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The Necessity of Practical Wisdom

La Necesidad de la Sabiduría Práctica

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Abstract: I defend a generalized developmentalist reading of Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics by arguing that it allows for a promising solution to the problem of instrumentalism of practical wisdom regarding theoretical wisdom. This problem consists in that if we accept the instrumentalist premise, we must consider the Aristotelian text as inconsistent. I show shortcomings in the solutions proposed by intellectualists and inclusivists. I then characterize the model of personal development my interpretation ascribes to the Aristotelian text and provide textual evidence. The generalized developmentalist reading I propose constitutes a middle ground between intellectualism and inclusivism since it accepts weak intellectualism while maintaining that practical wisdom is as necessary as theoretical wisdom for eudaimonia. Moreover, practical wisdom has a genetic as opposed to an instrumental role. Finally, I give two arguments to show that instrumentalism is incompatible with the interpretation proposed here and that the problem of instrumentalism poses no threat to it.

Keywords: Ethics; ancient philosophy; Aristotle; virtue; practical wisdom; eudaimonia.

Resumen: Defiendo una lectura del desarrollo generalizada de la Ética a Nicómaco de Aristóteles argumentando que ella permite formular una solución promisorio al problema del instrumentalismo de la sabiduría práctica (φρόνησις) con respecto a la sabiduría teórica (σοφία). Este problema consiste en que, si aceptamos las premisas instrumentalistas, debemos evaluar al texto aristotélico como inconsistente. Muestro limitaciones en las soluciones propuestas tanto por intelectualistas como por inclusivistas. Luego caracterizo el modelo de desarrollo personal que mi interpretación adjudica al texto aristotélico y proveo evidencia textual para sostenerlo. La lectura del desarrollo generalizada que propongo constituye una aproximación intermedia entre el intelectualismo y el inclusivismo dado que acepta una versión débil de intelectualismo mientras mantiene que la sabiduría práctica es tan necesaria como la sabiduría teórica para alcanzar la eudaimonia. Más aún, la sabiduría práctica tiene un rol genético como opuesto a uno meramente instrumental. Finalmente, proveo dos argumentos para mostrar que el instrumentalismo es incompatible con la interpretación que propongo aquí y que, por tanto, el problema del instrumentalismo no representa una amenaza para ella.

Palabras clave: Ética, filosofía antigua, Aristóteles, virtud, sabiduría práctica, eudaimonia.

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1. Introduction

I argue that a developmentalist reading allows for an original and promising solution to the problem of instrumentalism in the *Nicomachean Ethics*³ readings (NE from now on). Instrumentalist interpretation of the Aristotelian text leads to what I call strong intellectualism. This strong intellectualism consists of two premises:

- (1) Eudaimonia (εὐδαιμονία) consists of an active life according to the intellectual virtue⁴ of theoretical wisdom (σοφία).
- (2) Practical wisdom (φρόνησις) aims to provide the material means needed for the agent to exercise theoretical wisdom.

Strong intellectualism is the kind of reading defended by John Cooper (1986). In contrast, weak intellectualism accepts only the first premise. The problem of instrumentalism arises from premise (2). If we accept it, NE becomes inconsistent since Aristotle claims that practical wisdom is among the greatest of goods⁵ and that the eudaimon's life is the most complete and good that is possible to live.

To further understand the scope of the problem of instrumentalism, let us analyze the Aristotelian conception of eudaimonia more deeply. Aristotle defines eudaimonia as the major good a human can opt for. This good is always pursued for its own sake and never as a means to reach other goods. Additionally, eudaimonia consists of an active life according to the highest and most complete virtue. However, Aristotle's individuation of this highest virtue and the precise mode in which this virtue is related to the rest of the virtues is a matter of debate. In this debate, both practical wisdom and theoretical wisdom are protagonists. Furthermore, the discussion examines how these virtues relate to each other and eudaimonia. On one side of the debate, inclusivists reject both premises (1) and (2) and tell us that both virtues together constitute eudaimonia. On the other side, intellectualists tell us that eudaimonia is a life according to theoretical virtue. Thus, while inclusivists (e.g., Ackrill, 1980; Whiting, 1986) reject that there is a

³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, in Barnes, J. (Ed.). (2014). *Complete Works of Aristotle, Volume 2: The Revised Oxford Translation*. Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt6wq12z>

⁴ Throughout this text, I use virtue and excellence equivalently.

⁵ NE 1169b10-11.

problem of instrumentalism in NE since both virtues are at the same level, some intellectualists have claimed that we have to accept that the Aristotelian texts may be inconsistent on this point (e.g., Cooper, 1986). To make things worse, Aristotle explicitly affirms premise (1), so the inclusivist reading also seems at odds with the text. However, Aristotle also affirms that practical wisdom has a crucial role in a theoretical life. Furthermore, he considers practical wisdom among the greatest goods and tells us that good actions guided by it do not need external ends, for they are their own ends⁶. Hence, it also seems misguided to take practical wisdom's role as purely instrumental.

I argue that a generalized developmentalist reading allows us to maintain premise (1), i.e., a weak intellectualism, while conceiving practical wisdom as having its end in itself. This compatibility is achieved by conceiving practical wisdom not as instrumental but as necessary for the genesis of theoretical wisdom. The contrast between instrumental and necessary for the genesis is strong since instrumentalism tells us that practical wisdom's role is to provide material conditions to intellectual activity. Those conditions include money, a home, clothes, leisure time, instruments needed for writing, scientific instruments, peace, health, etcetera. Without these material conditions, pursuing a purely intellectual activity would be extremely hard but nevertheless possible with a lot of effort. Hence, these are contingent means since even though it would be better to have them all, we can do contemplation with a few or maybe none. By contrast, genetic means are necessary. For example, it is necessary to grasp some algebra's rules if we aim to form the capacity to solve problems employing equations⁷. Therefore, generalized developmentalism, as I conceive it, treats the process of reaching eudaimonia as gradual and practical wisdom as a necessary step toward theoretical wisdom. However, it must not be thought as if theoretical wisdom completes practical wisdom because, as I will argue in section 6, practical wisdom is complete. Moreover, given that Aristotle conceives practical wisdom as something you cannot lose once you have it, the developmentalist maintains that the inclusivist is, in a sense, right when he affirms that eudaimonia includes both practical and theoretical virtue.

To further support that instrumentalism is not compatible with the necessary genetic means that my generalized developmentalist reading ascribes to practical wisdom, I will provide two

⁶ NE 1140b2-7

⁷ Although this example is a necessary kinetic means, practical wisdom is a necessary non-kinetic means. This distinction will be depicted in 6.2.

arguments, one conceptual and the other by reductio. The conceptual argument is intended to show that not only the instrumentalist reading makes NE as a whole inconsistent, but it also makes practical wisdom collapse in an art (τέχνη). This consequence is inconsistent with Aristotle's insistence that practical wisdom is not art. The reductio argument aims to prove that if we accept the instrumentalist premise plus my generalized developmentalist reading, together, entail nonsense claims. Hence, generalized developmentalism and instrumentalism are incompatible.

The article will proceed as follows. In section 2, I analyze how both intellectualist and inclusivist interpreters of NE deal with the problem of instrumentalism and the shortcomings of their strategies. In section 3, I aim to establish the developmentalist thesis, i.e., that acquiring theoretical wisdom and thus reaching eudaimonia necessarily requires being practically wise. I further specify the type of means that practical wisdom provides for the genesis of theoretical wisdom, namely, motivational and cognitive means. Next, in section 4, I aim to generalize the developmentalist thesis to show how Aristotle conceives the process of reaching practical wisdom. This generalization will allow us to see NE's objective as a whole. I claim that NE is intended as a step-by-step guide for reaching eudaimonia. In turn, in section 5, I provide two arguments intended to show that instrumentalism is incompatible with my generalized developmentalist reading on NE. In section 6, I argue that necessary means could be complete if they are non-kinetic, this meaning that they are not stages of a movement. To do that, I rely on the triple scheme introduced by Aristotle in *De Anima* (henceforth DA). As an important corollary, we can appreciate that the transitions between the steps that lead to eudaimonia are different in nature from each other. Finally, in section 7, as a complement, I provide an interpretation of some passages of *Magna Moralia* I, 34 (MM from now on) that is compatible with what has been said.

2. The problem of instrumentalism in the inclusivism-intellectualism debate

Before we begin to analyze the debate, it is convenient to frame it in the Aristotelian map of virtues and their relations. In NE, virtues are separated into two main groups: ethical and dianoetic. The ethical virtues related to the character traits of an agent are linked to the irrational part of the soul and are dispositions to act (ἔξις) in the right way. For example, honesty, justice,

courage, and temperance are ethical virtues. If a person⁸ has all the ethical virtues, she has practical wisdom. This practical wisdom links the irrational and the rational part of the soul since it implies and is implied by all virtues of character as they always involve reason in their highest form⁹. By contrast, dianoetic virtues are virtues of the rational part of the soul defined as states by virtue of which the soul reaches truth¹⁰. In turn, the truth reached could be either necessary or contingent. Thus, the dianoetic virtues linked to necessary truths are science (ἐπιστήμη), theoretical wisdom (σοφία), and the intellect (νοῦς). On the other hand, the dianoetic virtues linked to contingent truths are art (τέχνη) and practical wisdom (φρόνησις). As said, eudaimonia is defined as an active life according to the highest and most complete virtue. In NE X 6-8, Aristotle individualizes this virtue, saying that it is the contemplative virtue of theoretical wisdom, which is divine, and his exercise surpasses all other activities in blessedness¹¹.

Now, inclusivist authors (e.g., Ackrill, 1980; Irwin, 1991; Whiting, 1986) emphasize that Aristotle conceives eudaimonia as the best and most complete life. For that reason, they consider practical wisdom, being one of the greatest goods, an essential component of a complete life. However, this conception of eudaimonia seems to contradict Aristotle's explicit remarks about how the best life is guided by contemplative activity, which, in turn, is autarchic.

By contrast, Kraut (1991), who can be characterized as a weak intellectualist, addresses the problem of instrumentalism as follows. He distinguishes two types of goods, namely, eudaimonic goods and non-eudaimonic goods. Equivalently, those that necessarily constitute the best life and those that do not. Even when, according to Kraut, eudaimonia is exclusively constituted by a contemplative life, there are some goods external to eudaimonia that are eligible for themselves. Those goods are linked to the virtues of character. Further, Aristotle, Kraut tells us, hierarchizes two ways a person can live her life, namely, the best way, i.e., a contemplative life, and the second-best way, i.e., a life according to practical wisdom. These lives are mutually exclusive and cannot be integrated, as the inclusivist demands. Thus, the way Kraut's interpretation would deal with the problem of instrumentalism is as follows. Even when eudaimonia is exclusively constituted by a life according to theoretical wisdom, there are some goods external to eudaimonia that are to be

⁸ In this article, I am going to be using person and human being equivalently.

⁹ NE 1144b29

¹⁰ NE 1139b11-17

¹¹ NE 1178b5-29

wished for themselves, and they constitute the second-best life possible for a human being. Hence, these goods are not instrumental to eudaimonia, for they have an independent value linked to a different form of life. Nevertheless, by addressing the problem this way, Kraut compromises himself to a non-eudaimonist reading of Aristotle's philosophy. This reading is hardly consistent with the beginning of the first book of NE, in which Aristotle clearly states that all goods are to be desired because they contribute to a further end in which all goods converge, namely, eudaimonia.

Inclusivists find this strategy wanting for the same reason. Ackrill discusses with Kenny (1966) the existence of non-eudaimonic goods similar to those posed by Kraut and categorically rejects them. In his remarks, Ackrill interprets the definition of eudaimonia differently. He tells us that Aristotle is not trying to give us a practical guide to what life is best to choose when defining eudaimonia. In contrast, Aristotle's point is about the logical content and meaning of the terms 'eudaimonia', 'good', and 'most complete'. Thus, eudaimonia is, by definition, the most desirable and complete form of life. Things being so, it makes no sense to speak about a non-eudaimonic good because if there were one, the form of life with that good plus eudaimonia would be more desirable and complete, which entails a contradiction.

Thus, an inclusivism like Ackrill's would address the problem of instrumentalism in the following way. It makes no sense to consider that practical wisdom is instrumental to eudaimonia as premise (2) claims because a life according to practical wisdom relates to eudaimonia as a part relates to the whole. Furthermore, it would be unintelligible to consider practical wisdom to be both external to eudaimonia and desirable by itself because, if things were so, eudaimonia could be improved by addition, contradicting its completeness.

Now, Ackrill's reading has two shortcomings. First, in NE X, Aristotle explicitly states that¹²:

If happiness is activity in accordance with excellence, it is reasonable that it should be in accordance with the highest excellence; and this will be that of the best thing in us. Whether it be intellect or something else that is this element which is thought to be our natural ruler and guide and to take thought of things noble and divine, whether it be itself also divine or only the most divine element in us, the activity of this in accordance

¹² NE 1177a11-18

with its proper excellence will be complete happiness. That this activity is contemplative we have already said.

Hence, he clearly does not consider practical wisdom as a part of complete happiness. Contrarily, contemplative activity seems to be all it takes to be happy. Does practical wisdom still have a necessary role in reaching eudaimonia? My answer in the next section will be positive.

Additionally, a conceptual definition of eudaimonia or virtue seems not to be what Aristotle has in mind when writing NE. It is rather a practical aim that is at stake, namely, to make us good and to guide us to live the better possible life, as shown in the following passage¹³:

Since, then, the present inquiry does not aim at theoretical knowledge like the others (for we are enquiring not in order to know what excellence is, but in order to become good, since otherwise our inquiry would have been of no use), we must examine the nature of actions, namely how we ought to do them; for these determine also the nature of the states that are produced, as we have said.

To sum up, inclusivists and intellectualists have addressed the problem of instrumentalism in different manners. Strong intellectualists like Cooper have made Aristotle's work inconsistent by assigning premises (1) and (2) to him. A version of weak intellectualism, namely Kraut's, could dissolve the problem by considering that practical wisdom is not necessary for, but independent of, eudaimonia. But his view makes eudaimonia improvable by addition, which implies a contradiction with its definition. Finally, inclusivism makes practical wisdom a part of eudaimonia, but that seems also at odds with Aristotle's text. The reason is that Aristotle is emphatic when claiming that his present interest is not just for the reader to know the good, but becoming good. Therefore, the problem of instrumentalism and of understanding the relationship between practical wisdom, theoretical wisdom, and eudaimonia remains.

In the next section, I will provide new arguments to defend the developmentalist's main thesis, i.e., that acquiring practical wisdom is a necessary developmental step toward theoretical wisdom.

3. Acquiring theoretical wisdom requires being practical wise

¹³ NE 1103b26-32

Hope May (2010) advances a developmentalist reading of NE similar to mine. However, three differences are worth mentioning. Firstly, I will attempt to interpret NE without appealing to other texts of the Corpus when possible. Therefore, I will only rely in this paper on NE and some passages of DA (in 6.2). Even when an interpretation of certain passages of MM will be provided in section 7, nothing previous to that section depends on it. Therefore, I will show that to prove the validity of the developmentalist thesis, we do not need to go beyond NE. Secondly, May does not directly address the problem of instrumentalism, the main goal of the present research. Finally, in the next section, I will extend the developmentalist thesis to formulate a generalized developmentalism.

The developmentalist thesis I have been referring to previously is the following:

(DT) Acquiring theoretical wisdom and thus reaching eudaimonia necessarily requires being practically wise (φρόνιμος).

The most important passage where Aristotle states this thesis is this¹⁴:

But again it [(the practical wisdom)] is not supreme over [(the theoretical)] wisdom, i.e., over the superior part of us, any more than the art of medicine is over health; for it does not use it but provides for its coming into being (ἀλλ' ὅρᾳ ὅπως γένηται); it issues orders, then, for its sake, but not to it. Further, to maintain its supremacy would be like saying that the art of politics rules the gods because it issues orders about all the affairs of the state.

A few remarks are worthwhile here. First, this analogy between medicine and practical wisdom must not be understood as homologous. Aristotle has already warned us against considering practical wisdom as an art, when he says¹⁵:

[...] practical wisdom cannot be knowledge nor art; not knowledge because that which can be done is capable of being otherwise, not art because action and making are different kinds of thing. It remains, then, that it is a true and reasoned state of capacity to act with regard to the things that are good or bad for man. For while making has an end other than itself, action cannot; for good action itself is its end.

So, the analogy must remain controlled. Although Aristotle has already illustrated how virtues of character are to be educated with the case of art, we must not take the analogy for an

¹⁴ NE 1145a6-11

¹⁵ NE 1140b2-7

equivalence. The reason is that while the arts have external products as ends, good actions, i.e., those guided by practical wisdom, do not need other ends besides themselves.

Second, that the end of medicine is health means that everything made in medicine is for the sake of health and also that medicine must generate health when it is not there. This directionality is what the presence of the subjunctive of the verb γίγνομαι amounts to in the case of the pair practical wisdom/theoretical wisdom. Thus, practical wisdom must provide the conditions for theoretical wisdom to come into being, or equivalently, to see how it could possibly be developed in the agent.

Interestingly, this passage was overlooked by May when establishing the interpretative validity of DT. As a result, she had to bring together scattered pieces of Aristotle's corpus to establish DT. However, even when Aristotle provides all that is needed for DT in the passage above, he provides more crucial details about how practical wisdom aids in generating theoretical wisdom elsewhere in NE. Let us inquire onto these details in the remainder of this section.

Firstly, let us analyze the role of the education of pleasure in becoming a temperate human being. Aristotle tells us that it is our moral responsibility to aim for good ends since wishing is voluntary¹⁶:

The end, then, being what we wish for, the things contributing to the end what we deliberate about and choose, actions concerning the latter must be according to choice and voluntary. Now the exercise of the excellences is concerned with these. Therefore excellence is also in our power, and so too vice.

Additionally, what we wish for is connected with what produces pleasure on us. Pleasure and the avoidance of pain complement every activity as a supervenient end¹⁷:

Pleasure completes activity not as the inherent state does, but as an end which supervenes as the bloom of the youth does on those on those in the flower of their age.

Furthermore, every activity is complemented by its proper pleasure (πᾶσάν τε ἐνέργειαν τελειοῖ ἢ ἡδονή)¹⁸.

¹⁶ NE 1113b3-6

¹⁷ NE 1174b31-33

¹⁸ NE 1175a21

Things being so, we can, at this point, conclude that it is our moral responsibility to form the right kind of pleasures that aim for the best and the noble and that those pleasures will direct all our activities to a complemented form.

Now, the one who has completed his education of right pleasures according to reason is the temperate human being (σώφρωνος)¹⁹:

[F]or both the continent man and the temperate man are such as to do nothing contrary to reason for the sake of the bodily pleasures, but the former has and the latter has not bad appetites, and the latter is such as not to feel pleasure contrary to reason, while the former is such as to feel pleasure but not to be led by it.

Given that the virtues, including temperance, form a unity²⁰ under the rational control of the practical wisdom in NE's system, in a strict sense, only the practically wise can be a temperate human being. Moreover, the temperate has pleasures of her own that are the highest ones²¹:

This is why the temperate man avoids these pleasures; for even he has pleasures of his own.

Those cannot be other than those linked to contemplative activity since those pleasures are the highest and most noble a human being can reach²²:

And we think happiness has pleasure mingled with it, but the activity of wisdom is admittedly the pleasantest of excellent activities; at all events philosophy is thought to offer pleasures marvelous for their purity and their enduringness, and it is to be expected that those who know will pass their time more pleasantly than those who inquire.

Therefore, the education of pleasure aims to redirect it to the highest objects. Aristotle tells us that only the practical wise has educated his pleasure to feel it exclusively for those highest objects, which are essentially theoretical. At this point, it is possible to state the motivational means:

(MMT) Only the practical wise has the motivational means, i.e., feels the right kind of pleasure necessary, to engage in contemplative activity and, thus, reach eudaimonia.

Secondly, to acquire theoretical knowledge, we need to inquire, which, in turn, requires developing adequate cognitive capacities. According to Aristotle's philosophical practice, one of

¹⁹ NE 1151b33-1152a4

²⁰ NE 1145a1-2

²¹ NE 1153a35

²² NE 1177a23-26

the main sources of knowledge is assessing the sages' most widely-held opinions. In this regard, Aristotle warns us that excellence in assessing and forming opinions is a quality of the practically wise²³:

Plainly, then, practical wisdom is an excellence and not an art. There being two parts of the soul that possess reason, it must be the excellence of one of the two, i.e., of that part which forms opinions; for opinion is about what can be otherwise, and so is practical wisdom.

To inquire, we also need to perceive particulars excellently. This kind of perception is also a proper faculty of the practically wise²⁴. In contrast, the incontinent is dragged by passion when perceiving particulars and cannot form perceptual knowledge. Plus, incontinence cannot make the knowledge become part of themselves. For this reason, when Aristotle inquires whether incontinent individuals can have knowledge and act accordingly, he reaches a negative conclusion²⁵:

It is plain that incontinent people must be in a similar condition to this. The fact that men use the language that flows from knowledge proves nothing; for even men under the influence of these passions utter scientific proofs and verses of Empedocles, and those who have just begun to learn can string together words, but do not yet know; for it has to become a part of themselves[...]

Consequently, now it is possible to state the cognitive means thesis:

(CMT) Only the practically wise has the cognitive means, i.e., the capacity to assess and form excellent opinions and the capacity to acquire perceptual knowledge, necessary to obtain theoretical knowledge and, thus, reach eudaimonia.

To summarize, DT establishes that practical wisdom is necessary to bring theoretical wisdom into being. It can be decomposed in MMT and CMT, this is $DT=MMT+CMT$. Both sub-theses further specify the meaning saying that practical wisdom is a necessary means. Furthermore, MMT has priority over CMT, since it is control of the passions that ensures a correct cognitive state to theorize, so the former *entails* the latter. This is the reason why in MM, only the first one is affirmed (see section 7). Nevertheless, the conjunction of both gives us a more thorough idea of what kind of means is practical wisdom according to DT.

²³ NE 1140b24-28

²⁴ NE 1142a11-21

²⁵ NE 1147a17-21

In the next section, I aim to generalize DT, showing that Aristotle provides us important insights into previous stages of moral development. Because of this generalization, I will call the present interpretation a generalized developmentalist one. The developmental schema of the process toward eudaimonia that will emerge in the analysis gives an image of NE as describing, in full detail, how a human being can reach it, starting from early childhood.

4. Extending the developmentalist thesis

DT concerns the relation between practical and theoretical wisdom. However, pursuing practical wisdom takes much effort in the NE's system. In this section, I argue that Aristotle provides a general sketch of the developmental process we must follow to reach temperance and, consequently, since the virtues form a unity, practical wisdom.

The process starts when one is a child. In this stage, the human being faces no moral conflict because even when she acts voluntarily, she has no deliberative choice (προαίρεσις)²⁶:

Choice, then, seems to be voluntary, but not the same thing as the voluntary; the latter extends more widely. For both children and the other animals share in voluntary action, but not in choice, and acts done on the spur of the moment we describe as voluntary, but not as chosen.

Given that this is a stage where no deliberative choice is possible, human beings do not want to stay in it, for even when it could be pleasant, it goes against the rational nature of humans to remain so²⁷:

And no one would choose to live with the intellect of a child throughout his life, however much he were to be pleased at the things children are pleased at, nor to get enjoyment by doing some most disgraceful deed, though he were never to feel any pain in consequence.

Nevertheless, the process of moral education could fail or not exist at all. In that case, the person would stay morally similar to children reaching a point of no return. This point is when the person becomes self-indulgent (ἀκόλαστος). Given that the self-indulgent has no regrets when misbehaving, she has no cure²⁸:

²⁶ NE 1111b7-10

²⁷ NE 1174a1-4

²⁸ NE 1150b29-33

The self-indulgent man, as was said, has no regrets; for he stands by his choice; but any incontinent man is subject to regrets. This is why the position is not as it was expressed in the formulation of the problem, but the self-indulgent man is incurable and the incontinent man curable [...]

The main difference between a child and a self-indulgent is that the latter acts on choice. Bad habits have permeated his deliberative faculty. Self-indulgence is the extreme opposite of practical wisdom.

In contrast, if the child is appropriately educated, she will progress. At first, she will be incontinent (ἀκρατής). However, incontinent individuals are better than self-indulgent ones in that, as was said, they preserve their deliberative faculty and, consequently, can be cured through a process of moral education. This process is similar to the education of the arts. The person learns through imitating good actions²⁹, at first with discomfort. When we act on reasons but feel discomfort, we are said to be continent (ἐγκρατής), which is a step further in the process of becoming temperate. Nevertheless, one step remains: forming the right kind of emotional disposition. The temperate, or equivalently, the practically wise, does not feel discomfort in acting according to reason but feel pleasure. She has formed the right desire and has overcome the motivational conflict³⁰:

[F]or both the continent man and the temperate man are such as to do nothing contrary to reason for the sake of bodily pleasures, but the former has and the latter has not bad appetites, and the latter is such as not to feel pleasure contrary to reason, while the former is such as to feel pleasure but not be led by it.

Thus, being practically wise requires not only doing the right actions for the right reasons, as the continent person also does but feeling only pleasures according to reason. It requires an adequate emotional state.

The following scheme (figure 1) sums up what has been said about the process of moral development here and in the previous section. The process depicted ends in reaching a life according to theoretical virtue or, in other words, in reaching eudaimonia.

²⁹ This process is described in detail in NE II.1

³⁰ NE 1151b33-1152a4

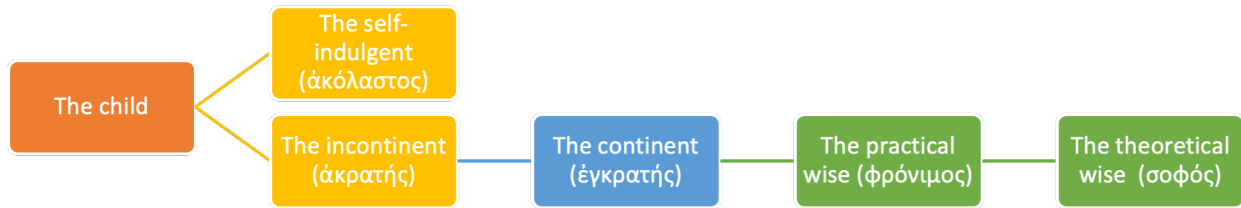


Figure 1: The stages of moral development according to Aristotle's EN. The divergence at the beginning is fundamental because if the agent does not receive an adequate moral education, she will reach a dead end.

Generalized developmentalism allows us to see the objective of the NE as a whole. More specifically, it allows seeing that NE is intended as a step-by-step guide for reaching eudaimonia. As argued above, Aristotle conceives this inquiry as practical, aiming to make us good. With that goal in mind, the scheme above shows how he thought we could achieve that purpose through moral education.

In the next section, I will argue that the problem of instrumentalism does not threaten generalized developmentalism. One argument was already advanced in section 3. That argument depends only on DT and does not need generalized developmentalism. I argued there that practical wisdom provides the necessary means for the genesis of theoretical wisdom, both motivational and cognitive. In contrast, the instrumentalist presupposes that practical wisdom's exclusive role in reaching eudaimonia is to provide material and contingent means to the better exercise of the contemplative activity. Both DT alone and generalized developmentalism are forms of weak intellectualism. Both identify eudaimonia with a life according to contemplative activity but recognize that practical wisdom has a necessary role in reaching that life. Furthermore, as practical

wisdom, once acquired, is persistent, both agree with the inclusivist that by the time eudaimonia is reached, the agent has acquired both practical and theoretical wisdom.

5. Two arguments to prove that generalized developmentalism is immune to the problem of instrumentalism

Before we start, a caveat is crucial. The arguments I will present in this section are mine and not Aristotle's. They are intended to show the present interpretation's adequacy and consistency when dealing with the problem of instrumentalism. The first argument is conceptual, and the second is by reductio.

Let us begin by stating the conceptual argument. Aristotle distinguishes sharply between art and practical wisdom. While the former aims to deliver a product, and the excellence of his exercise is measured by the quality of that external product, the former has its end in itself, which is the good acting ($\epsilon\upsilon\pi\rho\alpha\zeta\acute{\iota}\alpha$)³¹. If we were to accept the instrumentalist's interpretation, i.e., premise (2), this distinction would collapse since, according to that premise, practical wisdom is to be measured by its capacity to provide the material means for a better exercise of contemplative activity. Given that material means are products external to good acting, the distinction intended in the first place is lost. To be clear, the reason is that the arts are precisely defined as delivering external products. Contrarily, to assume DT implies that the change produced in the agent by the acquisition of practical wisdom is what matters for reaching eudaimonia, not an external product. As seen, this conceptual argument does not depend on generalized developmentalism but on DT alone.

The argument by reductio proceed as follows. We assume the validity of the generalized developmentalism plus the validity of premise (2) and reach a nonsensical consequence, thus proving that they are incompatible.

According to generalized developmentalism, both practical and theoretical wisdom define stages in the moral development of agents. Further, to reach any stage in generalized developmentalism it is necessary that we must have been in the previous one. If we were to consider

³¹ See NE 1140b2-7 cited at the beginning of section 3

practical wisdom as instrumental for providing motivational and cognitive means to the genesis of theoretical wisdom, then, necessarily, this reasoning would need to be extended to the other steps between the moral developmental stages. Things being so, we would have to say that incontinence is instrumental to continence and that continence is instrumental to practical wisdom. For in every developmental stage, we acquire the necessary state or capacities to advance to the next one. Nevertheless, those statements are clearly nonsensical. For example, we do not say that being a seed is instrumental to being a sprout or that being a sprout is instrumental to being a plant. Hence, given that we have reached nonsensical conclusions, it follows that premise (2) is not compatible with generalized developmentalism.

At this point, we have seen how generalized instrumentalism is a middle ground between strong intellectualism and inclusivism. It provides a promising solution for the problem of instrumentalism by not denying but making compatible two of Aristotle's claims, namely, that: (1) eudaimonia is identified with an active life according to contemplative virtue and (2) that good acting is its own end, and thus, desirable for its own sake.

6. The completeness of Practical Wisdom

This section will deal with an important objection that could arise against what has been argued up to this point. This objection can be stated as follows. It seems an oxymoron that practical wisdom is a necessary means and, at the same time, its own end³². Complete activities should not be orientated to something other than themselves. Furthermore, suppose practical wisdom is a necessary step toward theoretical wisdom. In that case, it seems that it is a stage of a movement aiming at something else, which contradicts it being its own end. We know for certain that Aristotle conceived theoretical wisdom as an activity that does not consist of a movement toward something else but is complete in itself. For instance, the one who investigates is not engaged in that kind of activity since she is moving toward being a knower³³:

[A]nd it is to be expected that those who know will pass their time more pleasantly than those who inquire. And the self-sufficiency that is spoken of must belong most to the contemplative activity.

³² Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for stating this objection allowing me to further clarify my position.

³³ NE 1177a25-27

Things being so, if the practically wise is moving to become something else, i.e., theoretically wise, as the generalized developmentalist argues, she may not be participating in an activity that is its own end but moving.

This objection consists in two different parts that will be addressed separately. Firstly, the difference between contingent and necessary means depicted above must be further clarified, and it shall be argued that only the later means can be complete despite their capacity to lead to something else. Secondly, arguments must be provided to show that practical activity is not a stage of a movement, despite being the condition for the genesis of theoretical wisdom. The second part is more complicated as addressing it requires saying something about Aristotle's biological psychology. More specifically, it requires what has been called the triple scheme in Aristotelian scholarship (e.g., Burnyeat 2002) as it is depicted in DA.

6.1 Necessary means could be complete

Necessary means, as they have been conceptualized above, are opposed to contingent material means. The latter consists of material conditions for the realization of an activity, and often we can dispense some of them only at the cost of making the realization of that activity more difficult. For instance, having a meal before contemplating a piece of art would help us not be distracted by the fact that we are hungry. We could still enjoy the piece of art without having the meal before if we are not extremely hungry, or it might suffice for us to have only a quarter or other fraction of the meal in order to enjoy the exposition. Of course, we cannot perform an activity if all the contingent means are removed. If we are suffering from cold, starvation, preoccupations, extreme pain, etcetera, we are unlikely to be enjoying the contemplation of art. But we can still do well with some of them. By contrast, necessary means can only be removed at the price of necessarily compromising the whole execution of the activity. They are, in a sense, conditions of possibility for realizing the activity itself. For example, having some degree of sense perception of the piece of art is necessary for its aesthetical contemplation. Thus, extreme perceptual impairment is not compatible with this kind of activity.

Necessary means can be separated into two kinds, which I will call kinetic and non-kinetic³⁴. On the one hand, kinetic necessary means are transitory states leading to something other than themselves, as learning is a transitory state leading to knowing. That practical wisdom, as conceived by Aristotle, cannot consist in a kinetic mean will be argued in 6.2. On the other hand, no-kinetic means are oriented toward themselves. Art contemplation could be conceived as of this sort since we direct our sense to beauty for the sake of contemplation alone. We can also do mathematics in order to do engineering or for the sake of knowledge itself, as when mathematicians study infinite cardinals higher than anything that can fit into this universe just for the sake of knowledge. Despite being non-kinetic, complete in themselves activities, they improve the lives of the contemplative agent. Let us suppose that, as Aristotle, we believe this kind of contemplative activity leads to the agent's eudaimonia. In that case, we can conceive contemplative activity as necessary means toward the best life for a human being without dismissing that these activities are complete in themselves. That being the case, we can see that at least some non-kinetic necessary means are complete.

Let us summarize the argument thus far. I have argued that some non-kinetic necessary means are complete. Textual evidence has been provided that Aristotle considered practical wisdom an activity directed toward itself and, thus, complete in the sense of not needing an external product. The following section will argue that practical wisdom cannot be understood as a movement on Aristotle's conception.

6.2 Practical wisdom is not a stage of a movement

As it is well known, Aristotle rejected Socrates' form of intellectualism³⁵. In this subsection, it will be argued that the positive doctrine of Aristotle in this regard denies that practical wisdom could be a kind of step in a movement toward something else. The key passages for defending this interpretative claim are to be found mainly in NE VII 2, where Aristotle assesses Socrates' intellectualism, and DA I and V, where he assesses the relationship between knowledge, its exercise, and movement.

³⁴ They are called no-kinetics and not statical because they essentially involve activity but not of oriented toward something else motive activity.

³⁵ To be more precise, his own interpretation of it.

Socrates', as interpreted by Aristotle, believed that it is impossible for an agent who possesses knowledge about the good to act contrary to it³⁶:

Socrates was entirely opposed to the view in question, holding that there is no such thing as incontinence; no one, he said, acts against what he believes best—people act so only by reason of ignorance. Now this view contradicts the plain phenomena, and we must inquire about what happens to such a man [...]

So, Aristotle believes that incontinence (ἀκρασία) is possible, and we need to find out how to account for this fact. In his view, Socrates' intellectualism is incompatible with our everyday experience.

To explain what kind of state incontinence is, Aristotle distinguishes two different senses in which a person can know³⁷:

But since we use the word 'know' in two senses (for both the man who has knowledge but is not using it and he who is using it are said to know), it will make a difference whether, when a man does what he should not, he has the knowledge but is not exercising it, or is exercising it, for the latter seems strange, but not the former.

Furthermore, he reinforces his point by stating³⁸:

[F]or within the case of having knowledge but not using it we see a difference of state, admitting of the possibility of having knowledge in a sense and yet not having it, as in the instance of a man asleep, mad, or drunk. But now this is just the condition of men under the influence of passions[...]

Now, this is a three-step structure formed by being capable of knowing, knowing but not using, and exercising the knowledge. The remarkable point here is that the same structure is developed in detail in DA, more specifically, in what has come to be known, in Aristotelian scholarship, as the triple scheme (e.g., Burnyeat 2002).

The triple scheme is a succession of three stages of knowledge development. In the first stage, the human is a knower, i.e., has the capacity to know. In the second stage, she knows but not yet apply the knowledge she possesses. Finally, she possesses the knowledge and applies it actively. Figure 2, summarizes this process.

³⁶ NE 1145b25-29

³⁷ NE 1146b31-33

³⁸ NE 1147a11-14

It is convenient to cite in length the passage where the triple scheme is depicted more clearly to explain knowledge acquisition and exercise in DA:

But we must now distinguish different senses in which things can be said to be potential or actual; at the moment we are speaking as if each of these phrases had only one sense. We can speak of something as a knower either as when we say that man is a knower, meaning that man falls within the class of beings that know or have knowledge, or as when we are speaking of a man who possesses knowledge of grammar; each of these has a potentiality, but not in the same way: the one because his kind of matter is such and such, the other because he can reflect when he wants to, if nothing external prevents him. And there is the man who is already reflecting – he is a knower in actuality and in the most proper sense is knowing, e.g., this A. Both the former are potential knowers, who realize their respective potentialities, the one by change of quality, i.e., repeated transitions from one state to its opposite under instruction, the other in another way by the transition from the inactive possession of sense or grammar to their active exercise.

The important thing about the triple scheme being present in both works is that we can use what is said in one to illuminate the other.

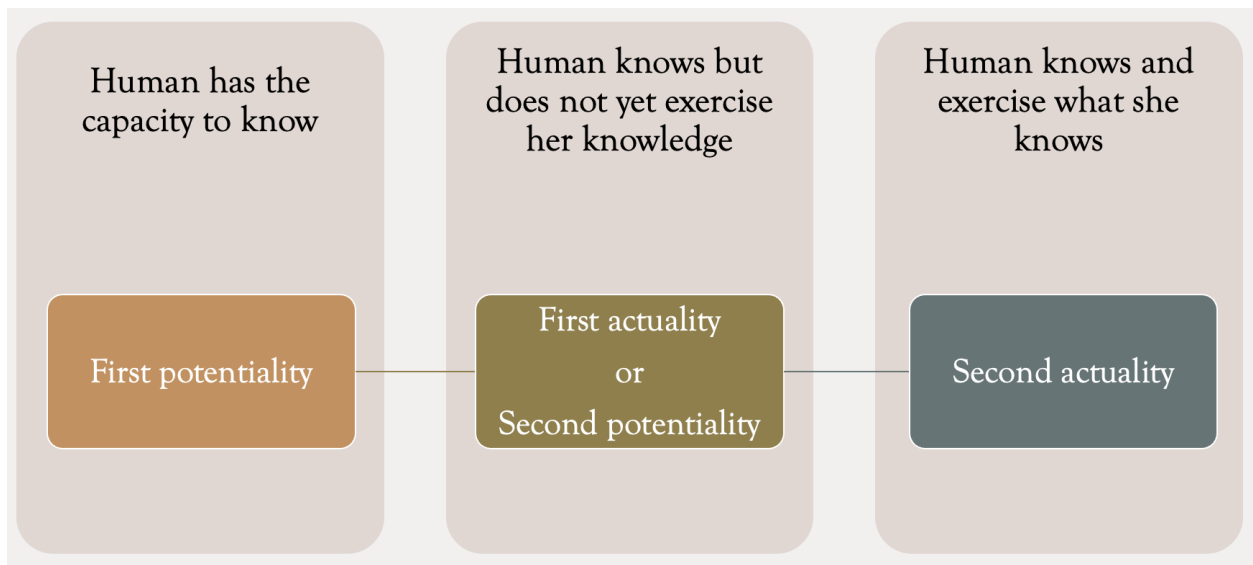


Figure 2: The triple scheme and the three stages of actualization of knowledge.

Let us say a few words about how the triple schema relates to the stages of development in figure 1. First, humans are, since childhood, naturally endowed with the capacity to know. The first stage of figure 1 coincides with the first stage in figure 2. Second, as they acquire practical

knowledge but do not yet exercise it, as in the first actuality stage, they are incontinent. Third, as they apply this knowledge, they can either be continent or practically wise since the difference between them lies in a correct emotional disposition (i.e., having or not having inner motivational conflict) and not in applying practical knowledge. In this way, Aristotle managed to account for incontinence, overcoming Socrates' intellectualism, without denying the importance that knowledge plays in our moral lives.

What is crucial is that in addition to making room for incontinence, this scheme reveals the nature of practical wisdom as purely active. Additionally, it makes clear that the nature of the transitions between the stages depicted in figure 1 is not homogeneous. Thus, transitioning between the child and the incontinent individual consists of a movement from a state where the person is capable of knowing but does not know how to act to one who knows how to act but does not yet apply this knowledge. In turn, transitioning between being incontinent and the continent consists precisely of a second actualization of practical knowledge. In the DA passage above, Aristotle affirms that these two transitions are different in nature. The former is a movement between contraries, while the latter is between inactive and active possession of knowledge. Furthermore, no further actualization of practical knowledge is needed to transition from being continent to being practically wise, but a change in the emotional dispositions leads to motivational conflict.

The moral here is that figure 1 should be read carefully. Despite the appearance of homogeneity that a diagrammatic representation of a philosophical system like this might suggest, similar lines on it represent very different kinds of transitions. Some of them involve movements, while others do not. In the case of practical wisdom, since it possesses the maximum degree of actualization of the knowledge that supports it, i.e., practical knowledge about particulars, it cannot be conceptualized as a stage in the movement to something else. The genetic transition between practical and theoretical wisdom has to be of another kind. Consequently, practical wisdom is final despite being a necessary means to theoretical wisdom.

7. The relationship between practical and theoretical wisdom in *Magna Moralia* I, 34

Whether *Magna Moralia* is a text written by Aristotle is a matter of debate (see Kraut, 2022). Furthermore, whether the ideas defended in this text are a further development, a previous

development, was written by a posterior peripatetic philosopher, or even if they are compatible with those of NE is not settled. Given that the debate about the place of MM concerning NE is beyond the scope of the present inquiry, I will say no more about it. Therefore, this section is intended as a complement and not a necessary step in the above argument.

A defense of the Motivational Means Thesis (MMT) can be found in MM³⁹. The relevant passage is the following⁴⁰:

Since then the excellences are practical, wisdom also will be practical. But does this hold sway over all things in the soul, as is held and also questioned? Surely not! For it would not seem to do so over to what is superior to itself; for instance, it does not hold sway over philosophy[...] But perhaps it holds the same position as the steward in the household [...] So and in like manner with him wisdom is, as it were, a kind of steward of philosophy, as is procuring leisure for it and for the doing of its work, by subduing the passions and keeping them in order.

Regarding differences in translation with NE, in this passage, practical wisdom is translated by 'wisdom' and theoretical wisdom by 'philosophy'. This passage needs to be analyzed carefully. In a careless reading, it may seem as if the steward metaphor is intended to say that practical wisdom just provides whatever material desires are required for theoretical wisdom. Under a closer look, what is being affirmed is equivalent to MMT, i.e., that only practical wisdom can secure the adequate motivational and emotional disposition necessary to acquire theoretical wisdom.

8. Conclusion

The problem of instrumentalism poses a major challenge to EN's readings since it affects both the consistency of the work as a whole and the conception between three key notions of it, namely, practical wisdom, theoretical wisdom, and eudaimonia. I have shown how strong intellectualists, like Cooper, weak intellectualists, like Kraut, and inclusivists, like Whiting, have dealt with this problem and the shortcomings of their strategies.

We have also seen that to prove DT it is not necessary to go beyond NE. Aristotle provides all the elements that are necessary to show that practical wisdom has a genetic role in reaching

³⁹ Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting me this idea.

⁴⁰ MM 1198b6-20

theoretical wisdom. That role amounts specifically to providing motivational and cognitive means as MMT and CMT establish.

Finally, generalized developmentalism is not compatible with instrumentalism for three reasons. First, it implies that practical wisdom provides the necessary means for reaching eudaimonia, as opposed to material contingent means posed by the instrumentalist premise. Second, it allows for maintaining intact the Aristotelian distinction between practical wisdom and arts, while the instrumentalist premise makes it collapse. And thirdly, if we were to insist on assuming generalized developmentalism plus the instrumentalist premise, we would have nonsensical conclusions as a result.

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