

## ***The Concept of Ethos: Aristotle and the Contemporary Ethical Debate***

Irene Dal Poz

Università di Padova

Dipartimento di Filosofia, Sociologia, Pedagogia e Psicologia Applicata

[dalpozirene@hotmail.it](mailto:dalpozirene@hotmail.it)

### **ABSTRACT**

The problem of the *self* has recently regained a wide interest in the philosophical panorama. The need to rethink the agent has then encouraged the rediscovery of Ancient Philosophy. Focusing on Aristotelian practical philosophy, this paper aims to demonstrate the intrinsic circularity existing between the agent and his context. To give evidence of this theory, it will be necessary to investigate the extensive concept of *ethos*, the meanings of which embrace both individual and collective dimension. Moreover, this itinerary through the Aristotelian thought will be the occasion for putting the rebirth of interest towards Ancient Philosophy into question.

### **KEYWORDS**

Aristotle, ethos, moral agent, self

### ***Introduction***

“b”

In the last decades the contemporary ethical scenario, especially in analytic philosophy, has renewed the debate about the self and the agency. The shared dissatisfaction towards the ethical perspectives, as P. Donatelli observes<sup>1</sup>, has led to the rediscovery and examination of the overshadowed dimension of the moral agent.

In this discussion, the Aristotelian voice has been raised by many scholars (belonging mainly to the Virtue Ethics current), who have identified the Greek philosopher as a relevant source for rethinking the moral agent and for putting the coordinates of contemporary moral philosophy into question. Given this premise and background, the paper will develop the research hypothesis that to fully understand the moral agent we have to consider him as deeply linked to his context. In order to throw some light on this issue, the essay will engage the cardinal concept of *ethos*<sup>2</sup> in the Aristotelian practical philosophy. In particular, it

---

<sup>1</sup> Donatelli P., *Il senso della virtù*, Carocci, Roma, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> In this essay I will follow some simple and coherent rules for the transliteration from Greek to English. I will not be taking into account the differences between the vocals, such as *epsilon* and *eta* or *omicron* and *omega*; the two vocals' couple will be transliterated with “e”, in the first case,

will attempt to analyze the relationship between its two essential meanings: *individual ethos* and *collective ethos*. While the first one states the agent's character, the second one indicates the context, referring to shared values, habits and tradition. *Collective ethos* will then be named directly *polis* or context in the development of the paper, due to the plurality of the connotations involved.

However, if the general aim is to determine the relationship between the two meanings of *ethos*, then the specific themes of the paper are two crossed subsets. The first aims to show how for Aristotle moral agent and *polis* are conceivable as poles existing only in their relationship. Whereas, the second sought subset wants to prove whether this approach is effective in front of some specific contemporary practical challenges. The intersection between these two parts is played by a transitional passage that shows the reasons for the rebirth of the Aristotelian praxis in the contemporary scenario. Coherently with its purpose, the paper is organized into three main sections: (1) the reconstruction of contemporary ethical demands; (2) the Aristotelian answer to the relationship between the part and the whole and (3) the test of its legitimacy and limits regarding contemporary ethical experience.

Therefore, (1) the first part of the paper will focus on the contemporary ethical debate, by giving an account of *what* kind of *contemporaneity* is thought and *why* it has been chosen. In fact, due to the complexity and heterogeneity of the philosophical panorama, as previously mentioned the boundaries of the discussion will be circumscribed to a specific movement in the analytic philosophy, notably Virtue Ethics, and to some of its actors (such as A. Anscombe, A. MacIntyre, M. Slote). Thus, to satisfy this preliminary passage, it will be necessary to interrogate the reasons of Virtue Ethics and the main steps of the rediscovery of Aristotelian practical philosophy in this scenario.

Following the research project, (2) the second part will be shaped on the concept of *ethos* as it emerges in Aristotle's practical writings. As a matter of fact, its characteristic plurivocity is the key lecture for showing the circularity between *individual ethos* and the *collective* one. This draws the attention to two cornerstone ideas: (a) the character preformation and (b) the practical agent's active contribution. In order to elucidate them, it will be necessary to study the problem of the character education by looking at the concept of virtue. First, I will briefly introduce (a) the passive phase, by showing how the *polis* influences the individual character. Thanks to the concepts of *induced virtue* it will be possible to emphasize the process of metabolization of habits and values. Thereafter, I will demonstrate how Aristotle conceives (b) the way an agent may modify or influence his context. Indeed, although Aristotle believes in the priority of the context/*polis*, he does not

---

and "o", in the second one. Moreover, the Greek vocal "u" will be transliterated with "y" (e.g. *physis*).

suppress a certain level of freedom for the agent. In this case, it will be necessary to examine the two meanings of practical reason in depth: the phronetical and the philosophical one. This will lead to the possible conclusion that the circularity between the *individual ethos* and the *collective* one cannot be defined as vicious, despite many scholars doing so.

To conclude, (3) the essay will focus on the pertinence of the Aristotelian perspective in the contemporary debate. Due to this goal, the conclusive part will problematize one issue: the *impasse of collective ethos*. The purpose will be to verify whether at present the concept of *collective ethos* has become too reductive or whether it is still functional. In other words, the attempt will be to understand whether the *collective ethos* still offers interpretative tools to approach the ethical experience and, if it does not, it will be necessary to explain why. In this case, the core issue will be to understand if we are bearing witness to an explosion of forms of life, that is to say to a pluralization of the contexts involved in our experience. However, as mentioned, it is necessary to begin with the reconstruction of the contemporary philosophical background.

### 1. *The necessity of a new approach and the rebirth of Aristotelian practical philosophy*

As the introductory title anticipates, this chapter aims at reconstructing a particular horizon in contemporary philosophy, Virtue Ethics, where Aristotelian practical philosophy has been the object of study and served as a model. This statement immediately raises difficulties, because it does not reckon with the many different trajectories that cross Virtue Ethics. In effect, when we talk of this movement, we are easily tempted to read it as if it were strictly coherent and rigorous. Contrarily, all the philosophers<sup>3</sup> who took part in it have developed some essential peculiarities and they would deserve a specific analysis. Some of them have probably distanced their ideas so far from that they can no longer be assimilated. However, even if it is impossible (and most likely not even necessary for our purpose) to abridge all of them in a single scenario, it is unobjectionable that there are some relevant early agreements. In fact, although their thoughts have been described as described heterogeneous and irreducible parabolas to each other, they have primarily moved from some considerable affinities. My present goal will be to investigate them and their reasons.

To begin with, I would like to retrace the theoretical *milieu* that has encouraged the actualization of Aristotelian thought and of its cross concepts. The best way in order to do that is to understand its starting point. The analysis of two philosophers will support me in this operation: E. G. Anscombe and M. Slote.

---

<sup>3</sup> I am thinking mostly of MacIntyre A., Murdoch I., Anscombe G. E., Annas J. and Slote M.

Thanks to them, it will be possible to fully examine the ethical demand at the heart of the Aristotelian rebirth. By reading the Anscombe's text, *Modern Moral Philosophy*, and Slote's contribution, *Virtue Ethics*, we realize (a) that these authors raised their voices because of their dissatisfaction with contemporary moral philosophy and (b) that in Aristotle they found their favorite interlocutor because his philosophy offers a reliable alternative approach.

Let us start by taking a look at the analysis of the *dissatisfaction with the way moral philosophy has been done in modern times and, especially, recently*<sup>4</sup> made by Slote. In particular, Slote's claim is that the contemporary panorama is connoted by the struggle between two main ethical theories, on the one hand Kantian ethics or deontology and on the other Utilitarianism or Consequentialism. Slote remarks that neither of these approaches can give reason of the complexity of the ethical experience. As a consequence, according to Slote this shared unfitness legitimizes the assimilation of the two and, at the same time, promotes the revival of interest in ancient practical philosophy. Hence, the landscape of ethical debate has become re-articulated from two ways of thinking to three: Consequentialism and Kantian ethics, joined together, and Virtue Ethics, whose roots are generally in ancient philosophy and, especially, in Aristotle.

But Slote's work also offers us a deeper key to understanding the interpretative battlefield, by explaining why Consequentialism and Kantian's dyad are not able to completely satisfy the necessity of thinking the *praxis*. The reason lies in the dominant property that characterizes them: they are act-focused, in the manner that they look for *moral rules that are supposed to govern human actions*<sup>5</sup>. According to Slote, this polarization of the action swallows up a fundamental part of morality, the one regarding the self and the moral agent. Conversely, Virtue Ethics is actually qualified for being agent-focused, that is to say that *the focus is on the virtuous individual and on those inner traits, dispositions, and motives that qualify him as being virtuous*<sup>6</sup>. So, Virtue Ethics is born exactly because of the necessity of rethinking the importance of the self, of the agent and of his entire characteristics, in contrast with the abstraction and the focus on action of the normative theories<sup>7</sup>.

However, the distance between these two lines of thought is marked not only by their main-foci (act or agent), but also by their different ways of settling in the reality. On the one side, the Kantian/Utilitarianistic approach privileges impersonality and objectivity, thanks to the support of an abstract and general parameter (whether it is the duty or the advantage is not important). Indeed, with this external principle they can guarantee an efficient and reliable way of

---

<sup>4</sup> Slote M., *Virtue ethics*, in *Three methods of ethics*, Wiley-Blackwell, 1997, p. 175.

<sup>5</sup> *Ivi*, p. 178.

<sup>6</sup> *Ivi*, p. 177.

<sup>7</sup> Donatelli P., *Il senso della virtù*, Introduction.

handling the experience. On the other side, Virtue Ethics demands a contextual or internal point of view. In this sense, the main problem is not the search for a criterion, but the analysis of how the agent is basically shaped by his form of life in order to become good. Now, the Aristotelian reference also becomes much clearer. As we will soon widely analyze, in Aristotelian practical philosophy, the character development necessarily takes place within the *polis*.

To sum up, Slote's principal contribution came in terms of a contraposition: the act-focus approach is grounded on an external point of view, while the agent-focus approach is anchored on an internal one. Before continuing the analysis of the revival of practical philosophy it is important to bear in mind that the above-seen contrast answers to the necessity of clarifying and that a "pure" approach does not exist. For example, imagining an absolute Kantian approach is useful in a descriptive perspective, but it is not realistic. In other words, it does not matter whether the focal center is the concept of duty, one of advantage or one of virtue: in the moral approach there is always an amalgam of different considerations working together.

Anyway, in these terms the importance of an internal point of view emerges for the first time with Anscombe. In her article, *Modern Moral Philosophy*, she denounces the stalemate of contemporary philosophy and she attacks contemporary normative philosophies. The reason of Anscombe's account lies in their detachment from their background, where they were still valid. Talking about the contemporary approaches, she says that *they are survivals, or derivatives from survivals, from an earlier conception of ethics, which no longer generally survive, and are only harmful without it*<sup>8</sup>. In this sense, the necessity of rethinking morality is born because of the disconnection between moral concepts and the consequent form of life, which concretely gives sense to them. Again, the answer is the rehabilitation of the Aristotelian conception of ethics and, in agreement with this different paradigm, the focus shifts from the duty and the action to the virtue and the agent's character.

But, Anscombe's analysis, based on the importance of the form of life, also highlights another latent root of Virtue Ethics: Wittgenstein and, especially, his late writing, *Philosophical Investigations*. This clarification reveals that the perception of dissatisfaction, which moves Virtue Ethics, is not a *unicum* and it is also shared with other authors, who find their roots in Wittgenstein's works and in his fundamental idea of *form of life*<sup>9</sup>. If on the one side there are Anscombe,

---

<sup>8</sup> Anscombe G.E.M., *Modern Moral Philosophy*, "Philosophy" XXXIII, 1958, pp. 1- 19, quote from p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> See Donatelli P. in *Reshaping Ethics after Wittgenstein*, in *Wittgenstein-Studien*, Band 4/2013: "I'd like to mention here the views held by authors such as Anscombe, Murdoch, Cavell and Diamond. They criticize, in very different ways, a significant line in modern and contemporary moral philosophy, which has depicted moral thought as the operation of a few concepts cut off from the life form where they have place", p. 224. Moreover, see Donatelli P. in the introduction

MacIntyre and other philosophers, who belong to Virtue Ethics and look at Aristotle as a model, then on the other there are some, such as S. Cavell and C. Diamond, who present themselves as a reliable alternative to Virtue Ethics. Although they share the same need to rethink ethics (and, above all the category of the *self*) beyond the limits of the *moral ought* conception and they do it by moving from the same claim of the form of life, the similar aim is pursued from different perspectives. In fact, the shared importance of the conceptual context as backdrop of moral life leaves room to a considerable distance, caused by the idea of “constitutive nature”. According to Anscombe’s account, virtues have to be inferred through the discovery of “natural” characteristics, that define what is *truly human*. This renewed naturalistic hypothesis supports then the assumption that the moral concepts of the Virtue Ethics are still valid, since they are stably based on human nature, while the morality of ought is temporarily attached to a particular form of life. The reference to a constitutive human nature is also the reason why Anscombe looks for a paradigm in ancient philosophy (e.g. in Aristotelian Practical Philosophy<sup>10</sup>), while Diamond and Cavell refute this option. Indeed, they have attempted to overcome the boundaries of a morality reduced to the *ought* not by referring to some proper human functions, but by focusing on the historical and dynamic density of moral concepts.

As a result, given this general framework, the real problem is not whether moral philosophy should be rethought or not, but how to perform this operation, in what direction and with which basis. It is for this reason that testing the efficacy of Virtue Ethics becomes even more important as well as remembering that the same philosophical necessity and root have produced at least two alternatives.

To recall the cardinal points, Virtue Ethics is a moral approach that can be interpreted as a laboratory for rethinking the *praxis* and it is qualified by two traits, inherited from the Aristotelian perspective and integrated with some contemporary philosophy contributions: (1) the problem of the self and of the virtuous character and (2) the inalienable contextual dimension. These two elements are inextricably shaped together. So, what matters above all, even more than their single exams, is always their relationship.

But now, after having rebuilt the contemporary philosophical scenario and having outlined the main features of Virtue Ethics, it is time to inquire directly practical philosophy and to analyze Aristotle’s account of the relationship between the agent and the context.

---

to Diamond C., *L’immaginazione e la vita morale*, edited by Donatelli P., Carocci, Roma, 2006. However, the reconstruction of this contemporary framework is actually far more complex, since it also includes also a third interpretive line, Williams B., not reducible to the here instituted contraposition.

<sup>10</sup> The issue of what kind of “naturalism” we can talk about in Aristotelian Practical Philosophy will be problematized in the following pages.

## 2. Aristotle and the different meanings of *ethos*

### a. The character preformation: from the collective *ethos* to the individual one

As stated above, the scope of this second section is the study of the interactions between the different meanings of *ethos* in Aristotle. The supposition is that through a path in practical philosophy their necessary co-implication will be demonstrated.

However, preliminarily it is essential to make some methodological remarks. In fact, though the main book reference is surely *Nicomachean Ethics*, if we consider Aristotelian practical philosophy as a prism whose faces show different perspective of the same figure, it becomes evident that we also have to include the analysis developed in other practical works, such as *Eudemian Ethics* and *Politics*. As a matter of fact, all these works have a common theme, which is the *praxis*, or better the *eu-praxis*, approached from different points of view and priorities. Moreover, it is always because of the continuity of contents, that it is impossible to elude the centrality of another treatise, *De Anima*, whose topic is the cardinal concept of the soul (*psyche*). In fact, a proper study of the eudaimonistic goal needs to broaden the horizon to the Aristotelian psychology and also to the metaphysics, since they both provide the coordinates for the analysis<sup>11</sup>. Always following the figurative representation, we could imagine a Cartesian plane whose axes are respectively Aristotelian metaphysics and psychology and whose point of intersection coincides with the prism of practical philosophy with all its sides. Thanks to this synoptic perspective, it will become clear that when we talk about a single concept we are at the same time engaging all the connected concepts (e.g. the concept of *ethos* is necessarily linked with those of *psyche*, of *physis*, of *polis* and of *phronesis*). Every concept is completely integrated in a network, giving a meaning to it. This principle is essential because it will play the role of evaluative parameter in the last section of the paper, being aimed at testing the pertinence of this point of view in contemporary ethics. Indeed, the result of this coordination of concepts is that they only make sense when kept together, therefore they may

---

<sup>11</sup> Irwin T. H. proceeds exactly in this direction, in *The metaphysical and psychological basis of Aristotle's ethics*, in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, edited by Rorty A. O., University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1980. Irwin wants to prove the point that sectorial and self-sufficient interpretation of the Aristotelian's writings is unsatisfactory, while it is more productive to imagine them as intersections of a more complex texture. Moreover, it is important to remind that Aristotelian psychology is far from an anthropological reduction, since the concept of *psyche* embraces all the living things. About the metaphysical coordinates of practical philosophy, the last Book is paradigmatic, the chapters from VI to VIII and the problem of the "human condition".

be unacceptable singularly. If there is a significant critical point of the present analysis, it is probably caused by this necessary co-implication of concepts.

But the above-outlined synoptic principle is the reason why if we want to engage in the issue of the reciprocal influences among the two *ethos* forms, we have to also address our interest to the virtue theory. This expression refers to the process of learning, training and practice of the *political*<sup>12</sup> virtue. This clarification of the *political* dimension is necessary since Aristotle makes a distinction between the “natural” virtue (*physike arete*) and the virtue “in the full sense” (*kyria*)<sup>13</sup>. Following the philosopher’s remarks, we shall turn our attention to the second meaning, which from now on will simply be called virtue. The reason behind the *minimization* of the natural roots of the virtue is that Aristotle refuses to qualify his ethics as a simple form of naturalism<sup>14</sup>. That means that his ethical perspective does not imply a natural exercise of *dynamis*, capacities, but a *canalization* of them towards *ton agathon* (the good). Nevertheless, although the agent cannot be naturally moral, since ethics needs a detachment from simple naturalness, the interpretation of character as a “second nature” is sustainable. This is only one of the paradoxes of practical philosophy that will be dissolved in the next pages, like the one concerning the new form of automatism generated by the acquisition of this second nature. Barely outlined now, these themes will be widened below.

---

<sup>12</sup> Here and in all the paper *political* will be used in an etymological sense; so, it is directly connected with the dimension of the *polis*, not “simply” with the political horizon, as we are used to believe now.

<sup>13</sup> The unique definition of character we have is in *Eudemian Ethics*, Inwood B. and Woolf Raphael (eds.), Cambridge University Press, 2013 (Book II, 1220 b 1) and is imbalanced towards the natural virtue. However, in *Nicomachean Ethics* we witness an understatement of the natural virtue importance and a strengthening of habituation process. The reconstruction of the confutation of the natural virtue in *Nicomachean Ethics* and its reasons are exposed in *La catena delle cause, determinismo e antideterminismo nel pensiero antico e contemporaneo*, edited by Natali C. and Maso S., Hakkert, Amsterdam, 2005. Another fundamental reference is *Abitudine e saggezza. Aristotele dall’Etica Eudemica all’Etica Nicomachea*, Donini P., Edizioni dell’Orso, Alessandria, 2014. In this book Donini explains the differences between the *Eudemian Ethics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics* analyzing their chronology, and proving the anteriority of the *Eudemian*. In fact, while in the *Eudemian Ethics* Aristotle emphasizes the natural foundation of virtue, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* he focuses on the metabolization of habits. Donini then retraces the cause of this turn and of this deeper analysis of the habituation process on the influence played by Plato’s *Laws* on Aristotle.

<sup>14</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated with Commentaries and Glossary by Hippocrates G. Apostle, D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1975, Book II, 1103 a 15 ff.: “an ethical virtue is acquired by habituation (*ethos*), as it indicated by the name ‘ethical’, which varies slightly from the name ‘ethos’. From this fact it is also clear that none of the ethical virtues arises in us by nature [at birth], for no thing which exists by nature can be changes into something else by habituation (...) Hence virtues arise in us neither by nature nor contrary to nature; but by our nature we can receive them and perfect them by habituation”.

However, what exactly is the thread that connects the relationship between *individual ethos* and *collective ethos* with virtue in practical philosophy? To understand it, let me turn to the first cornerstone idea: the preformation of character or the habit-forming process. With these two equivalent expressions I mean the way *collective ethos* shape and educate the practical agent. This is synthesizable by the concept of *induced virtue*, which is functional to this analysis for two reasons: (a) it creates an initial hierarchy between the forms of *ethos* in favor of the *collective* one and (b) it demands us to give reasons on *how* the virtue is induced.

First, we assumed that from Aristotle's account the *polis* is responsible for character habituation through *paideia*, education. This point of view is clearly supported by the continuity existing between *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*. As it emerges from *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, the goal of politics is the highest good and *politics takes the greatest care in making the citizens of a certain quality, i.e., good and disposed to noble actions (praktikoi ton kalon)*<sup>15</sup>. This institutes a direct correspondence between the *polis* and the possibilities for the agent of practicing<sup>16</sup> the human end, which is the *eudaimonia*<sup>17</sup>. The programmatic declaration of intent recurs not only at the beginning of the *logoi*<sup>18</sup>, in Book I and II, but also at the end, in Book X. In this sense, the Aristotelian *logoi* create circularity, where the end of the course confirms the beginning. What matters is that in these passages Aristotle explains *why* virtuous attitude can grow only at the political level and introduce the problem of *how* the *polis* generates this metabolization. Let us try to summarize the Aristotelian argumentation, with references to the aforementioned books:

(1) The objective of practical philosophy is the highest good, the human flourishing, which is defined as a virtuous activity<sup>19</sup>. This definition shifts the problem from the highest good to the assimilation of virtues;

---

<sup>15</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, 1099 b 30 – 31.

<sup>16</sup> The purpose of these *logoi* is as well the action: “since the end of such discussions is not knowledge but action”, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, 1095 a 5- 6.

<sup>17</sup> “ Accanto dunque alla concezione della polis come territorio abitato da comunità di liberi cittadini, la polis assumeva nel mondo greco anche il ruolo di comunità civica, la quale offriva, essa sola, al cittadino la possibilità di vivere bene e di esprimere e realizzare compiutamente se stesso, ed è in quest'ultima accezione del termine che la polis viene considerata da Aristotele” Salis R. in *La polis tra filosofia e storia nel primo libro della Politica di Aristotele*, p. 122, in *Aristotele e la storia*, edited by Rossitto C., Coppola A. and Biasutti F., Cleup, Padova, 2013.

<sup>18</sup> For an analysis of the function of the Aristotelian *logoi*, see Bodéüs R., *Le philosophe et la cité. Recherches sur les rapports entre morale et politique dans la pensée d'Aristote*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1982.

<sup>19</sup> “Then the good for a man turns out to be an activity of the soul according to virtue, and if the virtues are many, then according to the best and most complete virtue” *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, 1098 a 16 – 18.

(2) the virtue is a habit (*hexis*) and it is acquired by acting in a virtuous way<sup>20</sup>, so it is crucial to acquire the right habit as soon as possible<sup>21</sup>. This is the scope of the *polis*;

(3) the polis promotes the virtuous habits with the good forms of government, constitutions and the coercive force of laws<sup>22</sup>. In order to do that, the politician has to study the human soul, because by ‘human virtue’ we mean not that of the body but that of the soul, for it is of the soul, too, that happiness is stated by us to be an activity. If such be the case, it is clear that a statesman should understand in some way the attributes of the soul<sup>23</sup>.

The importance assigned by Aristotle to the *polis* and to its legislative process, connected with the educational purpose, is exemplified by the *rôle éminemment éducatif qui la fin de l’Ethique à Nicomaque fait jouer à la loi politique instituée par le nomothète*<sup>24</sup>. Indeed, as R. Bodéüs demonstrated<sup>25</sup>, *Nicomachean Ethics* is a

---

<sup>20</sup> *Ivi*, Book II, 1105 b 20 ff., paragraph IV. Here Aristotle qualifies virtue as a *hexis* and shows the difference between habits, powers and feelings.

<sup>21</sup> *Ivi*, Book II, “For it is by making citizens acquire certain habits that legislators make them good, and this is what every legislator wishes, but legislators who do not do this well are making a mistake; and good government differs from bad government in this respect. Again, it is from the same *actions* and because of the same *actions* that every virtue comes into being or is destroyed, and similarly with every art (...) In short, it is by similar activities that habits are developed in men; and in view of this, the activities in which men are engaged should be of [the right] quality, for the kinds of habits which develop follow the corresponding differences in those activities. So in acquiring a habit it makes no small difference whether we are acting in one way or in the contrary way right from our early youth; it makes a great difference, or rather all the difference” 1103 b 3 ff.

<sup>22</sup> *Ivi*, Book II, “For it is by making citizens acquire certain habits that legislators make them good, and this is what every legislator wishes, but legislators who do not do this well are making a mistake; and good government differs from bad government in this respect. Again, it is from the same *actions* and because of the same *actions* that every virtue comes into being or is destroyed, and similarly with every art (...) In short, it is by similar activities that habits are developed in men; and in view of this, the activities in which men are engaged should be of [the right] quality, for the kinds of habits which develop follow the corresponding differences in those activities. So in acquiring a habit it makes no small difference whether we are acting in one way or in the contrary way right from our early youth; it makes a great difference, or rather all the difference” 1103 b 3 ff.

<sup>23</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, 1102 a 9 ff.

<sup>24</sup> Rodrigo P., *Aristote et les choses humaines, avec une appendice sur la politique stoïcienne*, préface Aubenque P., Ousia, Bruxelles, 1998, p. 37. The last lines of the *Nicomachean Ethics* completely support this interpretation and directly open to the *Politics*: “since our predecessors left the subject of lawgiving without scrutiny, perhaps it is better if we make a greater effort to examine it, and especially the subject concerning constitution in general, so that we may complete as best as we can the philosophy concerning human affairs. First, then, let us try to go over those parts which have been stated well by our predecessors, then form the constitutions we have collected let us investigate what kinds of things tend to preserve or destroy the states or each of

course whose conceived audience is mainly made by scholars and politicians, namely the *nomothetês*. Thus, the emphasis Aristotle puts on these figures and on their particular functions allows us to distinguish two specific correlated aims of the *Nicomachean Ethics*: the political purpose, or the *education of the educators*<sup>26</sup>, and the spiritual one, or the *transformation of the self*.

Now, after having summarized the Aristotelian argument, we should attempt to grasp more precisely how this metabolization happens. Even though we said that the political education is the preferential channel in order to acquire virtues, we did not specify how it works, while Aristotle reconstructs this passage. The philosopher's account is that we acquire habits mainly thanks to an emotional education. This implies that above all in the earlier stages<sup>27</sup> the good man's development seems to devalue the cognitive and rational dimension and to appeal mainly to the emotional one. As a consequence, this draws the attention to the role of emotions (or passions, which both translate the Greek word *pathos*) in the habituation process and to the problem of being properly affected. Aristotle's claim is that:

Thus ethical virtue is concerned with pleasure and pains: for we do what is bad for the sake pleasure, and we abstain from doing what is noble because of the pain. In view of this, we should be brought up from our early youth in such a way as to enjoy and be pained by the things we should, as Plato says, for this is the right education. Again, since virtues are concerned with *actions* and passions, and since every *action* and every passion is accompanied by pleasure or pain, then for this *reason*, too, virtues would be concerned with pleasures and pains. (...) We assume, then, that such virtue is concerned with pleasures and pains and disposes us to do what is best, while vice disposes us to do the contrary.<sup>28</sup>

But what is the connection between virtues/vices, desire, passions and pleasure/pain? In fact, what actually characterizes and qualifies the Aristotelian

---

the forms of government and why some states are well while others are badly administered; for, after having investigated these matters, perhaps we would also be in a better position to perceive what form of government should be ordered, and what laws and customs each should use. So let us start to discuss these", 1181 b 13 ff.

<sup>25</sup> See Bodéüs R., *Le philosophe et la cité. Recherches sur les rapports entre morale et politique dans la pensée d'Aristote*.

<sup>26</sup> Expression borrowed from Bien G., *La filosofia politica di Aristotele*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2000.

<sup>27</sup> About the earlier stages of education, it is paradigmatic the study of Burnyeat M. *Ein Aristotle on Learning to Be Good*, in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, pp. 69-92. "A wide range of desires and feelings are shaping patterns of motivation and response in a person well before he comes to a reasoned outlook on his life as a whole, and certainly before he integrates the reflective consciousness with his actual behavior", p. 70.

<sup>28</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, 1104 b ff.

account is the effort made to give reason of this dynamic rigorously and to justify it coherently with the other parts of his work. So, first, I will briefly demonstrate the connection between virtues/vices, passions and pleasure/pain, omitting for the moment how desire takes part in this process. From this point of view, we know that in the Aristotelian theory virtue is a *hexis* (habit or disposition). We also know that the philosopher describes habits as *those qualities in virtue of which we are well or badly disposed with reference to the corresponding feelings*<sup>29</sup>. Thanks to this definition it is possible to connect and, at the same time, maintain distinct virtues and feelings. Moreover, this leads us to shift the focus from virtue to feelings (or passions), identified as *whatever is accompanied by pleasure or pain*<sup>30</sup>. So, if the *polis* wants to promote an effective educational aim, it has to recognize pleasure and pain as the load-bearing axes in the early habituation stage.

However, we are still missing the conjunction among feelings and behavior, which I will now elucidate thanks to the concept of desire. For this reason, in order to completely understand this dynamic we have to also include Aristotelian psychology, especially the passage exposed in *De Anima*, Book III, chapter 7. Here the philosopher institutes a correspondence between feelings (or better, pleasure and pain) and desire (*orexis*)<sup>31</sup>. The sensitive faculty and the appetitive one entail each other, since when we feel pleasure we pursue and when we feel pain we avoid. So, though the sensitive function and the appetitive one are logically and physically different, they strictly cooperate together.

This rapid reconstruction of the intersections between all these concepts says something more about the Aristotelian action theory<sup>32</sup>, especially about the role of desire. As Aristotle asserts, appetency (*orexis*) is the major cause of locomotion:

Both these, then, are causes of locomotion, intelligence and appetency. By intelligence we mean that which calculates the mean to an end, that is, the practical intellect, which differs from the speculative intellect by the end at which it aims. Appetency, too, is directed to some end in every case: for that which is the end of desire is the starting point of the practical intellect, and the last stage in this process of thought is the starting point of action. Hence there is good reason for the view that these two are the causes of motion, appetency and practical thought. For it is the object of appetency, which causes motion; and the reason why, thought causes motion is that the object of appetency is the starting point of thought. (...) But, as a matter of fact, intellect is not

---

<sup>29</sup> *Ivi*, Book II, 1105 b 27-28.

<sup>30</sup> *Ivi*, Book II, 1105 b 23.

<sup>31</sup> *De Anima*, edited by Hicks R. D., Cambridge University Press, 1990, Book III, 7, 431 a 8 ff.

<sup>32</sup> Because of the lack of space it will not be possible here to analyze the criterions of responsibility (or better, the voluntary actions/virtues), that is one of the more important contributions of the Aristotelian action theory. However, as is known, the text reference is Book III, *Nicomachean Ethics*.

found to cause motion apart from appetency. For rational wish is appetency; and, when anyone is moved in accordance with reason, he is also moved according to rational wish. But appetency may move a man in opposition to reason, for concupiscence is a species of appetency.<sup>33</sup>

As this quotation underlines, appetency has a greater influence than practical thought. Consequently if desire is the cause of actions (*praxeis*), it is as well the cause of virtues, because of the connection existing between actions and virtue. To cast some light on this circularity, we acquire virtues through the reiteration of actions, and the acquired virtue guarantees some stability to the agent's behavior and some reliability to his character (that is to say, to his future actions).

Nonetheless, we should make two considerations about the habituation process: (1) the rediscovery of the role of desire as a revolution, not as a tyranny and (2) the "natural" boundaries of *the induced virtue*. Focusing on these two considerations is also the turning point from the first part to the second part of the section dedicated to Aristotelian practical philosophy.

First, because of the extraordinary attention directed to the key role of appetency in action we could talk of a *desire revolution*. In contrast with an intellectualistic prejudice, Aristotle valorizes the primacy of desire over practical reason. A further evidence of this inversion of importance between practical reason and desire is the case of *akrasia*, known also as the *Medea principle*<sup>34</sup>. Indeed, the incontinence is described as a conflict engaging what we know we should do (which means the cognitive perception of a specific situation) and what we would like to do (which means the influence of passions in that context) resolved by the priority of desire<sup>35</sup>. In contrast to Plato's account<sup>36</sup>, Aristotle conceives the hiatus between reason and desire as plausible and believes that the strength of the first is not sufficient to assert itself. The reason is that *even if the intellect issues the order and the understanding bids us avoid or pursue something, still we are not thereby moved to act: on the contrary, action is determined by desire; in the case, for instance, of the incontinent man*.<sup>37</sup> In a hypothetical scale showing the weight of the action components, the emotional side would clearly turn out to be

---

<sup>33</sup> *De Anima*, III, 10, 433 a 13 ff.

<sup>34</sup> Definition given by Davidson D. in *Paradoxes of irrationality*, in *Philosophical essays on Freud*, Cambridge Editions Wollheim D. R. et Hopkins J., 1982, p. 294.

<sup>35</sup> This characterization of *akrasia* corresponds to the *strict incontinent action*, described by Mele A. R. in *Irrationality: An essay on Akrasia, self-deception and self-control*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1987. The strict incontinent action is defined as an "incontinent action against a consciously held better judgment about something to be done *here and now*", p.7. According to Mele, this is the typical kind of incontinence studied and its features are that it is free and intentional.

<sup>36</sup> The reference is to the Platonic writing, *Protagoras*, and, in particular, to the passages 351 a – 358 d.

<sup>37</sup> *De Anima*, Book III, 433 a.

predominant. However, it may be objected that the question concerning the action and the hierarchy between the rational sphere and the emotional one is actually far more complicated than that claimed by the “desire revolution”. The main risk is that the deconstruction and the invalidation of a picture of human nature based on a rational prejudice gives room to a new tyranny, one of feelings and desire. The phenomenon of weakness of willing always testifies the danger involved in this perspective, since it shows the consequences of being guided by appetency in contrast with reason or, generally speaking, the danger of a conflict between the plural components of actions. Indeed, when the *akratic* man is faced with a choice between two chains of actions, he experiences an internal conflict caused by these different tensions, and because of the lack of harmony he can not behave virtuously. But this remark leads us to the analysis of the practical reasons.

*b. The double meaning of practical reason: from individual ethos to the collective one*

Therefore, the importance given to the *akratic* phenomenon is a proof of the Aristotelian awareness of the risks hidden behind this revolution. Consequently, the hypothesis is that in practical philosophy we can talk of a morally virtuous action only in presence of the conjunction between intellect and desire. In absence of a reevaluation of the role of intellect, virtue would be an exclusive prerogative of desire and Aristotle could be *assimilated to Hume and the emotivists*<sup>38</sup>. For this reason, it is possible to read many passages from *Nicomachean Ethics* to try to throw light on the dangers of this new form of extremism and to mitigate it. In particular, Aristotle makes some interesting remarks about the necessity of harmonizing the distance between reason and desire when he introduces the crucial problem of the principle of action, decision (*proairesis*) in central Book VI. On this occasion, Aristotle affirms that:

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 that desire pursues. (...) But the function of what thinks about action is truth agreeing with correct desire.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> As Sorabji R. says in *Aristotle and the Role of Intellect in Virtue*, in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, p. 209.

<sup>39</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated with Introduction, Notes and Glossary by Irwin T., Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis, 1997, Book VI, 1139 a 22 – 26. In this case, I have preferred Irwin's edition because of the translation of *proairesis* with *decision*.

This definition ties the acquisition and the practice of virtue to the agreement and the proportion between reason and desire: *what reason asserts is that desire pursues*. But Aristotle goes further. Not only is decision the source of motion and the above-outlined dyad the source of choice, but also *decision is either understanding combined with desire or desire combined with thought, and this is the sort of principle that a human being is*<sup>40</sup>. As a result, the necessity of an agreement is directly required by the human composite soul and all the other states are above or below the human condition. Concerning the conditions beyond the truly human one, the beginning of Book VII is paradigmatic, since it offers a complete overview of the human possibilities<sup>41</sup>. Indeed, here Aristotle talks about six kinds of states. If we exclude virtues and vices, which are both a *hexis* requiring the explained agreement, four different states are left. Our attention is drawn to two of them, *brutality* and the *divine or heroic virtue*<sup>42</sup>, because they represent the negative and the positive extremes. Otherwise stated, *brutality* and the *divine virtue* identify the possible developmental directions beyond *ta anthropina*, the human affairs. On the other hand, the remaining two are the already-seen *akrasia*, incontinence, and its opposite, continence. Whereas the first couple synthesizes the extreme options, the last one embodies the condition of *oi polloi*, the many. In fact, Aristotle states that the virtuous man is one *who has harmonious thoughts, who desires the same things with respect to every part of the soul*<sup>43</sup>, while the majority of men are in conflict with themselves, as the incontinent case proves<sup>44</sup>. So, not only is Aristotle well aware of the complexity of the agreement between reason and desire, but he is also conscious that the virtuous condition concretely concerns only a minority in the *polis*.

The intrinsic difficulty of acting virtuously legitimates the controversial characterization of *semi-utopian*. On the one hand, it is a form of *utopia*, because it requires the correct education and the correct complete moral development; in this sense, only a few people can actually promote this kind of *care of self*. On the other hand, it is *semi-utopian* since Aristotle still leaves room for the *perfectionism* of the self, both in political and philosophical dimensions. In fact, the recognition of an unattained higher condition and the consequent work on oneself to realize it (or, at least, to get close) are the warranty of a continuous improvement towards the moral development. Thus, the self-realization is a concrete possibility, even though extremely difficult. Moreover, if until now the doubts affected mostly the

---

<sup>40</sup> *Ivi*, 1139 b 4 – 6.

<sup>41</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated with Commentaries and Glossary by Hippocrates G. Apostle, Book VII, 1045 a 15 – 24.

<sup>42</sup> If we want to clearly identify divine life or virtue, we should think of Book X of *Nicomachean Ethics*, chapter VI – VIII, where Aristotle introduces the *bios theoretikos* and the human tension toward divine life.

<sup>43</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book IX, 1166 a 14 – 15.

<sup>44</sup> *Ivi*, 1166 b 7 – 8.

agent and the practicability of the virtuous attitude, because of the complexity of intertwined elements, it is important to note that the doubts also touch the correlated concept, the *polis*. As a matter of fact, Aristotle is well aware that there could be *polis* whose constitutions (*politeia*) do not incentivize the moral development, or, what is worse, they concretely do not allow it. From this point of view, the Aristotelian account rather than being descriptive of a concrete condition, it is indicative of a tension towards the realization of the intrinsically connected aims, as well as the political and the individual. In this sense, Aristotelian practical philosophy is not naively optimistic or anchored in an irenic imagination of reality. But the confutation of a simplified interpretation of practical philosophy could be clarified through a deeper analysis of the concept of practical intellect and of its role.

The renewed importance of reason clearly unveils itself if we consider the formalization of the chain of reasoning, the practical syllogism<sup>45</sup>. First of all, in order to best capitalize this tool, we should briefly recall the structure of a practical syllogism, that could be schematized like that:

MaPX-Y  
MiP Z-X  
Con Z-Y<sup>46</sup>

Moreover, an example will make this schema more intelligible:

MaP: To not get wet when it rains (X) it is important to be in good health (Y);  
MiP: To carry an umbrella (Z) is a way not to get wet when it rains (X);  
Con: You should carry an umbrella when it rains (Z) to be in good health (Y).

What is relevant in our analysis is the exam of the different functions played by each concept and their interactions with each other. Concerning the *major term* (Y), thanks to the analysis in *Eudemian Ethics*, we know that *no one decides on an end, but rather on what contributes to the end (...) for example no one decides to be healthy (...) nor to be happy*<sup>47</sup>. So, according to Aristotle, the goal is not the result

---

<sup>45</sup> A careful examination of Aristotle's concept of practical syllogism is offered by Natali C., *La saggezza di Aristotele*, Bibliopolis, Napoli, 1989, especially chapter IV.

<sup>46</sup> Where MaP identifies the major premise, MiP indicates minor premise and Con identifies the conclusion, the syllogism's outcome, that is an action. Moreover, we have to distinguish:

- a) The *major term* (Y), which indicates the end (*telos*) that in the practical syllogism is *ton agathon/eudaimonia*;
- b) the *minor term* (Z), which is the efficient cause whose end is the major term;
- c) the *middle term* (X), which is a specification of the general goal relative to a particular *kairos* and connects the other two terms.

<sup>47</sup> *Eudemian Ethics*, Book II, 1226 a 6 – 10.

of reasoning or choice. But the philosopher goes further and shows that the end of the MaP is composed by the couple of opinion (*doxa*) and desire (*orexis*)<sup>48</sup>, which means the recognition of a good habit linked to the above-seen dynamic of pleasure and pain. Thus, the end of the practical syllogism is the result of metabolization and *ethismos*<sup>49</sup>, as *induced virtue* explained. However, because of its indeterminacy the MaP is inactive (e.g. human flourishing and to be in good health are still abstract concepts). Due to this passiveness and inactivity, the middle term (*not to get wet*) plays a key role in concretely re-determining the end (*to be in good health*) in the particular situation (*when it rains*) and, by doing that, in connecting the MaP with the conclusion. But this passage is still not enough, since we are missing what the agent actually does in order to realize the specification of the general end. And that is where the minor term (*to carry an umbrella*) intervenes. As it emerges from the scheme, the minor term is actually the course of action deliberated for achieving the general goal, after having specified it. However, the cooperation between middle and minor term is still unclear. That is why we have to focus on the MiP, since it is the place where they are joint together. Again, it is only through the balance of reason and desire that the agent can make choices, since the decision is *a deliberational desire for things that depend on us*<sup>50</sup> (in fact, e.g. the weather does not depend on us). The latter implies the transmission of desire, conveyed from Y to X, the specification of the general *agathon*, and the role of practical wisdom, which allows us to identify the best action model. Finally, we arrive at the study of the concept of practical reason, *phronesis*, the function of which has always engaged Aristotelian scholars<sup>51</sup>. They are mainly polarized into two perspectives: one that considers *phronesis* as the search (*zetesis*) for the ways to reach the goal, whereas the other one sees *phronesis* as directly involved with the definition of the goal<sup>52</sup>. However, E. Berti has offered a different interpretation, which goes beyond the polarization described above. According to Berti we should read practical wisdom as being differently involved in both. As a matter of fact, *phronesis* firstly has to recognize the goal<sup>53</sup>,

---

<sup>48</sup> *Ivi*, Book II, paragraph X.

<sup>49</sup> In the *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle directly recognizes the *polis* as the responsible of this habituation: “hence the good itself would be this: the goal of all that is achievable by human action. This is what falls under the science that has authority over all sciences; this science is politics and household management and wisdom”, Book I, 1218 b 13 ff. By *ethismos* we mean *the process of social transmission of behavioral patterns, through rewards and punishments*, as Natali defined it in *La saggezza di Aristotele*, p. 163.

<sup>50</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book III, 1113 a 12.

<sup>51</sup> In fact, Bodéüs has coined the expression *l’irritante querelle des exégètes* to talk about the debate that has gone through the XX century about the role of *phronesis* in practical philosophy.

<sup>52</sup> The two interpretative lines respectively are well represented by Aubenque P. and Gauthier R.

<sup>53</sup> Berti E., *Nuovi studi aristotelici vol. III, Filosofia pratica*, Morcelliana, Brescia, 2008, chapter 3, *Phronesis et science politique*, pp. 39 – 59, paragraph 2, *La phronesis et son objet*, pp. 47–51.

and only after the acknowledgement of *ton agathon* (which is the result of the habituation process) is it possible for one to decide on how to achieve it. Thus, this necessary recognition is what distinguishes *phronesis* from cleverness (*deinotes*)<sup>54</sup>, that is conceived as a form of instrumental reason that calculates the ways to achieve any goal (no matter if right or wrong). In this sense, even though practical wisdom does not deliberate about the *telos*<sup>55</sup> nor does it call it into question, its function is not simply the choice of the best chain of actions addressed to any end. Its fundamental premise is *ton agathon*, the good end (to recall the previous example, the first step is the acknowledgement of *health* (Y) as a good to be pursued).

These initial considerations about *phronesis* lead us to the second point, called the “*natural*” *boundaries of the induced virtue*. Indeed, it is important to remind ourselves that the *induced virtue* defines an “embryonic moment” that should be overcome. If it is true that political education is fundamental, since it represents the first stage in moral development, it is also true that habituation is not sufficient to make men virtuous, when this also implies autonomy, in the sense of being able to self-exercise practical reason. In other words, two elements work in synergy for *eupraxia*: intellect and character<sup>56</sup>. If character at the beginning is the outcome of the *induced virtue* and of the *polis*’ work, intellect, on the other hand, is always particular and requires the active contribution of the agent. And that is exactly the role of *phronesis*, since it is the intellectual virtue letting the agent deliberate about the possible course of actions.

But, allow me to make some remarks about *phronesis* and its personification, the *phronimos*. We could start from the incarnation of practical reason. The *phronimos* is an agent who shares the common opinion of the highest good, thanks to habituation, and who knows how to achieve it in the situation, thanks to the exercise of *phronesis*. The constant combination of these two features makes the *phronimos* a behavioral model, since *the measure of each thing is virtue or a good man as such*<sup>57</sup>. But this figure is problematic. Or better, it is, as we remarked for the aims of Aristotelian practical philosophy, a *semi-utopia*. In this case, its main problem is the unity of virtue: as J. Annas said, if we acquired a *hexis*, we should

---

<sup>54</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book, VI, 1144 a 24 -29.

<sup>55</sup> And it would not be possible, since we cannot deliberate about things that could not be otherwise, as Aristotle states in *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VI, 1141 b 8 ff. : “prudence, on the other hand, is concerned with things which are human and objects of deliberation; for we maintain that the function of a prudent man is especially this, to deliberate well, and no one deliberates about invariable things or about things not having an end which is a good attainable by action”.

<sup>56</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VI, 1139 a 31 – 1139 b 6.

<sup>57</sup> *Ivi*, Book X, 1176 a 16 – 17. The distance between the virtuous man, the excellent, and *oi polloi* is stated in Book III, 1113 a 25 – 1113 b 2.

be able to acquire all, since the link is the exercise of *phronesis*<sup>58</sup>. Thus, according to Annas' analysis, the complete wise-man, in possession of all the virtues, is a normative ideal, while we could talk of the concrete *phronimos* as a continuous "approximation", getting closer and closer to the ideal paradigm.

The second consideration directly aims at the characteristics of practical intellect. We could explain it by introducing two metaphorical pictures, often used among Aristotelian scholars in order to better represent the moral developmental dynamic: the athlete and the student<sup>59</sup>. In both cases, there is a fundamental initial training, where the athlete and the student are taught the skills that they will be able to practice, and then a moment of autonomous application. For instance, when you learn to play the piano, first you have to learn the fundamentals and the technique. Only at a later date you will be able to play more difficult compositions or to extemporize. In this case, assimilation goes through the repetition and recognition of the developed skills. That is why you will be able to use it and you will be persuaded of their goodness. The combination of repetition and recognition moreover generates a form of automatism, which allows the definition of virtues, and more generally of character, as "second nature". To understand this statement, the example of the athlete is perfect: as a matter of fact, the spontaneous and graceful movement made by athletes looks natural, and one could almost think that no effort is required. So, the result of the training is that the athlete or the student does not have to concentrate on what to do or how to do it all the time, thanks to the long repetition of the movement and to the acknowledgement of its reasons. As a consequence, the metabolization makes the thought and the resulting action immediate and natural. But the automatism, induced by lifelong repetition, generates the action naturally, so only a new metabolization can modify it. The concept of second nature should be now clearer: a developed character which is spontaneous and intuitive, but not impulsive. If we think of the practical syllogism, it means that the cardinal passage of the transmission of desire and of the practice of *phronesis* (MiP) becomes an automatism.

All these remarks about the chain of practical reasoning and the role of *phronesis* provoke two related questions:

- 1) How many chains of actions does *phronesis* really consider and practice?

---

<sup>58</sup> Annas J, *The morality of happiness*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1995.

<sup>59</sup> See Annas J., *The intelligent virtue*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011. Moreover, it has to be recognized that one of these figures is primarily Aristotelian, since the philosopher talks about the athlete in order to explain the existing connection between activities and character in *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book III, 1114 a: "for it is particular activities which produce men of a certain kind. This is clear in the case of those who train themselves for any contest or action; for they are constantly active". In addition, the student, as it has been said at the beginning, is the ideal audience of these *logoi*.

Does it really leave room for different chains of actions or do we follow some already fixed behavioral patterns?

2) Does Aristotle imagine any form of criticism of the politically accepted end? If yes, what is it and how does it work, since we know that by the end practical wisdom, although concerned, does not deliberate upon it?

The first question could be posed in two different ways: on the one hand it concerns the reliability of character, on the other hand it implies a form of character determinism. The two interpretations differ from the weight of the automatism seen above. While the first reads the mechanism as an assurance of character stability, the second one interprets it like a “prison of the character”<sup>60</sup>. The supporters of the first interpretation, like Annas and Burnyeat<sup>61</sup>, affirm that character positively conditions future actions, since *ethos* is a compound of virtues, being stable habits acquired through repetition. That is the previously announced circularity between *hexeis* and *praxeis*. The problem is to understand whether training and metabolization can enrich our possibilities or if they produce some standardized and predictable patterns. In other words, what is at stake is the chance of acting differently from how we are supposed to do according to our *ethos*. Otherwise, there is a risk one might fall into what has been called the “prison of character”, since the habit would become too strong and inevitably influence *praxeis*. This problem has been perfectly analyzed by P. Donini, who states that

il possesso di un carattere formato, qualificato da abiti stabili, consente dunque a un agente di rispondere correttamente nel modo richiesto dalla situazioni che gli si presentano, anche senza calcolare e deliberare intorno ad ogni parola e a ogni azione: ma gli abiti e il carattere comportano una sorta di automatismo nelle risposte anche in un altro senso: escludono, cioè, di per sé la possibilità di dar corsa a un’intera serie di azioni.<sup>62</sup>

This concern for character crystallization finds some coherent remarks in the Aristotelian text, especially when Aristotle recognizes that it is difficult, if not impossible, to change an *ethos* once it has been acquired. The main reference is the debate about the alcoholic, who could have avoided drunkenness but did not, or

---

<sup>60</sup> Donini P., *Ethos, Aristotele e il determinismo*, Edizioni dell’Orso, Torino, 1989.

<sup>61</sup> Annas J., *The morality of happiness*, and Burnyeat M. F., *Aristotle on learning to be good in Essays on Aristotle’s ethics*, pp. 69-72.

<sup>62</sup> Donini P., *Ethos, Aristotele e il determinismo*, p.79 and *Abitudine e saggezza. Aristotele dall’Etica Eudemia all’Etica Nicomachea*, chapter IV, *Unidirezionalità degli abiti e posizione del fine*, pp. 91-137.

the one, who became ill because of his way of life<sup>63</sup>. In both cases, their activities produced the stable negative state and the consequence is that a sick person will not *become healthy by merely wishing to become healthy*<sup>64</sup>. Again in Book V, Aristotle states that a habit does not leave room for opposite actions due to its tendency, such as *from healthy only healthy things are done and not both contraries*<sup>65</sup>. However, it is true that Aristotle contemplates also the reversibility of *ethos* when he talks of friendship, or better when he faces equally the corruption and the improvement of a virtuous character. In both cases, the shared question is if the character involution<sup>66</sup> or the superiority in virtue<sup>67</sup> justifies or not the rupture of friendship.

As it is evident, the problem generated by character automatism cannot be determined easily and Aristotle offers no decisive help in answering this question. Anyhow, it is needless to say: in all the considered situations representing cases of practical wisdom, the general end is never discussed. For instance, who can bring the choice of playing the piano or of learning a language into question and how? According to Aristotle's account, the same student cannot do that for two reasons. First, he is persuaded of its activity, which means that he has absorbed the *right* motivations<sup>68</sup>. Second, the practical reason, as it has been described till now, does not consider such a possibility. Although simplified, this example directly leads to the second point, namely the eventual critic of the *telos*, the goal. We could now explain this problem by going back to the formal presentation of the practical syllogism. In the MaP, we saw that the highest good is never actually brought into question and it is the outcome of *orexis* plus *doxa*. As already remarked, it is accepted due to the habituation process and practical reason (MiP) is active in all its concrete specifications, in the *kairos* (given by the middle term). For this reason, *phronesis* is fully immanent or, in other words, never separated from the shared *telos*. Like that, all solutions and courses of action are always within the possibilities offered by the *collective ethos*. This sort of finalistic dogmatism could be highly dangerous, in particular because it inhibits any form of criticism. The intrinsically negative potentialities of an immanent practical reason becomes clear if we consider some paroxysmal examples: just imagine living in a context or form

---

<sup>63</sup> Both the examples come from *Nicomachean Ethics* Book III, in the discussion about ignorance and responsible actions.

<sup>64</sup> *Ivi*, Book III, 1114 a 15 -16.

<sup>65</sup> *Ivi*, Book V, 1129 a 15.

<sup>66</sup> *Ivi*, Book IX, 1165 a 13 – 14: “again, if one accepts another as a friend, taking him as a good man, but the latter turns out to be evil and is regarded to be such, should he still be kept as a friend?”

<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem*, 1165 b 23 - 25: “but if one friend were to remain the same while the other were to become better and far superior in virtue, should the latter treat the former as a friend, or should not?”

<sup>68</sup> If you talk to an athlete or to a student of music or in general to someone who has for long time practiced an activity, he would certainly be able to give you many good reasons for doing that action, such as, for instance, it is healthy or it makes you feel good.

of life where wealth or physical wellness respectively are considered the highest good and everything (such as the educational system or the welfare state) always tends to it. In both cases, the simple exercise of *phronesis* does not provide any kind of instruments to discuss those ends, and the *phronimos* would be the agent able of better performing them.

This is potentially the aporetic climax of practical philosophy. And exactly here *politike episteme* intervenes, with its task of contesting and determining the *telos*<sup>69</sup>. In fact, this form of rationality aims at discussing the shared ends and at testing their contradictions through the dialectical method. To better understand how practical philosophy works, the beginning of *Nicomachean Ethics* is paradigmatic, where Aristotle discusses the different conceptions of *eudaimonia* and he shows the incongruity of the ways of life based only on pleasure, wealth and honor (*edone, ploutos* and *time*)<sup>70</sup> with respect to the human soul. In fact, the concepts of the human *psyche* and its excellence, perfection<sup>71</sup> are the basis of the confutation of these common opinions. Again, another opportunity to witness how *politike episteme* works are Books VIII and X, where Aristotle talks of friendship (*philia*). Also in this case, the philosopher proceeds dialectally and demonstrates that the central type of *philia* rather than being based on pleasure (*dia to edu*) and advantage (*are dia ton chresimon*) is *dia ten areten*<sup>72</sup> (according to virtue, so to character).

Moreover, thanks to these examples it is also possible to verify how far Aristotelian practical philosophy differs from the common sense. Indeed, on the one side, the recognition of *bios theoretikos*<sup>73</sup> as the highest and most preferable way of life does not match the sensibility of the *polis*, that demands the political involvement typical of the *bios praktikos*<sup>74</sup>. On the other side, although we have seen how uncommon moral excellence is, the perfect form of friendship is characterized by being the one among good men, who have developed the virtuous *ethos*. In both cases, *politike episteme* radically puts common sense into question and proposes alternative ways. These do not exclude shared opinions (such as

---

<sup>69</sup> One of the clearest studies about the different meanings of the practical reason is the already quoted work of Berti E. *Nuovi studi aristotelici vol. III, Filosofia pratica*; especially chapters II, *Ragione pratica e normatività in Aristotele*, p.25-38 and chapter III, *Phronesis et science politique*, pp. 39-59.

<sup>70</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, chapter 2.

<sup>71</sup> Which in the Aristotelian vocabulary means the skill of accomplishing its most important part. In the case of the human soul, the highest function is the rational one, or better the *bios theoretikos*.

<sup>72</sup> The definition of the highest kind of friendship is in *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VIII.

<sup>73</sup> *Ivi*, Book I and Book X.

<sup>74</sup> Which is, after all, the proper human way of life, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X. However, the conciliation of the practical and contemplative lives is one of the biggest issue of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, played between an inclusive or exclusive interpretation.

pleasure, honor and wealth, or pleasure and advantage), but reallocate their importance in a wider perspective.

In the light of this, the distinction between the two co-existing plans in practical philosophy can be summarized by this picture: *phronesis* focuses on how to exercise skills properly, while *politike episteme* pays attention to the purpose on its whole and it is guided by the understanding of basic human properties. In this sense, the practical philosopher is a cardinal figure in Aristotelian reflection, since it guarantees the existence of a critical circularity between the *individual ethos* and the *collective* one. Whereas the *phronimos* and *phronesis* show the immanent practice of reason, practical philosophy demonstrates that there is a reflective and transcendent movement towards the *polis* and its constitution anyway. Again, while the immanence of *phronesis* is typically conservative, since it finds its categories only inside the *polis*, the transcendence of *politike episteme* assures a form of transformation and of dynamism. This also enlightens a new figurative representation of their relationship: *politike episteme* is the compass whose variable and dynamic openness delimits the space of *phronesis*, all statically<sup>75</sup> contained within the circumference. Here all the different variations of *phronesis* take place<sup>76</sup>, while *politike episteme* remains external. This graphical representation also gives reason of another fundamental Aristotelian idea, especially if compared with Plato's point of view: the distinction between the roles of the philosopher and the politician. The first one influences politics at the base (in terms of drawing boundaries by defining the goal, *telos*), whereas the second one practices the political exercise concretely. These two figures are never overlapping, as regards the different functions.

The importance of *politike episteme* emerges also by considering the contemporary interpretation of the Aristotelian practical philosophy. As a matter of fact, one shortcoming of many scholars, especially from the analytic scenario, has been to underestimate the role of practical philosophy, emphasizing only one kind of practical reason, *phronesis*. As Berti has shown, this has led to a misunderstanding of the different plans involved in the *praxis*, overestimating the

---

<sup>75</sup> In this case, statically is not negatively qualified, since it is actually the right practice of a specific function. All the concepts of dynamism, transformation and conservatism rather than being the expression of values' judgment want to be a neutral description of functions.

<sup>76</sup> As a matter of fact, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle clearly distinguishes different practices of *phronesis*: "both politics and prudence are the same disposition, but in essence they are not the same. Of prudence concerned with the stat, the one which is architectonic is legislative, while the other which is concerned with particulars has the common name 'political prudence'; and the latter is concerned with particular *actions* and deliberations, for a particular measure voted on is like an individual thing to be acted upon. (...) Prudence is thought to be concerned most of all with matters relating to the person in whom it exists and with him only; and this disposition has the common name 'prudence'. Of the other kinds, one is financial management, another is law-giving, and a third is political, of which one part is deliberative and the other judicial", Book VI, 1141 b 24 – 35.

importance of *phronesis*. But the consideration of only a one-dimensional practical wisdom, merely endogenous, has had as a consequence a flattening of the agent on the context and an agent's inability to dissociate himself from the values of life form. This problem becomes clear if we consider two examples, coming from authors who are influenced by this interpretation, J. Annas and A. MacIntyre. In *Intelligent Virtue*, Annas analyzes the case of someone who grew up in a slum. Annas' account is that the considered context radically compromises his possibilities of developing and practicing virtue<sup>77</sup>. At the same time, in *After Virtue*, MacIntyre seems to connect virtues mainly to the common morality, moving the goal of criticizing contemporary ethics to the background. Even if it is true that when MacIntyre values the role of tradition he is thinking of the problem of individualism<sup>78</sup>, his emphasis on the community and on its values apparently do not consider the possibility of refusing or redirecting that tradition. Although in MacIntyre's account<sup>79</sup> the importance of the interpretative framework does not entail neither a relativistic conception of values and truth, nor an exclusive interpretation of traditions (as if they could exist closed on themselves), his voice is functional to emphasize one of the possible risks caused by the understatement of the role of *politike episteme*.

This rapid account of a misunderstanding of the Aristotelian view leads us to the last part of this paper, whose content refers directly to contemporary philosophy. Here I will approach the problem of the relationship between the agent and the context by trying to understand if the Aristotelian answer is still suitable for ethical experience.

### *3. The pertinence of an inactual thought for the contemporary debate*

To address this final topic, I would like to start from the above-mentioned problem of the imbalance in the relationship between the agent and the context,

---

<sup>77</sup> In Annas' thought it is important to remember that she distinguishes the difference between *not being able of virtue* and *not expecting virtue here*, where the first case is an error while the second is reasonable. That is why "we do not expect people raised on a garbage dumps outside a Third World megalopolis to be kind and generous in their everyday behavior, but this, I suggest, for the same kind of reason that we do not expect them to play the piano or to do the crossword. Their environment has obviously lacked the opportunities to learn and to do these things, and because this is so obvious we do not assume that they are naturally unable to do them", p. 31.

<sup>78</sup> MacIntyre A., *After Virtue*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, third edition, 2007: "I inherit from the past of my family, my city, my tribe, my nation, a variety of debts, inheritances, rightful expectations and obligations. These constitute the given of my life, my moral starting point. (...) This thought is likely to appear alien and even surprising from the standpoint of modern individualism", p. 220.

<sup>79</sup> Which is surely far more complicated than this brief reconstruction.

as it has come to light thanks to previous references to Annas and MacIntyre. My purpose is to recall this *aporia* and to show that, if seen through the analysis made in the first part, an asset has paradoxically emerged.

As already remarked, the *impasse* is created by the omission of the function of *politike episteme*. Once the task of practical philosophy is properly sharpened and the importance of transcendence has arisen, the role played by tradition and community still remains fundamental, but it is attenuated and specified. In these terms, *phronesis* and *politike episteme* co-operate and they can guarantee a bidirectional circularity between *individual ethos* and *collective* one. While *phronesis* proves the efficacy of the habituation process and of the individual responsibility, both within the *polis*' perspective, *politike episteme* assures the reflective movement upon the *polis* itself. At the exact point where Virtue Ethics seems to produce a deadlock, it is possible to rediscover the complexity of Aristotelian practical philosophy, the main strength of which is the ability of weaving together complementary tensions. As just seen, the harmony between the constitutive belonging to an ethical substance, or the immanence of *phronesis*, and its necessary passing, or the transcendence of *politike episteme*, are all perfect examples of this peculiarity.

The clarification of how all the different levels in practical philosophy imply each other revokes the evaluative principle introduced at the beginning, that is to say the coordination of concepts. As explained, each concept finds its sense in the network built by the relationship with others. The latter, meaning that if any concept is abstracted from the network, it loses its sense or its efficacy. For instance, the misunderstanding about the role of practical reason is the result of the overestimation of one concept, *phronesis*. But, allow me to establish another critical example, which has already been introduced many times: the desire revolution. Although it represents a fascinating acquisition in comparison with the rational prejudice that demonizes the importance of desire in the decision-making process, as I have tried to explain we can talk of it only by accepting the premises of Aristotelian ethics and psychology. Otherwise, the concept of desire is excluded from the context where it becomes productive and it loses its demonstrative strength.

From this point of view, we cannot look for an immediately implementable model in Aristotelian practical philosophy. In fact, a break has occurred between the modern conception of *praxis* and the ancient one; because of it, the cardinal concepts and their relationship have deeply changed<sup>80</sup>. An impracticable actualization of the whole train of thought, which is radically different from the contemporary one<sup>81</sup>, would be required to try to actualize one concept (e.g. desire).

---

<sup>80</sup> This is the strong theory exposed by Chignola S. et Duso G. in *Storia dei concetti e filosofia politica*, FrancoAngeli, Milano, 2008.

<sup>81</sup> A paradigmatic example is also the Aristotelian category of *agent*. As a matter of fact the

These remarks lead to the *inactuality* of Aristotelian practical philosophy and the necessity to respect its difference. This issue occupies the final part of the paper, which once again calls into question the relationship between *individual ethos* and *collective ethos* and introduces to the last and, probably, biggest problem. In fact, the concluding topic refers to the existence of one context or the *explosion* of the forms of life. This issue radically challenges the structure of the essay, since up to now I have focused on the connection between one agent and one life form (namely, the *polis*). The pluralization of the forms of life could jeopardize the thesis of the dynamic circularity between the two meanings of *ethos*, or could have to modify and extend it to this new input. In fact, the eventuality of considering many forms of life would confirm the *inactuality* of Aristotelian practical philosophy, which is based on a *one-to-one* relationship (the agent and the *polis*), and the impossibility to actualize it. To pursue this itinerary, first I will briefly draw a picture of what I mean by the pluralization of the contexts in contrast with the *one-to-one* connection, and then I will try to sum up some conclusive considerations.

First of all, at the beginning of the paper I defined the *collective ethos*, with all its meanings, as the context or the *polis*. In this sense, the *polis* has been thought of as a singular and coherent reality, where different parts interact with each other. This interpretation is suggested and confirmed also by Aristotle, when in *Politics* he talks about the relationship between the whole and the parts and the primacy of the whole<sup>82</sup>. As a consequence, the relationship between the *individual ethos* and the *collective* one is bidirectional, initially imbalanced towards the *polis* but never vicious thanks to the roles of practical reason. But what is relevant at this point is that Aristotle rigidly establishes both practical agent and *polis*. Indeed, Aristotle is thinking of a precise *polis*, Athens, in contrast with the other *polis* and the Barbarians. Moreover, the philosopher is considering a specific agent, the free man, in contrast with all the other excluded categories (e.g. women

---

philosopher in his *logoi*, and generally in his philosophy, is thinking of specific figure: the adult and free man in the *polis*. The evident consequence is that he is leaving out from this category many other figures that we are used to consider in it, such as women or children. I will come back soon on the issue of *polis* dimension.

<sup>82</sup> See the *Politics*, Second Edition, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2013, Book I, 1253 a 18 ff.: “Further, the state is by nature clearly prior to the family and to the individual, since the whole is of necessity prior to the part; for example, if the whole body be destroyed, there will be no foot or hand, except in an equivocal sense, as we might speak of a stone hand; for when destroyed the hand will be no better than that. But things are defined by their working and power; and we ought not to say that they are the same when they no longer have their proper quality, but only that they have the same name. The proof that the state is a creation of nature and prior to the individual is that the individual, when isolated, is not self-sufficing; and therefore he is like a part in relation to the whole. But he who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god: he is no part of a state.”

or slaves). As a consequence, the match between the possible combinations is all played inside these two specific terms and it does not consider different kinds of agents or forms of life.

To schematize it, we could imagine this kind of representation  $X \leftarrow \rightarrow y$ , where  $X$  stands for the context (or the whole, or the *polis*),  $y$  for the agent, and the majuscule or minuscule indicates the balance of power between them. But this rigid bidirectional equivalence no longer fits our ethical experience, due to one main reason: the expansions of the contexts, or what C. Taylor has defined as the “nova effect”<sup>83</sup>. With this expression the Canadian philosopher indicates the pluralization of perspectives and the openness of different forms of life. Rethinking the figurative representation seen above, it becomes clear that the two parts of the equivalence no longer correspond to the ethical scenario. To begin with the first term of the relationship ( $X$ ), instead of living within one context we now have to face the co-existence of many different ways of life. If in Aristotelian Practical Philosophy was acceptable to recognize a specific *collective ethos* (namely, the *polis*) as the reference frame, in the contemporary ethical horizon this strict identification is reductive. Not only the *polis* is not the current political dimension, but it has also been “substituted” by a multiplicity of co-existing contexts. In this sense, the texture composed by the forms of life seems to be thicker and more dynamic if compared to the case of the *polis*. To pass from one graphic representation to another, the supernova effect could be drawn as a stratification and intersection of many contextual levels, the directions and intensities of which are different.

But in this perspective, the focal point of which is the bidirectional relationship between the two means of *ethos*, the pluralization of the frames of reference problematizes two main questions:

1. Given that the basis of virtue are political, not natural, which *grid of intelligibility* is prevalent in the character preformation?
2. What happens to the correlative minor term ( $Y$ ) of the equivalence? That is to say, what changes in the way we approach the issue of the agent?

Regarding the *grid of intelligibility*, the question could be posed in this way: in Aristotelian Practical Philosophy the emphasis on the context corresponds to the early stage of the character habituation, when virtue is induced and the agent educated. In this sense, if the *polis* was responsible for the character habituation, who plays this role now and how? Let us consider an example: what mainly

---

<sup>83</sup> Taylor C., *A Secular Age*, Harvard University Press, 2009. In particular, the chapter *The Nova Effect*, pp. 299-419. In that case, Taylor talks of the nova effect in the context of the secularization problem. From this paper point of view, we will use that expression to identify the pluralization process.

characterizes our self-perception and identity? The sense of belonging to our city, to our country, to the European Union, to a certain conception of the European Union or to any other structure of society? What level actually prevails on the others and in which case, given that each one seems to be reasonable and acceptable? Consequently, if the concept of the form of life is modified or extended, also the agent has to be put into question (not to mention that the concept itself of an agent enlarged from the Aristotelian free adult man). From this point of view, the issue of the pluralization of *collective ethos* (X) radically involves the correlative term: the agent (y). Indeed, recalling the graphic representation of a stratification and an intersection of different contextual levels, the agent seems to discover himself as a changing segment that experiences and crosses some of them. Moreover, the pluralization of forms of life concerns not only the "passive" phase (so, the character preformation), but also the "active" one, since all the practices of practical reason are displayed through the constitutive reference to these complex stratification of contexts. As a matter of fact, a shared and recognized pattern of virtues is the premise for *phronesis*, for the consequent recognition of the *phronimos* and for the critical task of *politike episteme*.

It is unlikely that this is the right place to analyze and discuss in greater detail the depth of the problem of the pluralization of forms of life, that would deserve an independent and much wider analysis. However, what is interesting here is that the current *ethical* scenario seems to be more complex and articulated than the one described by Aristotle and this density is the cause of a new *impasse*. In fact, this stalemate is produced by the change in the definitions of the terms of agent and context, and, as a result, of their relationship itself.

Now let me conclude by making some remarks, that will summarize the hot-spots of the paper and will recall the above-seen issue.

### *Conclusion*

As previously stated, I would like to conclude by briefly summing up some of the most relevant points emerged in the paper. They are principally two: (1) the intimate contiguity and bidirectionality between *individual ethos* and *collective* one and (2) the *impasse* of the distance and the solution of the contingency.

The demonstration of the first theme has occupied all the initial section and has been encouraged by the reconstruction of the contemporary debate. First, thanks to Anscombe and Slote's analysis, a window into Virtue Ethics and its reasons has been given. Then, the clarified necessity of rethinking the moral agent has supported the examination of practical philosophy, guided by the inclusive concept of *ethos*. An itinerary through a composite complex of Aristotelian writings (*Nicomachean Ethics*, *Eudemian Ethics*, *Politics* and *De Anima*) has led to

the conclusion that the relationship between the two meanings of *ethos* is both circular and dynamic. These two features are guaranteed by the distinct steps of the moral development. From one side, we have (a) the metabolization or habituation process, denoted with the *induced virtue*. From the other side, we have (b) the co-existence of different levels of freedom, identified with the two practices of practical reason, *phronesis* and *politike episteme*. Moreover, another fundamental characteristic of Aristotelian practical philosophy has come to light: the constant balance between desire and reason. Its examination is unavoidable in order to fully understand the circularity just mentioned, because it gives reason of all the dimensions involved in the inner workings behind the above-seen expression.

An intermediate remark about the *inactuality* of Aristotelian Practical Philosophy has then conducted to the last section of the essay, whose problem is the legitimacy of Aristotelian practical philosophy in contemporary thought. Thus, I tried to draw the attention to an aporetic moment, referring to the problem of the *collective ethos* and its pluralization. From this point of view, the distance and the inactuality of Aristotelian reflection are at the same time an advantage and a limit. But this is precisely this issue I would like to recall here. Indeed, I would like to point out that one of the main contributions of this analysis is having demonstrated that next to the importance of the distance there is always the need for the contingency and for the specificity of the situation. In this sense, ancient philosophy does not directly provide an abstract and fixed model to be put into practice, since the same practice would contradict it. After all, the immanence of the *praxis* is one of the main Aristotelian lessons, as it is proved by his care for *endoxa* (shared opinions) in the dialectical method and for the role of *phronesis* in the decision-making process. Thus, if the rediscovery of Aristotelian practical philosophy wants to be included in the contemporary ethical horizon, it must always be accompanied by an immanent point of view, that has to take the peculiarities of each specific context and historical situation into consideration.

### *Bibliography*

- Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, Inwood B. and Woolf Raphael (eds.), Cambridge University Press, 2013.  
*Nicomachean Ethics*, translated with Commentaries and Glossary by Hippocrates G. Apostle, D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1975.  
*Nicomachean Ethics*, translated with Introduction, Notes and Glossary by Irwin T., Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis, 1997.  
*De Anima*, edited by Hicks R. D., Cambridge University Press, 1990.  
*Politics*, Second Edition, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2013.

- Annas J., *The morality of happiness*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1995.
- The intelligent virtue*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011.
- Anscombe G.E.M., *Modern Moral Philosophy*, "Philosophy" XXXIII, 1958.
- Aubenque P., *La prudence chez Aristote*, Puf, Paris, 2009.
- Bodéüs R., *Politique et philosophie chez Aristote*, préface de Pellegrin P., Société des Etudes Classiques, Namur, 1991.
- Le philosophe et la cité. Recherches sur les rapports entre morale et politique dans la pensée d'Aristote*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1982.
- Berti E., *Nuovi studi aristotelici vol. III, Filosofia pratica*, Morcelliana, Brescia, 2008.
- Bien G., *La filosofia politica di Aristotele*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2000.
- Davidson D. *Paradoxes of irrationality, Philosophical essays on Freud*, Cambridge, Editions D. R. Wolheim e J. Hopkins, 1982.
- Diamond C., *L'immaginazione e la vita morale*, edited by Donatelli P., Carocci, Roma, 2006.
- Donatelli P., *Il senso della virtù*, Carocci, Roma, 2009.
- Reshaping Ethics after Wittgenstein in Wittgenstein-Studien*, Band 4/2013.
- Donini P., *Ethos, Aristotele e il determinismo*, Edizioni dell'Orso, Torino, 1989.
- Abitudine e saggezza. Aristotele dall'Etica Eudemia all'Etica Nicomachea*, Edizioni dell'Orso, Alessandria, 2014.
- Duso G. e Chignola S., *Storia dei concetti e filosofia politica*, FrancoAngeli, Milano, 2008.
- MacIntyre A., *After Virtue*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, third edition, 2007.
- Mele A. R. in *Irrationality: An essay on Akrasia, self-deception and self-control*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1987.
- Natali C., *La saggezza di Aristotele*, Bibliopolis, Napoli, 1989.
- Natali C. e Maso S.(edited by), *La catena delle cause, determinismo e antideterminismo nel pensiero antico e in quello contemporaneo*, Hakkert, Amsterdam, 2005.
- Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics Book VII Symposium Aristotelicum*, edited by Natali C., University of Oxford, Oxford, 2009.
- Platone, *Protagora*, BUR, Milano, 2010.
- Rodrigo P., *Aristote et les choses humaines, avec une appendice sur la politique stoïcienne*, Ousia éditions, Paris, 1999.
- Rorty A. O. (edited by), *Essays on Aristotle's ethics*, University of California Press, 1980.
- Rorty A. O. e Nussbaum M. C. (edited by), *Essays on Aristotle's De Anima*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, New York, 1992.
- Salis R., *La polis tra filosofia e storia nel primo libro della Politica di Aristotele*, in *Aristotele e la storia*, a cura di in Rossitto C., Coppola A. e Biasutti F., Cleup, Padova 2013.

Slote M., *Virtue ethics*, In *Three methods of ethics*, Wiley-Blackwell, 1997.  
Taylor C., *A Secular Age*, Harvard University Press, 2009.