision in the true sense. Referring to this point, Aristotle himself writes:

> Our deliberation may be either good without qualification or good only to the extent that it promotes some [limited] end. Hence unqualifiedly good deliberation is the sort that correctly promotes the unqualified end [i.e., the highest good], while the [limited] sort is the sort that correctly promotes some [limited] end. (1142b29-33)

2.5 PRUDENCE AND CRAFT

2.5.1 Craft, Production and Action

One of Aristotle's main concerns in Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is to distinguish the kind of action governed by rational choice from the activity of craft. He cites building as an example of craft or technical expertise, and he describes it as 'essentially a certain state involving reason concerned with production' (1140a6). He sees it as involving inquiry and a certain kind of deliberation. Building is an example of an art or a craft that enables its practitioner to know what steps to take so as to bring into being something material, i.e., a building. Another favourite example of art or craft for Aristotle is medicine, even though what the medical practitioner tries to bring into being might be considered as something immaterial, i.e., health. Considering the builder in the abstract, it can be said that his ultimate end is nothing other than the construction of fine buildings. However, for Aristotle, his technical deliberation as a builder is not deliberation, strictly speaking, and his choosing of certain materials, tools and methods for a particular building project is only rational choice in a qualified sense. Thus he is quite strict in the way he limits rationally choosing to the sphere of the moral agent acting for the best without qualification. This leads him to distinguish sharply between what he calls production (*poiesis*) and what he calls action (*praxis*).

2.5.2 Craft, Production and the Use of Capacities – A Contrast with Prudence

A craft such as building is a rational discipline concerned with production. As such, it is a capacity that can be correctly or incorrectly used. A builder can be either good or bad from the point of view of technical expertise. On the other hand, practical wisdom, being concerned with action rather than production, requires the correct use of a capacity. For Aristotle, a person cannot be prudent or practically wise without at the same time being good. In his view, there is no scope for making a distinction between a good and a bad exercise of practical wisdom. Thus the prudent or practically wise person does not simply practise a craft. 'Skills can be misused, at will, to produce poor, shoddy, and at times morally grotesque results: practical wisdom cannot'.[13] It cannot be misused because by definition it entails doing what is morally good. Also, a person is oriented towards living a fulfilled life 'by natural necessity' (ibid.). However, practical wisdom and craft can still be compared because they both involve a certain theoretical understanding, and they both essentially consist 'in the ability to apply such an understanding in individual situations' (ibid., p. 93).

After stating that 'there is virtue [or vice in the use] of craft, but not [in the use] of prudence' (1140b22), Aristotle goes on to point out that 'in a craft, someone who makes errors voluntarily is more choiceworthy; but with prudence, as with the virtues, the reverse is true' (1140b23-24). The point here seems to be that a person cannot both be temperate, for example, and act voluntarily in an intemperate way. However, a person can be an accomplished craftsman and yet deliberately misuse his skill. Indeed, in certain circumstances, it can be entirely acceptable for a craftsman to make errors freely. Sherman gives the example of a tennis coach using his skill to demonstrate how

[13] Gerard J. Hughes, *Aristotle on Ethics*, (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 91.

to hit a bad forehand shot (p. 180 n. 19). This could be part of a teaching point. It is less acceptable 'to *misuse* virtue. Indeed it is unlikely that full virtue *can* be misused' (ibid.). Also, proficiency in a craft does not depend on being disposed to practise the craft or wanting to practise it. Indeed, a person's skills can become rusty or lost altogether through lack of use (1140b29). The same cannot happen with prudence. Because it is about human goods, we do not find ourselves without opportunities to use prudence – such that we might forget it. Thus prudence or practical wisdom is quite different from craft. Nevertheless, Aristotle also draws our attention to certain similarities between them. He sees both as intellectual and having to do with contingent things. In a certain sense, they both involve deliberating and acting on the basis of a specific picture of the end. They are very different in that practical wisdom is inseparable from excellence of character; it is concerned with the specifically human good.

2.5.3 The Grand End Theory of Prudence

As has already been stated, the prudent person is one who seeks to realize the highest or best good. A difficult question is whether Aristotle takes it for granted that the moral agent has a true explicit picture of this highest good during the process of deliberation. The prudent person's concern is with living well in general, and not with a restricted good such as health promotion or strength development. For Aristotle, aiming at living well as a whole or living well in general is the same as having *eudaimonia* or happiness as the objective of human action. As a point of departure, this conception of the end might seem rather indefinite. In Book VI, Aristotle makes no attempt to articulate what the *telos* or end is like. We know from other places that he regards *theōria* or contemplative study as the highest of all activities for a human being, but he

consistently denies this any practical application or interest. Sarah Broadie asserts that 'few of us would claim to know either at first or second hand what it is like to deliberate with a view to realising a Grand End' (*Ethics with Aristotle*, p. 198), and that it is regrettable that Aristotle himself gives us so few examples or concrete descriptions of deliberation. Indeed, most of the ones that he does give are really examples of technical deliberation. She goes on to take issue with John M. Cooper, Anthony Kenny, Alasdair MacIntyre and others, because they attribute to Aristotle what she calls 'a Grand End theory of practical wisdom' (ibid., p. 199).

In practice, Aristotle seems not to hold always for a single fixed end that justifies every rational choice. We have his famous saying that 'questions about actions and expediency, like questions about health, have no fixed answers' (1104a4). Broadie makes a strong case for a version of practical wisdom that she terms 'ground-level' (*Ethics with Aristotle,* p. 200), and that does not depend on a grasp of philosophical ethics or an illumination from a divine realm. Even though people do develop substantial conceptions of the human good which can serve as a yardstick to guide behaviour, these 'grand conceptions are not developed prior to the making of wise rational choices' (ibid., p. 204). On this view, it is sufficient to think of living well in general as an unqualified good in the sense of there being in the moral agent a complete openness to any consideration that might be relevant in deciding what to do. 'The limitless nature of prohairetic choice consists in openness to possible revision bit by bit from any quarter, not in mythical adherence to an exhaustive plan that encodes the grounds of every pro and con simultaneously and in advance' (ibid., p. 211). Thus the practical agent operates in an open-ended manner, constantly having to revise his deliberation to take account of new factors or to judge that they are not relevant. In this,

he differs from the craftsman whose focus is by definition restricted. Having to operate with fixed terms of reference, the craftsman always includes some considerations and permanently excludes others.

In his review essay on Sarah Broadie's book, *Ethics with Aristotle*, which is entitled *In Defense of the Grand End*, and which has already been cited, Richard Kraut strongly defends the Grand End view of practical wisdom. He regards an argument concerning the justification of decisions as central to the Grand End view. The person who is practically wise is able to justify his decisions in a way that includes a correct conception of happiness or *eudaimonia*. This is not to suggest that 'the best moral agent is someone who mentally says to himself, at every waking moment, "Happiness consists in such-and-such; let me see, now, what I must do in these particular circumstances to achieve it"' (Kraut, *Grand End*, p. 362). The person of practical wisdom is like a doctor who does not have to begin his medical deliberations by consciously reminding himself that health is good. Nevertheless, the decisions of the practically wise person have to be grounded either explicitly or implicitly in his conception of happiness; and it is in this sense that practical wisdom can be compared to a craft such as medicine, the end of which is a specific goal that serves as the starting point for all medical thinking. One of Kraut's most telling arguments against Broadie's interpretation is that her position makes the ideal deliberator a reactor rather than an actor.

> Such a person notices something specific in his immediate surroundings or situation, and this activates a desire for an intermediate-level end. If this is the whole story, then the ideal deliberator is always reacting to this or that situation but has no general plan for shaping his environment. (Kraut, *Grand End*, p. 366, n. 2)

A picture of life at its best has to include a plan for initiating action, and 'such a plan should begin with a conception of where our good lies' (ibid.), and should hardly be confined to intermediate goals.

2.5.4 Deliberation – A Structure of Reasoned Explanation

Broadie goes on to take issue with Aristotle himself because he identifies practical wisdom so much with deliberating well. 'Good deliberation is only one of its manifestations and should not be made the central issue' (Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle,* p. 211). He should have put the focus more on practical intelligence working well, she suggests. The moral agent only needs to deliberate when he is unsure as to what to do or how to respond. Quite often, practical intelligence has no need to deliberate. Many virtues – friendliness would be an example – are frequently exhibited in contexts that are not thought out or planned beforehand. In certain situations, the most appropriate response might be a feeling not expressed in action. 'These difficulties have led many commentators to the view that "deliberation" in Aristotle refers not to a psychological process but to the structure of reasoned explanation which is at least potentially present in the rationale of the agent's response' (Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle,* p. 79). Thus the agent can, if challenged, give reasons as to why he did or felt this rather than something else without it being necessarily true that he considered other options or needed to think out how to respond.

2.5.5 Distinguishing Production and Action

As has already been stated, Aristotle makes a sharp distinction between practical wisdom and any kind of craft or productive capability. 'For production has its end in something other than itself, but action does not, since its end is acting well itself'

(1140b6-7). The product is other than the producer and his work of producing. As what it is, for example, a good or a bad building, it stands as something by which the producer and his producing can be judged. When it comes to action, there is nothing by which the action can be judged as an instance of acting well apart from the action itself. It cannot be judged as a productive capability is judged. The particular features of a product are external and accidental to its nature as a product. However, this does not hold for action.

> The particulars of an action belong to its essence as action, since these are features of what it is that is judged good or not. The verdict depends on the when, the where, the agent's relations with those affected, the foreseeable consequences, the cost, the alternatives sacrificed, etc. (Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle,* p. 209)

In the case of action, there always has to be deliberation in some form. 'Deliberation decides whether to do a certain thing; the decision is never taken care of by the description of what might be done' (ibid., p.210). With production, deliberation and practical ingenuity can become redundant as rules and set procedures are established. In the sphere of practical wisdom, deliberation is always present; its place can never be taken by rules.

Aristotle's distinction between action and production raises certain difficulties. His statement that 'goal-directed thought concerned with action [...] is also the principle of productive thought' (1139b1) suggests a connection as well as a distinction. What the agent produces is immediately related to and indeed explained by his action, what he decides to do. The actions which are the focus of ethics – honourable or kind actions which the good person does for their own sake, because he sees that to act in such a manner is to live well – these same actions may be productions in the most literal sense.

In building a house, the builder – as well as exercising a craft and producing something material – may be keeping a promise and thereby, acting honourably. The agent's kind action may be preparing a meal for a needy person. Distinguishing performances that are actions from performances that are productions is not at all straightforward. Many performances appear to take in both action and production. While the two can be distinguished conceptually, the overlap between them in actual life is considerable. Yet Aristotle seems to deny this. 'Nor is one included in the other; for action is not production, and production is not action' (1140a5-6). Unlike J.L. Ackrill,[14] whose position on this issue has formed the basis for the discussion up to this point, Sarah Broadie sees no real problem here. She understands Aristotle as holding the view that action is not essentially production, and that production is not essentially action. She goes on to state that it is easy to come up with an argument and practical examples in support of this claim. 'An instance of fine production is not necessarily one of good conduct, as when excellent clothes are produced fast and cheaply through the use of child labour' (Broadie and Rowe, p. 366).

2.5.6 The Primacy of Action and Practical Reason

Aristotle goes on to state that 'every producer in his production aims at some [further] goal' (1139b2). The work of producing is for the sake of its object, the thing produced, and the thing produced is for the sake of something further, i.e., the using of it. According to W.D. Ross, the work of all art or craft is the means 'ultimately to some form of action (as opposed to making) which is its own end; thus art is subordinate to

[14] J. L. Ackrill, *Aristotle the Philosopher*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 142-143 &153-154.

practical reason'.[15] Although Aristotle's focus in this context is very much on instrumental or useful making or producing, craft also includes fine art. Ross goes on to point out that the use of fine art 'might be supposed to be aesthetic contemplation, but there is no clear evidence that Aristotle thought of this as an end in itself' (ibid.).

2.6 ACTION AND DECISION

2.6.1 The Two Parts of the Rational Soul

Another main concern of Aristotle in Book VI is to explain the nature of practical wisdom by comparison and contrast with theoretical wisdom. He understands theoretical wisdom as excellence in realms of knowledge that are abstract and capable of being made exact. Its objects are necessary and universal. Practical wisdom, on the other hand, is concerned with contingent particulars that are imprecise and non-abstract. Theoretical wisdom is the excellence of the rational part of the soul that is scientific. Practical wisdom is the excellence of the part that is rationally calculating. Already, in Chapter 1 of Book VI, Aristotle sees the two virtues as quite distinct. 'Hence we should find the best state of the scientific part and the best state of the rationally calculating part; for this state is the virtue of each of them' (1139a16-17). In subdividing the rational soul into a scientific or theoretical part and a calculating or practical part, Aristotle is underlining the fact that he sees the ethical right reason or *orthos logos* as different from its theoretical counterpart. And yet, he is affirming that the doing or not doing of human actions that are contingent is a fitting task for the highest human faculty.

[15] W. D. Ross, *Aristotle*, 3rd edn (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1937), p. 217.

2.6.2 Decision as Deliberative Desire

Despite having subdivided the human soul into different parts, Aristotle proceeds in Chapter 2 of Book VI to bring sense perception, thought and desire together. 'There are three [capacities] in the soul – sense perception, understanding, desire – that control action and truth' (1139a17-18). He immediately makes it clear that he regards the role of sense perception (*aisthēsis*) as secondary. 'Of these three, sense perception is clearly not the principle of any action, since beasts have perception, but no share in action' (1139a18-20). Although Aristotle holds that non-human animals act voluntarily (1111a26), he is very clear that they are not capable of rational choice or decision. 'Decision [...] is [...] not the same as the voluntary, which extends more widely. For children and the other animals share in voluntary action, but not in decision' (1111b8-10). In Chapter 2 of Book VI, Aristotle identifies thought (*dianoia*) and desire (*orexis*) very closely.

> As assertion and denial are to thought, so pursuit and avoidance are to desire. Now virtue of character is a state that decides; and decision is a deliberative desire. If, then, the decision is excellent, the reason must be true and the desire correct, so that what reason asserts is what desire pursues. This, then, is thought and truth concerned with action. (1139a21-26)

Thus Aristotle affirms that desire's pursuit of its object is equivalent to assertion in the realm of thought, and that in decision or rational choice, there is harmony between what is asserted and what is pursued. In the case of an action that is decided upon, both thought and desire are involved in affirming that it is good and to be done. For Aristotle, an action that is contingent and particular can be regarded not only as right and good but also as true. Furthermore, it can be said that he sees reason as making a contribution to motivation itself by giving the pursuit of desire a definite direction. As

he himself writes, 'the function of what thinks about action is truth agreeing with correct desire. The principle of an action – the source of motion, not the goal – is decision; the principle of decision is desire and goal-directed reason' (1139a30-33).

For Aristotle, it is very important that decision or rational choice be understood as a combination of thought (*dianoia*) and desire (*orexis*) concerning the same thing. For 'decision is either understanding combined with desire or desire combined with thought' (1139b4-5). And, as he has already declared in Chapter 2 of Book VI, 'decision is a deliberative desire (*orexis bouleutikē*)' (1139a23). The connection between thought and desire here should not be seen as a desire for some objective combined with a judgment that the doing of a particular action would bring it about. Rather thought identifies a particular action that is to be done and desire is the readiness to do it. 'Thus thought and desire together affirm a prescription: thought affirms it in response to the need for guidance on the part of the desiderative side, and desire affirms it by way of acceptance' (Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle,* p. 220). One implication of Aristotle's mode of acceptance account of desire is that it avoids reducing the notion of good to that of desire. In this context, David Charles quotes a line from Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. 'We desire because it seems good to us rather than it seems good to us because we desire it' (1072a29).[16] It is also noteworthy that Aristotle's account does not focus desire exclusively on the pleasant.

2.6.3 Decision and Rational Wish

Also in Chapter 2 of Book VI, Aristotle makes a distinction between *thought by itself* and *goal-directed thought*. 'Thought by itself moves nothing, what moves us is goal-

[16] David Charles, *Aristotle's Philosophy of Action*, (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1984), p. 86.

directed thought concerned with action' (1139a35-36). In his notes on this section, Terence Irwin points out that Aristotle leaves several questions unanswered (p. 240). Is desire prior to all thought or reasoning? Is goal-directed thought only of secondary importance compared to this desire? Or can goal-directed thought itself produce the relevant desire? A further complication is the fact that the desire needed for decision is not just any kind of desire. It cannot be appetite (*epithumia*) or spirit (*thumos*) because they belong to the non-rational part of the soul. This is not to deny the fact that Aristotle sees the non-rational part as sharing 'in reason in a way, insofar as it both listens to reason and obeys it' (1102b32-33). Thus the sensitive or desiderative part of the human soul, though non-rational, is responsive to reason and essentially related to it. Irwin suggests that the desire needed for decision is rational wish (*boulēsis*) aiming at the good. 'Goal-directed reason might refer to the *reasoning* on the basis of which we come to believe that x is good for its own sake and hence form a wish for x' (p. 240). According to Broadie, although the kind of desire needed for decision is closely related to wish, it 'is not wish [...] because we wish for things at a practical distance and even for what is impossible' (*Ethics with Aristotle,* p. 220). At an earlier stage in his notes, Irwin acknowledges that Aristotle never makes it completely explicit that a decision must be based on a wish (p. 205). However, he does seem to imply it. What he explicitly rejects is the identification of decision with wish (1111b20).

2.6.4 Desire and Action

In her book, *The Fragility of Goodness*, Martha C. Nussbaum makes the point that although much research has been done on the meaning and origin of various Aristotelian terms that have been added to the philosophical lexicon, the extent to which

desire or *orexis* is a term Aristotle himself created has been largely unrecognized.[17] She suggests that we need to 'recover a sense of the philosophical newness and strangeness of this word' (ibid., p. 275), which never occurs in Plato's writings. As Aristotle uses it, desire or *orexis* always implies a connection with an object, an orientation towards something in the environment. Also, it is more active than passive. The word suggests 'a complex responsiveness that receives from the world and in turn focuses itself outwards towards the world' (ibid., p. 274). No animal movement or human action can take place without the active presence of some form of *orexis* in the agent. However, in the *De Anima*, it has to be admitted that Aristotle sometimes writes as if there are human actions that can be produced by thought winning out over *orexis* (ibid., p. 487). As we have already seen, rational wish (*boulēsis*), appetite (*epithumia*), and spirit (*thumos*) are all to be understood as forms of *orexis*.

For Aristotle, the notion of *orexis* is intrinsically bound up with the notion of a lack of self-sufficiency or completeness, and with an awareness of that lack. Unlike an inert object such as a rock or a perfected god, animals 'are not self-sufficient, but the sorts of beings that go for items which they see and imagine – and not for any of these, but just for the ones towards which, having a need, they inwardly strain' (Nussbaum, *Fragility of Goodness*, p. 276). Nussbaum suggests that Aristotle's invention of the term, *orexis*, has had the effect of demystifying human action by enabling it to be seen as similar to animal motions. 'Like them it is a selective reaching-out, and like them it goes after objects that are seen to have a certain relation to the animal's needs. Animals look less brutish, humans more animal' (ibid.). Although Aristotle almost always regards desire

[17] Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, rev. edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 273.

or *orexis* as essential for all animal movement and human action, he never sees *orexis* as acting independently. The cognitive elements – perception and thought – are also essential. He regards *orexis* and cognitive activities as very closely related conceptually and as combining to cause movement and action.

> The human being is taken to be a creature of love and desire, even in his or her rational action. But desire is not something altogether brutish: it involves selective focusing upon objects in the world and an equally selective set of responses to that focusing. (Nussbaum, *Fragility of Goodness*, p. 289)

Like non-human animals, human beings are neither spontaneously self-moving nor acted upon from without; 'we all reach out, being incomplete, for things in the world. That is the way our movements are caused' (ibid.).

2.6.5 A Desire-based Theory of Action

In general, it can be stated that Aristotle's theory of action is very much desire-based. In his view, human action cannot be explained adequately in terms of knowledge and teleological factors on their own. As has already been pointed out, he refers to rational choice or decision as 'deliberative desire' (1139a23). For him, to desire is to be active towards the good. Indeed, desire can be characterized as the immediate efficient cause of action. As I take a glass of water in my hand so as to have a drink, it is my desire to have a drink that is the efficient cause of my reaching out my arm. And my goal to satisfy my thirst or propose a toast is the final cause. Thus Aristotle understood 'action in terms of efficient causality *and* knowledge, and regarded the presence of teleological factors (if any) as compatible with desires being efficient causes of action' (Charles, p. 59).

Nancy Sherman also stresses the desire-based nature of Aristotle's theory of action. 'In an unequivocal way, Aristotle is a theorist for whom reasons for action must be desire-based' (Sherman, p. 61). She goes on to make a helpful distinction between an agent's desires as such and the objects of the agent's desires.

> It is not an agent's desires *per se* that are among his reasons, since reasons are considerations which move one, and it is less an agent's awareness of his affective state that moves him than an awareness of the *objects* of his desires. (ibid., p. 62)

Because I am conscious of a feared object, for example, a dangerous bull, and not because I notice that I have a feeling of fear, I do not go into the field in which this bull is grazing. My feeling of fear corresponds to the object; it has 'intentional content' (ibid.). I act in a certain way because of how I see, imagine or conceive the object, and this is immediately related to my desire or desiderative state. My reason for acting focuses on the object of my desire – something to be avoided or pursued – and not so much on the desire itself. Also, it is noteworthy that an agent's affective or desiderative state does not have to be heightened for an action to occur. Indeed, it is to be expected that most of the time he acts routinely without any great feelings of fear or pleasure. 'An intentional object of action is something an agent can be said to have a preference for, a pull towards (however mild, calm, or stable) in virtue of desires he empirically has' (Sherman, p. 65).

2.6.6 Decision and the Will

Although it is often suggested that Aristotle, like Plato, had no distinct notion of the will, W.D. Ross sees Aristotle's teaching on decision or rational choice as 'clearly an attempt to formulate such a conception' (pp. 199-200). W.F.R. Hardie quotes Burnet's statement that decision or '*prohairesis* is really what we call the will' (p. 163), although

he acknowledges that he is unclear as to what either Ross or Burnet had in mind. Hardie goes on to state that he is even less clear as to what commentators such as Gauthier and Jolif meant when they claimed that Aristotle had no notion of will or of free will. Despite the fact that allowances have to be made on account of the difficulty of establishing what Aristotle meant when he used the word *prohairesis*, and that it might not be possible to do so precisely, Hardie himself, in the appended notes to the second edition of his book, *Aristotle's Ethical Theory*, supports the view 'that Aristotle, when he spoke of *prohairesis*, was sometimes referring to an activity of willing' (p. 380). Ross goes on to point out that some of the features of Aristotle's teaching represent 'a great advance on any previous thought on the subject' (p. 200). Among these features, he includes the distinction of choice from appetite and rational wish, and the recognition of it as involving both desire and reason or thought – and not simply desire in addition to reason, but desire guided by reason and reason impelled by desire. For Aristotle, decision or rational choice is the result of a deliberative process that both takes time and precedes action. Decision is the efficient cause of action, and, in this sense, it seems to involve something very like a notion of the will understood as a mental event that precedes and causes certain actions.

Terence Irwin suggests that there is at least an implicit notion of the will behind Aristotle's 'identifying virtue with a state that involves rational choice or decision [...], rather than with a tendency to act'.[18] 'Virtue, then, is a state that decides' (1106b36). The focus is not so much on any external results that might be achieved. This is not to suggest that the virtuous person should not act on his decisions. On the contrary,

[18] T. H. Irwin, 'The Virtues: Theory and Common Sense in Greek Philosophy', in *How Should One Live?* ed. by Roger Crisp (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 37-55 (p. 54).

expressing a virtuous state in action is better than simply having the state. 'But he does not take external success to be necessary for the virtue; he insists that virtuous agents retain their virtue even in adverse external circumstances (*NE* 1100b30-35)' (Irwin, *The Virtues: Theory and Common Sense*, p. 54). Thus Aristotle allows for the fact that circumstances can intervene to frustrate the exercise of virtue. For example, a magnificent person might fail in his attempts to complete a certain project because of external conditions outside his control. But if his failure were due to a lack of appropriate knowledge, this would indicate a lack of virtue.

2.6.7 Prudential Decision and the Commanding of Action

In general, making a good decision is not sufficient for virtue. Besides deliberating and deciding, prudence also involves commanding that the action decided upon actually be done. 'Someone is not prudent simply by knowing; he must also act on his knowledge' (1152a8-9). Knowledge and decision must lead to action if the agent is to become truly virtuous and succeed in living a good life. If prudence did not go beyond what the virtuous agent deliberated about and decided, it would fail as a practical virtue. The action decided upon might never be done. Prudence requires not only the making but also the carrying out of good decisions. 'Prudence is prescriptive, since its end is what action we must or must not do, whereas comprehension only judges' (1143a8-10). For Aristotle, a decision involving prudence is not the same as a moral judgment. A person might consider the morality of a practice such as capital punishment and make a moral judgment about it without ever having to make a prudential decision about the same matter. Prudence is always about something that the agent faces personally. He deliberates about and decides something that he will actually do or not do. His prudential decision commands him to act or not to act.

2.7 PRUDENCE AND CONTEMPLATION

2.7.1 Theoretical Wisdom

Scientific knowledge (*epistēmē*) is the first intellectual virtue that Aristotle discusses in Book VI (1139b18-34). It is a cognitive state of the soul, which, when activated, grasps a particular body of doctrine or instructions that can be demonstrated from more basic principles of nature. Strictly speaking, it is knowledge of scientific laws or syllogistic explanation of necessary and unchanging truths, and it includes mathematics and some disciplines that study the natural universe. Understanding (*nous*) (1140b31-1141a8) is closely related to scientific knowledge. Sometimes called comprehension, intelligence, or intuition, it is the ability to grasp the ultimate premises or starting points on which scientific knowledge is based. Theoretical wisdom (*sophia*) is the combination of scientific knowledge and understanding concerning the highest objects; it is the best form of knowledge. 'Wisdom is both scientific knowledge and understanding about the things that are by nature most honorable' (1141b3-4). Theoretical wisdom is to be distinguished from political science and from prudence, which are 'about human concerns, about things open to deliberation' (1141b10). Scientific knowledge, understanding and theoretical wisdom concern the things about the universe that cannot be changed. The activity of theoretical wisdom is what Aristotle calls contemplative study (*theōria*); he has in mind the study of subjects such as metaphysics, mathematics and natural science. In his view, the activity of contemplating these subjects is the finest activity for a human being. It is the activity of the most divine element or part of a human being (1177b26-28).

2.7.2 Distinguishing Theoretical Wisdom and Prudence

For Aristotle, the realms of theoretical wisdom and of practical wisdom or prudence are incommensurable. He characterizes the knowledge of a person such as Anaxagoras or Thales as 'extraordinary, amazing, difficult, and divine, but useless, because it is not human goods that he looks for' (1141b6-8). Such a person might be regarded as very knowledgeable, but not necessarily as prudent (1141b5). Theoretical wisdom has no immediate practical end; it is not utilitarian. It can also be suggested that it is not humanistic. Its objects are above the human, and the pursuit of them requires something more than the merely human (1177b26-28). According to Aristotle, 'it would be absurd for someone to think that political science or prudence is the most excellent science; for the best thing in the universe is not a human being' (1141a20-22). At a later stage, he states that 'there are other beings of a far more divine nature than human beings – most evidently, for instance, the beings composing the universe' (1141a34-1141b2). In these lines, Aristotle seems to be reflecting the traditional Greek belief not only in a pantheon of gods but also in a circle of superhuman beings. The stars and other heavenly bodies were thought to be emulating the activities of the gods by their eternal movement. According to the traditional view, some of the gods performed regular functions in which they presided over and ran 'the various branches of nature and universal features of human life: the movement of the sun, the return of the seasons, weather, the sea, childbirth, agriculture and so on' (Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle*, p. 409). These were the necessary duties of the relevant deities. They also engaged in various extraordinary or extra-curricular activities. Homer portrays them as sometimes celebrating together, 'intervening in the affairs of kings and cities, and jockeying with each other for control of historic events' (ibid.).

2.7.3 Looking Beyond the Human

In his ethical treatises, Aristotle does not try to describe the nature of the divine in the way that he does in some of his other works, most notably *Metaphysics* XII, 7-10, where he puts forward a very exalted conception of God. Nevertheless, he does make several references to the gods in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and it is clear that his moral philosophy does have a definite religious dimension. He affirms that the gods have a role in human life. 'For if the gods pay some attention to human beings, as they seem to, it would be reasonable for them to take pleasure in what is best and most akin to them, namely understanding' (1179a25-26). Aristotle belonged to a culture whose gods were thought to be not all that removed from human beings – except as regards our condition of mortality. In her book, *Ethics with Aristotle*, Broadie goes so far as to say that the Greek gods 'were clearly not a species separate from the human species' (p. 409). She develops this point in a way that is very striking.

> They do not differ from us in anything like the way in which we differ from ants [...]. There is not only parallel behaviour, but communication and family relationships and the tribal unity in which all turn towards Zeus as 'father of gods and man'. Even less was the difference between gods and men the difference between finite and infinite. It was the difference between us as we are and as we should be if we were immortal, which is to imply: if we were not afflicted with aging and decline, disease, poverty, toil, frustration, anxiety and exposure to every kind of pain and indignity. (ibid.)

By contrast, the gods were thought to live lives of ease and freedom. Their regular cosmic business and various other activities were never for them 'like the bitter necessities which wear us out before we have a chance to realize more than a fraction of our human potential' (ibid.).

For Aristotle, 'human beings are not the measure of all things but find their own true measure through contemplation of an eternal order beyond themselves'.[19] He does not believe that we should look at our lives only from a human point of view. Like Plato, he looks to something beyond the human and sees in it something that is a guide to the living of a true human life. He differs from Plato in that 'his divine standard is a particular thing – a living god – not a form or universal'.[20] Aristotle also believes that there is something less than the human. He thinks that we should resist the temptation to reduce ourselves to this level. Although our lives can be compared with those of other animals and plants, we are in reality far superior. If we make use of what is distinctively human in us, our lives can be 'an approximation of divine life. Excellence in reasoning, both practical and theoretical, occupies a central place in Aristotle's ethics in part because it explains why we occupy this intermediate position in the cosmic hierarchy' (Kraut, *Human Good*, p. 100). In comparison, a life dedicated to the pursuit of physical pleasure is subhuman. 'The defender of such a life would have to admit that mere animals could live as well or better than human beings, and that a bodiless god would be miserable' (ibid.). Thus Aristotle's moral philosophy must be seen as an attempt 'to organize human life into a systematic unity, and to locate human beings within a larger metaphysical framework. It goes well beyond a mere listing of goods as they present themselves to our community' (ibid., p. 101).

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[19] Joseph Dunne, *Back to the Rough Ground: 'Phronesis' and 'Techne' in Modern Philosophy and in Aristotle*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), p. 239.
[20] Richard Kraut, 'Aristotle on the Human Good: An Overview', in *Aristotle's Ethics* (see Nussbaum [1999] above), pp. 79-104 (p. 99).

2.7.4 Theoretical Wisdom – An Indirect Practical Dimension

For Aristotle, the exercise of theoretical wisdom is the way of life that is most godlike. Although a life dedicated to the acquisition of theoretical wisdom does not have practical import directly, it can be argued that it does have practical import indirectly. Such a way of life requires great discipline and concentration, and it develops the character of the person who is truly committed to it. Thus it 'has ethical substance at its core' (Dunne, p. 239). Also, the person who engages properly in contemplative study is enabled 'to acquire a disposition which allows the right order of the cosmos and the simplicity of the deity to work their way into his soul' (ibid.).

2.7.5 The Elevation of Theoretical Wisdom and the Challenge to Prudence

Aristotle's elevation of theoretical wisdom and the contemplative life poses serious questions for prudence and the ethical or political life. In Chapter 8 of Book X, Aristotle tells us very directly that the ethical life realizes *eudaimonia* only 'in a secondary way' (1178a9). Perfect *eudaimonia* consists in the life of contemplative study (1178a7). In Chapter 7, he urges us 'as far as we can [...] [to] go to all lengths to live a life in accord with our supreme element' (1177b34-35), i.e., our theoretical reason. Earlier in the same chapter, he tells us that 'we deny ourselves leisure so that we can be at leisure, and fight wars so that we can be at peace' (1177b4-6). 'Actions in accord with the virtues [...] require trouble, aim at some [further] end, and are choiceworthy for something other than themselves' (1177b17-19). On the other hand, the life of contemplative study is pure activity and pure leisure, and it 'aims at no end apart from itself' (1177b21). 'If (theoretical) understanding, more than anything else, is the human being' (1178a8), prudence and the ethical life seem to be relegated to a less than premier position. In his notes, Irwin points out that the use of the phrase '*more* to

be identified with the person' (p. 310). The implication here is that the contemplative *than anything else* suggests a qualification to the claim that theoretical understanding is life is not the only constituent of *eudaimonia*. Also, the fact that Aristotle urges us to live the contemplative life only 'as far as we can' (1177b34) suggests that there are constraints on how it should be pursued: not as a god, perhaps, but as a human being, within limits set by prudence.

2.7.6 The Unity of the Highest Good

Richard Kraut makes a very strong case for the unity of the highest good in Aristotle's moral philosophy. He highlights the fact that Aristotle does not treat virtuous activity as just one good among others. 'He takes the good to consist in virtuous activity alone; it is *the* good, not just a good, because everything else is to be sought for its sake' (Kraut, *Human Good*, p. 84). According to Kraut, Aristotle sees virtuous activity as a single type of good that can be equated with happiness or *eudaimonia*. He points out that Aristotle stresses the self-sufficiency of *eudaimonia* already in Chapter 7 of Book 1 (1097b14-20); happiness is not to be seen as a composite of all intrinsic goods. Goods such as health, strength, honour, friends, etc., are subordinate to virtue. Although they help to sustain virtuous activity, they do not increase its value.

2.7.7 The Best Virtue: Perfect or Complete?

In defending the view that Aristotle puts forward in Book X, that the best life for a human being is one that has contemplation as its ultimate end, Kraut reminds us of the conclusion of the *ergon* argument in Chapter 7 of Book 1. 'And so the human good proves to be activity of the soul in accord with virtue, and indeed with the best and most complete virtue, if there are more virtues than one' (1098a16-18). In these lines, where

Irwin has 'best and most complete virtue', Kraut has 'best and most perfect virtue'. This is because he opposes the interpretation that 'the best virtue is the composite of them all [...] I think Aristotle wrote these words in order to anticipate his conclusion that one virtue – theoretical wisdom – is best' (Kraut, *Human Good*, p. 103, n. 16). Also, in the last few lines of Book VI (1145a6-11), Aristotle 'briefly remarks that theoretical wisdom is superior to practical wisdom, and that the latter issues orders for the sake of the former' (ibid., p. 88). It is significant that when Aristotle takes up these issues again in Chapters 7 and 8 of Book X, his first sentence recalls the *ergon* argument of Book 1. 'If happiness is activity in accord with virtue, it is reasonable for it to accord with the supreme virtue, which will be the virtue of the best thing' (1177a12-13). Although Kraut emphasizes that *eudaimonia* is only perfectly realized when one exercises the highest virtue, i.e., theoretical wisdom, he goes on to point out that the contemplative and the practically wise agent or good politician have much in common. The successful living of the ethical or political life requires and expresses high levels of intellectual virtue. The political leader has to reflect about the ends of human life; he needs good judgment when hard decisions have to be taken; his reason is in control of his emotions, and they in turn are properly integrated with his reason. 'Happiness consists in just one thing – virtuous activity of the rational soul – although this one type of good can be further analyzed into two species, and one of them is even more worthwhile than the other' (Kraut, *Human Good*, p. 90).

2.7.8 The Best – Not the Enemy of the Good

One of the attractions of Kraut's interpretation is that it enables the *Nicomachean Ethics* to be seen as better organized and more unified than is often thought. He suggests that Aristotle viewed Book VI as providing an instrument for more exact decision making

because he understood the exercising of the two most important virtues of thought described in Book VI, i.e., practical wisdom and theoretical wisdom, to be the ultimate goals of fulfilled and successful living. Book VI gives us a clearer picture of the ultimate goal of life in that it establishes that both the contemplative or philosophical life and the ethical or political life are focused on the exercise of intellectual virtues. 'The purpose of Book VI is not to decide between these two ultimate ends – that question is postponed to Book X – but to provide a better understanding of what the two ultimate ends are' (Kraut, *Human Good*, p. 92), and what commitment to them entails. To live the philosophical life properly, as well as needing to know what theoretical wisdom is, the agent also needs to be able to answer certain quantitative questions. In terms of external resources, for example, what and how much might he need? The ideal ethical or political agent faces similar questions. He needs to be able to determine how much money he might need for his household and for his various political and social projects. Also, he has to be able to find the mean in several other dimensions of his life, his relationship to his own emotions and friends being but two examples. His anger and other passions need to be neither too strong nor too weak, but appropriate to each occasion. He needs to have neither too few nor too many friends. And when, in Book X, Aristotle does decide in favour of the philosophical life, there is no suggestion that the best – contemplation – should be seen as the enemy of the good – prudence or practical wisdom. 'He gives no hint that we should act unethically in order to maximize contemplation' (Kraut, *Human Good*, p. 94). Although Aristotle is clear that contemplation is the ultimate end, and that the best we can do for ourselves or other people is to promote this end, he accepts that 'there are many people who are incapable of achieving this good, and so when one acts for their sake, one ought to promote their ability to engage in ethical activity' (ibid., pp. 95-96).

2.8 PRUDENCE AND PERCEPTION

2.8.1 Universals and Particulars

An understanding of ultimate ends is only part of what the agent needs so as to be able to live well. In addition to knowledge of universals, good deliberation also requires an awareness of particulars. Aristotle's prudent person is good at making decisions partly because he is able to perceive the salient features of any situation. The capacity to be sensitive to the relevant details in particular situations involves both knowing what to look for and being able to 'think through highly general questions about the ultimate end of human life' (Kraut, *Human Good*, p. 98). Indeed, in Chapter 7 of Book VI, Aristotle seems to emphasize the particulars more than the universals. 'And since prudence is concerned with action, it must possess both [the universal and the particular knowledge] or the [particular] more [than the universal]' (1141b22-23). In the same section, he remarks that 'some people who lack knowledge but have experience are better in action than others who have knowledge' (1141b17-18). In practice, the person with experience of particulars often makes better decisions than the person with superior theoretical knowledge. For example, the person 'who knows that bird meats are light and healthy will be better at producing health' than 'someone who knows that light meats are digestible and [hence] healthy, but not which sorts of meats are light' (1141b19-22). W. D. Ross comments on these lines in terms of the practical syllogism. 'Practical wisdom being concerned with particular actions, it is better to know the conclusion of the practical syllogism without the major premise than the major premise without the conclusion' (p. 219). Although commentators often use the term, practical syllogism, Aristotle himself does not use it. When Aristotle does refer to 'inferences about actions' (1144a31), Irwin points out in his notes that 'he cannot have in mind a

syllogism in the full technical sense (since *sullogismos* [inference] about action, unlike a strict syllogism, has a particular premise)' (p. 335).

2.8.2 Two Kinds of Particulars

In his notes, Irwin makes a distinction between particulars as relatively determinate types, for example, *bird meat* as distinct from *light meat*, and particulars as specific instances, for example, *this piece of chicken* or any individual item (p. 245). Where particulars are determinate types, identification of them is part of good deliberation. Where they are specific instances, 'they are not themselves discovered by deliberation, but perception of them is required for successful deliberation, so that good deliberation must include good perception' (ibid.). To return to Aristotle's example, the closer one comes to knowledge of which particular things produce health, the better. To know that bird meats are easily digested is better than to know that light meats are easily digested. Indeed, to know that light meats are easily digested is not strictly necessary. However, to know that this piece of chicken is easily digested is best of all since by acting on that knowledge, the agent is most likely to eat healthily. Thus prudence is more the knowledge of particulars that perception makes possible than it is knowledge of universals. On account of the fact that 'perception controls [particulars]' (1147a26), prudence must include a kind of perception.

2.8.3 A Special Kind of Perception

The kind of perception Aristotle has in mind 'is not the perception of special objects, but the sort by which we perceive that the last among mathematical objects is a triangle' (1142a27-29). This kind of perception is not ordinary perception. For example, it is not like the perception of colours, which are the proper objects of the sense of sight. It is

more like a mathematician trying to solve a problem. The problem might be the construction of a complex figure based on triangles. He needs both knowledge of universals – the kind of triangle to be drawn to construct the figure – and perception of particulars – the particular triangle he is drawing to be of the required type. In a similar way, the prudent person is trying to solve a problem – how to achieve *eudaimonia* in a particular situation. Solving the problem involves finding the right universals and bringing them together with a particular in the right way.

2.8.4 Perception and Deliberation

Perception comes into its own when deliberation has completed its work. 'Nor do we deliberate about particulars, about whether this is a loaf, for instance, or is cooked the right amount; for these are questions for perception, and if we keep on deliberating at each stage we shall go on without end' (1112b34-1113a2). Deliberation identifies a universal of the right kind for perception to use. The agent can come to know by the sound it makes when he knocks on it whether a loaf is cooked properly. Perception uses such universals to guide action in accordance with the kind of wish that gets it started.

Perception is involved in another way also. Before the agent begins to deliberate at all, he has to have a practical problem to deliberate about. Sometimes it is his appetites (*epithumiai*) that initiate the deliberative process. He is hungry; he desires to eat; he wishes for the good. He begins to deliberate about what to eat: light meats are good; bird meats are light; he perceives that this piece of chicken is available and edible. If he is unhindered, he eats it.

2.8.5 Perception, The Emotions and Prudence

Often, however, it is not the agent's appetites that get deliberation started but the situation in which he finds himself. The way in which a particular situation brings itself to his attention is often through his emotions or feelings. His anger or fear or sympathy is aroused, and these emotions lead him to deliberate. Indeed, these same emotions contribute to the perception and interpretation of the very situations to which they are responses. It is partly because we can feel anger or fear that we perceive situations as insults or as threats. Thus our emotions are modes of perception. In her book, *The Therapy of Desire*, Martha Nussbaum states that 'emotions have a rich cognitive structure. It is clear that they are not mindless surges of affect, but discerning ways of viewing objects; and beliefs of various kinds are their necessary conditions'.[21] Nussbaum goes on to discuss the two painful emotions – fear and pity. It is striking that Aristotle does not try to individuate such emotions by referring to various kinds of painful feelings.

> Emotions, instead, are individuated by reference to their characteristic beliefs. We cannot describe the pain that is peculiar to *fear*, or say how fear differs from grief or pity, without saying that it is pain *at the thought of* a certain sort of future event that is believed to be impending. But if the beliefs are an essential part of the definition of the emotion, then we have to say that their role is not merely that of external necessary condition. They must be seen as *constituent parts* of the emotion itself. (Nussbaum, *Therapy of Desire*, p. 88)

[21] Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 88.

In the following paragraph, Nussbaum points out that Aristotle uses two Greek prepositions, *ek* and *epi*, to highlight the intimate relationship between belief and feeling.

> There is both a *causal* relationship (fear is pain and disturbance 'out of' – *ek* – the thought of impending evils), and also a relationship of *intentionality* or *aboutness* (pity is defined as 'painful feeling *directed at* – *epi* – the appearance that someone is suffering [...]'). In fact, both relationships are present in both cases, clearly: for it is equally true that pity's pain is produced by the thought of another's suffering – Aristotle's rhetorical analysis relies on this – and also that fear is pain *directed at* the imagined future evil. (ibid.)

Thus Aristotle understands emotions as not only involving sensations and desires but also beliefs. Through them, we are enabled to see situations as problematic and as requiring deliberation and action.

In Aristotle's view, human emotions have to be educated and brought into harmony with a correct view of the human good. But when they are educated properly, it is not just that they play a crucial role in motivating the agent to act virtuously, they are also 'recognitions of truth and value. And as such they are not just instruments of virtue, they are constituent parts of virtuous agency' (Nussbaum, *Therapy of Desire*, p. 96). As we have already seen, Aristotle understands prudence and the virtues of character as mutually interdependent. And he defines the virtues of character as states or dispositions regarding emotions or feelings. 'By virtue I mean virtue of character; for this is about feelings and actions, and these admit of excess, deficiency, and an intermediate condition' (1106b17-19). Aristotle goes on to state that 'having these feelings at the right times, about the right things, toward the right people, for the right

end, and in the right way, is the intermediate and best condition, and this is proper to virtue' (1106b21-23). In the next line, Aristotle points out that 'similarly, actions also admit of excess, deficiency, and an intermediate condition' (1106b24). With a passage such as this in mind, Nussbaum makes a very apt comment.

> What this means is that even were the apparently correct action to be chosen without the appropriate motivating and reactive emotions, it would not count for Aristotle *as a virtuous action*: an action is virtuous only if it is done *in the way that* a virtuous person would do it. All of this is a part of the equipment of the person of practical wisdom, part of what practical rationality is. Rationality recognizes truth; the recognition of some ethical truths is impossible without emotion; indeed, certain emotions centrally involve such recognitions. (Nussbaum, *Therapy of Desire*, p. 96)

Thus the person who is truly prudent will have emotions that correctly perceive and interpret a situation and that are appropriately responsive to it.

CHAPTER THREE

SOME ASPECTS

OF

PRUDENCE (*PRUDENTIA*)

IN

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE

TO HIS

COMMENTARY ON ARISTOTLE'S

'NICOMACHEAN ETHICS'

3.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

3.1.1 The Reception of Aristotle in Thirteenth Century Western Europe

The reception of the complete works of Aristotle in Latin translations was a development that contributed very significantly to the shaping of thirteenth-century western European thought. In the early Middle Ages, only Aristotle's logical works were translated. In the sixth century, Boethius translated and wrote commentaries on the *Categories* and the *De Interpretatione*. He also translated and wrote a commentary on Porphyry's *Isagoge*. These works formed the *logica vetus* and came to be recognized as the standard texts in logic. From the middle of the twelfth century, many of Aristotle's other writings began to become available in translation. Up to that time, medieval thought had been dominated by such figures as Augustine, Boethius, and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, all of whom were strongly influenced by Neo-Platonism. With the increasing availability of most of the works of Aristotle, the medieval world was challenged by quite a different philosophical outlook, one in which human beings and other things in the natural world were understood not on the basis of their participation in an ideal world of forms but in terms of their own inner principles or natures.

The study of Aristotelian philosophy developed through the Faculties of Arts of the universities. In 1239, when Thomas Aquinas went to the University of Naples to study the liberal arts and philosophy, Aristotle's natural philosophy was among the subjects being taught there. It was here that Aquinas spent the next five years of his life and 'had as one of his teachers [...] a certain Master Peter of Ireland'.[1] It was also here that

[1] *Magistri Petri de Ybernia: Expositio et Quaestiones in Aristotelis Librum de Longitudine et Brevitate Vitae*, ed. by Michael Dunne (Louvain-Paris: Editions Peeters, 1993), p. 1.

he became acquainted with the Dominicans and took the decision to enter the Order, receiving the habit in early 1244. At that time, Naples was part of the kingdom of Sicily. As a result of the translations Michael Scot and others had made from Arabic and Greek works, 'Sicily and southern Italy experienced an intense cultural life at the time. Aristotelian science, Arabic astronomy, and Greek medicine all were flourishing in Palermo, Salerno, and Naples'.[2] King Frederick II of Sicily employed Michael Scot from about 1227. Scot's greatest achievement was probably his translation of many of the Arabic commentaries of Averroes. He died in Palermo about 1235. In other places, there was considerable opposition to these new developments. The study of Aristotle was only finally and officially approved at the University of Paris between 1252 and 1255. At this point, Thomas Aquinas was completing his theological training as a Dominican there. What was a steady stream in the first half of the thirteenth century became a flood from the middle of that century onwards.

> At this stage the reception of Aristotle was part of a vast effort to absorb the philosophical, medical, astrological, and natural science not only of ancient Greece, but also of past and contemporary Judaism and Islam. The Aristotelian encyclopaedia provided the framework for all this new material.[3]

Very quickly, Aristotle came to be known as *the Philosopher*, and scholastic theoretical discussions of all kinds were based on his conceptual framework.

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[2] Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas: Volume 1 - The Person and His Work*, trans. by Robert Royal, 2 vols (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), p. 6.
[3] C. H. Lohr, 'The Medieval Interpretation of Aristotle', in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, ed. by Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny and Jan Pinborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 80-98 (p. 81).

3.1.2 Aquinas Seeking Truth by Studying Aristotle

That Thomas Aquinas devoted immense energy to the study of Aristotle's works is beyond question. This is the more remarkable because such work never formed part of his normal academic duties. He was never a master of the Faculty of Arts in any of the universities in which he taught. Yet he clearly saw in Aristotle a wonderful intellectual challenge and resource, and he considered it to be of the utmost importance to try to penetrate his thought as completely as he could. In all, Aquinas wrote twelve commentaries on the works of Aristotle. When he died in 1274, some of them were left uncompleted. He commented on *De Interpretatione*, the *Posterior Analytics*, the *Physics*, *De Caelo*, *De Generatione et Corruptione*, *Meteora*, *De Anima*, *De Sensu et Sensato*, *De Memoria et Reminiscentia*, the *Metaphysics*, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and the *Politics*. In all of these works, Aquinas wrote more as a philosopher than as a historian. 'His intention is always to seek the truth of what the Philosopher has thought'.[4]

For Aquinas, Aristotle is always the principal philosophical source. He regards Aristotle as an expert on human nature and takes from him the basic structure of his ethics: the ordering to happiness as the final human end, the organization of the moral virtues, and the analysis of friendship that he employs in treating of charity. In the *Secunda Pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*, one of the major systematic accounts of his moral science, 'Aquinas makes a massive number of specific references to Aristotle himself: the *Index Thomisticus* lists 38 references to "*Aristoteles*" and 977 references to

[4] Jan A. Aersten, 'Aquinas's Philosophy in its Historical Setting', in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, ed. by Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 12-37 (p. 21).

"*Philosophus*"'.[5] Only Scripture and Augustine are referred to more often. Aquinas was firmly convinced that philosophers could attain truth, and this conviction led him to look for and to promote harmony between Aristotle and Christian faith. Although he understood well the difference between revelation and reason, theology and philosophy, he did not separate them – as was done later.

3.1.3 The *Nicomachean Ethics* – Some Medieval Latin Translations and Commentaries

The first Latin translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* was made anonymously in the twelfth century. Consisting only of Books II and III, it was known as the *Ethica vetus*. The entire *Nicomachean Ethics* was translated anonymously early in the thirteenth century. However, only Book I of this translation, known as the *Ethica nova*, was widely circulated. Some Latin commentaries, based on one or other of these translations or on a combination of the two, were also produced during this period. They had in common an approach to the human end as discussed by Aristotle that was 'understood as the happiness achieved through union with God or with a reality caused by God'.[6]

After 1240, a number of new commentaries began to appear. Their most important characteristic was an understanding of the properly human end discussed in Book 1 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* 'as the happiness attainable in this life through the activity of the moral virtues' (Doig, p. 1). In 1240, Herman the German produced a translation

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[5] Denis J. M. Bradley, *Aquinas on the Twofold Human Good*, (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997), p. 103.
[6] James C. Doig, *Aquinas's Philosophical Commentary on the 'Ethics': A Historical Perspective*, (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), p. 1.

from the Arabic of both the *Nicomachean Ethics* and Averroes's commentary on that work. The commentary of Averroes was significant in that it was a first indication that a theological perspective was not 'a prerequisite for finding that Aristotle discusses a happiness that has its limitations, i.e., a "*beatitudo imperfecta*"' (Doig, p. 15). At around the same time, Robert Kilwardby, a Dominican and master of the Faculty of Arts in Paris between 1237 and 1245, also wrote a commentary that avoided some of the misconceptions of the earlier Latin commentaries. He viewed happiness as a human good that could be achieved by the agent's habitual actions.

Working from the Greek text and making use of previous translations, Robert Grosseteste translated the entire *Nicomachean Ethics* during 1246 and 1247. Known as the *Liber ethicorum*, this work became immensely popular. Like all the medieval commentators, Grosseteste's method of translating was literal rather than literary. He was even more literal than his predecessors and particularly thorough as well. He included numerous annotations or *notulae* explaining Greek terms and points of grammar. Also, Grosseteste translated several Greek commentaries, the most important of which was probably that by Eustratius of Nicea, who lived in the late eleventh century. As regards Aristotle's statement in Book X about happiness or the human good being activity in accord 'with the best and most complete virtue' (1098a17), Eustratius thought prudence was the virtue Aristotle had in mind at this point. According to Doig, the underlying assumption here was 'a view of the life guided by moral virtues as the most properly human and as the life directed toward the end "perfect and of itself sufficient" that is studied in *Ethics*.1' (Doig, pp. 16-17).

3.1.4 Albert the Great and Some Aspects of his *Super Ethica*

Albert the Great, a Dominican teacher of Thomas Aquinas possibly in Paris between 1246 and 1248 and certainly in Cologne from the autumn of 1248, was one of the greatest living authorities at this time. He became aware of Grosseteste's translations of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Greek Commentaries* and used them as the basis for a series of lectures, which he gave in Cologne between 1248 and 1252. These lectures were published as the *Super Ethica* and were probably based to some extent on a record or *reportatio* that Aquinas – as one of Albert's students – had drawn up. Albert's enthusiasm for Grosseteste's work is clear from the fact that he refers to it nearly 300 times, using such terms as 'the Commentator says' or 'according to the Commentator'. Albert follows the interpretations of the Greek commentators as regards the discussion of happiness at the centre of Book 1. He sees it 'as the study of civil happiness to be obtained through activity in accord with moral virtue' (Doig, p. 18). He views the agent's proper work as 'the governing of his life by practical reason, his best and most proper potency' (ibid., p. 20). Although civil happiness can dispose the agent to contemplative happiness, 'the happiness natural to man is that coming from life in society' (ibid.).

Albert understands prudence as the most important virtue at the source of civil happiness. He sees its main activity not as deliberation, but rather as the act of choosing the end. Prudence determines an end such as that of making a journey to Rome. Also, prudence gives the moral virtues their proper direction as regards their end. According to Doig, Albert argues that the 'nature-like tendency of a moral virtue toward an end is possible only if the end has been prescribed for it by something joined to it, and this is accomplished by prudence perfecting the order given by natural reason' (p. 22).

In the context of Book X's discussion of happiness, Albert notes an 'objection according to which the human intellect is not prepared for contemplation; compared to the entities above it, the human intellect is like the eye of a bat in relation to the light of the sun' (ibid., p. 23). He goes on to make a distinction between philosophical and divine contemplation. 'While "theophanies descending from God" are required for the latter, by the habitus of wisdom the human intellect is prepared for philosophical contemplation' (ibid.). However, he sees even philosophical contemplation 'as quite other than the properly ratiocinative cognition involved in the greater part of the soul's activities' (ibid., pp. 23-24).

3.2 AQUINAS, ALBERT THE GREAT AND PRUDENCE

3.2.1 Aquinas on the Question of Happiness in Aristotle – A Different Perspective

Doig suggests that 'Aristotle's *Ethics* was never far from Aquinas's mind during the period extending from his first arrival in Paris in 1246 until his final departure from the city in 1272' (ibid., p. 24). In his *Commentary on Peter Lombard's Sentences*, which he wrote between 1254 and 1256, there are more than 300 direct references to the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The *Summa contra Gentiles* (1262-1264) has 54 direct references and the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa Theologiae* (1265-1266) 71. One of the most striking things about Aquinas's writings during this period is not only the frequency with which he makes references to the *Nicomachean Ethics* but also the fact that he repeatedly takes up positions as regards the *intentio Aristotelis* that are at variance with those of his teachers, including Albert. Doig, for example, points to passages in the *Summa contra Gentiles* (111.44), the *Q.D. de Anima* (a. 16) and the *Prima Pars* (88.1) where it is clear that Aquinas understood Aristotle's teaching in Book X to be that theoretical 'wisdom

is the perfect virtue whose activity is at the source of the agent's ultimate happiness' (Doig, p. 26). Doig goes on to propose that such differences – as well as his appreciation of the importance of the *Nicomachean Ethics* – suggest 'at least one reason for Aquinas's decision to present his own full-fledged interpretation of Aristotle's *Ethics*, namely, to present Aristotle's response to the question of human happiness' (ibid.). When Aquinas comes to deal with the issue of human happiness in his *Sententia libri Ethicorum* (usually abbreviated *SLE*) or *Commentary on Aristotle's 'Nicomachean Ethics'*, which he composed in Paris in the years 1271 and 1272, he makes it very clear that he regards Aristotle's true position as being quite different to that put forward by such commentators as Albert and Averroes. He proposes that 'happiness will more properly be found in the life of thought than in a life of activity, and in an act of reason or intellect than in an act of the appetitive power controlled by reason'.[7]

3.2.2 Differences between Aquinas and Albert as regards Prudence

When Aquinas's *SLE* and Albert's *Super Ethica* are compared from the point of view of their treatment of Aristotle's understanding of prudence, significant differences also emerge. As we have already seen, Aristotle remarks in Chapter 13 of Book VI that virtue or the state in accord with prudence is not merely 'the state in accord with the correct reason, but the state involving the correct reason' (1144b26-27). In his interpretation of these lines, Aquinas writes in terms that are very similar to those of the contemporary commentator, Sarah Broadie, discussed in Chapter 2.

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[7] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's 'Nicomachean Ethics'*, trans. by C. I. Litzinger, O.P., rev. edn (Notre Dame, IN: Dumb Ox Books, 1993), 1.10.S126, p. 42. This work is usually referred to as *SLE*, i.e., *Sententia libri Ethicorum*. *SLE*.1.10.S126 refers to Book 1, Lecture 10, and to paragraph 126 of the Spiazzi edition. Further references to the Dumb Ox Books edition of Aquinas's *Commentary on Aristotle's 'Nicomachean Ethics'* are given after quotations in the text following this system.

> Not only does it pertain to moral virtue to be in accord with right reason – otherwise someone could be morally virtuous without the need of prudence simply by the fact that he had been instructed by another's mind – but we must add that moral virtue is a habit accompanied by right reason, which of course is prudence. (*SLE*.VI.11.S1284)

At this point, Aquinas seems to understand Aristotle as simply expressing the essential co-existence of prudence and the virtues of character. Albert's understanding is quite different. He relates 'the state in accord with the correct reason' to the basic role of prudence in the development of moral virtue. Reason is perfected for this purpose by prudence. Albert distinguishes between a form of prudence that is perfect and a form of prudence that is imperfect. He sees perfect prudence as being inseparable from moral virtue. However, an agent whose prudence is imperfect might be virtuous in the context of a situation requiring temperance but lacking in virtue in regard to a situation requiring courage. According to Albert, virtues are first possessed in seminal form. When an agent lacking the form of justice first acts justly, his action 'arises from a seminal potency of justice, not from the complete and distinct habitus' (Doig, p. 53). Behind his choice to perform the just action, there is rational activity resulting from the seed of prudence in his reason. As the agent gradually develops the habitus or state of justice, the imperfect prudence corresponding to this virtue is also gradually developed. The agent's prudence can only be said to be perfect when all the moral virtues have been fully acquired. Albert comments on 'the state involving the correct reason' in the context of the threefold function of prudence in relation to virtuous activity – the predetermining of the end, the prescribing of the choice, and the ordering or directing of activity towards the end. Doig suggests that Aquinas's omission of any discussion of

these issues in his *SLE* can be interpreted as masking 'a definite turning away from Albert's doctrine' (p. 49).

3.2.3 Prudence in Aquinas's *Commentary on the Sentences*

In his writings on the interrelations of prudence and moral virtue, Doig detects a gradual distancing from Albert on the part of Aquinas. Even in his *Commentary on Peter Lombard's Sentences*, which he wrote only a few years after he had been Albert's student, there is evidence of a turning away. Already, Aquinas understands the end of human life as consisting in the good of reason. Nevertheless, the moral virtues have a crucial role to play in that they enable the agent to control his passions and actions so that reason's grasp of the correct good can be fulfilled. Aquinas understands natural reason's predetermining of the end of human life as preceding 'prudence, just as the intellectus of principles [precedes] science' (Doig, p. 55). He seems to regard reason as having a pre-eminent role in constituting virtue – and not as Albert might have put it, reason having been perfected for this purpose by prudence. In Aquinas's understanding, 'reason naturally knows that the agent is to live according to what reason discovers to be good, and that such a life, when spelled out, will be found to encompass living temperately, courageously, and justly' (Doig, p. 56). However, Aquinas does recognize prudence as predetermining the end in a secondary sense. It can be said to predetermine the end for moral virtues. For example, this might involve the prescribing of a particular act as courageous. 'Given natural reason's determination of the end, that is, once the orientation of the moral virtues is established, prudence effects the mean in actions and passions' (Doig, p. 55).

However, Doig also points out that there are passages in the *Commentary on the Sentences* where Aquinas writes in a way that more closely resembles Albert. When considering 'whether the other cardinal virtues are reduced to prudence as to the more principal virtue or cause', Aquinas states that prudence is 'the generator and both the custodian and the moderator of virtues' (p. 56). At this point, he understands correct reason or prudence as the cause of the acquisition of the moral virtues 'insofar as it is at the source of the actions bringing about their development' (ibid.). Prudence is the custodian and moderator of the moral virtues 'insofar as it determines the correct "path" of each virtue by deliberation and choice' (ibid., pp. 56-57). In this article, Aquinas is not as clear or as precise as he was earlier when he made a distinction between two senses of predetermining the end. Indeed, Doig characterizes his presentation at this point 'as indicative of a mind in the early stages of grappling with a problem' (ibid., p. 56).

3.2.4 Prudence in the *De Veritate*

It is in his *De Veritate*, written between 1256 and 1259, that Aquinas next treats of prudence. The context is a discussion on providence. God's providential care can be spoken of 'only by analogy with the agent's providence regarding himself' (Doig, p. 57). Referring to Aristotle at 1144b28, Aquinas states that 'prudence is the reasoned plan of doing things'.[8] He goes on to make a distinction between prudence and art or craft. Art has to do with things to be made. Although it starts from an agent, it terminates in something extrinsic such as a bench or a house. The reasoned plan of making such things is what is called art. Prudence has to do with things to be done.

[8] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Truth* (*Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*), trans. by Robert W. Mulligan, S.J., (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1994), Question 5, Article 1, p. 202.

These are 'actions which do not go outside the agent, but, instead, are acts that perfect him, as, for example, chaste living, bearing oneself patiently, and the like. The reasoned plan of performing these is called prudence' (Aquinas, *Truth*, p.202). Aquinas then distinguishes between the end and the means. He states that 'it is especially the role of prudence to direct the means to the end' (ibid., p. 203). Following Aristotle at 1142b31-33, 1140a25 and 1141b9, he reminds his readers that the prudent person is one who deliberates well, and following Aristotle at 1112b13, he states that 'deliberation "is not concerned with ends, but only with means"' (ibid.). Aquinas goes on to consider the two ways in which the end of human activity pre-exists in us. The first way is through the natural knowledge we have of our end. Following Aristotle at 1141b10, he states that this knowledge 'belongs to the intellect, which is a principle of things to be done as well as of things to be studied' (ibid). The second way in which the end of human activity pre-exists in us is through our desires. 'Here the ends of things to be done exist in us in our moral virtues, which influence a man to live a just, brave, or temperate life. This is, in a sense, the proximate end of things to be done' (ibid.). Continuing, Aquinas states that we are perfected in a similar way as regards the means towards the end. 'Our knowledge is perfected by counsel, our appetite, by choice; and in these matters we are directed by prudence' (ibid.). Aquinas goes on to consider briefly the kind of reasoning process involved in prudence. The prudent person 'must stand in the proper relation to the ends themselves, for a reasoned plan cannot exist unless the principles of reason are maintained' (ibid.). He sums up by stating that 'prudence requires not only the understanding of ends but also moral virtues by which the will is settled in a correct end' (ibid.). Following Aristotle at 1144a30-35 and 1144b30, Aquinas is very clear that a prudent person must be virtuous. Also, because a superior power includes everything found in an inferior power, prudence in some way

includes 'both the will as directed towards the end and the knowledge of the end itself' (ibid.). Doig regards Aquinas's presentation of the role of prudence in the *De Veritate* as being for the most part clearer and more developed than that given in the *Commentary on the Sentences*. However, he regards his terminology as less satisfactory at this point than 'it will be later when, in the *SLE*, he will explain that, for prudence to order effectively a choice, prudence is necessarily accompanied by the correct orientation of the human appetite' (Doig, p. 59).

3.2.5 Prudence and Appointing the End for Moral Virtues in the *Summa Theologiae*

Doig expresses himself surprised that when Aquinas comes to write the *Prima Secundae* about 13 years after he had written the *De Veritate*, he states that 'prudence directs the moral virtues not only in the choice of the means, but also in appointing the end'.[9] Following Aristotle at 1107a1 and 1144b21, he goes on to explain that 'the end of each moral virtue is to keep the mean in the matter proper to that virtue; and this is appointed according to the right decision of prudence' (ibid.). Although it is obviously the secondary meaning of appointing or predetermining the end that was assigned to prudence in the *Commentary on the Sentences* that Aquinas has in mind here, i.e., the prescription of a particular act as courageous or as temperate or whatever, Doig sees this as a return to Albert's way of speaking. He goes on to suggest that it is as if to anticipate the confusion that might arise for a reader trying to understand Aquinas's

[9] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Blackfriars English and Latin edition, 61 vols, vol. 23 (1a2ae, qq. 47-56), ed. by W. D. Hughes, O.P., (London/New York: Eyre & Spottiswoode/McGraw-Hill, 1969), 1a2ae, Question 66, Article 3, ad. 3. Further references to this edition of the *Summa Theologiae* are given after quotations in the text following this system and omitting the title.

meaning in assigning to prudence a function of predetermining the end, that John A. Oesterle, in his translation of this text, offers the following explanatory note.

> Prudence does not prescribe the end of the moral virtues substantially and in general, for this is accomplished by what is called *synderesis*, the virtue by which we grasp the primary practical principles [...] Prudence directs the moral virtues in prescribing the end in regard to the manner of attaining the end and taking into account the particular circumstances by which the end is rightly achieved. For example, reason naturally dictates the end that one should live temperately, but it depends on prudence to find out how this is to be attained concretely in regard to the person concerned, the place, and the time.[10]

In the *Secunda Secundae*, Aquinas is very clear that prudence does not predetermine the end for moral virtues. This is the work of natural reason functioning as *synderesis*. For Aquinas, *synderesis* is an instinctive understanding on the part of practical reason of the first principles of practice. 'The end in matters of practice operates like a first principle in matters of theory' (2a2ae.q.47, a.6).[11] The role of prudence is limited to determining which courses of activity and specific actions actually instantiate the moral virtues in the particular situations that make up our lives. Thus the function of prudence 'is not to appoint the ends for moral virtues, but only to arrange our activities which serve to reach them' (ibid.). Aquinas concludes by stating that although prudence ranks above the moral virtues and moves them, 'yet it is put forth from synderesis, rather as insight into principles advances into scientific knowledge' (ibid., ad 3).

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[10] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Treatise on the Virtues*, trans. by John A. Oesterle, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), p. 154, n. 27.

[11] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Blackfriars English and Latin edition, 61 vols, vol. 36 (2a2ae, qq. 47-56), ed. by Thomas Gilby, O.P., (London/New York: Eyre & Spottiswoode/ McGraw-Hill, 1974). For reference system, see footnote 9 above.

3.2.6 Some Contemporary Perspectives on Aquinas's Doctrine of *Synderesis*

According to Denis J.M. Bradley, Aquinas's doctrine of *synderesis* 'transforms more than develops Aristotelian moral philosophy' (p. 254). At this point in the *Secunda Secundae*, he sees Aquinas as 'merely trying to shore up the *cognitive* foundations of Aristotelian *phronesis*' (p. 249). Aristotle only recognizes the indemonstrable and necessary principles of theoretical reason; he does not mention 'any universal, innate, indemonstrable principles of practical reason' (p. 240). By extending the operation of understanding or *nous* to the practical order, Aquinas was able to ground morality in reason rather than in rightly habituated emotion. I suspect that most Aristotelian commentators would want to take issue with Bradley at this point. At 1143b1-3, Aristotle states that 'in demonstrations understanding is about the unchanging terms that are first. In [premises] about action understanding is about the last term, the one that admits of being otherwise, and [hence] about the minor premise'. Referring to these lines, Anthony Kenny asserts that 'it is common ground among commentators that in this passage Aristotle is teaching that there is a practical form of *nous*' (p. 170). However, Kenny does acknowledge that 'first, and most explicitly, *nous* is the grasp of the first principles of theoretical science; the understanding of unproven necessary truths which is the basis of *epistēmē* (ibid.). Bradley's summing up seems to me to be reasonably accurate. He states that in Aquinas 'the act of *synderesis* certainly exceeds in scope, firmness, clarity, and significance the "true apprehension" of Aristotle's *phronimos*' (p. 256). In this context, Mark Daniel Nelson remarks that Aquinas 'is wrestling with two traditions: the classical Aristotelian tradition of the virtues and the Christianized Stoic and Roman tradition of natural law'.[12] He sees *synderesis* as a kind

[12] Mark Daniel Nelson, *The Priority of Prudence: Virtue and Natural Law in Thomas Aquinas and the Implications for Modern Ethics*, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), p. 99.

of starting point; it explains how practical reasoning begins, but it does not supply content for the work of deliberating.

> Thomas goes so far as to say that we have a natural knowledge that we ought to act reasonably with respect to goods, but the orientation of our will to authentic goods and our deliberations about how to achieve them are entirely dependent on the virtues we are able to develop with practice over a lifetime. Prudence determines what is reasonable. (Nelson, p. 99)

3.2.7 *SLE.*VI.11 – A Final Stage in Aquinas's Understanding

Doig suggests that Aquinas's use of "predetermine" in Question 47, Article 6 of the *Secunda Secundae* represents a final setting aside of Albert's way of speaking. Again, he draws our attention to Aristotle's text at 1144b26-27 – that virtue is not only 'the state in accord with the correct reason, but the state involving the correct reason'. He goes on to state that if Aquinas's *SLE.* VI.11 is read against this background of a gradual turning away from the terminology and teaching of Albert's *Super Ethica.*VI.18, it can help us to appreciate that his interpretation of Aristotle at this point represents a final stage in his understanding (Doig, p. 62).

3.2.8 Prudence in Aquinas – A More Holistic Perspective

Another significant difference between Albert and Aquinas is revealed when their interpretations of Aristotle's statement at 1140b28-29 are examined. In these lines, Aristotle asserts that 'prudence is not only a state involving reason. A sign of this is the fact that such a state can be forgotten, but prudence cannot'. Doig summarizes Albert's interpretation of these lines 'as indicating that prudence is in reason together with the innate principles of the natural law' (p. 63). The approach adopted by Aquinas is quite

different. He begins by pointing out that prudence is an intellectual virtue because it resides in the rationally calculating or estimative part of the rational soul. Continuing, he states that 'it is not connected with reason alone, as art or science, but it requires rectitude of the appetitive faculty' (*SLE*.VI.4.S1174). An indication of this is that a virtue such as art or science – residing only in reason – can be forgotten. The same cannot happen with prudence. 'Prudence [...] is not forgotten by disuse, but it is destroyed by the cessation of right desire which, while remaining, is continually engaged with the things belonging to prudence, so that oblivion cannot come along unawares' (ibid.). Whereas Albert interprets prudence solely in rational terms, Aquinas makes room for an appetitive or desiderative dimension. If prudence is conceived of as a habitus in a potency, it can only be in one potency, i.e., particular reason. In this context, Doig suggests that Aquinas writes 'as if he conceives of a prudent agent rather than of a habitus in a potency' (p. 63). When Aquinas comments on Aristotle's statement at 1140a24-25 that we should study the sort of people regarded as prudent so as to grasp the nature of prudence, he remarks that Aristotle 'determines the method of procedure, saying that we must accept what prudence is from a consideration of people classed as prudent' (*SLE*.VI.4.S1161). It is likely that a reflection such as this helped Aquinas to take a more holistic view compared to that taken by Albert. It is clear that he was well able to visualize a prudent agent in whom knowledge and desire were integrated. In *SLE*.VI.7.S1200, Aquinas again states that 'prudence is not only in the reason but has a function likewise in the appetitive faculty'. He goes on to acknowledge that there are certain kinds of practical science, viz., domestic ethics and political science, which are exclusively in reason.

3.3 SOME OTHER ASPECTS OF PRUDENCE IN AQUINAS

3.3.1 Three Different Types of Prudence

Following Aristotle in Chapter 8 of Book VI, Aquinas distinguishes different types of prudence – civic prudence, domestic prudence and personal prudence. He defines personal prudence as 'the right plan of things to be done in the light of what is good or bad for [...] oneself' (*SLE*.VI.7.S1196). Personal 'prudence and civic prudence are substantially the same habit' (ibid.). However, civic prudence concerns things that are good or bad for the entire civic community. Its relation to personal prudence is like that between legal justice and virtue. Aquinas sees domestic or household prudence as occupying a middle position between that regulating the individual and the state. 'Because the whole is more important than the part, and consequently the city than the household and the household than one man, civic prudence must be more important than domestic and the latter more important than personal prudence' (*SLE*.VI.7.S1201). Aquinas interprets Aristotle as stating that the particular good of each individual requires both the proper administration of the household, i.e., domestic prudence, and the proper administration of the state, i.e., civic prudence. According to Aquinas, domestic and civic prudence – though necessary – are insufficient without personal prudence. 'When the state and the household have been properly arranged, it is still not evident how one's own personal affairs must be disposed. Therefore, it is necessary to attend to this by the prudence dealing with an individual's good' (*SLE*.VI.7.S1207). At an earlier point, Aquinas asserts that 'that which is concerned with one person only, oneself, seems to be especially prudence' (*SLE*.VI.7.S1199).

3.3.2 The Need for Shrewdness (*Dinotica*)

In *SLE*.VI.10.S1271, Aquinas introduces an 'operative principle that discovers ways leading to ends' which he later refers to as 'shrewdness' (*dinotica*) or 'a certain ingenuity' (*SLE*.VI.10.S1272). Although necessary for virtue, this particular power or principle is not sufficient. 'When the intention is good, ingenuity of this sort deserves praise, but when the intention is bad, it is called craftiness, which implies evil as prudence implies good' (ibid.). It is the moral virtues that make all the difference here. 'The habit of prudence in the soul is not joined to this insight, i.e., this perceptive principle of shrewdness, without moral virtue which always refers to the good' (*SLE*.VI.10.S1273). This is far removed from Albert's innate principles or seed of prudence gradually developing into a habitus of a particular kind of imperfect prudence in relation to a particular moral virtue. Instead, Aquinas puts forward this notion of shrewdness or 'natural ingenuity, which guided by the first practical principles, and presupposing the correct orientation of the rational appetite, enables an agent to acquire the one habitus of prudence in tandem with the acquisition of all the moral virtues' (Doig, p. 65).

3.3.3 From Natural Virtue to Moral Virtue – The Integrating Function of Prudence

In *SLE*.VI.11.S1275, Aquinas follows Aristotle in Chapter 13 of Book VI by drawing a parallel between shrewdness and prudence in the discursive part of the soul and natural virtue and moral virtue in the appetitive part. He regards it as self-evident that virtues or vices exist in some people naturally. 'Immediately from birth certain men seem to be just or temperate or brave because of a natural disposition by which they are inclined to virtuous works' (*SLE*.VI.11.S1276). Aquinas goes on to state that natural virtue

involves three elements: firstly, reason, because the first principles of human conduct are implanted by nature; secondly, the will, 'which of itself is naturally moved by the good apprehended as its proper object' (*SLE*.VI.11.S1277); and thirdly, the sensitive appetite. Only the sensitive appetite varies from person to person. By natural temperament, some people 'are inclined to anger, others to concupiscence or passions of a different kind either too much or too little, or with moderation in which moral virtue consists' (ibid.). According to Aquinas, the discrimination of reason is required to prevent the various natural habits and inclinations from leading us astray. Only a habit that 'accepts reason in its operation so that it operates with discretion [...] will be a virtue in the proper and perfect sense, i.e., a moral virtue' (*SLE*.VI.11.S1279). Thus Aquinas strongly supports what he calls 'Aristotle's middle position' which maintains 'that moral virtue is according to reason and accompanied by reason' (*SLE*.VI.S1285). He goes on to affirm that it is not possible for a person to be good 'according to moral virtue, without prudence, nor even to be prudent without moral virtue' (ibid.). It is in regard to the moral virtues – and not the natural virtues – that a person is called good without qualification. This is because the moral virtues cannot exist without prudence, nor can prudence exist without the moral virtues. 'When there is prudence, which is a single virtue, all the virtues will be simultaneous with it, and none of them will be present if prudence is not there' (*SLE*.VI.11.S1287).

That prudence, according to Aquinas, has an integrating function is also well brought out in the *Prima Secundae*. Without prudence, the natural habits and inclinations do not become full virtues. As he himself states, 'natural inclinations fail to have the complete character of virtue if prudence is lacking' (1a2ae. q.65, a.1, ad 1). Aquinas offers as an example a person who behaves 'well in matters of anger, but not in matters of

concupiscence' (ibid.). Such a person 'will indeed acquire a certain habit of restraining his anger. This habit, however, will lack the quality of virtue, through the absence of prudence, which is wanting in matters of concupiscence' (ibid.). In the same article, he sums up as follows at a later point: 'the whole matter of moral virtue falls under the single rule of prudence' (ad 3). His final conclusion is that 'the lack of prudence in one field of things to be done would result in a deficiency elsewhere about other things to be done' (ibid., ad 4).

3.3.4 Prudence Concerns Universals and Particulars

Aquinas follows Aristotle very closely in underlining the fact that prudence involves both universals and particulars. The prudent person has the ability to make effective links between universal principles and particular situations, which are variable and unpredictable. In *SLE*.VI.7.S1208, he asserts that an indication that prudence is not only concerned with universals but also with particulars is the fact that a young person can become highly competent in the speculative sciences and in mathematics, but 'it does not seem that a youth can become prudent. The reason is that prudence deals with particulars which are made known to us by experience'. Because a great deal of time is needed to acquire such experience, a young person cannot be expected to have it. Aquinas goes on to point out that because the work of prudence is deliberative, it can be in error in two ways. 'One concerns the universal, e.g., whether it is true that all sluggish waters are unhealthy. The other concerns the particular, e.g., whether this water is sluggish. Therefore, prudence must give direction in regard to both universals and particulars' (*SLE*.VI.7.S1212).

3.3.5 Prudence and the Virtues of the Speculative Intellect

Continuing, Aquinas compares prudence with scientific knowledge. Whereas scientific knowledge is concerned with universals, prudence has to do with 'a singular ultimate, viz., the particular, since it is of the nature of the practicable to be particular' (*SLE*.VI.7.S1213). Thus there is a clear distinction between prudence and scientific knowledge. Aquinas goes on to compare prudence with understanding. They are alike in that they both have to do with ultimates. Understanding concerns 'indemonstrable principles for which there is no proof' (*SLE*.VI.7.S1214). Prudence concerns the 'singular practicable that must be taken as a principle in things to be done' (ibid.). Although knowledge of the singular ultimate cannot be proved by reason, there is genuine knowledge of it through what Aquinas terms 'the inner sense which perceives things sensibly conceivable' (ibid.) – as in mathematics. Prudence and understanding differ in that 'understanding is not given to inquiry, but prudence is, because it is deliberative' (*SLE*.VI.7.S1216).

In *SLE*.VI.6.S1190, Aquinas follows Aristotle very closely in stating that wisdom is the combination of scientific knowledge and understanding – 'not of all possible things but of the most honorable'. As the science of the most divine things, it is the principal intellectual virtue. He upholds the dignity of science and wisdom. 'The speculative sciences are not sought as useful for some further end but simply as honorable in themselves' (*SLE*.VI.6.S1185). Their objects are necessary and universal. 'Wisdom is the same without qualification in relation to everything' (*SLE*.VI.6.S1187). One of the main characteristics of prudence is that it consists in 'a proportion and a relation to something. The man who can properly consider each thing pertaining to him is said to be prudent and to such a one we grant or attribute prudence' (ibid.). After considering

how philosophers such as Anaxagoras and Thales are regarded as wise but not as prudent, Aquinas asserts that 'prudence deals with human goods about which we deliberate. Now, to deliberate well seems to be the special work of the prudent man' (*SLE*.VI.6.S1193). It is not possible to deliberate about things that are necessary because they cannot be otherwise.

Similarly, 'deliberation is not possible about things in general that are not ordered to some end, i.e., to a practicable good' (ibid.). Because prudence is concerned with practicable things, it considers both universals and particulars. Because action has to do with particulars or singulars, the knowledge of particulars is often more important than the knowledge of universals, in which action does not occur. Aquinas considers as an example a doctor who has knowledge of universals but lacks knowledge of particulars. Such a doctor – knowing that light meats are easily digestible and healthful but not knowing which meats are light – is not able to help people to get well. 'But the man who knows that the flesh of fowls is light and healthful is better able to effect a cure' (*SLE*.VI.6.S1194). Thus the morally astute person is like a good doctor in that he is able to make prudent judgments about particular cases. For Aquinas, prudence is very much a positive virtue because it enables a person to apply the right principle in every situation. Although being prudent can involve being cautious and defensive in certain situations, it would be a distortion to identify it with such an approach generally.

> Contrary to modern concepts of moral virtue, virtue for St Thomas is not primarily about obeying rules. It is just the virtue of prudence which frees us from having to refer to the book of rules to see what is right in any situation, and gives us a confident command of applying principles rightly in new situations on

our own. Prudence establishes right reason about things to be *done*, whereas the virtues of the speculative intellect are for the truth that is to be *known*.[13]

3.3.6 The Perfecting Function of Prudence

In *SLE*.VI.10.S1269, Aquinas underlines that prudence perfects practical reason – a part of the human soul that is 'rational by essence'. And the moral virtues perfect the appetite – the part that is 'rational by participation'. The perfecting function of prudence and all the other virtues is a recurring theme in Aquinas's writings. In the *Prima Secundae*, for example, he states that 'human virtue is a habit perfecting man so that he may act well' (1a2ae.q.58, a.3). Continuing, he reminds his readers that there are two principles or sources of human actions, viz., the intellect or reason and the appetite. 'Consequently, every human virtue is necessarily perfective of one of these principles' (ibid.). A virtue that perfects the speculative or practical intellect so that its activity may be good will be an intellectual virtue. A virtue that perfects the appetite will be a moral virtue. Although prudence 'is counted among the moral virtues' (ibid., ad 1) and requires them for its exercise, strictly speaking, it is an intellectual virtue.

3.3.7 Prudence Involves Deliberation, Judgment and the Commanding of Action

It is also in *SLE*.VI.10.S1269 that prudence is referred to as giving good advice, judging and ordering the means to the end. This is an example of Aquinas going well beyond a simple comment on or interpretation of the corresponding text in Aristotle so as to give his own view. According to Aquinas, there are three stages in every action: deliberation, judgment and the command of the will. Prudence requires excellence in deliberation, 'which is associated with the inquiry of reason [...] (and) takes time'

[13] Francis Selman, *Aspects of Aquinas*, (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2005), p. 143.

(*SLE*.VI.8.S1219). Genuine deliberation or *eubulia* consists in that rectitude which aims at 'an absolutely good end, by suitable methods and at an opportune time' (*SLE*.VI.8.S1234). In the *Secunda Secundae*, Aquinas refers to *eubulia* or 'well advisedness' as a virtue that is allied to prudence. He describes it as 'the activity of deliberating well, or rather, the cast of mind towards it' (2a2ae. q.51, a.1). It is the virtue that 'makes a man of good counsel' (2a2ae. q51, a.2); it 'is ordered to prudence as to the more principal virtue, without which it would not be a virtue' (ibid.).

In *SLE*.VI.9.S1240, Aquinas states that *synesis* or right judgment is more excellent than deliberation or *eubulia*, 'for inquiry is ordered to judgment as to an end'. People who can judge well about things to be done are called '*syneti* and *eusyneti*, i.e., people of sense and people of good sense' (ibid.). '*Synesis* signifies a right judgment [...] in the majority of cases' (*SLE*.VI.9.S1243). In the succeeding paragraphs, Aquinas introduces another virtue, *gnome*, which is the disposition to be able to judge exceptional cases. In the *Secunda Secundae*, he refers to *gnome* as 'a superior virtue of judiciousness [...], which implies a certain sharp-sightedness of judgment' (2a2ae. q.51, a.4).

In *SLE*.VI.9.S1239, Aquinas points out that practical reason does not halt at the point of judgment, 'but proceeds further to do something. Hence there is required a third work, as it were final and perfecting, viz., to command that the thing be done. This properly belongs to prudence'. Continuing, he states that 'prudence is preceptive inasmuch as the work of the end is to determine what must be done' (*SLE*.VI.9.S1240). Thus prudence involves more than good deliberation and sound judgment. Making sure that the right action is performed is of fundamental importance. In her book, *The Recovery of Virtue*, Jean Porter states that 'because command is the act of prudence which is most

directly connected to action, Aquinas identifies it as the chief act of prudence'.[14] This interpretation is supported by what Aquinas himself writes in the *Secunda Secundae*. After asserting that the practical intellect is meant for the doing of things, he states that the act of commanding 'consists in bringing into execution what has been thought out and decided on. And because this approaches more closely to what the practical reason is for, it is a chief act of the practical reason, and so of prudence as well' (2a2ae. q.47, a.8).

[14] Jean Porter. *The Recovery of Virtue: The Relevance of Aquinas for Christian Ethics*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1990), p. 163.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, Aristotle holds that only the prudent person is fully virtuous. A good deliberator, he is able to determine the kind of action that will promote *eudaimonia* or human flourishing in different kinds of situations. His practical perception enables him to discern the kind of situation he is in and the kind of action he needs to do. Having considered his situation, he chooses in accordance with his wish to do the kind of action that will best promote *eudaimonia.* And he acts on his choice correctly carrying out an action of the proper kind. In this way, the person who is prudent is able to succeed in action through giving himself the correct orders. For Aristotle, prudence is an intellectual virtue of the calculating or practical part of the rational soul. The function of the rationally calculating part is to enable a person to do what best promotes *eudaimonia.* As commentators such as Cooper and Reeve insist, although the deliberations of the prudent person can embrace both means and ends, they cannot be about the ultimate end, i.e., *eudaimonia.* In this context, the role of the intellectual virtue of understanding or *nous* is particularly important. 'It is no part of the function of *phronēsis* to discover what *eudaimonia* is. That function belongs to scientific knowledge, dialectic, and *nous*' (Reeve, p. 97). Even though prudence and practical knowledge are crucially important, the intellectual virtues of the scientific part of the rational soul and theoretical knowledge are also needed. Reeve's interpretation of Aristotle at this point closely resembles that of Kraut, which was followed in Chapter Two. 'Study expressing wisdom is primary *eudaimonia*; practical activity expressing *phronēsis* is secondary *eudaimonia*; and the latter is for the sake of the former' (Reeve, p. 97).

Although more than 1,500 years of history and much else separate Thomas Aquinas from Aristotle, the extent to which Aquinas's doctrine of prudence seems to resemble

that of Aristotle is – at first sight – remarkable. I suspect Aquinas would be quite happy to endorse almost completely the admittedly rather sketchy outline of Aristotle's notion of prudence given in the above paragraph. However, I think he would want to highlight his belief that Aristotle's conception of ultimate end or *eudaimonia* can only be realized in an imperfect way in this life. In *SLE*.1.16.S202, after stating that 'those we call happy are men, subject to change in this life, who cannot attain perfect beatitude', Aquinas asserts that 'perfect beatitude is reserved for man after this life'. At an earlier point, he acknowledges that Aristotle 'speaks of happiness as it is attainable in this life, for happiness in a future life is entirely beyond the investigation of reason' (*SLE*.1.9.S113). At 1098a18-20, Aristotle states that the human good 'must be in a complete life. For one swallow does not make a spring, nor does one day; nor similarly, does one day or a short time make us blessed and happy'. Aquinas interprets these lines as meaning that 'continuity and perpetuity, to some extent, are [...] required for happiness' (*SLE*.1.10.S129). At a later stage, he asserts that continuity and perpetuity, which belong to the nature of perfect happiness, are not found in the present life. 'Hence perfect happiness cannot be had in this life' (ibid.). With a passage such as this in mind, Ralph McInerny states that Aquinas 'is able to say that Aristotle, by his own statement, has described an imperfect happiness'.[1] Nevertheless, Aquinas does not consider that Aristotle's conception of *eudaimonia* is in conflict with the notion that human happiness consists in union with God for all eternity. 'There is but one concept of ultimate, but there are two realizations of it, one imperfect, the other perfect' (ibid.).

[1] Thomas Aquinas, *Disputed Questions in Virtue: Quaestio Disputata de Virtutibus in Communi* and *Quaestio Disputata de Virtutibus Cardinalibus*, trans. by Ralph McInerny (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 1999), p. xvii.

In his book, *Right Practical Reason: Aristotle, Action, and Prudence in Aquinas*, Daniel Westberg mentions that Gauthier considered that Aquinas 'radically altered Aristotle's account of *phronēsis* by his theological concerns'.[2] He states that Gauthier 'identified *synderesis* and the will as the major innovations in Aquinas's account of practical reason as compared to Aristotle's' (Westberg, p. 29). According to this view, the introduction of *synderesis* diminishes the role of prudence as regards how the basic ends of human action are to be understood. The suggestion might be that we are left with 'a limited *prudentia* which works within a framework of principles already developed (and furnished by a different form of knowledge) and whose function is merely to select and apply' (Westberg, p. 32). This would be in marked contrast to Aristotle's 'open-ended *phronēsis* which begins with desire for an end' (ibid.). Westberg starts to deal with what he considers as Gauthier's 'fundamentally flawed' (ibid., p.30) understanding of Aquinas's relation to Aristotle by drawing our attention to 'a de-emphasis on *synderesis* in the *Summa Theologiae* as compared to earlier works' (ibid.). He might have added that there is no mention at all of *synderesis* in Aquinas's *Sententia libri Ethicorum*. James C. Doig also notices 'the little attention paid synderesis in the *Summa theologiae*' (Aquinas's Commentary, p. 186). He goes on to state that 'the reader cannot but be surprised to find not only no mention of synderesis in Aquinas's commentary on Aristotle's *Ethics*, but as well no reference to a "natural habitus" of the first indemonstrable principles of morality' (ibid.). However, there is an indirect reference that Doig does not acknowledge. In *SLE*.VI.11.S1277, Aquinas states in relation to natural virtue that 'it can be considered first on the part of reason, since the first principles of human conduct are implanted by nature, for instance, that no one should be

[2] Daniel Westberg, *Right Practical Reason: Aristotle, Action, and Prudence in Aquinas*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 29.

injured, and the like'. Doig is in no doubt but that 'Aquinas was convinced that the *Ethics* contained a doctrine equivalent to synderesis' (ibid.). As indicated in Chapter Three, Aristotle's notion of practical *nous* is basically compatible with Aquinas's doctrine of *synderesis*, even if it is not as clear or as well developed. Indeed, it could be argued that Aquinas's hierarchy of *synderesis*, prudence and the moral virtues is more Aristotle than Aristotle himself.

In my opinion, Westberg is very insightful when he points to the difficulty of balancing 'the themes of contingency and freedom on the one hand, and on the other, necessity and truth' (p. 33) in accounts of practical reason. 'Since all of these elements are stressed at various times by Aristotle, we should be careful not to minimize them' (ibid.). For example, the material discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis under the subheading – The Challenge of Dealing Adequately with the Complexity of Ethical Issues – might be considered as reflecting the theme of contingency and freedom; whereas the material in the next paragraph of Chapter Two under the subheading – Knowledge and Right Reason in Aristotle's Ethics – might be considered as reflecting the theme of necessity and truth. According to Westberg, it seems almost impossible 'to combine the two themes in one process of reasoning' (ibid., p. 33) in the case of Aquinas's teaching. He makes a contrast between 'what can be regarded as an ambiguous attitude to truth in Aristotle' (ibid.), which gives rise to a more fluid system, and Aquinas's 'assertion of truth in the connection of natural law and eternal law' (ibid.) as a result of his theological concerns. His conclusion is that a choice has to be made 'either to emphasize the Aristotelian teleological element (and soften his teaching on law and truth in the practical syllogism), or to emphasize the absolute starting-points and the importance of truth but lose some of the Aristotelian freedom' (ibid., pp. 33-34).

Jean-Pierre Torrell refers to Aquinas's *Sententia libri Ethicorum* as 'indeed a *Sententia*, which is to say a summary [...] and not an *expositio*, an in-depth commentary with textual discussions' (p. 228). Torrell goes on to suggest that Aquinas's title should be taken as an indication that he did not want his *Commentary on Aristotle's 'Nicomachean Ethics'* to be regarded as a critical commentary. Gauthier also highlights this point. In his book, *Aquinas on Human Action*, Ralph McInerny takes issue with Gauthier, who 'dismissed the commentary as useless'.[4] According to McInerny, Aquinas's 'commentaries on Aristotle are precious aids for understanding the text of Aristotle' (ibid., p. 163). As regards the *SLE* and Aristotle's notion of prudence, I think the truth of McInerny's statement and that of another statement made by Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump are well borne out. Kretzmann and Stump assert that all Aquinas's Aristotelian commentaries 'are marked by his extraordinary ability as a philosophical commentator to discern a logical structure in almost every passage he examines in every sort of text'.[5]

When one focuses on the *SLE*, the extent to which Aquinas's doctrine of prudence resembles that of Aristotle is striking. As outlined in Chapter Three, the accounts of Aquinas and Aristotle are almost identical as regards issues such as the nature of prudence as an intellectual virtue residing in the practical reason and concerned with things to be done, the relationship between prudence and moral virtue, the distinction between natural virtue and full virtue, the reciprocity of the virtues, the need for shrewdness, the fact that prudence concerns both universals and particulars, the

[4] Ralph McInerny, *Aquinas on Human Action: A Theory of Practice*, (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1992), p. 177.
[5] Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump, 'Aquinas, Thomas' in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward Craig and others, 10 vols (London: Routledge, 1998), 1, pp.326-350 (p. 331).

importance of deliberation, judgment, and the commanding of action, the distinction between prudence and the intellectual virtues that are theoretical, etc. Aquinas's stress on the commanding of action as the chief act of prudence might seem to be in conflict with Aristotle's stress on deliberation and decision. However, this conflict is more apparent than real. The commanding of action is the final stage – the culmination of a process. Its perfection necessarily includes the perfecting of the stages leading to it, e.g., deliberation and decision. According to Denis J.M. Bradley, Aquinas's interpretation of Aristotle's understanding of theoretical wisdom and the contemplative life as pre-eminent is 'remarkably in harmony with' (p. 154, n. 73) that of Richard Kraut, which was discussed in Chapter Two. In terms of the modern division between an intellectualist and an inclusivist interpretation of Aristotelian *eudaimonia*, it seems that Aquinas would belong more naturally on the intellectualist side.

A drawback in treating of Aquinas's teachings on prudence principally in the context of the *Sententia libri Ethicorum* is that the way in which he departs from Aristotle in some of his more theological writings is concealed. Although the *SLE* represents Aquinas's views, it does not represent the full theological treatment as found in a work such as the *Summa Theologiae*. For example, in Question 58 of the *Prima Secundae*, Aquinas weakens the distinction between prudence and art or craft. After quoting Augustine's saying that virtue is the art of right conduct, Aquinas states that 'this applies to prudence essentially, but to other virtues by participation, in so far as they are directed by it' (a. 1, ad 1). In Question 61 of the *Prima Secundae*, which treats of the cardinal virtues, Aquinas refers to prudence as 'something of a moral virtue' (a. 1). When speaking strictly, Aquinas regards prudence as an intellectual virtue. However, he sometimes

follows the tradition of placing all the cardinal virtues, including prudence, among the moral virtues.

In this context, other examples that could be considered include the relationship between prudence and the theological virtues caused by grace, the distinction between acquired prudence and infused prudence, and the link between prudence and God's providence. It is in the discussion of these theological issues, which go beyond Aristotle's philosophical scope, that it becomes clear that Aquinas's understanding of prudence involves an added dimension. This added dimension makes quite a significant difference. For example, in the *Prima Secundae*, after discussing the virtues of faith, hope and charity, Aquinas states that 'charity is the mother and the root of all the virtues, inasmuch as it is the form of them all' (1a2ae. q.62, a.4). Although prudence is the mother and the root of the virtues of character, it is charity that 'moulds even prudence itself' (Pieper, p. 58). The kind of prudence Aquinas has in mind here is acquired prudence and not infused prudence, which he introduces at a later stage. The relationship of charity to this acquired prudence as its formal cause distinguishes it quite sharply from Aristotle's *phronēsis*. For Aquinas, the overriding concern was to develop a teaching on practical reasoning and its perfecting in the virtue of prudence that would be consistent with both the truth he saw in Aristotle and the truth Christian theology provides in helping the person to ascend to God.

As we have seen, Aristotle understands the person as having two major capabilities on account of his possessing a rational soul. One capability is theoretical and is for understanding how things are. The other capability is practical and involves two dimensions – one relating to action or the doing of things, and the other relating to

production or the making of things. The prudent person is one who is good at thinking about how to act wisely and live well. Very importantly, he also succeeds in actually living a fulfilled and worthwhile life. In this way, he realizes the potential of his practical reason as regards the dimension of action. According to Aristotle, only the person who actually deliberates about and personally decides to do virtuous actions for their own sakes is fully or perfectly virtuous. 'Full virtue cannot be acquired without prudence' (1144b16-17). Thus Aristotle is clear that although prudence is based on a naturally virtuous character, full virtue only develops when the person decides for himself that he will be temperate, courageous, just, etc. It is significant that prudence, unlike the virtues of character, does not have a natural state and a full or perfect state. Prudence is by definition a perfect virtue, and it is for this reason that it develops the virtues of character into full or perfect virtues. It seems to me that this relationship of interdependence between prudence and the virtues of character is probably the most distinctive aspect of Aristotle's account of the ethical life. That it is also highly significant is well brought out by J. Donald Monan in his book, *Moral Knowledge and its Methodology in Aristotle*.[6]

> For, once having asserted that moral knowledge depends upon one's morally good *praxis* or conduct, he (Aristotle) cannot choose an ultimate norm which is purely objectivistic, or constituted 'in itself', without man. And, once having established that morally responsible action depends upon *knowing why* it is good, he cannot choose an ultimate norm which is purely volitional. To save the two elements of his doctrine he had to choose a norm in which true reason and right desire are synthesized, which is in effect the definition of the *phronimos*. (Monan, pp. 80-81)

[6] J. Donald Monan, *Moral Knowledge and its Methodology in Aristotle*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).

At the end of this thesis, I am very conscious that some questions remain unanswered. In relation to Aristotle, it seems to me that the most important question concerns the conflict between the kind of intellectualist interpretation of *eudaimonia* and the contemplative life that has been put forward by such as Kraut – as outlined in Chapter Two – and Aristotle's views about virtue as outlined in the above paragraph. When Aristotle identifies happiness with contemplation, he seems to hold that the person can have sufficient reason to choose the virtues of character and their corresponding actions only to the extent that they promote his contemplation, i.e., his exercise of the virtue of theoretical wisdom. Viewed from this perspective, prudence and the moral virtues are seen as instrumental means to an ontologically distinct end, i.e., contemplation. However, Aristotle also holds that the person has sufficient reason to choose the virtues of character and their corresponding actions for their own sakes, and not just to the extent that they are instrumental means to something else. On this view, moral action is its own end. Because of the conflict between these two perspectives in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, it is hardly surprising that some commentators, e.g., Ackrill and Nussbaum, have concluded that it is not possible to reconcile Aristotle's treatment of *eudaimonia* and the contemplative life with his treatment of prudence, the virtues of character and the ethical life. In relation to Aquinas, there are also some unanswered questions. Certainly, the extent to which his teachings on prudence should be characterized as Aristotelian is an issue that would require a far more extensive study than has been possible in these pages. Nevertheless, I think it is safe to conclude that his notion of prudence is not as thoroughly Aristotelian as is sometimes assumed. Aquinas's elevation of charity to a position of pre-eminence among the virtues suggests another question. To what extent is the self-sacrificing love of a truly Christian ethic compatible with an Aristotelian notion of prudence that emphasizes personal fulfilment?

Perhaps, to paraphrase Ackrill in his remark on Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, both Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, in their various writings, are like most great philosophers in that they raise more questions than they answer.[7] It is my hope to return to deal with these questions in a future study.

[7] J. L. Ackrill, 'Aristotle on *Eudaimonia*', in *Aristotle's Ethics* (see Nussbaum [1999] above), pp. 57-77 (p. 57).

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