



The Discernment of Perception: An Aristotelian Conception of Private and Public Rationality

What one acquires here is not a technique; one learns correct judgments. There are also rules, but they do not form a system, and only experienced people can apply them right. Unlike calculating-rules.

What is most difficult here is to put this indefiniteness, correctly and unfalsified, into words.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, II.xi

Of these States the poet is the equable man . . .

He bestows on every object or quality its fit proportion, neither more
nor less . . .

He judges not as the judge judges, but as the sun falling round a
helpless thing . . .

He sees eternity in men and women, he does not see men and
women as dreams or dots.

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

Is practical reasoning scientific?¹ If it is not, as it is ordinarily practiced, can it be made to be? And would it be a good thing if it were?² Much contemporary writing in moral philosophy and in the social sciences gives a vigorously affirmative answer either to the first question or to the conjunction of the second and third. Aristotle's ethical and political writings present powerful negative arguments. "It is obvious," he writes, "that practical wisdom is not scientific understanding (*epistēmē*)" (*EN* 1142a24). And this is not just an admission of a defect in contem-

1. This topic was first addressed in my *Aristotle's De Motu Animalium* (Princeton, N.J., 1978) Essay 4; it was developed further in *Fragility* chap. 10. For related development of the ideas about literature, see, in this collection, "Flawed Crystals," "Finely Aware" and "Perception and Revolution."

2. On "scientific," see further below; and, for a discussion of ancient conceptions of science, see *Fragility* chap. 4.

porary theory. For he makes it clear elsewhere that it is in the very nature of truly rational practical choice that it cannot be made more “scientific” without becoming worse. Instead, he tells us, the “discernment” of the correct choice rests with something that he calls “perception.”³ From the context it is evident that this is some sort of complex responsiveness to the salient features of one’s concrete situation.

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

This paper is a sympathetic presentation of the Aristotelian conception. In the process it sketches some ways in which Aristotle argues against his actual opponents, and some ways in which his views might provide us with arguments against some contemporary proposals for “scientific” conceptions of rationality. But since its aim is to remain rather close to Aristotle and to the ethical problems to which his view responds, it does not provide a detailed exegesis of opposing positions or, therefore, detailed arguments against them. It offers a direction for further inquiry.

In the paper the word “scientific” will be used as Aristotle used it, to designate a family of characteristics that were usually associated with the claim that a body of knowledge had the status of an *epistēmē*. Since the aspiration to *epistēmē* took different forms in the projects of different opponents, Aristotle’s attack on scientific conceptions of rationality is a family of attacks, directed at logically distinct positions—although these positions are in some forms mutually consistent and were combined into a single conception in certain works of Plato. I shall suggest that Aristotle’s attack has three distinct dimensions, closely interwoven. These are: an attack on the claim that all valuable things are commensurable; an argument for the priority of particular judgments to universals; and a defense of the emotions and the imagination as essential to rational choice. Each of the three features he attacks was prominent in the ancient ethical debate; and each has been important in contemporary writing on choice. Once we have understood the three features of Aristotle’s criticism separately, and understood the corresponding features of his own positive conception, we shall see how the parts of his conception fit together, and confront the charge that this norm is empty of content. In order to see its content more clearly, we will turn to a complex literary case that presents its salient features more fully. Finally we shall move from the area of personal choice, where Aristotle’s picture has an immediate intuitive appeal, to the more difficult task of commending his view as exemplary for public choice.

3. EN 1109b18–23, 1126b2–4—on which see below.

I. Plural Values and Noncommensurability

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

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

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

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

6. On the role of hedonism in Plato and its relationship to the historical context, see *Fragility*, chap. 4, which includes full references to the secondary literature.

quality-based selection among goods that are plural and heterogeneous, each being chosen for its own distinctive value.

Arguments against pleasure as a single end and standard of choice occupy considerable space in his ethical works. The other available candidate, the useful or advantageous, is criticized only implicitly, in many passages that treat it as a non-homogeneous, nonsingle item. Presumably this is because it had no prominent defenders. The popularity of hedonism as a theory of choice called, on the other hand, for detailed criticism. There are numerous well-known difficulties surrounding the interpretation of Aristotle's two accounts of pleasure.⁷ What we can confidently say is that both accounts deny that pleasure is a single thing yielded in a qualitatively homogeneous way by many different types of activity. According to *EN VII*, my pleasures just are identical with the activities that I do in a certain way: viz., the unimpeded activations of my natural state. Pleasures, then, are just as distinct and incommensurable as are the different kinds of natural activity: seeing, reasoning, acting justly, and so forth (1153a14–15, b9–12). According to *EN X*, pleasure supervenes upon the activity to which it attaches, like the bloom on the cheek of a healthy young person, completing or perfecting it. Here pleasure is not identical with the activity; but it cannot be identified without reference to the activity to which it attaches. It cannot be pursued on its own without conceptual incoherence,⁸ any more than blooming cheeks can be cultivated in isolation from the health and bodily fitness with which they belong.⁹ Still less could there be a single item, Pleasure, that is separable from *all* the activities and yielded up by all of them in differing quantities. To these criticisms, Aristotle adds the observation that pleasures “differ in kind” as the associated activities differ (1173b28ff.). Some are choiceworthy and some are not, some are better and some are worse. Some, furthermore, are pleasures only for corrupt people, while some are pleasures for good people (1173b20ff.). Thus the *way* in which pleasure is not single provides us with additional reasons not to set it up as the end of practical choice.

Pleasure does not fall short by lack of singleness alone. It fails, as well, in inclusiveness: that is, it does not cover or contain everything that we pursue as choiceworthy. For, Aristotle writes, “there are many things that we would eagerly pursue even if they brought no pleasure, such as seeing, remembering, knowing, having the excellences. And even if pleasures follow upon these of necessity, it makes no difference; for we *would* choose them even if no pleasure came from them” (*EN* 1174a4–8). Even if in fact pleasure is firmly linked to excellent action as a necessary consequence, it is not the end *for which* we act. We choose the action for its own sake alone. Deliberative imagination can inform us that we would do so even if the link with pleasure were broken. Elsewhere Aristotle shows us cases

7. These difficulties include: the question whether the two accounts are answers to a single or to two different questions; the question whether the two accounts are compatible or incompatible; the question whether *EN VII* (= *EE VI*) belongs with the *Nicomachean* or the *Eudemean* work, and what difference this makes to our analysis. Some important items in the vast literature on these questions are discussed in *Fragility*, chap. 10.

8. For one account of the relationship between the conceptual and the empirical in Aristotle, see *Fragility*, chap. 8.

9. The interpretation given here is the most common one; a recent reinterpretation is discussed in *Fragility*, chap. 10, n. 12.

where the link is in fact broken: for example, a good person will sometimes choose to sacrifice life itself, and therefore all possibility of present and future pleasure, for the sake of helping a friend or acting courageously (1117b10ff.). Aristotle shows us, then, that we do in fact pursue and value ends that are not reducible to pleasure; we shall later see that he makes an implicit argument for the value and goodness of these plural commitments.

Argument against pleasure is strong argument against Singleness, since no other plausible candidate for a homogeneous single standard was being put forward. But it is plain that Aristotle's opposition to Singleness is general. In his attack on the Platonic notion of the single Good,¹⁰ he insists that "the definitions of honor and practical wisdom and pleasure are separate and different *qua* goods" (*EN* 1096b23–25); from this he draws the conclusion that there can be no single common notion of good across these things. What he seems to be saying is that what we pursue or choose when we deem each of these items choiceworthy is something distinct, peculiar to the item in question; there is no single thing that belongs to all of them in such a way as to offer a plausible unitary account of their practical value. In the *Politics* he rejects even more explicitly the view that all goods are commensurable. In this important passage he has been describing a theory about the basis of political claims according to which any and all differences between persons are relevant to political distribution. If A is the same as B in all other respects but excels B in height, A is *eo ipso* entitled to a greater share of political goods than B; if A excels B in height and B excels A at playing the flute, we will have to decide which excels the other by more. And so on. Aristotle's first objection to this scheme is specific: it recognizes as relevant to political claims many features that are totally irrelevant to good political activity. But his second objection is general. The scheme is defective because it involves treating all goods as commensurable with one another: height and musicianship are measured against wealth and freedom. "But since this is impossible, it is obvious that in politics it is reasonable for men not to base their claim upon any and every inequality" (1283a9–11).¹¹

Clearly this, like the *EN* argument, is an argument against Singleness: there is no one standard in terms of which all goods are commensurable *qua* goods. It looks like an argument against Metricity as well: for it suggests that there is something absurd in supposing that even in each single pairwise comparison of alternatives we will find a single relevant homogeneous measure. And in fact the *EN* remarks about definition, when linked to other observations about the intrinsic

10. See further discussion of this passage in *Fragility*, chap. 10, with notes. I argue there that several other interesting and profound arguments in this chapter of the *EN* are not really pertinent to the criticism of Plato with reference to the notion of a single good in a human life: this is the argument that seems to do the important work on that topic.

11. For further discussion of this passage, and of Aristotle's arguments that the goal of political distribution should be capability to function, see my "Nature, Function, and Capability: Aristotle on Political Distribution," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, Supplementary Volume 1988. On the need to recognize qualitatively heterogeneous ends in political planning, see Robert Erikson, "Descriptions of Inequality: the Swedish Approach to Welfare Research," paper for the Quality of Life Conference arranged by the World Institute for Development Economics Research in Helsinki, and forthcoming in *The Quality of Life*, Oxford University Press, ed. M. Nussbaum and A. Sen.

value of activity according to excellence, do yield arguments against Metricity, and Consequentialism as well, in favor of a picture in which the end or good consists of a number of distinct component activities (associated with the several excellences), each of these being an ultimate end pursued for its own sake. The good life for a human being consists, Aristotle argues, in activity according to the excellences; repeatedly he insists that it is these activities, not either their consequences or the states of soul that produce them, which are the ultimate bearers of value, the ends for which we pursue everything else that we pursue. It is actually part of the definition of activity according to excellence that it should be chosen for its own sake and not for the sake of something else (*EN* 1105a28–33), so to choose good activity only for the sake of some further consequences will not only be to misunderstand the relative value of actions and consequences, it will actually be to fail to act well. If I eat healthy food simply in order to have my parents' approval, or act justly simply in order to be rewarded (*or*, we must add, simply in order to produce the best consequences for the city), my action fails to be virtuous at all. To act temperately or justly requires, evidently, an understanding of the intrinsic value of temperance and justice; I cannot treat them as tools and still act in accordance with them. But now if, in addition, each of the excellences is, as Aristotle has argued, a distinct item, different in its nature from each of the others, then the choice to act according to any one of them will require an appreciation of that distinct nature as an end in itself; choice among alternatives will involve weighing these distinct natures as distinct items, and choosing the one that gets chosen for the sake of what it itself is. Suppose that, offered a choice between playing music and helping a friend, I decide by selecting some single metric over these two cases and asking about quantities of that. Then either the metric will be identical with the nature of the distinctive value of one or the other of the alternatives, or it will be something distinct from them both—let us say, for example, pleasure or efficiency. But in all three of these cases we will, according to Aristotle, be neglecting the nature of some genuine end or value: in the first two cases we will be neglecting one, in the third case both. By reducing music and friendship to matters of efficiency, for example, I will be failing to attend properly to what they themselves *are*. By assessing friendship in terms of artistic creativity, or artistic creativity in terms of other-regarding virtue alone, I still neglect some genuine value.

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

12. On this ambition as a theme in early Greek ethics, see *Fragility*, chaps. 3 and 4.

measurability is not rational, this will be a strong reason to favor the development of a superior technique.

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

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

As for the first question: The Aristotelian should begin by objecting to the way it is posed; for the opponent suggests that deliberation must be either quantitative or a mere shot in the dark.¹⁴ Why should we believe this? Experience shows us a

13. In Book I of the *EN*, in discussing the criterion of "sufficiency," Aristotle suggests that we ask, concerning a candidate for component membership in *eudaimonia*, whether a life that was complete with respect to every other item, but lacked this one alone, was truly complete without it. The argument in *EN IX* for the role of friendship in *eudaimonia* works the same way: see *Fragility*, chap. 12.

14. This is a deep and pervasive thought, from ancient Greek times until the present. For a critical discussion, see Amartya Sen, "Plural Utility," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 83

further alternative: that it is qualitative and not quantitative, and rational just because it is qualitative, and based upon a grasp of the special nature of each of the items in question. We choose this way all the time; and there is no reason for us to let the rhetoric of weighing and measuring bully us into being on the defensive here, or supposing that we must, if we are rational, be proceeding according to some hidden metric.¹⁵

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

(1982–3). Sen argues plausibly that utility cannot adequately be understood as a single metric, since not all qualitative distinctions can be reduced to quantitative distinctions. Then, however, he comes to the conclusion that utility must be understood as a plurality of vectors, along each of which there is full quantitative commensurability, and between which there is total non-comparability. This view is still, then, in the grip of the picture that Aristotle attacks. In more recent work, Sen has defended a more thoroughly Aristotelian conception. See especially *Commodities and Capabilities*, a Hennisman Lecture (Amsterdam, 1985), in which the valuation function is an incomplete partial ordering based on qualitative comparison and not on reduction to any single metric.

15. I do not discuss here the apparent difficulties caused by the presence in most translations of the phrase, “We deliberate not about the end, but about the means to the end.” The mistranslation is discussed in *Fragility*, chap. 10, with references, especially to David Wiggins, “Deliberation and Practical Reason,” *Proc. Arist. Soc.* 76 (1975–6) 29–51, to which my understanding of Aristotle on these issues is much indebted. Deliberation about “what pertains to the end” (the correct translation of the Greek) includes, as well, the further specification of what is to count as the end. Starting, for example, from the valued end of love and friendship, I can go on to ask for a further specification of what, more precisely, love and friendship *are* and for an enumeration of their types, without implying that I regard these different relationships as commensurable on a single quantitative scale, either with one another or with other major values. And if I should ask of justice or of love whether both are constituent parts of *eudaimonia*, I surely do not imply that we can hold these two things up to a single measuring standard, regarding them as productive of some one further thing. The question whether something is or is not to count as part of *eudaimonia* is just the question whether that thing is a valuable component in the best human life. Since Aristotle holds that the best life is inclusive of all those things that are choiceworthy for their own sake, this is equivalent to asking whether that item has intrinsic value. But in his discussion of Plato on the good, Aristotle has argued that valuing a virtue for its own sake not only does not require, but is incompatible with viewing it as qualitatively commensurable with other valuable items. To view it in that way would not be to have the proper regard for the distinctness of *its* nature.

16. On the relevance of Aristotelian conceptions to contemporary social thinking, see “Perception and Revolution,” this volume. See also “Non-Relative Virtues: an Aristotelian Approach,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 1988.

17. So far, too, it appears compatible with a single-valued ranking in terms of the strength of agents’ desires, the view defended by James Griffin in “Are There Incommensurable Values?” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 7 (1977) 34–59, and discussed by Dan Brock in his commentary on the original version of this paper in *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium for Ancient Philosophy* 1 (1985); for an Aristotelian criticism of that view, see below.

should we not envisage the rational agent as proceeding according to some such ordering, and social rationality as aggregation of such individual orderings?

We shall soon see how Aristotle objects to the idea of any antecedently fixed ordering or ranking of ends; I therefore defer discussion of the implications of these arguments for social choice. I am also unable to discuss at length two other ways in which Aristotle's ethical approach is at odds with models dominant in social science. I mention them briefly. First, as we have begun to see, Aristotle does not make the sharp distinction between means and ends that is taken for granted in much of social science literature, in economics, perhaps, above all (see n.15). Nor does he hold that ultimate ends cannot be objects of rational deliberation. We can ask concerning each ultimate end not only what the instrumental means to its realization are, but also what *counts* as realizing this end. Furthermore, against the background of our (evolving) pattern of ends, we can always ask of some putative constituent, for example friendship, whether or not it really belongs there as a constituent of the end: that is, whether life would be less rich and complete without it. All this is a part of rational deliberation; and by extending the sphere of practical rationality in this way, Aristotelianism certainly diverges from much that economic accounts of rationality either assume or explicitly state. I cannot enter further here into this highly important and complex subject.¹⁸

Another evident difference between Aristotle and the theorist who proceeds by ordering preferences concerns the relationship between desire and value. Aristotle does not think that the bare fact that someone prefers something gives us any reason at all for ranking it as preferable. It all depends who the someone is and through what procedures the ranking has been effected. The rankings of the person of practical wisdom will be criterial of our norms, both personal and social; what the bad or mad or childish person prefers counts little or nothing. Nor are the judgments of severely deprived people to be trusted: for frequently they will adjust their preferences to what their actual situation makes possible. Value is anthropocentric, not fixed altogether independently of the desires and needs of human beings;¹⁹ but to say this is very far from saying that every preference of every human being counts for evaluative purposes.

Aristotle would be even more strongly opposed, clearly, to any proposal in which alternatives are ranked in terms of a metric of desire strength. If the fact that someone desires something gives us, all by itself, no good reason to value it, a fortiori the strength or quantity of someone's actual desire give us no good reason for valuing it proportionally to that strength. Even if Aristotle should grant that desire strength *can* be measured and numbered in the unitary way required by this theory—as he almost certainly would not—he would surely view it as an

18. For the bare beginnings of a discussion, see n. 15, *Fragility*, chap. 10, and *De Motu*, Essay 5. On this subject, in addition to the Wiggins article cited in n. 15, see also his "Claims of Need," in *Morality and Objectivity*, ed. T. Honderich (London, 1985) 149–202. An excellent discussion of this whole topic is in Henry Richardson, *Deliberation Is of Ends*, Harvard Ph.D. dissertation, 1986.

19. On this anthropocentricity, see *Fragility*, chaps. 10 and 11, and "Aristotle on Human Nature and the Foundations of Ethics," forthcoming in a volume in honor of Bernard Williams, ed. R. Harrison and J. Altham, Cambridge University Press, 1991.

even more perverse and less plausible version of commensurability than the one that locates commensurability in the object or alternative chosen. The Platonic thesis errs by making values commensurable; but at least it locates value in the right place, in objects and activities, not in our feelings about these. This proposal, by contrast, says something no more plausible, and locates value in the wrong place.²⁰

But instead of pursuing this important subject further, I want to turn now to one of its offshoots, one that will focus the difference between Aristotelianism and some forms of technical social theory in a particularly interesting way. In the theory of ordered preferences, when there is a choice (personal or collective) to be made between A and B, only one question is typically asked and considered salient, namely, which alternative is preferred. (Sometimes, as in the Griffin proposal, questions of the weight or intensity of preference are raised, but this is notoriously difficult and controversial.) The agent works with the picture of a single line or scale, and the aim is simply to get as high up on this line as possible. Although the line does not imply, in this case, the presence of a unitary measure of value in terms of which all alternatives are seen as commensurable, there is still a single line, the ranking of actual preferences from among the available alternatives. All alternatives are arranged along this line, and the agent is to look to nothing else in choosing. Aristotelianism asks about overall preferability. But its rather difficult picture of the choice situation also encourages us to ask and to dwell upon a further question about A and B. We have said that the Aristotelian agent scrutinizes each valuable alternative, seeking out its distinct nature. She is determined to acknowledge the precise sort of value or goodness present in each of the competing alternatives, seeing each value as, so to speak, a separate jewel in the crown, valuable in its own right, which does not cease to be separately valuable just because the contingencies of the situation sever it from other goods and it loses out in an overall rational choice. This emphasis on the recognition of plural incommensurable goods leads directly and naturally to the perception of a possibility of irreconcilable contingent conflicts among them. For once we see that A and B have distinct intrinsically valuable goods to offer, we will also be prepared to see that a situation in which we are forced by contingencies beyond our control to choose between A and B is a situation in which we will be forced to forgo some genuine value. Where both A and B are types of virtuous action, the choice situation is one in which we will have to act in some respect deficiently; perhaps even to act unjustly or wrongly. In such situations, to decide that A is preferable to B is sometimes the least of our worries. Agamemnon saw that between the sacrifice of his daughter Iphigenia and an impiety that would bring in its wake the death of all concerned, there was hardly a question of *how* to choose for a rational agent. But here the further problems have only begun. What can be done, thought, felt, about the deficiency or guilt involved in missing out on B? What actions, emotions, responses, are appropriate to the agent who is trapped in such a situation?

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

What expressions of remorse, what reparative efforts, does morality require here? The individual cannot neglect these concerns without grave moral deficiency. Agamemnon neglected them, in the belief that the problem of preference was the only one to be solved by rationality. The chorus of elders regard this not as wisdom, but as madness.

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

21. See *Fragility*, Chap. 2; also *Aristotle's De Motu*, essay 4; and "Flawed Crystals," this volume. Aristotle himself gives less weight to such conflicts than his theory seems to demand, but he does in principle recognize them: see *Fragility*, chaps. 11–12 and Interlude 2.

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

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

is good.²⁴ It encourages us to develop appropriate ways of thinking and feeling about these possibilities, telling us that all this is a part of living well for a human being. Agamemnon's decision, even under these terrible constraints, will be better and more rationally made if he considers the relation of these constraints to his wishes and choices as a person of virtue. Social choice theory, however, insists that only his ordinal ranking of the actual possibilities is relevant; he can choose rationally and well without thinking that the sacrifice of a daughter is an absolutely bad thing.²⁵

Does this matter for a theory of public rationality? I would argue that it matters deeply. Frequently leaders, like private citizens, will be confronted with unpalatable moral choices, choices in which there is no loss-free, and perhaps even no guilt-free course available. We want leaders who will be able to make tough necessary choices in such situations, preferring A to B or B to A. We do not want the presence of recognized dilemma to prevent them from evincing a preference. But we also want them to preserve and publicly display enough of the Aristotelian intuitions of the ordinary private person that they will say, here is a situation in which we are violating an important human value. Suppose, for example, we are in agreement that on balance Truman was correct in choosing to bomb Hiroshima; that this was the best available exit to the horrible dilemma in which he and the nation had been placed by factors beyond their control. Still, it matters deeply whether the bombing is to be treated simply as the winning alternative, or, in addition, as a course of action that overrides a genuine moral value. It matters whether Truman takes this course with unswerving confidence in his own powers of reason, or with reluctance, remorse, and the belief that he is obligated to make whatever reparations can be made. Whether all his attention is directed toward picking the top point on a single ordered line, or whether he attends, as well, to the intrinsic ethical character of the claim that on balance is not preferred.²⁶ The Aristotelian leader, cherishing each separate value and attaching to each the appropriate emotions and feelings of obligation, behaves in the second of these ways. What is more, he or she holds that it is good, in a more general way, to focus on these dilemmas and not to go beyond them, or "solve" them, because to do so

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

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

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

reaffirms and strengthens attachment to the values in question, in such a way that one will be less likely to violate them in other circumstances. The leader who is brought up to disregard the contrast between one's actual situation and a situation that is, for better or worse, not available will not learn through that education that there is a salient difference between these two ways, and so he or she will be all too likely to prefer the former, as easier on the conscience.²⁷

In R. M. Hare's recent book *Moral Thinking*, two stylized reasoners are introduced. They are called the Archangel and the Prole.²⁸ The Prole, stuck with ordinary daily intuitive rationality, sees moral dilemmas as real and indissoluble, requiring remorse and reparative efforts. The Archangel, a Utilitarian philosopher, is able to see that from the critical perspective of this theory (as Hare describes it) such dilemmas vanish. She learns to rise above them, and has disdain for those who continue to recognize them. Hare presents his position, as always, with vigor and subtlety. He qualifies his contrast by arguing that there are many reasons why, in most daily choices, we should behave like proles. And yet the Archangel is a norm for practical reasoning, when it is at its best. And it is clear that the Archangel is Hare's answer to his own urgent motivating questions about how a theory of choice can actually make things better in human life. I believe, with Aristotle, that the Archangel's superior clarity and simplicity does not make things better; that rising above a human problem does not solve it. I believe that we want more proles and fewer Archangels, not only in daily choice, but as leaders and models. Angels, Thomas Aquinas held, cannot perceive what is there for perceiving in this world of contingency. And thus they are, as Aquinas concluded, poor guides indeed for getting around in this world, however well off they might be in heaven. It is, said Aristotle, the human good that we are seeking, and not the good of some other being.

II. Priority of the Particular

"The discernment rests with perception." This phrase, from which my title is taken, is used by Aristotle in connection with his attack on another feature of pseudo-scientific pictures of rationality: the insistence that rational choice can be captured in a system of general rules or principles which can then simply be applied to each new case. Aristotle's defense of the priority of "perception," together with his insistence that practical wisdom cannot be a systematic science concerned throughout with universal and general principles, is evidently a defense of the priority of concrete situational judgments of a more informal and intuitive kind to any such system. Once again he is attacking an item that is generally taken to be criterial of rationality in our day, particularly in the public sphere. His attack on ethical generality is closely linked to the attack on commensurability. For the two notions are closely related, and both are seen by their defenders as progressive

27. There is an excellent discussion of this in S. Hampshire, "Public and Private Morality," in *Morality and Conflict* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), 101-25, at 123; I discuss his position in the later (political) sections of this essay.

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

stratagems that we can use to extricate ourselves from the ethical vulnerability that arises from the perception of qualitative heterogeneity. Too much heterogeneity leaves the agent who sees it open to the possibility of surprise and perplexity. For a new situation may strike her as unlike any other. A valuable item may seem altogether distinct and new. But if she tells herself either that there is only a single item in terms of which all values are commensurable—or that there is a finite number of general values, repeatedly instantiated, under which all new cases are bound to fall as instances—by either of these routes she will escape from the burden of the intractable and unexpected. She will come to each new situation prepared to see only those items about which she already knows how to deliberate.

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

Here we must begin to distinguish, as Aristotle himself does not, or does not with clarity, the *general* from the *universal*. The *general* is opposed to the *concrete*; a general rule not only covers many cases, it applies to them in virtue of some rather non-concrete characteristics. A *universal* rule, by contrast, applies to all cases that are in the relevant ways similar; but a universal may be highly concrete, citing features that are not very likely to be replicated. Many moral views that base correct choice on universal principles employ principles of broad generality. And this is a natural link, if one is interested in the codifying and action-guiding force of principles. One could not teach a child what to do using rules whose terms were too concrete to prepare the child for new cases as yet unseen; and one epistemological role for rules in morality has traditionally been to simplify and systematize the moral world, a task that highly refined and concrete universals have difficulty performing. But universals may also be concrete; and some philosophers, notably R. M. Hare,²⁹ who have a deep interest in the universalizability of moral prescriptions have also insisted that principles should often be highly context-specific. Aristotle's claims that the "particular" is "prior" in ethical reasoning are directed, in different ways and with different arguments, at both general principles and universal principles. His attack on the general is more global and more fundamental. Universalizability he accepts up to a point, though I believe that in certain cases he denies its moral role, holding that it is not, in these cases, correct to say that were the same circumstances to occur again, the same choice would again be correct. So to give a clear description of the view and the arguments that

29. See *Moral Thinking*; and for further discussion of his position in this volume, see Introduction, and "'Finely Aware,'" endnote.

support it, we must insist on this distinction more forcefully than does Aristotle, whose primary opponent is a Plato whose universals are also highly general.

Aristotelian arguments against commensurability do not by themselves imply that particular judgments are prior to general rules. His attack on commensurability, as we have described it, relied on the picture of a plurality of distinct values, each generating its own claims, but each having, as well, its own general definition and being instantiable in any number of particular situations and actions. So the bare fact that, for example, courage and justice and friendship are plural and distinct does little to support the priority of particular perceptions to systems of rules or principles. On the contrary, our talk of distinctness in definition suggested that Aristotle might have had a strong interest in such a system. On the other hand, Aristotle does insist, as we have seen, that practical wisdom is not *epistēmē*, that is, systematic scientific understanding. He defends this claim by arguing that it is concerned with ultimate particulars (*ta kath'hekasta*) and that these particulars cannot be subsumed under any *epistēmē* (a system of universal principles) but must be grasped with insight through experience (*EN* 1142a11ff.). In praising perception, he is praising the grasping of particulars contained in this sort of experienced judgment. His statement seems to be an assault on the priority of the *general*, and probably of the *universal* as well. We need, then, to ask how the further moves from plurality to specificity or concreteness, and sometimes also from concreteness to singularity, are defended. And we need to know, as well, what role rules, of various sorts, actually do play in Aristotelian rationality.

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

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

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

30. For a longer account of this point, see *Fragility*, chap. 10.

the concrete particulars, and the discernment rests with perception. (*EN* 1109b18–23)

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

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

All law is universal; but about some things it is not possible for a universal statement to be correct. Then in those matters in which it is necessary to speak universally, but not possible to do so correctly, the law takes the usual case, though without ignoring the possibility of missing the mark. . . . When, then, the law speaks universally, and something comes up that is not covered by the universal, then it is correct, insofar as the legislator has been deficient or gone wrong in speaking simply, to correct his omission, saying what he would have said himself had he been present and would have legislated if he had known. (*EN* 1137b13ff.)

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

Aristotle illustrates the idea of ethical flexibility in a vivid and famous metaphor. He tells us that a person who makes each choice by appeal to some ante-

31. Note here the slide from universal to general: but the point is that the moment it covers many particulars it gets too unspecific to be the best way of approaching a concrete context. A universal need not abstract from contextual features (see below); but the sort of universal principle that can be fixed in advance and applied to many cases will have to do this too much for Aristotle. I translate *katholou*, for consistency, as “universal” throughout, though in my interpretive remarks I try to make clear exactly which issue Aristotle has in mind.

cedent general principle held firm and inflexible for the occasion is like an architect who tries to use a straight ruler on the intricate curves of a fluted column. No real architect does this. Instead following the lead of the builders of Lesbos, he will measure with a flexible strip of metal, the Lesbian Rule, that “bends to the shape of the stone and is not fixed” (1137b30–32). This device is still in use, as one might expect. I have one. It is invaluable for measuring oddly-shaped parts of an old Victorian house. (The Utilitarian who recently wrote that “we” prefer ethical systems in the style of the Bauhaus³² had fortunate architectural tastes, given his view of rules.) It is also of use in measuring the parts of the body, few of which are straight. We could anticipate our point, not too oddly, by saying that Aristotle’s picture of ethical reality has the form of a human body or bodies rather than that of a mathematical construct. So it requires rules that fit it. Good deliberation, like the Lesbian Rule, accommodates itself to the shape that it finds, responsively and with respect for complexity.

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

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

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

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

32. J. Glover, quoted in D. Wiggins, “Deliberation and Practical Reason” (see n. 18).

33. This “ought to” is sometimes mistranslated as “will have to.” On this, see *De Motu*, Essay 4, *Fragility*, chap. 10.

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

In the *EN V* passage, and implicitly in the one from Book II, Aristotle alludes to a second feature of the practical, its indeterminate or indefinable character (*to aoriston*). It is difficult to interpret this feature; it seems to be connected with the variety of practical contexts and the situation-relativity of appropriate choice. One example is revealing. There is no definition (*horismos*) of good joke-telling, Aristotle writes, but it is *aoristos*, since it is so much a matter of pleasing the particular hearer, and “different things are repugnant and pleasant to different people” (1128a25ff). To extrapolate from this case, excellent choice cannot be captured in general rules, because it is a matter of fitting one’s choice to the complex requirements of a concrete situation, taking all of its contextual features into account. A rule, like a manual of humor, would do both too little and too much: too little,

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

35. *EN* 1134b28–33; on Aristotle’s arguments as to why laws should be made difficult to change, see *Fragility*, chap. 10.

because most of what really counts is in the response to the concrete; and this would be omitted. Too much, because the rule would imply that it was itself normative for response (as a joke manual would ask you to tailor your wit to the formulae it contains), and this would impinge too much on the flexibility of good practice. The Lesbian Rule is called *aoristos*, presumably because, unlike such precepts, it varies its own shape according to the shape of what is before it. In speaking of mutability Aristotle stresses change over time and the moral relevance of surprise; in speaking of the *aoriston* he stresses complexity and context. Both features call for responsiveness and yielding flexibility, a rightness of tone and a sureness of touch that no general account could adequately capture.

Finally Aristotle suggests that the concrete ethical case may simply contain some ultimately particular and non-repeatable elements. This is one part of what he means when he says that they simply do not fall under any general science or precept. Complexity and variety already yield a high degree of situational particularity, for the occurrence of properties that are, taken singly, instantiated elsewhere in an endless variety of combinations can make the whole context a unique particular. But Aristotle also recognizes the ethical relevance of non-repeatable components. The moderate diet for Milo the wrestler is not the same as the moderate diet for Aristotle (indeed, for any other human being), because Milo's concrete, and presumably unique combination of size, weight, needs, goals and activity are all relevant to determining the appropriate for him. This is a contingent limitation on the universal; we could try to say that we have here a universal principle with only a single instance, in that if anyone else should turn up with that precise size, weight, etc., the ethical prescription would be the same. Even so, this would not be the sort of universal principle that would satisfy most devotees of principles, since it is rooted in the particulars of Milo's historical context in such a way that it could not have been anticipated with precision in advance; and perhaps (indeed, very likely) will be of no further use in the future. An ethical science with "principles" this context-specific would have to have a vast and infinitely extensible series of principles; and this is not a science that will satisfy those who are looking for science.

But Aristotle goes further still in some cases. The particularity of love and friendship seems to demand nonrepeatability in yet a stronger sense. Good friends will attend to the particular needs and concerns of their friends, benefiting them for the sake of what they are, in and of themselves. Some of this "themselves" consists of repeatable character traits; but features of shared history and of family relationship that are not even in principle repeatable are allowed to bear serious ethical weight. Here the agent's own historical singularity (and/or the historical singularity of the relationship itself) enter into moral deliberation in a way that could not even in principle give rise to a universal principle, since what is ethically important (among other things) is to treat the friend as a unique nonreplaceable being, a being not like anyone else in the world.³⁶ "Practical wisdom is not con-

36. On the types of individuality recognized as relevant to love and friendship, see *Fragility*, chaps. 6, 7, 12. For some doubts as to whether the Aristotelian position really satisfies all our intuitions about this individuality, see this volume, "Love and the Individual." Further remarks are in the Introduction in the section entitled "The Aristotelian Ethical View," and in the endnote to "Finely Aware."

cerned with universals only; it must also recognize particulars, for it is practical, and practice concerns particulars" (1141b4–16).³⁷

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

But Aristotle's point in all these cases is that the rule or algorithm represents a falling off from full practical rationality, not its flourishing or completion. The existence of a formal choice function is not a condition of rational choice, any more than the existence of a navigation manual is a condition (surely not sufficient and usually not even necessary) of good navigation. Either the choice function is simply the summary of what good judges do or have done in situations so far encountered—in which case it will be true but posterior, and the more posterior the more it simplifies³⁸—or it is an attempt to extract from that which they do and have done some more elegant and simple procedure that can from then on be normative for what they do—in which case it will be false and even corrupting.

An important thing to remember, in assessing this claim, is that Aristotelian deliberation does not confine itself to means–end reasoning. It is, as we have insisted, concerned as well with the specification of ultimate ends. But this means

37. For a list of passages in which Aristotle speaks this way, see *Fragility*, chap. 10, n. 29. Compare the illuminating discussion of these issues in Andrew Harrison, *Making and Thinking: A Study of Intelligent Activities* (Hassocks, Sussex, 1978), esp. chap. 3.

38. See *Aristotle's De Motu*, Essay 4.

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

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

It is obvious that practical wisdom is not deductive scientific understanding (*epistēmē*). For it is of the ultimate and particular, as has been said—for the matter of action is like this. It is the analogue of theoretical insight (*nous*): for *nous* is of the ultimately first principles, for which there is no external justification; and practical wisdom is of the ultimate and particular, of which there is no scientific understanding, but a kind of perception—not, I mean, ordinary sense-perception of the proper objects of each sense, but the sort of perception by which we grasp that a certain figure is composed in a certain way out of triangles. (1142a23)³⁹

Practical insight is like perceiving in the sense that it is noninferential, non-deductive; it is an ability to recognize the salient features of a complex situation.

39. See the excellent discussion of this passage in Wiggins, "Deliberation." I am to some extent indebted to his translation-cum-explication here, as in 1143a25–b14 below.

And just as the theoretical *nous* comes only out of a long experience with first principles and a sense, gained gradually in and through experience, of the fundamental role played by these principles in discourse and explanation, so too practical perception, which Aristotle also calls *nous*, is gained only through a long process of living and choosing that develops the agent's resourcefulness and responsiveness:

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

and again:

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

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

III. The Rationality of Emotions and Imagination

So far the Aristotelian picture has attacked two items that are commonly alleged to be criterial of rationality. His third target is even more broadly so held: the idea that rational choice is not made under the influence of the emotions and the imag-

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

Imagination fares no better. Plato's rejection of the influence of sensuous cognition is part and parcel of his general rejection of the influence of the bodily. Without attempting to characterize Kant's own complex view of imagination, we may say that modern Kantians have shown considerable interest in curbing flights of deliberative imagination that they see as potential strong impediments to action in accordance with duty. Imagination is thought to be too often egoistic and self-indulgent, too concerned with particulars and with their relation to the self. One can be correctly motivated by duty without developing imagination; therefore its cultivation is at best a luxury, at worst a danger.

Nor do Utilitarians approve of imagination's vivid portrayal of alternatives in all their color and singularity; again this faculty is suspected of being wedded to particularity and the recognition of incommensurables, therefore of being a threat to the impartial assessment of facts and probabilities. Whatever the faults of Dickens's *Hard Times* as a portrait of Utilitarianism—and they are many—he is surely correct in depicting the Benthamite father as holding the view that "fancy" is a form of dangerous self-indulgence, and that reason (conceived of as that fact-storing and calculative power in virtue of which Mr. Gradgrind is always "ready to

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

41. See *Fragility*, chaps. 5, 7. The *Phaedrus*, I argue, modifies this picture.

weigh and measure each parcel of human nature, and tell you exactly what it comes to") is the only faculty to which education is properly addressed, if we are to build a properly impartial society. (Concerning Louisa, from the cradle starved in fancy, he reflects with moral satisfaction, "would have been self-willed . . . but for her bringing-up.") Contemporary theorists follow these leads, either explicitly repudiating imagination and emotion as irrational or offering a picture of rationality in which they play no positive role.

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

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

Phantasia appears to be a faculty well suited to the work of deliberation as Aristotle understands it, and it is no surprise to find him invoking it in connection with the minor premise of the "practical syllogism," that is, the creature's perception of an item in the world *as* something that answers to one of his or her practical interests or concerns. Elsewhere he shows imagination working closely with an ethical conception of the good: our imaginative view of a situation "marks off" or "determines" it as presenting elements that correspond to our view of what is to be pursued and avoided.⁴³ It is also no surprise that he ascribes to human beings the capacity for a special sort of imagining, which is called "deliberative *phantasia*," and which involves the ability to link several imaginings or perceptions together, "making a unity from many." All thought, for Aristotle, is of necessity (in finite creatures) accompanied by an imagining that is concrete, even where the thought itself is abstract. This is just a fact of human psychology. But whereas the mathematician can safely disregard the concrete features of his or her imagined triangle when she is proving a theorem about triangles, the person of practical

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

43. See *De Anima*, 431b2ff, discussed in greater length in *Fragility*, chap. 10. In "Changing Aristotle's Mind" (forthcoming in M. Nussbaum and A. Rorty, eds., *Essays on Aristotle's "De Anima"* [Oxford, 1991]), Hilary Putnam and I bring forward evidence that Aristotle regards emotion, as well as imagination, as a selective form of cognitive awareness.

wisdom will not neglect the concrete deliverances of imagination when thinking about virtue and goodness. Instead of ascending from particular to general, deliberative imagination links particulars without dispensing with their particularity.⁴⁴ It would involve, for example, the ability to recall past experience as one with, as relevant to, the case at hand, while still conceiving of both with rich and vivid concreteness. We are now prepared to understand that the Aristotelian will hold this concrete focusing to be not dangerously irrational, but an essential ingredient of responsible rationality, to be cultivated by educators.

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

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

Putting all this together, and allowing ourselves to extrapolate from the text in a way that appears to be consistent with its spirit, we might say that a person of

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

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

46. See my "The Stoics on the Extirpation of the Passions," *Apeiron*, 1987.

practical insight will cultivate emotional openness and responsiveness in approaching a new situation. Frequently, it will be her passionate response, rather than detached thinking, that will guide her to the appropriate recognitions. "Here is a case where a friend needs my help": this will often be "seen" first by the feelings that are constituent parts of friendship, rather than by pure intellect. Intellect will often want to consult these feelings to get information about the true nature of the situation. Without them, its approach to a new situation would be blind and obtuse. And even where correct choice is reached in the absence of feeling and emotional response, Aristotle will insist that it is less virtuous than choice that is emotional. If I help a friend unfeelingly, I am less praiseworthy than if I do so with appropriate love and sympathy. Indeed my choice may not really be virtuous at all; for an action to be virtuous, it must not only have the same content as the virtuously disposed person's action, it must be done "in the same manner" as the manner in which a person whose passions love the good would do it. Without feeling, a part of correct perception is missing.

I believe that such statements imply that perception is not merely aided by emotion but is also in part constituted by appropriate response. Good perception is a full recognition or acknowledgment of the nature of the practical situation; the whole personality sees it for what it is. The agent who discerns intellectually that a friend is in need or that a loved one has died, but who fails to respond to these facts with appropriate sympathy or grief, clearly lacks a part of Aristotelian virtue. It seems right to say, in addition, that a part of discernment or perception is lacking. This person doesn't really, or doesn't fully, *see* what has happened, doesn't recognize it in a full-blooded way or take it in. We want to say that she is merely saying the words. "He needs my help," or "she is dead," but really doesn't yet fully *know* it, because the emotional part of cognition is lacking. And it isn't just that sometimes we need the emotions to *get to* the right (intellectual) view of the situation; this is true, but not the entire story. Neither is it just that the emotions supply extra praiseworthy elements external to cognition but without which virtue is incomplete. The emotions are themselves modes of vision, or recognition. Their responses are part of what knowing, that is truly recognizing or acknowledging, *consists in*. To respond "at the right times with reference to the right objects, toward the right people, with the right aim, and in the right way, is what is appropriate and best, and this is characteristic of excellence" (*EN* 1106b21-3).

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

perception of the nature of this particular case. How, then, has he escaped his own criticism?

Without becoming too deeply entangled in the interpretative issues surrounding this difficult text, I want to suggest that this frequently scorned position makes far more sense if we take the inclusive view of perception that I have just outlined, according to which it has emotional and imaginative, as well as intellectual, components. The agent who is swayed by pleasure does not have to be dislodged from factual knowledge of his or her situation, that is, that this is a case of infidelity or overeating. There is a sense in which she can be said to know this throughout: for, as Aristotle in the same context says explicitly, she may say all the right things when questioned, and offer factually correct descriptions. She may, he adds, even correctly perform means–end deliberations in connection with her akratic action, which presumably she could not if she did not in a certain sense grasp, by intellect, its character.⁴⁷ She is, however, evasive. She is not fully confronting or acknowledging the situation to herself, allowing herself to see vividly its implications for her life and the lives of others, and to have the responses that are appropriate to that vision. Her interest in short-term pleasure causes her to insulate herself from these responses and from the knowledge they help to constitute. So her intellectual grasp doesn't amount to perception, or to a real grasp and use of the minor premise. Even though she has the facts right, there is a perfectly good, though quite non-Socratic, sense in which she doesn't know what she is doing.

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

If I am right, the Aristotelian account quietly turns this picture on its head, pointing out that *akrasia* is frequently (though not always) caused by an excess of

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

theory and a deficiency in passional response. The person who acts akratically against his or her knowledge of the good is frequently quite capable of performing correctly in all the intellectual ways; what she lacks is the heart's confrontation with concrete ethical reality. We could express this by saying that knowledge needs responsiveness to be effective in action; we could also say that in the absence of correct response there is no, or no full, practical knowledge. The Aristotelian account, putting things in the second way, urges us to think of real practical insight and understanding as a complex matter involving the whole soul. The opposite of Platonic knowledge is ignorance; the opposite of Aristotelian perception can, in some cases, be ignorance; but it can also, in other cases, be denial or self-deceptive rationalization.

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

All this, once again, has clear implications for the contemporary theory of choice. Many contemporary theories of rationality, as taught and practiced in the academy and in public life, share the goals and the policies of Mr. Gradgrind. That is, they make every attempt to cultivate calculative intellect and none at all to cultivate "fancy" and emotion. They do not concern themselves with the books

48. On all these issues, see *Fragility*, especially chap. 3, Interlude 2. [Also, in this volume, "Fictions" and "Love's Knowledge."]

(especially works of literature) that would cultivate those responses; indeed they implicitly deny their relevance to rationality. Aristotle tells us in no uncertain terms that people of practical wisdom, both in public and in private life, will cultivate emotion and imagination in themselves and in others, and will be very careful not to rely too heavily on a technical or purely intellectual theory that might stifle or impede these responses. They will promote an education that cultivates fancy and feeling through works of literature and history, teaching appropriate occasions for and degrees of response. They will consider it childish and immature *not* to cry or be angry or otherwise to experience and display passion where the situation calls for it. In looking for private models and public leaders, we should desire to be assured of their sensitivity and emotional depth, as well as of their intellectual competence.

IV. The Three Elements Together

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

Noncommensurability, as we have said, is not sufficient for the priority of particular to universal. But commensurability in the strong form of Singleness is certainly sufficient for the priority of both the general and the universal to the particular: for the single measure will have to be some sort of highly general universal, that is, one thing that turns up in qualitatively the same way in many different things. Even the limited commensurability of Metricity is sufficient for the rejection of unique nonrepeatable properties from practical salience. And we can see that the general spirit of Aristotle's noncommensurability leads directly to and supports his account of the priority of particulars. For his noncommensurability says, Look and see how rich and diverse the ultimate values in the world are. Do not fail to investigate each valuable item, cherishing it for its own specific nature and not reducing it to something else. These injunctions lead in the direction of a long and open-ended list—for we would not want to rule out beforehand the possibility that some new item will turn up whose own separate nature is irreducibly distinct from those we have previously recognized. In the context of friendship and love, especially, these injunctions are virtually certain to guarantee that the list of ultimate values will include some nonrepeatable particular items: for each friend is to be cherished for his or her own sake, not simply as an instantiation of the universal value, friendship. And it appears that this will include not only character, but also a shared history of mutuality. In this way, although Aris-

total does have independent arguments for the priority of particulars (those having to do with indefiniteness and mutability), the first two elements certainly support each other well.

The account of emotion and imagination gives further support to and is supported by both elements. For it is in the nature of imagination, as we have said, to recognize highly concrete and, frequently, uniquely particular objects. And the objects to which we are most strongly attached by our passions are frequently like this as well. In the *Politics*, arguing against Plato, Aristotle says that the two things that above all make people love and care for something are the thought that it is all their own and the thought that it's the only one they have (1262b22–3); so our most intense feelings of love and fear and grief are likely to be directed at objects and persons who are seen as irreducibly particular in their nature and in their relationship to us. To argue that emotion and imagination are essential components of practical knowing and judging is to suggest very strongly that good judging will at least in part be a matter of focusing on the concrete and even the particular, which will be seen as incommensurate with other things. And in *EN X.9* he indeed explicitly connects the loving relation between parent and child with an ethical knowledge that is superior to that of the public educator in its concrete particularity (1180b7–13). On the other hand, to defend noncommensurability is to reopen the space in which the emotions and imagination operate and have their force. A Platonist ethical position, Aristotle plausibly argues, undermines the strength of the emotions (*Pol.* 1262b23–4); and Plato himself would concede that belief in commensurability and universality at least cuts away many of the most common emotional reactions, since he, too, grants that these are based on perceptions of specialness. Again, to defend the priority of particulars is to inform us that imagination can play a role in deliberation that cannot be altogether replaced by the functioning of abstract thought. It would be possible to defend a flexible context-oriented perception of particulars without giving a prominent role to emotion and imagination; for one might try to describe a purely intellectual faculty that would by itself be adequate for seizing the relevant features. There is some precedent for this in some pre-Aristotelian Greek accounts of practical wisdom, which defend an improvisatory contextual use of reason that looks very cool, wily, and self-controlled.⁴⁹ Aristotle would feel, I think, that this sort of reason was insufficient for the sensitive task of deliberating about ends, though it might be all right for technical means–end reasoning. Here he is in agreement with an important tradition in Athenian political thought. For although Thucydides, as we have mentioned, praises the resourceful improvisational ability of Themistocles without mention of emotions, the funeral oration of Pericles makes it abundantly clear that full political rationality requires passion, and the sort of judgment that is made with and through love and vision. Athenians are to cultivate the ability to conceive in imagination of their city's greatness and still greater promise; and they are to “fall in love” with her when they see this greatness (*II.43.1*). He would probably conclude, not implausibly, that a citizen who did not feel this love had in a certain way failed to perceive both Athens and his own place in her.

One final connection between this feature and the other two: if one believes,

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

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

The three elements fit together, then, to form a coherent picture of practical choice. I see no significant tensions among them, and numerous reasons why the defender of one will wish to defend the others as well. They seem to articulate different aspects of a single idea. We might characterize this central idea, borrowing a phrase from Henry James, as one of becoming "finely aware and richly responsible"; of being a person on whom nothing is lost."⁵⁰ Being responsibly committed to the world of value before her, the perceiving agent can be counted on to investigate and scrutinize the nature of each item and each situation, to respond to what is there before her with full sensitivity and imaginative vigor, not to fall short of what is there to be seen and felt because of evasiveness, scientific abstractness, or a love of simplification. The Aristotelian agent is a person whom we could trust to describe a complex situation with full concreteness of detail and emotional shading, missing nothing of practical relevance. As James writes, "The person capable of feeling in the given case more than another of what is to be felt for it, and so serving in the highest degree to record it dramatically and objectively, is the only sort of person on whom we can count not to betray, to cheapen, or, as we say, give away the value and beauty of the thing."⁵¹ But this means that the person of practical wisdom lies surprisingly close to the artist and/or the perceiver of art, not in the sense that this conception reduces moral value to aesthetic value or makes moral judgment a matter of taste, but in the sense that we are asked to see morality as a high type of vision of and response to the particular, an ability that we seek and value in our greatest artists, and especially our novelists, whose value for us is above all practical and never detached from our questions about how to live. Fine conduct requires above all correct description; such description is itself a form of morally assessable conduct. "To 'put' things is very exactly and responsibly and interminably to do them." The novelist is a moral agent; and the moral agent, to the extent to which she is good, shares in the abilities of the novelist.⁵²

V. Yearnings of Thought, Excursions of Sympathy

Let us examine this conception further, then, by turning to a novel. The believer in a general system of rules or a general decision procedure could at this point go on to enumerate those rules or to describe that procedure. The Aristotelian tells us that we must instead look for instruction to exemplary, experienced models of

50. H. James, *The Princess Casamassima* (New York, 1907-9) I. 169.

51. *Ibid.*, preface, I. xiii.

52. *Golden Bowl*, Preface; see "'Finely Aware,'" this volume.

practical wisdom. The commitment of Aristotelian practical wisdom to rich descriptions of qualitative heterogeneity, to context-sensitive perceiving, and to emotional and imaginative activity has already suggested to us that certain sorts of novels would be good places to see the good of this conception fittingly expressed. And, as I have already suggested, I believe that the novels of Henry James are such novels: that if we want to know more about the content of the Aristotelian way of choosing, and why it is good, we cannot do better than to turn to one of them. I can also think of no better way to indicate the distance between this picture and the picture of choice present in decision theories of many kinds than to show and comment upon the kind of prose in which the Aristotelian view is appropriately embodied.

To juxtapose Aristotle and James is not to deny that in many salient features their conceptions of reasoning are not identical. They have relevantly different conceptions of consciousness, of the nature and taxonomy of the emotions; and all of this should be borne in mind. And yet the convergence of sympathies is more striking than these differences; nor is the convergence purely fortuitous. For one thing, numerous lines of influence connect James with Aristotle—from his own direct reading to indirect philosophical and literary influences of many kinds. But it is more important still to point out that if in fact, as I have suggested, this conception truly answers to deep human intuitions about practical reason, intuitions that recur in much, though not exactly, the same form across differences of time and place, then it is no surprise that two perceptive writers about practical reason should independently converge upon them. The problems of choosing well have a remarkable persistence; convergence on a good response requires less explanation than convergence in error.

It may appear peculiar to place such a long and mysterious piece of prose at the heart of an article. It is intended to appear so; and the reader should reflect on the difference, asking what is missing in moral philosophies that deny themselves resources of this sort.

Here, then, from the final pages of Henry James's *The Golden Bowl*, is a part of Maggie Verver's deliberation:

'Well—?' Mrs. Assingham urged.

'Well, I hope—!'

'Hope he'll see her?'

Maggie hesitated, however; she made no direct reply. 'It's useless hoping,' she presently said. 'She won't. But he ought to.' Her friend's expression of a moment before, which had been apologised for as vulgar, prolonged its sharpness to her ear—that of an electric bell under continued pressure. Stated so simply, what was it but dreadful, truly, that the feasibility of Charlotte's 'getting at' the man who for so long had loved her should now be in question? Strangest of all things doubtless this care of Maggie's as to what might make for it or make against it; stranger still her fairly lapsing at moments into a vague calculation of the conceivability, on her own part, with her husband, of some direct sounding of the subject. Would it be too monstrous, her suddenly breaking out to him as in alarm at the lapse of the weeks: 'Wouldn't it really seem that you're bound in honour to do something for her privately before they go?' Maggie was capable of weighing the risk of this adventure for her own spirit, capable of sinking to intense little absences, even

while conversing as now with the person who had most of her confidence, during which she followed up the possibilities. It was true that Mrs Assingham could at such times somewhat restore the balance by not wholly failing to guess her thought. Her thought however just at present had more than one face—had a series that it successively presented. These were indeed the possibilities involved in the adventure of her concerning herself for the quantity of compensation Mrs Verver might still look to. There was always the possibility that she *was* after all sufficiently to get at him—there was in fact that of her having again and again done so. Against this stood nothing but Fanny Assingham's apparent belief in her privation—more mercilessly imposed or more hopelessly felt in the actual relation of the parties; over and beyond everything that from more than three months back of course had fostered in the Princess a like conviction. These assumptions might certainly be baseless—inasmuch as there were hours and hours of Amerigo's time that there was no habit, no pretence of his accounting for; inasmuch too as Charlotte, inevitably, had had more than once, to the undisguised knowledge of the pair in Portland Place, been obliged to come up to Eaton Square, whence so many of her personal possessions were in course of removal. She didn't come to Portland Place—didn't even come to ask for luncheon on two separate occasions when it reached the consciousness of the household there that she was spending the day in London. Maggie hated, she scorned, to compare hours and appearances, to weigh the idea of whether there hadn't been moments during these days when an assignation in easy conditions, a snatched interview in an air the season had so cleared of prying eyes, mightn't perfectly work. But the very reason of this was partly that, haunted with the vision of the poor woman carrying off with such bravery as she found to her hand the secret of her not being appeased, she was conscious of scant room for any alternative image. The alternative image would have been that the secret covered up was the secret of appeasement somehow obtained, somehow extorted and cherished; and the difference between the two kinds of hiding was too great to permit of a mistake. Charlotte was hiding neither pride nor joy—she was hiding humiliation; and here it was that the Princess's passion, so powerless for vindictive fights, most inveterately bruised its tenderness against the hard glass of her question.

Behind the glass lurked the *whole* history of the relation she had so fairly flattened her nose against it to penetrate—the glass Mrs Verver might at this stage have been frantically tapping from within by way of supreme irrepressible entreaty. Maggie had said to herself complacently after that last passage with her stepmother in the garden of Fawns that there was nothing left for her to do and that she could thereupon fold her hands. But why wasn't it still left to push further and, from the point of view of personal pride, grovel lower?—why wasn't it still left to offer herself as the bearer of a message reporting to him their friend's anguish and convincing him of her need? She could thus have translated Mrs Verver's tap against the glass, as I have called it, into fifty forms; could perhaps have translated it most into the form of a reminder that would pierce deep. 'You don't know what it is to have been loved and broken with. You haven't been broken with, because in *your* relation what can there have been worth speaking of to break? Ours was everything a relation could be, filled to the brim with the wine of consciousness; and if it was to have no meaning, no better meaning than that such a creature as you could breathe upon it, at your hour, for blight, why was I myself dealt with all for deception? why condemned after a couple of short years to find the golden flame—oh the golden flame!—a mere handful of black ashes?' Our young woman so yielded at moments to what was insidious in these

foredoomed ingenuities of her pity that for minutes together sometimes the weight of a new duty seemed to rest upon her—the duty of speaking before separation should constitute its chasm, of pleading for some benefit that might be carried away into exile like the last saved object of price of the *émigré*, the jewel wrapped in a piece of old silk and negotiable some day in the market of misery.

This imagined service to the woman who could no longer help herself was one of the traps set for Maggie's spirit at every turn of the road; the click of which, catching and holding the divine faculty fast, was followed inevitably by a flutter, by a struggle of wings and even, as we may say, by a scattering of fine feathers. For they promptly enough felt, these yearnings of thought and excursions of sympathy, the concussion that couldn't bring them down—the arrest produced by the so remarkably distinct figure that, at Fawns, for the previous weeks, was constantly crossing, in its regular revolution, the further end of any watched perspective. Whoever knew, or whoever didn't, whether or to what extent Charlotte, with natural business in Eaton Square, had shuffled other opportunities under that cloak, it was all matter for the kind of quiet ponderation the little man who so kept his wandering way had made his own. It was part of the very inveteracy of his straw hat and his white waistcoat, of the trick of his hands in his pockets, of the detachment of the attention he fixed on his slow steps from behind his secure pince-nez. The thing that never failed now as an item in the picture was that gleam of the silken noose, his wife's immaterial tether, so marked to Maggie's sense during her last month in the country. Mrs Verver's straight neck had certainly not slipped it; nor had the other end of the long cord—oh quite conveniently long!—disengaged its smaller loop from the hooked thumb that, with his fingers closed upon it, her husband kept out of sight. To have recognised, for all its tenuity, the play of this gathered lasso might inevitably be to wonder with what magic it was twisted, to what tension subjected, but could never be to doubt either of its adequacy to its office or its perfect durability. These reminded states for the Princess were in fact states of renewed gaping. So many things her father knew that she even yet didn't!

All this at present with Mrs Assingham passed through her in quick vibrations. She had expressed while the revolution of her thought was incomplete the idea of what Amerigo 'ought' on his side, in the premises, to be capable of, and then had felt her companion's answering stare. But she insisted on what she had meant. 'He ought to wish to see her—and I mean in some protected and independent way, as he used to—in case of her being herself able to manage it. That,' said Maggie with the courage of her conviction, 'he ought to be ready, he ought to be happy, he ought to feel himself sworn—little as it is for the end of such a history!—to take from her. It's as if he wished to get off without taking anything.'

The first thing we notice, as we read through these pages, is that, by comparison with our standing toward an example of formal decision theory, and even toward a well developed nontechnical philosopher's example, we are at sea here. If we do not have some familiarity with the novel as a whole, it is very difficult to figure out what is being deliberated about and decided, much less what the meaning and weight of each of the factors is. In consequence of this, it is also hugely difficult to determine whether Maggie's thought and response here is rational and praiseworthy, or the opposite. To decide this would require us to know a great deal about her story as a whole; it would seem hasty and arbitrary to form any such judgment in advance of the fullest possible scrutiny of the entire novel. (More than this: this

novel, by emphasizing the fact that it is written from several among many possible points of view, reminds us again and again that the whole of the relevant reality is more complex yet than the text, that many potentially relevant insights are being denied us.) These very facts make the passage a good example of Aristotelianism. The rich contextuality of good choice, and its attentiveness to particulars in all their contextual embeddedness, imply that we should not expect to be able to plunge in so near the end of a complex story and comprehend or assess everything. As a good doctor will neither prescribe in advance of a full scrutiny of this patient's history nor assess the work of a fellow doctor without making herself master of all the contextual material this doctor used in arriving at her choice, so we cannot really expect that Maggie's reasons will be perspicuous to and assessible by us unless we immerse ourselves in her story. The fact that this example is really not excerptable is its virtue, and Maggie's. If everything she treats as relevant to her choice at the end of the passage *were* capable of being adequately summarized for us in these few paragraphs, her choice would almost certainly be irrational and bad. We would be highly suspicious of any real person who did choose with so little contextual baggage, in the way that philosophical examples all too often indicate. This means that we should really have quoted the whole novel as our example. It also means that in real life the models that will be most helpfully exemplary for us as Aristotelians will be those whose stories are known in sufficient detail that the meaning and richness of particular deliberations is comprehensible—namely, the lives of friends, and of characters in novels insofar as we allow these to become our friends. I have felt free to use the example only because I feel that by now I stand to the novel in the appropriate relation of friendship, a relation that, like deliberation itself, is affective as well as intellectual.⁵³

As soon as we notice that we are lost without the fuller context, we also discover that the style of this example sounds like something that does not belong in philosophy at all. To contrast it with the prose of an example in a theoretical work of decision theory would be too comic. But even the less scientific prose of a typical philosopher's example is simplicity itself next to this complex and mysterious construction, full of indefiniteness and obliquity, periphrasis and indirection, conveying the core of its meaning in metaphors and pictures rather than in logical formulae or in universal propositions. This is, I believe, the prose of Aristotelian perception, expressing the "yearnings of thought and excursions of sympathy" that the person of practical wisdom will perform. This prose expresses the commitment of the agent to confront all the complexities of the situation head on, in all their indeterminacy and particularity, and to regard the act of deliberation as an adventure of the personality as a whole. It depicts in its cadences the moral effort of straining to see correctly and to come up with the appropriate picture or description; its tensions, obliquities, and circumnavigations express the sheer difficulty of finding the right description or picture for what is there before one. If, as James says, to "put" is to "do," showing this is showing moral activity of a valuable kind.

As we examine further the content of this deliberation, we notice that each of the major features of Aristotelian deliberation is present, and in a way that ought

53. See Introduction, "Flawed Crystals," and "'Finely Aware,'" this volume.

to convince us that *this*, and not some simpler or neater thing, is what rationality requires. Noncommensurability is an interesting case in point. Earlier in the novel, Maggie has made a great point of conceiving of all the claims upon her as homogeneous along a single quantitative scale. Financial imagery for ethical values has been prominent, expressing this reductive strategy. Even when she is not using this imagery, she is continually showing, in a number of ways, her determination not to acknowledge conflicting obligations, not to waver from "that ideal consistency on which her moral comfort almost at any time depended." This involves her, repeatedly, in one or another sort of reinterpretation of the values with which she is concerned, so as to ensure that they harmonize with one another, are "round" rather than angular. A claim will be acknowledged only to the extent to which it consents to fit in with other claims that are held fixed; but this involves Maggie in considerable neglect of the separate nature of each distinct claim. For separate natures are rough-edged angular items that cannot always be easily slipped into a preexisting structure. Her architectural imagery, like the financial imagery of commensurability, expresses a denial of separate natures. The structure of the moral life is compared to solid, simple, clean-lined buildings, the pure white classical houses and the manicured gardens of Eaton Square rather than the ambiguous grays and complex shapes of Portland Place.⁵⁴

In this scene, as in much of the novel's second part, Maggie shows her recognition that commensurability in particular, consistent harmony in general, are not good aims for the rational deliberation of an adult woman. She allows herself to explore fully the separate nature of each pertinent claim, entering into it, wondering about what it is, attempting to do justice to it in feeling as well as thought. "Her thought . . . had more than one face—had a series that it successively presented." First she considers the situation of her husband and Charlotte, asking herself what account of their current relationship is the most probable. She then turns from this consideration of probabilities to a deeper inspection of Charlotte's character and the character of their love, attempting to understand it and its implications for her choice, allowing herself vividly to picture and imagine the suffering of her friend, in a way that brings home to her the moral difficulty of her own project, which is the cause of this suffering. Then, while she is nearly overwhelmed by pity, her "yearnings of thought and excursions of sympathy" are brought up short, as if by a collision, by the equally vivid picture of her father, who appears as it were before her as a "so remarkably distinct figure," forcing consideration of his claims. She used to see her father as the source of all moral claims, an authority with which nothing could be allowed to be in conflict. Now she sees him "contrasted and opposed, in short, objectively presented": that is, she sees *him*, in his own distinct nature, just because she now sees the particular way in which his needs and wishes are in tension with other claims. She has a vivid sense of his separateness and also of his qualitative individuality, just because of the "concussion" with which his interests oppose her sympathy for Charlotte. She sees him as the cause of Charlotte's captivity and pain, and sees therefore that any attempt to do justice to his needs must end by wronging and further paining her; on the other hand pity, and this project of being truthful, must threaten his control and his

54. For fuller development of these points, see "Flawed Crystals," this volume.

dignity.⁵⁵ As we follow all this we sense that this way of looking into the distinctness of separate and heterogeneous items is not *less* rational than her old adherence to commensurability or to weaker related principles. It is a way of growing up morally, of reasoning like a mature woman rather than a fearful child.

This case is also a very good place to understand what the Aristotelian means by insisting that the particular is prior to the general. It is not that Maggie drops, in the event, all her guiding principles, giving them up to some rudderless intuition about the irreducibly particular. Much of her deliberation is firmly historical, asking how past commitments undertaken and past actions performed bear on the situation at hand. It is seen as fully continuous with and falling under the influence of that past. Furthermore, we cannot understand the force that many of these commitments have for her if we do not use general terms. She expresses concern for such general and universalizable principles as promise-keeping, duties of gratitude to a friend who has given help and encouragement, duties of a child to a parent. If we described the particulars on which her thought dwells using proper names only, avoiding such general terms as "father," "husband," and "friend," we would not properly capture the meaning they have for her. She does not simply think of Adam as a radically unique item generating claims that are *sui generis*. And even where the terms of her reflection are highly *concrete*—for example, when she thinks of what she owes to a friend with whom she has a certain sort of concrete history—much of her thought is universalizable, carrying with it the implication that if exactly similar circumstances arose in any time and place, the same choice would again be right. All of this is consistent with Aristotelianism, which lays great stress on good habits and on a commitment to the general definitions of the virtues.⁵⁶

Moreover, in her willingness to admit a conflict of duties and commitments, Maggie is even more true to her antecedent general principles than would be an agent who simply denied that there could be a real conflict of duties, or one who viewed the conflict in terms of greater and lesser amounts of one and the same thing. For the fact that the world produces a tragic conflict of "oughts" does not cause her either to judge that one of the conflicting principles no longer binds her or to rewrite the nature of the conflict so that it no longer presents the same tragic aspect. Far from being more rootless and ad hoc, Aristotelian deliberation is in this way more faithful to its past than many other types that have been proposed.⁵⁷

But at the same time there are several ways in which the concrete particularity of Maggie's situation is prior to general guidelines. First, she is prepared to recognize non-repeatable and unique items as morally relevant alongside the universalizable. "Father" does not exhaustively describe the morally salient features of her situation with Adam, nor is the "so remarkably distinct figure" who appears before her an abstract Parent. The general and universal description must be completed by attention to his personal qualities and to their unique personal history—

55. See the interpretation of her earlier encounter with her father in "'Finely Aware,'" this volume.

56. See Introduction and Note to "'Finely Aware,'" this volume.

57. See, for the charge to which this is a reply, Hilary Putnam, "Taking Rules Seriously: A Response to Martha Nussbaum," *New Literary History* 15 (1983) 193–200; and also my reply in the same issue.

just as her concern for the relation of “best friend” must be completed by thought and feeling about who Charlotte individually is. Some of this will be universalizable, though not in the least general; some of it will not be universalizable. But if we rewrote the passage so as to leave in the repeatable features and omit the vivid and specific pictures and the nonrepeatable memories, we would have lost a lot of its moral richness, and the deliberation would seem bizarrely irrational.

Then too, Maggie sees, as an Aristotelian ought to, how the contextual interweaving of the various items in the scene shades their moral meaning. She must consider not simply what, in a general way, her duties to her friend Charlotte are. She must think what they are given Charlotte’s concrete situation, on which she focuses in agonizing detail. In order to judge what to urge, even in order to say what each one of her possibly conflicting obligations requires, she must imagine what Charlotte’s current situation is, what she is likely to be feeling and desiring. A beneficent action that did not fit itself to the concrete requirements of that silent suffering and that concealed humiliation would not be morally correct, any more than a move in navigation that was all right by the book but chosen without regard to the concrete circumstances of the navigator would be the correct navigational choice. We can say more. It is not simply that the action, to be correct, must be “tuned” to its context. We can also see that there is no way of describing the chosen action itself without reference to features of context that are far too concrete to figure in a usefully action-guiding principle, and in many cases not altogether universalizable. Maggie’s choice is not to urge a last confrontation in order to permit a result that protects the dignity of the family; it is to favor a certain way of dealing with Charlotte’s particular pain in the circumstances, in order to protect the dignity of a very particular father. The tonality of the action (or non-action) itself is particular and enmeshed, and can hardly be well described (if we want to capture its *rightness*) without the subtleties of the novelist.

Finally, the particular is prior in the sense that Maggie persistently permits discovery and surprise, even a surprise that might cause serious reversal in her entire ethical conception. The first half of the novel shows her approaching other people as if they were sculptures or paintings, situations as if they were all episodes of contemplation of one’s collection of such objects. The objects do not act or move; they lack the power to behave in unpredictable and alarming ways; the whole moral scene has about it an atmosphere of cool contemplative control. The second half shows her thinking instead in the imagery of theatrical improvisation. She has become an actress who suddenly discovers that her script is not written in advance and she must “quite heroically” improvise her role. “Preparation and practice had come but a short way; her part opened out, and she invented from moment to moment what to say and to do.” I postpone a full discussion of this revealing metaphor to the next section; but clearly it indicates a keen sense of responsibility to the moment and an openness to such surprises as it may contain.

Maggie’s deliberation shows us quite clearly what it means to say that imagination and emotional response have a guiding role to play in perception and that they are partly constitutive of moral knowledge. Had she approached the situation of Charlotte and Amerigo and Adam with the intellect alone, it is very doubtful that she could have seen in it all that she is able to see. The images of Charlotte tapping on the glass, of Adam walking along holding Charlotte as in an invisible

halter, have an ability to communicate to her and to express the precise ethical significance of Charlotte's predicament; this ability would, we feel, be absent from any confrontation with Charlotte that avoided the use of images. And we see, too, how closely intertwined this imaginative function is with the work of the emotions. Maggie's pictures are suffused with feeling; indeed, we sometimes see that the picture is suggested or engendered by an emotion. Her thoughts are brought up short by a *concussion*, which then finds its expression in the picture of her father walking. The emotional shock or surge of concern for Adam is the source of the way in which she then pictures him. And emotion seems to be an indefeasible element *in* the picture. She imagines Adam as a beloved father; her image is itself loving. (We could as well say that it is a characteristic of her vivid and highly responsive emotional life to use images. We could not give a good account of her emotions without mentioning how she sees the objects of her loves and anxieties.) And all of this fused and highly complex material appears to be essential in leading her to a correct ethical perception of each of the claims upon her. If she had not permitted herself to see Adam in that sort of detail, to be "brought up short" by that concussive picture, she would not have understood what she owed him in that circumstance. Emotions can be excessive and misleading, as we see from the moment in which her comprehensive effort to do justice to the entire situation almost founders in the surge of her pity for Charlotte. But correction comes, when it comes, not in the form of a cool intellectual judgment, but in the form of the self-critical feeling-infused picture of the bird in the cage, which then makes room for the complex image of Adam, beloved and fearful, strolling across the forefront of her mind with the silken noose between his fingers.

And once again, I think we want to insist that these excursions of imagination and yearnings of sympathy do not serve as means only, to an intellectual knowledge that is in principle (though not perhaps in fact) separable from them. We see no such knowing here. The intent focusing on the concrete, an activity in which all of her personality is actively involved, looks like an end in itself. Suppose we rewrite the scene, adding on, after the Adam picture, several sentences of the type, "From this she inferred that her duty to her father was. . ." Would we be convinced that this further stage represented real progress in moral knowing? Does it add anything to the "quick vibrations" of her perception? The Aristotelian claims that it does not—except, perhaps, in the sense that it fossilizes or preserves the work of perception in a form in which it could be tapped on another occasion as a guide, or a substitute should there be no time for full perception. On the contrary, the Aristotelian will insist that the intellectual conclusion may well even be a regression or falling off from the fullest knowing or acknowledging of the situation, defensible in the way I have indicated, but also dangerous, since fossilized partial knowing can too easily become a form of denial unless it is continually awakened into perception.

Finally, we are told by the Aristotelian view that the exercise of practical wisdom is itself a human excellence, an activity of intrinsic value apart from its tendency to produce virtuous actions. Our case gives us a vivid sense of what this position comes to. Both before and after the pages of thought that are quoted here, Maggie speaks and acts in more or less the same way. She does not change her

mind, or speak and act differently. James draws our attention to this by the sentence, "But she insisted on what she had meant," and by ascribing to her, before and after, almost identical words. But he also insists that before the thoughts recorded, "the revolution of her thought was incomplete." If this deliberation has a moral value, it seems not to lie in its productivity of overt activities. But we are convinced that it does have a moral value.⁵⁸ Something significant has been added by her faithful confrontation with all of the factors, even if the decision itself remains unchanged. The silent inner work of perception is shown here as a praiseworthy case of human excellence in its own right. This means that its constituent parts are constituent parts, as well, of the good life for this human being.

VI. An Empty Situation Morality?

This ethical norm will be charged with being empty of content. In one sense this charge is correct. Because of the priority of the particular, we can give no general account of deliberative priorities, and also no general account of the techniques and procedures of good deliberation, that would suffice to discriminate good from defective choice in advance of a confrontation with the matter of the case. A general account may give us necessary conditions for choosing well; it cannot by itself give sufficient conditions. Aristotle says this plainly: just as the agent's own decision rests with perception, so too does our decision as to whether he or she has chosen well. The demand to set up exhaustive general criteria for correct perception should be resisted (*EN* 1126b2–4). In Aristotle's city the people of practical wisdom do not go about with placards on their backs, so that all we need to do is to follow them. Nor can we ever in life have a complete water-tight guarantee that perception has in a particular case been correctly exercised. There are no sufficient conditions: our own decision rests with perception.

But the charge of emptiness has been made in a stronger and more troubling form. Hilary Putnam, commenting on a previous attempt of mine to elicit an Aristotelian picture of choice from *The Golden Bowl*, suggested that this view is in danger of collapsing into "an empty situation morality" in which everything is "a matter of trade-offs."⁵⁹ I take it that this amounts to the charge that the agent who puts so much weight on the concrete choice situation and judges primarily with a view to the demands of the situation will be deficient in ethical continuity and commitment over time, lacking in firm principles and in a reliable general conception of the good life. So long as the agent agonizes enough over the material of the case, she can do anything she likes.

We have begun to answer this charge already, by insisting on the role that general principles play as guides inside Maggie Verver's deliberation. We have also pointed out that the ability of the Aristotelian conception to recognize conflicts of duties permits a deeper sort of fidelity to principles than we get in many ethical

58. See "Finely Aware," this volume, and Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London, 1970).

59. Putnam, "Taking Rules Seriously."

conceptions. But we now need to go further to answer Putnam: for this will permit us to give a richer account than we have so far of the interplay of the general and the particular in Aristotelian choice.

We can begin by returning to the metaphor of theatrical improvisation, which is a favorite Jamesian as well as Aristotelian image for the activity of practical wisdom. Maggie Verver is an actress who has prepared and practiced, and now discovers that she must "quite heroically," "from moment to moment," improvise her role. Does she, in learning to improvise, adopt a way of choosing in which there are no principles and everything is ad hoc? (Perhaps: in which everything is permitted)? The image of the actress suggests how inaccurate such an inference would be. The salient difference between acting from a script and improvising is that one has to be not less but far *more* keenly attentive to what is given by the other actors and by the situation. You cannot get away with doing anything by rote; you must be actively aware and responsive at every moment, ready for surprises, so as not to let the others down. An improvising actress, if she is improvising well, does not feel that she can say just anything at all. She must suit her choice to the evolving story, which has its own form and continuity. Above all, she must preserve the commitments of her character to the other characters (of herself as actress to the other actors). More, not less, attentive fidelity is required.

Consider the analogous contrast between a symphony player and a jazz musician. For the former, commitments and continuities are external, coming from the score and the conductor. Her job is to interpret those signals. The jazz player, actively forging continuity, must choose in full awareness of and responsibility to the historical traditions of the form, and actively honor at every moment her commitments to her fellow musicians, whom she had better know as well as possible as unique individuals. She will be more responsible than the score-reader, not less, to the unfolding continuities and structures of the work. (We can also say that as the classical player ascends the scale of musical excellence, so to speak, becoming not simply a rote reader of the score but an active thinking interpreter who freshly realizes the work at each performance, she resembles more and more the jazz musician in the nature of her attention.)

These two cases indicate to us, then, that the perceiver who improvises morally is doubly responsible: responsible to the history of commitment and to the ongoing structures that go to constitute her context; and especially responsible to these, in that her commitments are forged freshly on each occasion, in an active and intelligent confrontation between her own history and the requirements of the occasion.

In ethical terms, what this means is that the perceiver brings to the new situation a history of general conceptions and commitments, and a host of past obligations and affiliations (some general, some particular), all of which contribute to and help to constitute her evolving conception of good living. The organized internalization of these commitments constitutes her character. She will see the situation as made up, in good part, out of general items; her moral description of it will use (as we saw) terms such as "father" and "friend." It will also acknowledge obligations, both general and particular, that bear upon her responsibility in this situation. This will be so, as we said, even where to do so brings the pain of conflict; for this is a part of acknowledging this concrete situation for the situation it is.

Perception, we might say, is a process of loving conversation between rules and concrete responses, general conceptions and unique cases, in which the general articulates the particular and is in turn further articulated by it. The particular is constituted out of features both repeatable and nonrepeatable; it is outlined by the structure of general terms, and it also contains the unique images of those we love.⁶⁰ The general is dark, uncommunicative, if it is not realized in a concrete image; but a concrete image or description would be inarticulate, in fact mad, if it contained no general terms. The particular is prior for the reasons and in the ways that we have said; there are relevant nonrepeatable properties, there is some revisability. In the end the general is only as good as its role in the correct articulation of the concrete. But particular human contexts are never, if seen well, *sui generis* in all of their elements, nor divorced from a past full of obligations. And fidelity to those, as a mark of humanity, is one of the most essential values of perception.⁶¹

And we now see another way in which novels can play an important role in the articulation of an Aristotelian morality. For novels, as a genre, direct us to attend to the concrete; they display before us a wealth of richly realized detail, presented as relevant for choice. And yet they speak to us: they ask us to imagine possible relations between our own situations and those of the protagonists, to identify with the characters and/or the situation, thereby perceiving those similarities and differences. In this way their structure suggests, as well, that much of moral relevance is universalizable: learning about Maggie Verver's situation helps us understand our own.

One more point can be added: that Aristotelian deliberation, as I conceive of it, is concerned very deeply with one general notion above all: the notion of the human being. The starting point of an Aristotelian inquiry in ethics is the question, "How should a human being live?" (see Introduction). And the general answer to this question suggested by Aristotle himself is, "In accordance with all the forms of good functioning that make up a complete human life." The notion of good human functioning steers and guides the inquiry at a deep level, focusing attention on certain features of situations rather than others. The agent brings to the situation of choice her evolving picture of the good or complete human life. She views the situation as one in which good human functioning will or will not be realized; and the concept "human being" is one of the very most central ones she uses to demarcate it, in thinking about others and about herself. She views the good particular judgment as a further articulation of this evolving conception of the human good—or as a revision of it, if it should seem defective. Nothing is unrevisable; but the guidance of the tentative conception is very important in her thought about what occasions the situation creates for functioning of various kinds. Furthermore, as "Transcending" argues, this concept is not optional. Any choice that will be a good choice *for her* must be a good choice for her *as a human being*. This contributes in no small measure to our feeling that the Aristotelian

60. "'Finely Aware'" shows that things are slightly more complicated: in some cases general terms cannot even *outline* the particular, in that the distinction between general good and bad rests in getting the particulars right.

61. See Introduction, and endnote to "'Finely Aware,'" this volume.

conception is not at all rootless (far less so, for example, than deliberation schemes based upon one's preferences of the moment), and to our feeling that it does give the agent good guidance as to the direction her thought might take.

This is a large issue; and its further implications cannot be pursued here. I have studied them elsewhere.⁶² But one especially important point should be mentioned: the Aristotelian view does not imply subjectivism, or even relativism. The insistence that deliberation must take contextual features into account does not imply that the deliberated choice is correct only relative to local norms. Aristotelian particularism is fully compatible with the view that what perception aims to see is (in some sense) the way things are; it requires further argument to decide on the best interpretation of the position here. And surely the use of the concept "human being" will play an important role in suiting the conception to make cross-cultural judgments and to ground a cross-cultural debate.⁶³ So if Putnam's worry is partly on this score, I think there is little basis for it.

And here, we should add, novels once again prove appropriate vehicles for the Aristotelian conception. For while they do speak concretely about human beings in their varied social contexts, and see the social context in each case as relevant to choice, they also have built into their very structure a sense of our common humanity. They speak to human beings about human beings, and the sense of a common human form of life, characterized by certain possibilities and certain sorts of finitude, is a powerful link among them, and between each of them and its readers. The concrete is seen as a scene for human functioning, and the reader is invited to assess it accordingly. Thus, while it is extremely difficult, and frequently impossible, to assess intuitively, as a possibility for oneself, an ethical or religious treatise from an extremely different cultural tradition, novels cross these boundaries far more vigorously, engaging the reader in emotions of compassion and love that make the reader herself a participant in the society in question, and an assessor of what it offers as material for human life in the world. Thus in their very structure they contain the interplay between the evolving general conception and the rich perception of the particular; and they teach the reader to navigate resourcefully between those two levels.

VII. Improvising When to Improvise

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

62. On this point see "Nature, Function, and Capability," "Non-Relative Virtues"; also "Aristotle on Human Nature and the Foundations of Ethics" (n. 19). See also Wiggins, "Deliberation."

63. "Non-Relative Virtues" and "Aristotle on Human Nature" provide further arguments on this point.

the right and not the wrong time, with the right and not the wrong sort and amount of flexibility?'⁶⁴

The answer shows another dimension of the priority of the particular in good deliberation. For it must be: there is no general rule for this, the discrimination rests with perception. The experienced navigator will sense when to follow the rule book and when to leave it aside. The "right rule" in such matters is simply: do it the way an experienced navigator would do it. There is no safe guarantee at all, no formula, and no shortcut. And yet this absence of formula does not mean that we have *laissez-faire*, or that any choice one makes is all right. There are many ways of wrecking a ship in a storm, and very few ways of sailing it well. As Aristotle says, "There are many ways of missing the target . . . and only one way of hitting it; so one is easy and the other is hard" (1106b28–32).⁶⁵ Nor does it mean that we have no place to turn for guidance. We turn to stories of practical wisdom, both for representations of fine attention, and in order to be formed ourselves, as readers, into just such attentive and discriminating beings.

Has anything been said here? Does all this have any content? This question keeps on returning. For there is a tendency, both in philosophy and in life, to seek out theories that fix things in advance. It seems both shameful and dangerous to have accomplished so little and to have left so much to the occasions of life. The answer is: just as much content as the truth.

VIII. Public and Private: The Perceiver as Leader

We have spoken primarily about individual and private choice. We have given as our example a woman agonizing in a solitary way over what to do. And there is reason for this. For in the discrimination of perception the emphasis is on the private and separate work of each individual judge, who must greet each new situation with responsive flexibility. Rules are in the public domain; we can imagine them being followed by a community as a whole. In the same way, a general maximizing technique can obviously be applied to the situation of a large group, taken as a whole. In Aristotelian perception, things look otherwise. The emphasis on the inner work of imagination and emotion, the value ascribed to improvisational resourcefulness, the claim that the "matter of the practical" has an indefiniteness that is hard to put into words at all—all this leads us naturally to think of the view as a model for personal choice that has little applicability to the public sphere. And often in contemporary ethical theory those who are sympathetic to an Aristotelian morality for personal choice make at the same time a strong distinction

64. This is isomorphic to, though not the same question as, the question about when to maintain a balanced vision of the good of all and when to take up the exclusive attention characteristic of love as that question is raised in "Flawed Crystals," "Perceptive Equilibrium," and "Steerforth's Arm," this volume.

65. Here we should probably see a difference between the case of improvisatory ethics and the case of theatrical or musical improvisation: in the latter, there is an indefinite plurality of ways of making a right choice. This is connected with the fact that in ethics the agent is more deeply bound to past obligations, or bound in a different way: see "Finely Aware," this volume.

between public and private, insisting that public procedures should be more explicit and codified than the Aristotelian procedure would recommend.⁶⁶

Aristotle did not share this view. In fact, it is evident that in many of the passages we have discussed he is above all concerned with the conduct of public life. Passages attacking commensurability, and some of those indicating the limits of general rules, are found in his discussions of law and political systems. The virtue of equity and the use of the flexible ruler are properties of a good political judge. Aristotle's ideal person of practical wisdom is no solitary Jamesian heroine, but a politically active citizen of Athens; Pericles is an example. Indeed, even when we read those parts of his discussion that appear to be about personal choice, we must remember that there is no strong distinction between the public and the private in Aristotle's ethical conception. The good human life is a life with and toward others; membership in a *polis* is an important part of one's other-directed activity. And each of the virtues is said to have a social aspect:⁶⁷ this is what it means to say that in a way justice is the entirety of human excellence. Even the idea that correct emotional response is part and parcel of virtue, even the idea that literature and poetry can teach this element of the virtues—these are for Aristotle thoroughly public ideas. Athenian males did not reserve expression of love, grief, and anger for the privacy of the home. The public sphere was suffused with the emotional and imaginative energy that we sometimes associate, instead, with the private sphere, just as the sphere of the household was itself suffused with public concern. Dramatic poetry was a central part of a major public festival; Aristotelian philosophy presents itself as valuable for public practice.

In insisting that perception is the norm for political rationality, Aristotle is not innovating, though he is taking sides in a controversy of long standing. For his picture has, as we have suggested, strong links with the ideals of Periclean Athens; and his criticisms of general rules are at the same time criticisms of some of the political ideals of Sparta. As Thucydides represents the contrast, Spartan morality taught that civic strength and courage can best be promoted by a system of inflexible rules, to which all citizens are to regard themselves as thoroughly subservient. Spartans are characterized as cautious, slow, heavy. They are taught not even to think of improvising on their own, not to think their own intelligence more reliable than the law's guidance. ("We are educated to be too unlearned to look down on the law with contempt," I.84.) Nor are they to attend, in decision making, to the particularities of individuals and situations: for their king Archidamus reminds them that individuals do not differ very much—and he seems to connect this reminder with the injunction to trust the rule as a sufficient guide.⁶⁸ Both qualitative heterogeneity and the separateness of each individual chooser are denied in Spartan morality, as is, apparently, the value of personal emotional and imaginative engagement.

Athenian political morality, by contrast, elevates concrete perceptions above rule-following and makes public policy a matter of creative improvisation. The highest virtue of a leader is Themistocles' ability "to improvise on his own what

66. See, for one prominent example, S. Hampshire, *Morality and Conflict*

67. For the interpretation of this claim, see *Fragility*, chap. 12.

68. See Thuc. I. 84.

the concrete situation requires" (*autoschediazein ta deonta*). Athenian political life is characterized by intense attention to the particularities of individuals and situations. Its education teaches young citizens to "use their judgment as most intimately their own" (I.70); and self-directed judgment (educated in part by the love of art and music, whereas Spartan education is constituted by laborious drill) learns to value the distinctive qualities of each person and situation. Athenian political life is characterized as innovative, daring, mobile, "many-colored." And it is also full of feeling. Pericles is explicit on this point, as we have seen (see p. 83). He wants neither subservient followers nor calculating technocrats; he wants improvisers whose creativity is animated by passion.⁶⁹

Aristotelian perception is, then, a style of public rationality. Can we take it seriously in this role? We need to ask, first, whether we want leaders and policy-makers who reason in the Aristotelian way. Then we will go on to ask what form of government might support the Aristotelian abilities.

First, then, do we, and should we, demand that our public leaders reason as Aristotle recommends? In assessing their behavior do we, and should we, look for the improvisatory imagination and the rich responsiveness that characterizes Aristotle's good and equitable judge? Hampshire has objected that Aristotelian perception is not explicit, not codified enough for public life. It is sometimes rather difficult to tell whether the claim is that Aristotle's is not a good ideal, or that, though a good ideal, it will not work in practice in many cases. The second claim is insisted on by Aristotle himself. For he insists, as we have said, that we need formal procedures and codified rules in the public sphere for a number of reasons: to speed up the working-through of complex material that could not be surveyed by perception in the available time; to guard against corruption in situations where bias could easily distort judgment; and, in general, to provide a context of choice for those whose reasoning we do not really trust.⁷⁰ The rule of law is defended and given a place of honor in Aristotelian politics.

And yet Aristotle made a distinction. He concedes repeatedly that rules *must* frequently be used in public life, and that this is better than any available alternative. He denies, however, that they are the norm toward which the public domain should strive. Can we make sense of this distinction and accept this point? Or do we believe that the judgment of the person of practical wisdom is a norm *in principle* unsuitable for the public sphere? And to what in our institutions might the recognition of such an ideal correspond?

Aristotle speaks of the equity of the flexible ruler as the virtue of a good judge. And his idea is that a judge of practical wisdom, rather than being unreflectively subservient to law, will apply it in accordance with his very own ethical judgment, looking attentively at the history and the circumstances of his city as he does so. He believes that including this element of flexible ethical judgment in the institutions of the city gives it a moral reach and vision that it would not otherwise have. Legislators, too, should show practical wisdom and vision; but it is striking that Aristotle singles out the judicial context as one in which equitable response is most especially required.

69. See Thuc. II. 37ff.

70. See Aristotle's *De Motu*, Essay 4.

Aristotle's demand corresponds closely to a prominent strand in our American tradition of legal and judicial reasoning. The dialogue between rule and perception in Aristotelian morality has a close and interesting relationship to the procedures of a good judge, who must bring to bear, in the concrete situation, her knowledge of law, the history of precedent, her own sense of the moral convictions embodied in the law, and her understanding of the case before her. Although there are, in the American legal debate, conflicting understandings of what a judge should be doing, several contending theories agree in rejecting, as normative in the process of judicial reasoning, the marks of "scientific" reasoning that Aristotle attacks. Few would urge legal reasoning to reduce qualitative distinctions to quantitative distinctions. And most insist on the centrality of the confrontation with the complexities of particular cases, seen as parts of a concrete history, evolving through precedent. Most insist (though in various different ways) on the complex interaction of principle, precedent, and new perception. (Evidence that Robert Bork rejected this complex conception and the role it ascribes to historical precedent, preferring a more dogmatic and noncontextualized conception of judgment, was a great part of what led to his rejection as nominee to the United States Supreme Court.) As for the emotions, although their contribution is sometimes denigrated here as elsewhere, they too have been prominently recognized as of value in steering or guiding the best legal reasoning. Sometimes this argument is made by legal relativists who view all legal judgment as expressive of "ideology," and who deny that there is any normative distinction to be made between power and persuasion, any room for a substantial conception of objectivity in legal judgment. But the point has also been made by legal thinkers whose views lie closer to Aristotle's—who do defend a substantial conception of practical wisdom, and simply insist that in the process of wise judgment rich emotional response is a mark not of irrationality but of rich or complete rationality. Prominent in this latter group is the constitutional lawyer Paul Gewirtz, who has argued that, although the passions *can* delude, they "can also open, clarify, and enrich understanding," and that "the values and achievements of a legal system—and of lawyers, judges, and citizens involved with a legal system—are shaped by what the emotions yield."⁷¹

In short: good legal judgment is increasingly being seen as Aristotle sees it—as the wise supplementing of the generalities of written law by a judge who imagines what a person of practical wisdom *would* say in the situation,⁷² bringing to the business of judging the resources of a rich and responsive personality. It is not surprising that such reflections have recently led lawyers to take a keen interest in

71. For a discussion of recent work connecting law with literature, and speaking of the role of emotion and imagination in legal reasoning, see my "Introduction," n. 76, where this passage from Gewirtz is quoted in full, with references and bibliography; the passage quoted here is from the same paragraph.

72. Aristotle's requirement could be interpreted to mean "say what the *original* legislator would say," and thus to give support to the idea that constitutional interpretation attempts to seek out the intent of the founders. But it is better read as instructing the judge to imagine what a *wise* legislator would say, and thus to give judges the latitude to put together precedent, principle, and perception in their own way.

literature and to claim that works of literature offer insight into norms of legal judgment. For the account of judgment that Gewirtz and others provide has a natural link with the activity of the reader (or spectator) implied within many literary (and dramatic) texts. Thus Gewirtz's reflections about perception and emotion lead him to speak of "the special place literature can have in developing the legal mind to its fullest richness and complexity."

Within American ideals of legal judgment, then, the Aristotelian ideal is already recognized; and it will be important to develop these arguments further, both theoretically and historically, explaining what was good in court decisions of the past. But we notice that the ideal of the good judge is closely connected (in Gewirtz's thought and in the tradition on which he comments) to a more general political norm. The good judge is also a model citizen; and in Aristotle's view he will ask himself, as well, what a wise legislator would say. For although, as Aristotle would grant, formal and rule-governed procedures of many kinds have an invaluable role to play at many levels of the decision-making process, what is above all demanded of a good leader, and what we ought to demand of ourselves as citizens, is a different, and more Aristotelian kind of reasoning. We do not usually believe that training in quantitative social science techniques is essential for being a good representative, though we do need such experts around. We do insist, appropriately, and should insist more, on the development of the imagination, on a vigorous sense of concrete human reality, and even on a rather Athenian level of passionate engagement with life. The dangers of not insisting on this, and of giving way, instead, before the seductive lure of the technical intellect, are clear. We will have, as we have already had in the policy making that conducted the Vietnam war, impoverished models of humanity before our leaders' eyes—numbers and dots, taking the place of women and men. And when one's deliberation fails to endow human beings with their full and complex humanity, it becomes very much easier to contemplate doing terrible things toward them. We want leaders whose hearts and imaginations acknowledge the humanity in human beings. Walt Whitman's portrait of Abraham Lincoln's "large, sweet soul" is a portrait of such an Aristotelian leader, visionary in love, resourceful in imagining. And such images can still be found in American political life, though not often enough.

IX. A Society of Perceivers

I have suggested that Aristotelian norms are already a part of our political and legal traditions; so I have implied that they are not, as such, foreign to democracy, or biased in the direction of aristocracy. And Aristotle himself introduced the norms in connection with the ideal of a society of "free and equal citizens, ruling and being ruled in turn." But it has often been suspected that Aristotle's norm is not, in fact, compatible with a democratic way of life. This question needs our scrutiny. For even if we are satisfied that the Aristotelian virtues are valuable in both leaders and citizens, we might decide to pursue a different norm, if we were convinced that they could be cultivated only by abandoning institutions that we regard, for independent reasons, as best and most just.

I have written elsewhere about the general form of Aristotle's political conception; and I have described the form of democracy that is demanded by his ideal.⁷³ So here I shall be brief, focusing on the abilities of perception, and their material and institutional conditions.

First, it must be conceded that Aristotle's demand for leaders of equity and practical wisdom can frequently best be realized through the inclusion in a political system of certain institutions that are not directly democratic in character. Aristotle himself was divided about this—both praising Pericles in his role as “first citizen” and insisting on the ideal of “ruling and being ruled in turn.” For the contemporary student of Aristotle, it will seem likely that a non-directly democratic institution such as the United States Supreme Court has an essential role to play in keeping perception at the heart of political life. On the other hand, it is also very important that this body be responsive, at some level, to the perceptions of citizens and to their sense of their traditions. In the defeat of the nomination of Robert Bork to the Supreme Court, a surprising consensus of citizen perceptions defeated the claims of a putative expert; and this possibility, too, seems in line with Aristotelian demands.

Second, if the form of government in an Aristotelian city is to be democratic, giving to all citizens the two forms of participation, judicial and legislative, that Aristotle demands, it is essential that government should concern itself with the provision of education. Aristotle argues that to be a citizen perceiver requires freedom from manual labor. He argues this on the grounds that, as he sees it, a life of such labor makes it impossible to get the rich and full education required to cultivate the various abilities involved in perception. He believes the provision of such an education to be the “first and most essential” task of government, and he frequently reproves actual governments for their neglect in this regard.

On the point about labor, we might well wish to moderate Aristotle's requirement of lifelong freedom from manual tasks. For the point of his requirement is above all, as we have said, a point about the provision of both basic and what we might call higher education. And although in the ancient Greek context it might well have seemed impossible to combine this rich or full education with a subsequent life in the laboring class, our own possibilities are more numerous. It seems altogether reasonable to make universal access to higher education a goal of a modern democracy, and to insist on its importance for citizenship much as Aristotle does, while reaching out further than Aristotle was able to do, to include a larger group within this citizen body. Thus the provision of adequate resources for education, including higher education, becomes one of the very most essential tasks of a government based on perception. Treating higher education not as a luxury for the privileged few, but as a necessity for a fully human development of the faculties of citizen perception, government would then be committed to ensuring that no citizen, however poor, would be cut off from the opportunity to receive such an education because of poverty and the need to hold a job. This does not mean that we will neglect the larger question about the relationships between forms of labor in later life and a fully human use of one's faculties. Aristotelian

73. See “Nature, Function, and Capability.” Also, “Aristotelian Social Democracy,” in *Liberalism and the Good*, ed. G. Mara and H. Richardson (New York, 1990).

politics is also profoundly interested in such possible tensions, since it is committed to making sure that all citizens have the necessary conditions for fully good human functioning. But education is seen as modifying all of subsequent life and making it more humane. So questions about education would be the first and most crucial questions.

In short, there is a strong element of perfectionism in the Aristotelian theory, which insists that rather demanding material and institutional conditions must be met if people are to realize their full humanity. This is not aristocracy in the hereditary or nature-based sense. As I have argued elsewhere, it has more in common with modern forms of social democracy that are based upon a substantial notion of the human good and good human functioning.

Aristotelian education is aimed at producing citizens who are perceivers. It begins with the confident belief that each member of the heterogeneous citizenry is a potential person of practical wisdom, with the basic (that is, as yet undeveloped) ability to cultivate practical perception and to use it on behalf of the entire group.⁷⁴ It aims at bringing these basic abilities to full actuality. As both Aristotle and Periclean Athens insist, the core of this education will be found in the studies that we now call "the humanities"—in the qualitatively rich study of human life through works of art and literature, through the study of history, and through humanistic forms of social inquiry. (It would also prominently include teaching in the understanding of nature embodied in mathematics and the natural sciences, though it would be careful not to confuse these studies with the humanistic studies.) Technical and quantitative analyses of social reality will be presented as tools, frequently very valuable, but incomplete in themselves, incomplete without the richer study of human ends that they cannot themselves perform. This would mean, for example, a public educational policy that moves in a direction roughly opposite to that now being taken by the Thatcher government in Britain, where humanistic studies (and also basic scientific inquiry) are being demoted and squeezed in favor of the development of technical and entrepreneurial abilities. This impoverished and impoverishing conception will not, the Aristotelian claims, prove able to sustain a democratic citizenry. Perception is fully compatible with democracy. But it does have material and institutional necessary conditions; and it is the responsibility of legislators to put these in place.

Where the teaching of moral reasoning itself is concerned, the Aristotelian conception will strongly endorse recent American efforts to make this a central part of education in medicine, law, business, and in undergraduate education more generally. But here again distinctions need to be made. The sort of moral reasoning course recommended by the Aristotelian will be clear, well argued, theoretically rich. But it will also make large demands upon the imagination and the emotions. It will be very far from a course in formal decision theory, or in the principles of economic rationality (as these are most often portrayed). It will at all times encourage the student to attend closely to the heterogeneity of life. And course materials will include works of literature that enrich and develop the sense of life, expressing, in their own attention to particularity and their richness of feeling, elements of the Aristotelian conception. It will include as well the deep and

74. See "Nature, Function, and Capability."

rigorous study of alternative moral conceptions, in order to give the student a clearer sense of the available choices. All this will be in the service of promoting the student's ability to choose a general conception of the good life, and to perceive, in practice, what this conception requires. At every stage in the process, the student would continue to refine her abilities to reflect and perceive in and about concrete cases, perhaps again through continued contact with works of literature and history.⁷⁵

In short: the acceptance of an Aristotelian conception should lead to the recognition that the humanities are the core of our public culture, and that other techniques of reasoning are tools whose place is to assist them in their task of revealing and enacting a full and rich sense of human life and its public requirements. We do not have far to go to reach Walt Whitman's idea (contained in our epigraph here) that in a society based upon perception the poets (and philosophers who think like poets or welcome the insights of literature into their philosophy) are models of teaching and judgment. For they above all are devoted to finding precisely the right way of rendering the concrete, putting all the variety, messiness, and indefiniteness of the "matter of the practical" into words that will not debase its value, or simplify its mystery.⁷⁶

Endnote

This essay has been published in a shorter version, but this is the first complete publication. All sections have been rewritten for this occasion. It is a continuation of some of the work on Aristotelian practical reasoning that was done in Chapter 10 of *The Fragility of Goodness* and resembles that chapter in its general argument. But this presentation of the Aristotelian position is more complete in its coverage of issues and more explicit in its contrasts between Aristotle's position and several of its rivals. It is philosophically central to this collection, since (along with the Introduction) it brings forward the philosophical conception of the ethical life and ethical reasoning in connection with which, as these papers argue, the works of literature discussed have an essential role to play in ethical inquiry. Of course, in the overall pursuit of the "how to live" question (see Introduction, "Perceptive Equilibrium"), this Aristotelian conception is only one of a number of alternatives to be fully investigated. This essay does not claim to have provided

75. See the Introduction, and also "Perceptive Equilibrium," this volume, on the distinction between the Aristotelian framing method, which considers all the alternative theories of the good human life, and the Aristotelian ethical conception, one particular conception that is considered by the framing method. As my discussions there indicate, the distinction between these two levels is not always easy to draw, since the methods recommended by the framing method include the use of some faculties that are especially valued by the Aristotelian conception, and less so by the other conceptions. However, the claim is that by being more inclusive, by including faculties that other architectonic methods omit, the Aristotelian framing method can claim to be fair to all the alternatives.

76. For comments that have helped me in my work on these ideas I am very grateful to Lawrence Blum, Dan Brock, and Henry Richardson.

that full investigation, and thus not a full defense of the Aristotelian position. It aims only at describing sympathetically the salient elements of the Aristotelian conception and at showing how, within and from its own point of view, it defends itself against several rivals. A full defense would require a far more systematic and sympathetic investigation of the rivals.

It is important to be clear about the relationship between this ethical conception and the role I claim for literature. My claim is that without *concluding* the investigation proposed by the overall ethical question, without, therefore, establishing any more than that the Aristotelian conception is a serious ethical alternative, we can still conclude that literature (of the sort and in the ways described) has an invaluable role to play inside moral philosophy, as expressive of that conception (or those conceptions, since I claim that it is a family of related views).

This essay shows the essential importance of the philosophical commentary on literature that I discuss in the Introduction, section F (see also “Love’s Knowledge”). It is itself an example of such an Aristotelian commentary.

The claims about the political implications of the Aristotelian position are further developed in “Perception and Revolution” (and its endnote). The claims about the priority of the particular and the contrast between general and universal are further developed in the Introduction, and in “‘Finely Aware’” (with endnote), which develops further the metaphor of improvisation.



Plato on Commensurability and Desire

And look: I gave them numbering, chief of all the strategems.

Prometheus, in Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*

Every circumstance by which the condition of an individual can be influenced, being remarked and inventoried, nothing . . . [is] left to chance, caprice, or unguided discretion, everything being surveyed and set down in dimension, number, weight, and measure.

Jeremy Bentham, *Pauper Management Improved*

If ethical values are all commensurable, differing from one another only in quantity, what difference does this make?¹ Plato gives us a stark and simple answer. The adoption of an ethical “science of measurement,” at the heart of which is the belief in commensurability, is both necessary and sufficient for “saving our lives,” that is, for giving human beings a life that will be free of certain intolerable pains and confusions. Here I propose to examine one aspect of Plato’s “life-saving” project, namely, some alleged connections between the belief in the commensurability of value and the nature of the human emotions. It is Plato’s idea, I shall argue, that the belief in commensurability cuts very deep: taken seriously, it will transform our passions as well as our decision making, giving emotions such as love, fear, grief, and hence the ethical problems that are connected with them, an alto-

1. This paper is closely related to *Fragility*, chaps. 4 and 6; the manner of presentation is different, and some of the arguments, especially in sect. IV, do not appear in the book at all. The interpretative issues are more fully defended in the book, with much reference to and discussion of the secondary literature. I therefore confine myself here to acknowledgment of the sources that have been most important for my work. For the *Protagoras* these are C.C.W. Taylor’s excellent commentary in the Clarendon Plato Series (Oxford, 1976), and T. H. Irwin, *Plato’s Moral Theory* (Oxford, 1977). David Wiggins’s “Weakness of Will, Commensurability, and the Objects of Deliberation and Desire,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 79 (1978–9) 251–77 has several points of intersection with this essay. I first read an earlier draft of it in 1974, long before I began developing these views, and returned to the published piece only at the stage of final revision of this article. I am not aware of a direct influence; but there may have been some. In any case, conversations with Wiggins on this and related topics over the years have been an invaluable source of encouragement and illumination.