PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE AND EDUCATION

Phronesis as Professional Knowledge

Practical Wisdom in the Professions

Elizabeth Anne Kinsella and
Allan Pitman (Eds.)

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PHRONESIS AS PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE: PRACTICAL WISDOM IN THE PROFESSIONS

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ELIZABETH ANNE KINSELLA AND ALLAN PITMAN

ENGAGING PHRONESIS IN PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE AND EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

This book originated from a continuing conversation in which we voiced concern (bordering on distress) regarding the instrumentalist values that permeate (often without question) our professional schools, professional practices, and policy decisions. Like others, we were grappling with a sense that something of fundamental importance—of moral significance—was missing in the vision of what it means to be a professional, and in the ensuing educational aims in professional schools and continuing professional education.

We are not alone in this concern; numerous social theorists have pointed out that, for more than two centuries, value-rationality has increasingly given way to instrumentalist rationality (Bourdieu, 2004; Flyvbjerg, 2001; Ralston Saul, 1993; Sandywell, 1996; Schön, 1983, 1987). What then are the implications of this trend for professional education and practice? And, what if anything can be done? We wondered whether, at the heart of the issue, might lie significant issues concerning how we conceive of knowledge in the professions. We questioned whether some corrective might be possible, whether something of importance might be recovered, perhaps through Aristotle and his conception of *phronesis* or practical wisdom.

Numerous scholars have called for renewed attention to phronesis through various means, such as a reinvigoration of the concept within the professions; a reconceptualisation of professional knowledge that draws on phronesis; and even a reconceptualisation of social science itself (see, for example, Dunne, 1993, 1999; Eikeland, 2006, 2008; Flaming, 2001; Flyvbjerg, 2001; Frank, 2004; Gadamer, 1980, 1996; Kingwell, 2002; MacIntyre, 1982; Montgomery, 2006; Nussbaum, 2001; Polkinghorne, 2004; Schön, 1983, 1987; Smith, 1999; Stout, 1988; Taylor, 1999; Vanier, 2001).

Consideration of these challenges led to the question at the centre of this inquiry: "If we take phronesis seriously as an organising framework for professional knowledge, what are the implications for professional education and practice?"

We took the opportunity to invite a diverse group of interdisciplinary scholars to meet to discuss and debate this question and to formalise their responses in the chapters that comprise this book. Their responses open a multiplicity of understandings as to what is meant by *phronesis* and how it might be reinterpreted, understood, applied, and extended in a world radically different to that of the progenitor of the term, Aristotle.

E.A. Kinsella, A. Pitman (eds.), Phronesis as Professional Knowledge: Practical Wisdom in the Professions, 1–11.

But what is *phronesis*? *Phronesis* (phronēsis) is generally defined as practical wisdom or knowledge of the proper ends of life. In Aristotle's scheme, *phronesis* is classified as one of several 'intellectual virtues' or 'excellences of mind' (Eikeland, 2008). Aristotle (trans. 1975) distinguished *phronesis* from the two other intellectual virtues of *episteme* and *techne*. In Aristotle's conception, drawn below from Flyvbjerg (2001), *episteme* is characterised as scientific, universal, invariable, context-independent knowledge. The original concept is known today through the terms *epistemology* and *epistemic*. *Techne* is characterised as context-dependent, pragmatic, variable, craft knowledge and is oriented toward practical instrumental rationality governed by a conscious goal. The original concept appears today in terms such as *technique*, *technical*, and *technology*. *Phronesis*, on the other hand, is an intellectual virtue that implies ethics. It involves deliberation that is based on values, concerned with practical judgement and informed by reflection. It is pragmatic, variable, context-dependent, and oriented toward action.

Through the process of developing this book, we have discovered that phronesis is a slippery concept, much more so than we had first anticipated. Rather than offering a neat corrective to instrumentalist rationality, the dialogues in these pages open a range of exciting conversations. This book does not present a tidy interpretation of *phronesis*. Rather, through the voices of the contributors, a diaspora of meanings is laid open. This is not to say that there are not commonalities between the ideas advanced: rather, the complexity of the search for an understanding of those forms of knowledge that are brought to, and are part of, professional practice has become clearer. The juxtaposition of chapters in this collection opens a space for dialogue and for the expression of divergent perspectives. We found ourselves wondering whether the classic epistemological metaphor of the blind men grasping at pieces of the elephant was inadequate: perhaps we are dealing with multiple elephants!

What has emerged is a constellation of ideas that have a common concern related to the nature of professional knowledge. In particular, the concern focuses on what is missing from the official discourse: the practical disjuncture between the knowledge required for practice and professional schools' current conceptions of what constitutes legitimate knowledge. Stephen Kemmis refers to this disjuncture as a "negative space"—"a longing for something else" that is not currently present (Kemmis, chapter 11, p. 157). The professions are plagued with a theory–practice gap, which seems to be at the centre of this discontent. Our task was to explore the possibilities of a positive space that could respond to this void. Each of the chapters in this collection responds in one way or another to this space, by considering the ways in which phronesis might (or might not) offer a generative possibility for reconsidering the professional knowledge of practitioners.

PHRONESIS IN CONTEMPORARY PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE: EMERGING THREADS AND JUXTAPOSITIONS

We do not live in Aristotle's world. Gadamer explained the problem of historicity and interpretation well when he pointed out that we cannot fully understand the critique of a 19th-century critic of Shakespeare, let alone see what Shakespeare

saw. Similarly, we cannot see the world as Aristotle saw it. At the core of this book is the recognition of the tensions inherent in any project that considers Aristotle's ideas in a world vastly different from his.

The book opens with Fred Ellett's consideration of this topic in some depth. Ellett asks what might legitimately be recovered from Aristotle's thought, what must be unequivocally rejected, and what might be modified for contemporary times.

Aristotle lived in a world comprised of freemen and slaves. Races were deemed superior or inferior. Men and women were seen to have intrinsically different capacities that precluded women from involvement in serious intellectual work. The world was viewed as stable and eternal. The object of the intellect was to gain knowledge and, through knowledge, wisdom (*sophia*) and to develop a love for knowledge (*philos*). Hence, philosophy was the pursuit of the elite: the object was a society ruled by the wise 'philosopher king.' In current times, while we may wish for wise, thinking political leaders, we do so in a fundamentally different social and philosophical world. In this world, in which theoretical work has been differentiated from the practical and technical, and a post-enlightenment framing of science dominates our world view, new understandings of the tentative nature of our law-like claims call into question, for example, the eternal verity of Aristotle's *episteme*.

In addition, the social constructions surrounding class, ethnicity, and gender with which we live differ vastly from those taken into consideration in the Athens of Aristotle. This difference has implications for thinking about professional practice in respect to the teleology of 'the good' and of 'doing the good,' as well as for assumptions about what that might mean, about who can take part in the practice, and for whom such practice is intended. The concern here is on two levels: one in which the focus is on phronesis as it relates to professional practice and its practitioners, the other on those engaged in meta-discussions about phronesis itself. Recognition of the social constructions surrounding class, ethnicity, and gender is, it would appear, key to any reconstitution of the notion of *phronesis*. Indeed, the whole understanding of what *is* 'the good'—the teleological objective of the whole exercise—must be reconsidered in light of the different positions and the situatedness of those engaged in professional practices.

What cannot be recovered, as Ellett makes clear, is a moral essentialism of humankind's nature, purpose, and function, or a first philosophy that is fixed, timeless, and universally necessary. The naturalness of sexism, classism, and racism is emphatically rejected. We are then talking about an Aristotelian conception of knowledge in a world that Aristotle would scarcely recognise. What, then can be recovered and what must be added to a conception that holds relevance for contemporary times? Ellett argues that four aspects are recoverable in that: (a) phronesis typically involves judgement that is deliberative, typically indeterminate but not calculative; (b) phronesis is a virtue; (c) phronesis typically is an embodied social practice that has internal goods and excellences; and (d) phronesis typically involves complicated interactions between the general and practical. Ellett rejects (a) Aristotle's metaphysical biology; (b) Aristotle's first philosophy; and (c) recent 'Grand' claims for practical rationality. Finally, he argues, given the centrality of probability in current conceptions of theoretical reason and practical rationality,

that future conceptions of phronesis, should be 'worked together' with the concept of probability.

Phronesis, or the quest for practical wisdom, implies reflection, but what might processes of reflection oriented toward phronesis look like in professional practice? These are questions tackled in various ways by many of the authors in this book (Arthur Frank, Kathy Hibbert, Joy Higgs, Rob Macklin and Gail Whiteford, Derek Sellman, and Stephen Kemmis), but most directly, as a centre point of focus by Elizabeth Anne Kinsella.

In thinking about how practitioners might enact phronesis, Kinsella contends that attention to reflection and judgement is key. Informed by the seminal reflective practice work of Donald Schön, Kinsella's work offers an extension. Kinsella proposes a continuum of reflection that informs professional action from (a) receptive or phenomenological reflection, to (b) intentional cognitive reflection, to (c) embodied or tacit reflection, to (d) critical reflexivity. Her analysis acknowledges that reflection can take many forms: it can be deep, interior, emotional, and introspective; it can be intentional and based in reason; it may also be tacit, embodied, and revealed in intelligent action; and, further, it may be used to critically interrogate assumptions about taken-for-granted understandings in professional life.

Kinsella contends that the work of Schön provides a basis for an elaboration of thinking about the ways in which practitioners use reflection to make judgements and to inform action. She considers six criteria that might be seen as useful in orientating practitioners toward phronetic or wise judgement in professional practice: pragmatic usefulness, persuasiveness, aesthetic appeal, ethical considerations, transformative potential, and dialogic intersubjectivity.

Arthur Frank presents a case for practical wisdom to be discovered in reflective health care practice. His writing shows the power of narrative as a means of reflection and as a means of revealing what phronesis looks like in practice. Frank's writing calls for practitioners "to reflect enough that maybe, eventually, a kind of practical wisdom will develop that can never be fully articulated ... but is felt as a guiding force" (Frank, chapter 4, p. 57). This kind of practical wisdom, according to Frank, is *phronesis*. His writing moves beyond a linear articulation of what phronesis might be, to capture something more, to actually reveal the aesthetic texture of what phronesis looks like.

Frank points out that in health care, practitioners have two choices: to "look at the day as a big checklist and don't look back or even around ... as a way of getting through their day" (Frank, p. 57), *or* to engage in reflection. He draws attention to how, in professional practice, reflection often begins with interruption: "Reflection interrupts that flow. It is a carved-out space in which we ask ourselves what we're doing, and *who* is doing the things that seem to be getting done" (Frank, p. 54). Frank notes multiple claims on the health care practitioner, of which he names six: *Practical* claims address the expectation of an outcome from the consultation; *professional* claims that the practitioner will meet the expectations of peers, both institutionally and personally; *scientific* claims call on practitioners to act according to the science on which their practice is based, or to "have very good

reasons for any deviation" (Frank, p. 56); *commercial* claims act on practitioners as employees, as investors and/or as owners of practices; *ethical* claims concern standards of practice, respect of patients, etc.; and *moral* claims call practitioners to moral actions, for example, witnessing the patient's suffering. A procedural checklist, he suggests, does little to address these claims; but it does (if set down as a protocol) diminish the responsibility of the practitioner, under the guise of accountability. Arthur Frank calls for a phronesis that involves relationship and a call to witness the patient's suffering. His preoccupation with the practitioner as 'witness' and his call to practitioners to respond to patients in the face of their suffering illuminate a relational emphasis in his practical wisdom.

Kathy Hibbert also takes up themes of reflection, narrative, and action, to consider what phronesis might offer our thinking about learning and diversity in professional education. Like others, her interest in phronesis began with her concerns about the increasingly instrumentalised contexts of professional practice. Hibbert offers a narrative of an experience that has "haunted" her and fuelled her interest in this area of scholarship: an era of "professional practice" where educators "disseminate materials" and "reproduce … received training," where "information was scripted and *delivered* in a top-down system" (Hibbert, chapter 5, p. 62). About her own experience as a teaching consultant, she writes, "I recall feeling that this process of 'training' represented the direct opposite of everything I know about good teaching, and it led to a sense of deprofessionalisation and demoralisation" (Hibbert, p. 62), a disheartening digression from a vision of practice that engages practitioners as "professionals and intellectuals" (Hibbert, p. 62).

Like Frank, Hibbert points out that reflection often begins in the disruption of routinised experiences. She argues that routinised experiences can be dangerous and that scrutinising one's actions in practice can influence future actions and decisions oriented toward phronesis. In particular, Hibbert considers how we might cultivate the capacity for phronetic action, drawing on Dewey to argue that phronetic action involves a whole-hearted and open-minded willingness to assume responsibility for one's actions. She agrees with Joseph Dunne's (1993) claim that "phronetic action can't exist without both intellectual and moral conditions of the mind" (p. 264). This theme linking reflection to moral action and its relationship to phronesis continue to weave explicitly and implicitly throughout the book.

Joy Higgs also draws on the power of narrative and Socratic dialogue to reflect, through story, on the nature of phronesis. It has been said that we sometimes need fiction to reveal the truth. In Higgs's fictional narrative of a dialogue between Veteratoris (the mentor) and Novitius (the initiate), phronesis is examined in the pursuit of wise practice and the generation of practical knowledge, which Higgs posits as an approach to balance the instrumentalist rationalities that hold 'pride of place' in professional practice.

Higgs observes that professional practice is characterised by the 'absence of certainty.' Recognition of the complexity and uncertainty of practice is a theme that permeates this book and is reminiscent of the classic metaphor of the swamp used by Schön to illuminate the nature of practice. Phronesis, it seems, is located in Schön's swamp:

> In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high, hard ground overlooking a swamp. On the high ground, manageable problems lend themselves to solution through the application of research-based theory and technique. In the swampy lowland, messy, confusing problems defy technical solution. (Schön, 1987, p. 3)

Higgs contends that practice is the precursor of knowledge. Practitioner observation, reflection, and experience bring together actions and ideas that are enacted in wise practice. For Higgs, wisdom is seen as "the ineluctable nexus between practice, judgement, and knowledge" (Higgs, chapter 6, p. 81); "the hallmark of a professional is the capacity to make sound judgements" (Higgs, p.79). In characterising practice knowledge, Higgs depicts it as the sum of the knowledges so used, including propositional as well as experiential knowledge: "Here episteme, techne, and phronesis dance together" (Higgs, p. 77).

Within the spectrum of professional practices, Rob Macklin and Gail Whiteford investigate phronesis and qualitative research, arguing that scientific reason is not an appropriate test for interpretively oriented qualitative research. They define scientific reason in a manner consistent with Aristotle's classic conception of episteme and with taken-for-granted views about scientific reason—as informing impartial, universal, and generalisable knowledge that permeates our culture. Macklin and Whiteford argue that while scientific reasoning appropriately underpins quantitative research, a different form of rationality—practical rationality—is required to undertake and judge the practice of qualitative research. As such, they point out that the practice of qualitative research requires instruction in the practice of practical judgement and a quest for phronesis, as opposed to technical training and a focus on scientific rationality.

For Macklin and Whiteford, the dominance of the epistemology of science presents fundamental problems for qualitative researchers. The basis for their position is that the criteria for judging qualitative research are irreducibly different from those of quantitative work. They describe the task of recognition and justification of qualitative research within a culture of science as Herculean; however, it might also be cast as the impossible task of Sisyphus, doomed to spend eternity pushing a block of marble uphill, always to have it roll back down. They argue instead for practical rationality as a more appropriate means for making judgements about qualitative research.

Interestingly, a central theme in the work of Macklin and Whiteford, and in other chapters in this book, is the centrality of *aporia*—unresolvable dilemmas and uncertainties—as a characteristic of the work of professional practice. Embracing rather than avoiding aporias troubles assumptions about the quest for certainty and the use of episteme alone as the gold standard in professional practice. Professional practitioners draw on relevant epistemological knowledge, but the application of that knowledge calls for a quite different form of knowledge from that of episteme alone, one that embraces the messiness of practice. However, doing so is not to deny the central role of episteme in the practice of a profession (i.e., a physician cannot know what to do without a good grounding in the relevant sciences, and a teacher cannot teach without content knowledge) but rather to point out that

attention to a different form of knowledge rooted in attention to aporia is also fruitful for effective practice.

There are particular assumptions about scientific reason, consistent with Aristotle's conception, that permeate Macklin and Whiteford's work. Interestingly, the work of philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn (1962) troubles conceptions of scientific reason and therefore of episteme, as impartial, universal, and generalisable. As pointed out by Farrukh Chishtie, scientific reason and the judgements that scientists make require a form of phronesis in and of itself. This tension about the lines between episteme and phronesis, in light of contemporary views of philosophy of science, is an interesting consideration opened up by the authors of this collection.

The nature of phronesis *within* the practice of science becomes a topic of great interest, explored by Chishtie in his consideration of what *phronesis* might mean in a post-Kuhnian world dominated by science. Kuhn's (1962, 1977) view of epistemic values leads to a position whereby the knowledge that constitutes the episteme of a disciplinary community is seen to be legitimated through the exercise of judgement based upon agreed values: the epistemic values of the community. This view constitutes a radical repositioning of the role of judgement within conceptions of scientific knowledge. Not only is judgement exercised on a day-to-day basis by practitioners but it is also deeply implicated in the generation of the scientific theories and epistemic frameworks upon which professional practice itself is based. Chishtie argues that, as a consequence, phronesis becomes significant not only in individual practice but also to conceptions of episteme itself. In a Kuhnian view, episteme can no longer be unproblematically viewed as universal, context-independent knowledge. The distinctions between episteme and phronesis blur as our understanding of science is challenged. An implication of this, as pointed out by Flyvbjerg (2001) and Chishtie, is that power relations become significant insofar as they contribute to the formation of the episteme and the policing of its boundaries. In light of a Kuhnian view of science, the assumptions that the professions and their governing institutions hold regarding the nature of episteme, and the place of phronetic judgment in scientific practice, become topics for further consideration and investigation.

Derek Sellman reminds us that phronesis is Aristotle's special virtue, one that straddles cognition and emotion, as well as intellect and character. Phronesis, closely related to wisdom, is the virtue that enables us to judge what it is we should do in any given situation. Sellman points out that the virtue of phronesis has a place in professional life distinguishable from its place in everyday life; he proposes the concept of professional phronimos—the professionally wise practitioner—as significant for conceptions of professional competence.

Sellman's aim is to reclaim the term *competence* from those who have 'commandeered' it to describe skills-based learning. For Sellman, competence involves some form of emergent self-awareness or self-revelation. He argues that an expanded understanding of competence, one that includes phronesis, is necessary if practice is to be more than the mere routine application of technically derived protocols or algorithmic responses to the complex issues facing practitioners in

everyday work environments. According to this view, competence both encompasses those practitioners who transcend purely technical approaches to solving or resolving messy practice situations and begins to operate in ways that cannot be adequately described in technical rational terms.

Sellman also highlights the tensions between agency and structure in the quest for phronesis, a theme that resurfaces and is elaborated the chapter by Allan Pitman. In particular the dangers of calls for practitioners to develop phronesis in the absence of any recognition of the role of institutions in encouraging or discouraging such development in individual practitioners are of concern. If the structured constraints of practice are not recognized, practitioners may find themselves caught in an endless cycle of blame related to their incapacity to live according to the characteristics of the phronimos—the professionally wise practitioner.

This theme of the structured constraints of practice is elaborated by Allan Pitman in his consideration of the 'hostile ground for growing phronesis' in a time of excessive managerialism and accountability discourses in the professions. Pitman considers the challenges of enacting phronesis, including practical wisdom and professional judgement, in practice contexts in which professionals have numerous and frequently conflicting ruling bodies to which they are held accountable. Professional practice takes place in a social and political context, which is geographically and temporally located. Pitman highlights the situatedness of practice in its institutional and ideological contexts, in an age when discourses of accountability have enveloped professional work. He unpacks assumptions about professional knowledge in the teaching profession to examine the way in which the various accountability mechanisms create tensions for practitioners and potentially work against efforts toward phronesis.

Pitman points out that any concern that advocates for a phronetic characterisation of professional practice is located in a dominant discourse of professional practice. As the era of trust in the actions of practitioners has waned, and the financial commitments of governments have grown, so too have arisen discourses of accountability and managerialism, and systems of surveillance.

There is a paradox here, reflected in several chapters in this book, that as the mechanisms of professionalisation have been put in place, so too have the levels of prescription increased, thereby circumscribing the capacity of members to act autonomously in situations that demand the exercise of judgement. The 'danger' of calling for phronesis and holding practitioners accountable for practical wisdom in contexts that may not support it, and that may actively mitigate against it, is that practitioners may face a double bind, where they are blamed for a failure of agency at the personal level, when the issues may well be structural and systemic. This underlines the essential need to consider calls for phronesis in light of what Kemmis (2005) has called the extra-individual features of practice, including the social, cultural, material-economic, discursive, political, and policy dimensions.

Interestingly, Stephen Kemmis suggests that calls for phronesis might be seen as a response to a lack in the present thinking and discourse about professional practice; that is, a reaction to a disquiet about the realities in which professionals go about their work. He describes this lack as a 'negative space' and suggests that

phronesis might be seen as a placeholder for the 'something more' that we are looking for in our thinking about the practice of professionals.

Kemmis proposes that our longing for phronesis, for wisdom, is really a longing for something else—a longing for praxis. According to Kemmis, "*Praxis* is a particular kind of action. It is action *that is morally committed, and oriented and informed by traditions in a field*" (Kemmis & Smith, 2008, p. 4; emphasis in original); "*Praxis* is the action itself, in all its materiality and with all its effects on and consequences for the cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political dimensions of our world in its being and becoming. *Praxis* emerges in 'sayings', 'doings', and 'relatings'" (Kemmis, p. 150).

Provocatively, Kemmis posits praxis as a *prerequisite* for phronesis and as the centrepiece of a morally committed practice. He suggests that it is the wrong way around to hope that if we develop phronesis in rising generations of practitioners, then praxis will follow. According to Kemmis, it is through experience and action—through praxis—that we develop phronesis; therefore, "it is the happening-ness of *praxis* that we must commit ourselves to if we want to learn or develop *phronēsis*" (Kemmis, p. 158). He suggests that phronesis as a virtue is "evident in the honour and nobility of persons who have committed themselves to *praxis* as a way of life" (Kemmis, p. 158).

This raises conceptual tensions worthy of considered attention. One might ask: What is the nature of the relationship between phronesis and praxis? Where does one end and the other begin? Does one precede the other? To what extent are they symbiotic? Is morally committed action enacted through praxis, phronesis, or both?

Perhaps at the heart of Kemmis's challenge lie contesting ideas about various types of reflection, action, and moral commitment and the ways in which they are related to and enacted in professional life through phronesis, or praxis, or both. For instance, one might ask whether phronesis implies a kind of knowledge that exists 'only in the heads' of practitioners, a Cartesian kind of intentional reflection, separated from and followed by action; whereas, praxis implies a type of embodied reflection revealed through morally committed doings, sayings, and relating. Where exactly the conceptual lines in these two dimensions lie is subject to debate. In the context of professional practice, phronesis might be oriented slightly more toward morally committed thought, whereas praxis might be oriented slightly more toward morally committed action, but the lines between the two appear uncertain. It appears that both phronesis and praxis are desirable in morally committed practice. This raises issues concerning the various conceptions of both phronesis and praxis; ongoing work to tease out the lines of distinction and the overlap between the two concepts and the implications for professional practice is imperative. It is clear that the writers in this collection hold differing views about these conceptual lines, which have yet to be articulated in a definitive way. The boundaries are blurry!

Of further note, Kemmis draws attention not only to *individual* phronesis, that of the practitioner, but to *collective* phronesis, the collective good that a professional community commits itself to through its practice as a profession. This notion of collective phronesis, and the implications it opens up for how professions envision

FREDERICK S. ELLETT, JR.

PRACTICAL RATIONALITY AND A RECOVERY OF ARISTOTLE'S 'PHRONESIS' FOR THE PROFESSIONS

I. INTRODUCTION

In the Western philosophical tradition, customary practice has been to distinguish theoretical reason, which is concerned to determine what one should believe, from practical reason (or practical rationality), where practical rationality is concerned to determine how one should act. In recent decades, there has been a renewed interest in Aristotle's conception of practical rationality, or 'phronesis.' My main task here is to explicate some of the important roles such a (recovered) concept can and should usefully play in the professions. To achieve this task, I begin by briefly characterising the concept of 'profession.' I then briefly set out what can and should be legitimately recovered from Aristotle's conception, what cannot be legitimately recovered, and what modifications must reasonably be made to develop a viable conception of practical rationality for the professions. I suggest that 'practical rationality' is best seen as a placeholder term concerned with our being responsible in deciding what to do. Finally, I illustrate how 'phronesis' can and should play a central and important part in professional teaching in Ontario.

II. ON BEING A PROFESSION

I begin by briefly setting out a plausible understanding of what we might, for our purposes here, usefully consider a profession to be. Here I draw freely from the Pitman and Ellett (2008) essay, "Professionalism: Its ambiguity in the current [educational] reforms in Ontario." Many of the ideas expressed in the essay have built upon earlier *educational* works by McPeck and Sanders (1974), Carr and Kemmis (1989), and the early work by Lee Shulman[i] (1987/2004a). After their review of the literature, McPeck and Sanders (1974) plausibly argued that a profession has four 'requirements' (my emphases):

- that there exists a *specialized literature* which forms an intellectual basis for practice;
- that the occupational group provides a needed social [or public] service as its *raison d`être;*
- that there exists a set of standards designed to ensure, or certify, minimal competence in membership in the group;
- that there exists a broad range of *autonomy* both for the individual and for the occupational group to practice according to its own *judgment*. (p. 64)

E.A. Kinsella, A. Pitman (eds.), Phronesis as Professional Knowledge: Practical Wisdom in the Professions, 13–33.

world-class university rowing. For most professionals, then, being a good professional is a very important part of living a good life and a part of living a good life that holds serious implications for one's self-identity and self-esteem. But being a good professional is usually only a part, though an important part, of making and living a good life. (I should note here that I think it plausible that most professionals *can* reliably pursue the goods and ends of their profession even if such activities do not further—and perhaps, even, to some degree, conflict with—their self-interest, a point to which I will return.) So, then, I suggest that for our considerations the term *phronesis* be suitably restricted to coincide with the range and scope of professional judgements[v].

III.1 Recovering 'Phronesis': Deliberative Judgement (and Not a Calculation)

As Runes's (1960) definition correctly suggests, Aristotle broke with his teacher, Plato, in his holding (roughly) that the *form* of *theoretical* reason (or knowledge), which asks 'what should one *accept* (or *believe*)?' differs from the *form* of *practical* rationality, which asks 'what should one *do*?' and 'how should one act?' Aristotle held (roughly) that theoretical reason is governed primarily by the rules of (formal) *deductive logic*; but he held that practical rationality typically takes the form of a *deliberation:* the weighing of pros and cons.

And by holding that phronesis is a form of deliberation (or judgement), the most plausible account, in my view, argues that phronesis is not a mathematical calculation of any kind (nor a kind of formal, logical argument)[vi]. (This view stands in contrast to the views of such thinkers as John Stuart Mill, 1863/2001.) Although deliberation can be said to involve 'the weighing of pros and cons,' the term *weighing* is used metaphorically. For example, Black (1972, pp. 56–57), who used the term *reasonableness* in his recovery of Aristotle's conception, has explicitly argued both that such a deliberation (judgement) does not involve the 'maximising' of any quantity and that typically no *determinate* answer can be found to the question 'what is the most reasonable way to act?' (see also Sen, 1995, 2009). Black also argued that persons in the same situation may judge differently and yet both can be reasonable. (Here, thinkers such as Black, 1972, and Sen, 1995, 2009, have argued that the so-called 'rational choice theory,' which has been widely held in economics, is an inadequate model. They both see a more plausible model in Aristotle's 'phronesis.' I side with Black and Sen.)

III.2 Recovering 'Phronesis': Practical Rationality as a Virtue (with Accompanying Virtues)

As I have noted, some writers have set out to recover the key insights by using the term 'practical wisdom.' In a very good discussion of these matters, Stout (1990) has argued that we should see nurses (and doctors) as engaging in *social practices* where *practical wisdom* is one of the central *virtues*. This notion leads to the second major recovery from Aristotle. According to Plato, Socrates claimed that if an agent knew what the right action was, then the agent would indeed perform that

> that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve [internal] *excellence*, and human conceptions of ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. (p. 187, my emphasis)

MacIntyre (1984) went on to articulate the concept by saying that "arts, sciences, games, politics in the Aristotlean sense, the making and sustaining of family life, all fall under the concept" (p.188), whereas taking long showers, playing tic-tac-toe, bricklaying, and planting tulips do not fall under the concept. The internal goods (and excellences) of a social practice stand in contrast to the so-called *external* goods: money, status, prestige, and their accompanying power relations.

Of course, external goods are real goods (if only instrumental goods). Such external goods can be achieved in other ways or in ways that have little to do with achieving the excellences of the social practice (with achieving the internal goods of the practice). Although MacIntyre (1984) claimed that contemporary moral theorising tends to support the emotive theory, which holds that ethical (moral) statements are really just expressions of one's emotions, MacIntyre's conception of 'social practice' implicitly rejects both motivational hedonism and rational egoism. In other words, MacIntyre assumed it plausible to hold that most members of the social practice *can* reliably pursue the goods and ends of the social practice, even if such activities do not further (and perhaps even, to some degree, conflict with) the member's self-interest. Again, I agree that MacIntyre's position is a plausible assumption.

Furthermore, MacIntyre (1984) has argued that social practices are almost always embodied in *institutions*[x], which, according to MacIntyre, typically trade in *external* (to the social practice) goods: money, status, prestige, and their accompanying power relations. Stout (1990) applied MacIntyre's conceptions to the social practice of medical care as follows:

> Social practices are often embodied in institutions. In our [the U.S.] society, the practice of medical care is embodied in institutions such as professional associations, medical schools, partnerships, independent hospitals, and increasingly powerful commercial hospital chains. It is also closely related to broader institutions such as the capitalist market and governmental agencies. Without some sort of sustaining institutions, the practice would change dramatically for the worse, if not collapse altogether. (p. 274)

As both MacIntyre and Stout have noted, although the good side of this discussion is that such institutions do indeed help sustain the social practice, the bad side is that such institutions, since they trade in external goods, often seriously corrupt (or distort or disrupt) the achievement of the internal goods of the social practice.

Now, in Ontario, the duties and responsibilities of the elementary and secondary public school teachers are primarily set out in the province's *Education Act* and the act's *Regulations*. Furthermore, elementary and secondary public school teachers are also members of two different institutions: respectively, the Ontario College of Teachers and the Ontario Teachers' Federation. Many see the Ontario College of

Teachers as having been set up explicitly to promote teaching as a profession, whereas the Ontario Teachers' Federation is seen as being primarily concerned with wages, pensions, and other working conditions. Here, then, at least two important questions arise. How far (and in what ways) does the Ontario College of Teachers actually enable teachers to act professionally? How far (and in what ways) does the Ontario Teachers' Federation conflict with (or undermine) teachers' abilities to act professionally? (I shall return to these matters below in Section V.) (In Ontario, nursing is similarly related to two institutions, the College of Nurses and the Ontario Nursing Association.)

III.4 Recovering 'Phronesis': Deliberative Judgements Involving Complex Interactions of the Generals and Particulars

Another of the well-known writers who have tried to recover the key ideas from the Aristotelian tradition is Martha Nussbaum. Many good yet short characterisations illustrate the complex 'interactions' between all the generals and the particulars involved when the agent is trying to decide (judge) the reasonable action to perform in a concrete situation. I hope you will find Martha Nussbaum's characterisation to give a good sense of what is going on here. In trying to draw out the similarities between the views of Aristotle and the novelist Henry James, Nussbaum (1990) drew upon one character's actions in the book by Henry James, *The Golden Bowl*. She wrote:

> In ethical terms, what [the stories articulated imply] is that the perceiver [agent] 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 [the perceiver's] evolving conceptions of good living [good acting].... 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 of both repeatable and nonrepeatable; it is outlined by the structure of general terms, and so it contains the unique images of those we love. (pp. 94–95)

From this passage, I hope it is clear that Nussbaum held that using literature is a good way to sensitise and initiate students (and professionals, too) into what is important in the moral realm. In favourably comparing Aristotle's views with James's depictions, Nussbaum also held that literature is a kind of moral philosophy. I believe that an adequate characterisation of good scientific judgements can be seen as typically deliberative judgements involving complex interactions of the generals and particulars (see Elgin, 1996; Hooker, 1995). I further maintain that an adequate characterisation of good professional judgements can be seen as typically deliberative judgements involving complex interactions of the generals and particulars.

III.5 Modifying Aristotle's 'Phronesis': Rejecting the Moral Essentialism

Nussbaum plausibly shows noteworthy similarities between the ethical views of Aristotle and the ethical stances involved in Henry James's depictions. For some reason, however, Nussbaum totally neglects to deal with one of the key features of Aristotle's views. As we have seen above, many have given the following kind of definition (e.g., Runes, 1960, p. 235, my emphasis):

> Phronesis: practical wisdom, or knowledge of *the proper ends* of conduct and of the means of attaining them; distinguished by Aristotle from theoretical knowledge or science, and from technical skill.

This definition is misleading in important ways, for it fails to make clear that, for Aristotle, the *ultimate, proper end* of the good life is determined by *theoretical reason* and not by practical reason. Furthermore, for Aristotle, theoretical reason holds that all things must have a form (and function), and that the form for humans enables the philosopher to show that the highest good for *all* humans is the contemplation of knowledge.

Aristotle's position here is often called 'moral essentialism' (or 'moral cognitivism'). This position has generated many critiques (an early refutation came from Kant.) Here, it is useful to note that MacIntyre himself rejected this position. Although MacIntyre (1984, 1988) has indeed argued that much of Aristotle can be recovered, he has provided good reasons for rejecting Aristotle's moral essentialism. As MacIntyre (1984) summed it up, we must reject Aristotle's 'metaphysical biology,' the position that holds that mankind has "an essential nature and an essential purpose or function" (p. 88). As Kekes (1995, 2002) argued in many of his works, deciding how one should live one's life is as much a matter of *making* as finding. (The alternative position to essentialism is often called 'moral pluralism.') In my judgement, such thinkers as Dewey, Kant, Kekes, Margolis, MacIntyre, and Stout provide good reasons to reject the essentialist position. So, this discussion leads to our first rejection: the rejection of Aristotle's moral essentialism.

III.6 Modifying Aristotle's 'Phronesis': Rejecting the 'First Philosophy'

MacIntyre (1988) unwittingly leads us to our second rejection. MacIntyre's work, *After Virtue*, had set out to recover something like an Aristotelian conception of virtue, but he recognised he needed some account of rational inquiry. In his *Whose Justice? Whose Rationality?* MacIntyre (1988) set out to defeat the contemporary liberal political theories by advancing an account of practical rationality as socially and historically determined[xi]. MacIntyre (1988) put it this way: a number of analytic philosophers (primarily the American John Rawls) have held that

> rationality requires . . .that we first divest ourselves of allegiance to any one of the contending theories and abstract ourselves from all those particularities of social relationship . . . Only by so doing . . . shall we arrive at a genuinely neutral, impartial, and . . . universal point of view . . . . [This] conception of