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Practical Wisdom and Diversity

Aligning Insights, Virtues and Values

Springer Gabler

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Aristotle on Happiness, Emotions, and Practical Wisdom – A Short Reading Guide

Jan Radicke

1   Introduction

The lectures Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) gave on practical philosophy more than 2300 years ago are an impressive testimony to early European thought[1]. They are the first systematic outline of political ethics left to us. Many things have changed in our world since then and much knowledge in the field of natural sciences has been added and is being added every day, but the fundamental question as to the meaning of life still remains the same; how to live our lives in a happy and a dignified way.

Obviously, the question is difficult, and any answer – as pointed out by Aristotle – can only be approximate and is based on several, ultimate moral premises, which by definition defy any further logical justification. This is why moral philosophers have directed their thoughts not only to the question of happiness and the meaning of life, but also to these premises and how to justify them. As one might expect, their answers widely differ. There are two main approaches to resolving the difficulty of the "ultimate justification". One school of thought is exemplified by Immanuel Kant, who leaving happiness alone, answered the question of how to live virtuously by formulating his famous general ethics rule, the *categorical imperative*, which he found through introspection[2]. On the one hand, its highly abstract nature and lack of reference to any specific standard is its greatest strength, because most people understand it to be self-evident; but at the same time, it is also its greatest weakness since it does not provide any help with how to lead a life of happiness and leaves us completely in the lurch

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[1]   There are many studies on Aristotle's ethical theory and companions on the Nico-machean Ethics. Cf. in recent times: Bormann/Schröer, 2005; Miller, 2011; Rapp/Corcilius, 2011; Trewet, 2011; Echeñique, 2012; Radke-Uhlmann, 2012; Shields, 2012; Polansky, 2014; Hardy/Rudebusch, 2014; Mesch, 2015; Scott, 2015; important older contributions: Hardie, 1968; Bien, 1973.

[2]   Cf. I. Kant, Grundlegung der Metaphysik der Sitten, p. 51 (Frankfurt edition): „Handle nur nach derjenigen Maxime, durch die du zugleich wollen kannst, dass sie ein allgemeines Gesetz werde" or „Handle so, als ob die Maxime deiner Handlung durch deinen Willen zum allgemeinen Naturgesetz werden sollte."

when it comes to the many situations of daily life which do not strictly fall under any rule of ethics. For such questions as, "Shall I wash my car today or read a good book instead?", Kant's bloodless maxims are of no use at all.

Therefore, many philosophers have chosen the exact opposite path by starting with reality and real phenomena and then distilling from them the rules for a happy life. The strong and the weak points of this method are contrary to that of Kant. The advantage is that by relying on concrete phenomena, you can develop many precise conceptions of what a happy life should be. The disadvantage is that many of these inductions will seem subjective and even arbitrary to other people because they lack the firm basis of being self-evident.

The classic example for this practical-philosophical approach to ethics is provided by Aristotle's theory, which has been adopted or rejected by moral philosophers throughout the centuries[1]. No matter to which school of ethics one personally adheres, reading Aristotle is very instructive, because as the founding hero of logic he always makes clear what the premises of his thoughts are and argues precisely on behalf of his opinions. As a rule, Aristotle conceals nothing from his reader and, when he omits something, he always gives the reason why. This makes each of the arguments supporting his theory of a happy life understandable, even for those who do not agree with them.

Anyone who wants to know if Aristotle's ethical doctrine is still viable today should read the *Nicomachean Ethics* (NE), (if possible in the original Greek, because almost all translations tend to blur the remarkable precision) and begin a self-experiment[2]. There is hope of success if at least one of the following prerequisites is fulfilled: The reader should be of middle age and be committed to the values of western civilisation; should have some responsibility in family and society and should know the elementary forms of scientific argument (induc-

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[1]   On the philosophical reception of the text in the 20th century cf. Gutschker, 2002.

[2]   Standard edition of the Greek text: Bywater, 1894, which needs an overhaul, so already Dirlmeyer, 1960, 252; critical commentary Joachim, 1951; translations (with notes): Ross, 1954; Dirlmeyer, 1960; Bien, 1972; Broadie/Rowe, 2002; Wolf, 2006.

tion, deduction, logic). The responsible citizen is the reader for whom Aristotle wrote his ethical and political treatises, and as he himself said more than once, more for practical use than for theoretical enjoyment (1095a2-13. 1103b26-30). [If not indicated otherwise, references will be to the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The quotations are given in reference to Bekker because the division of chapters differs in German and English editions. Aristotle's *Politics* will be quoted with the addition *Pol.*]. Indeed, the benefit that can be gained by reading the *Nicomachean Ethics* does not only depend on the work itself, but also on the personal background of the reader; something I personally experienced during the two extensive readings of this book which I undertook within a span of about thirty years. My appreciation of this great text of European philosophy was equally high on both occasions, but the perspective I brought to it was altogether different on each occasion because I, myself, had changed. When reading it as a student of classics about 30 years ago, I did not lack enthusiasm and perhaps not the intelligence to understand Aristotle's arguments, but I lacked practical experience in life to understand them with heart and soul. Now, in a phase of life which antiquity regarded as the beginning of old age (alas!), many of life's experiences have left their stamp on me and many choices as how to live have already been taken. So, I felt when re-reading the *Nicomachean Ethics* that my own sense of self was somehow at stake. To quote Aristotle: "You will sooner become a good mathematician than win Practical Wisdom" (1142a11-13) – if it is to be gained at all.

In this sense, the following pages may help the reader of Aristotle's *Ethics* by presenting a basic outline of his ethical theory. By necessity, my remarks will be quite short and will provide only an abstract framework. His treatment is of course much longer, more colorful, and more diverse than my condensed notes on it. Aristotle illustrates many things (which are reduced to a mere word or two in these pages) with a host of examples. If, therefore, academic theorizing seems to be overbearing in the following short account, the blame should be laid at my doorstep. However, it has to be said, Aristotle's *Ethics* is a complex system of thought, the understanding of which requires a certain amount of intellectual effort.

2   The philosophical and historical setting

Aristotle's ethics project began somewhere between 340 and 325 B.C. A more precise date cannot be fixed (Dirlmeyer, 1960, p. 249). Historically, the NE belongs to the transitional phase from the epoch of the Greek Classic to Hellenism, which was triggered by the conquests of Alexander the Great (whose teacher, by the way, was Aristotle), and which brought about enormous changes to the Greek world. At this time the moral values of the Greek city-state (*polis*) were no longer taken for granted and became the subject of philosophical debate. Aristotle's *Ethics* account for this fact and is the last communitarian *Polis*-Ethics before more individualistic concepts like Epicureanism and Stoicism started gaining ground. In its essence, therefore, Aristotle's *Ethics* has to be understood as a conservative project, which – as we will see in the end – has some consequences with respect to the underlying moral values.

The NE is a more or less corrected script of a lecture Aristotle gave to Athenian citizens outside the narrow circle of his own philosophical school, the *Peripatos*. It is one of several treatises (*pragmateiai*) where the philosopher discusses human behaviour and social organization. To these belong the *Eudemian Ethics*, the *Politics*, and what might be surprising for the modern reader, the *Poetic* and *Rhetoric*, because these arts (*technai*) are also about men and their character (*ēthos*). Essentially, the NE treats the moral issues which relate to the individual person. It is, therefore, only one part of the practical philosophy to which Aristotle, according to his definition of man as social animal (*zoon politikon,* Pol. 1253a2-3), gives the general name politics (*politike*)[1] By singling out different aspects of human moral life and assigning them to different works, Aristotle emancipates himself from his teacher Plato, who in his *Dialogues* does not differentiate between the various fields but treats them as a unity. In fact, Aristotle's ethical project has always to be read in opposition to Plato's.

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[1]   Cf. the Index Aristotelicus of Bonitz s.v. politikos pp. 614b31-52

3   Premises of thought

The difference between Aristotle and Plato can already be seen when it comes to justifying moral values. In case of Aristotle, the general premises are founded on a 'weak' method of reasoning. Moral rules are not established by divine revelations or philosophical inspiration but are revealed by induction and analysis of popular moral convictions and by comparison of diverging philosophical positions (Kraut, 2006, pp. 76-95; Frede, 2013, pp. 215-237). In this kind of thought, divine commandments or ontologies like Plato's *Concept of Ideas*, on which all further ethical values are based, are strictly excluded. To give an example: Aristotle's notion about what is just and how to act accordingly does not result from a religious concept nor from an existing abstract ideal of justice (Plato), but from a discussion of the various opinions (*phainomena*) put forward by ordinary Athenian citizens and, of course, philosophers (1145b2-7). Today, a similar method of reasoning, though with reference to the entire world, is also proposed by neo-Aristotelean philosophers like Martha Nussbaum.

The difficulties and limits of ethical theory were known to Aristotle, as he himself states more than once (1094b11-27. 1104a1-10). However, in contrast to modern ethics he does not waste much energy on the matter of *ultimate justification*, but only says that scientific methods should be suited to the nature of its object (Scott, 2015, pp. 123-141). According to him, in the case of human behaviour, which is complex and depends on ever changing situations, there can be nothing as inflexible as a mathematical proof. This 'weak' method of determining moral rules via induction is attractive, especially for non-religious persons, but there are some pitfalls which will become clear further on when we see how Aristotle steps forward to justify inequality by inducing it from notions on slavery in Athens.

3.1   Structural premises

The main question raised in the NE is, "What is happiness (*eudaimonia*) and how can I lead a happy life?" Since Kant, we are accustomed to ask, "How can I act in an ethical way?" The difference between the two questions shows the difference of perspective. To Aristotle, happiness and moral behaviour are not

thought of as being in opposition, but as a unity. Acting virtuously does not mean restricting my own happiness. On the contrary, acting virtuously and being happy are firmly tied to each other. But, what is happiness according to Aristotle? With this question we are approaching the structural premises which are decisive for Aristotle's view of the human world. Aristotle speaks about *eudaimonia* in the first book of the NE after discussing various notions about it. Genuine happiness, he argues, is nothing static or immobile, like material wealth, but it is a kind of dynamic process. Happiness, as far as it can be achieved, comes from living happily.

This seems to be a truism; but it is not. First, we have to look at the Greek language to understand Aristotle better. The Greek word he uses for 'living' is *praxis* (= action) which derives from the verb *prattein* (= to act). A happy life is then identical with living happily, in Greek *eu* (= well) *prattein*, *eu prattō* meaning in everyday language "I am doing fine". Next step: Every action (*praxis*), so Aristotle, is directed toward a certain goal (*telos*). Acting means aiming at something (1094a1-5). This is implied when we use the term *praxis*. Now we are getting an important premise of Aristotelian thought which in this general form is foreign to us and has been heavily criticized. Since living is identical with acting (*praxis*), life is always directed toward an aim, and the sense of human life, that is to say, happiness, consists of realising the specific aim which lies in our human nature. In the words of Aristotle: humankind have got by nature a specific human potential (*ergon*) to be fulfilled by acting (*energeia*) in accordance with it (1097b24-28; Stemmer, 2005, pp. 65-86). Happiness is the highest objective in a hierarchy of goals, which is shown by the fact that there is nothing above it, but it is an end in itself (1097a35-97b6). A somewhat simplistic example may help to understand Aristotle's reasoning about the chains of objectives: I go to work and thus use my free time to earn money (only for the sake of argument; obviously one can also work for other reasons), I earn money to buy something to eat, I buy something to eat to keep myself from being hungry. I do not want to be hungry, because it obstructs my happiness.

In Aristotle's system of thought, the *telos*-structure of human life is an important formal premise because it lies at the basis of human happiness and the

good life. Being human implies that by nature (*physis*) one has specific potentials (*dynameis*), and if you want to attain happiness (*eudaimonia*), you have to realize (*energein*) them. All this sounds demanding, but *nota bene*, Aristotle's writings are not the word of God; nobody is forced to lead a good life and, moreover, nobody is forced to lead it in the way suggested by the philosopher. Aristotle would only claim that his views on the nature of humankind and happiness are derived through scientific method, that they are in themselves coherent, and that they can help to lead a happy life. If the precepts are right, he says, it would be silly not to live by them. Obviously, as in many other ancient moral theories, ethics, happiness, rules and knowledge are intertwined. That human beings may behave contrary to knowledge is a thought systematically developed only much later by St Augustine.

3.2   Material premises – citizen and individual

Up to this point, we have heard much about the structure of the happy life. But what is the content of a happy life? Now we must look at the material premises, i.e. at Aristotle's definition of human nature. As usual, Aristotle starts by discussing popular views and philosophical doctrines (Plato), which he adapts and modifies. First, he places man in the cosmos between God and beast. In comparison to God, who is perfect by definition, man is a deficient creature, as evidenced by his corporeality and his final death. In comparison to the beasts, which Aristotle regards only as a living part of nature, man is defined by a surplus of capabilities, since he is able to think, to communicate through complex language, and, what is most important, to act with consciousness and determination.

Aristotle's famous definition that man is a political animal (*zoon politikon*) has to be viewed in this context and carries a double meaning. It is both negative and positive. On the one hand, man is less perfect than God, because he needs other men to survive; on the other hand, he is better off than the beasts, because he is able to participate in social interaction and can enjoy its pleasures (Pol. 1253a6-18). In this point Aristotle diverges from ethics theorists of the early modern era (and also antiquity) who postulate an original state of nature

in which everyone lived on his own accord and, thus, define human beings as isolated individuals. For the definition of happiness, the consequences of this difference are enormous and must be briefly touched upon here. First, Aristotle. Since man is by nature and definition a social animal (*zoon politikon*), it follows that he needs society to be happy (Pol. 1253a18-29). Otherwise, he would not live up to his potentials. The degree to which an individual is able to achieve *eudaimonia* depends on society.

If the society in which you live is supportive so that you are in a position to act according to your natural social disposition, your personal happiness can be great. However, if society is otherwise, then the potential for happiness is diminished. According to Aristotle, human society consists mainly of your family (*oikia*) and the city (*polis*) to which you belong. So, as a social animal it is your duty to comport yourself in a way that is congruent with being a member of a private household as well as of being a citizen. Now we come to the theories of the so-called "Possessive Individualism" (C. B. MacPherson), which have shaped the modern view on society and state. According to this theoretical construct, in the beginning men lived by themselves in a state of nature without any society or state. Man is thus defined in principle as an unsocial animal. Afterwards, the state was invented as a technical instrument to protect man from his evil neighbors, everybody behaving in the state of nature according the motto *homo homini lupus* (Hobbes). That's how the life of the Indians was viewed by the British and French colonists in America! To save lives and possessions men gave up part of their unlimited individual rights by way of a social contract. Hence, state and government were born. It is plain to see that modern political theories, too, do not work without abstract premises on human nature.

The idea of defining man in opposition to society would never have occurred to Aristotle. However, he, too, does not define man only by his social nature. At this point, a look to Plato may help to sharpen our understanding of Aristotle's position. Plato in his *Republic* (*politeia*), his *chef-d'oeuvre*, identifies man and citizen and defines happiness as purely functioning in the hierarchy of an ideal *Polis*. Aristotle, by contrast, showing himself to be more in touch with normal life than his teacher, defines happiness in two ways, thus creating a kind of

double teleology. Certainly, as emphasized by Plato, man is a *zoon politikon* living in a society, but he is also, as shown by reality, an individual person with his own specific talents and wishes. *Eudaimonia*, therefore, is to be realized not only in social, but also in private life. If you want to lead a good life, it is not enough to be a perfect citizen, but you also have to pursue your own private happiness.

3.3   Human nature – body and soul

Talk about private happiness sounds very liberal to us, and in a certain way it is. However, Aristotle has also some clear preconceptions of what perfect private happiness should look like. Though it is not excluded, private happiness in his sense is not about going to motorcar races or football games, but a rather intellectual enterprise. Aristotle develops his theory on the basis of some anthropological premises, repeatedly pointing out that his is only a rough sketch and that natural talents of men differ. He begins his speculation about human nature with the traditional dualism of body (*sōma*) and soul (*psychē*). Since the different functions of the soul sets man apart from the beast, these define the human nature (1102a16-18). High esteem of the soul does not mean that the body should be neglected, health (*hygieia*) is an important good, but since being human is defined by having a soul, true human happiness can only consist in realizing the psychic potentials (*dynameis*) in the best possible way. *Eudaimonia* is, put precisely, the right activity of the soul (*energeia psychēs*; 1098a16-17).

What, however, is the soul (*psychē*)? In *Ethics*, Aristotle does not want to discuss the nature of this 'organ', because he is interested in its functions and not its physiology. He first draws a general distinction between an intellectual (*logikon*) and a non-intellectual (*alogon*) part of the soul (1102a27-28). The non-intellectual part consists again of two parts; a vegetative part (*phytikon*) which is responsible for generation and is common to men and beasts – it is therefore left out of discussion by Aristotle (1102a32-02b3) – and an emotional part (*epithymētikon*), in which are located the feeling of pleasure and pain and the emotions (1102b13-31). The intellectual part also comprises several functions. There we find, to say it in a Kantian way, the capabilities for theoretical reasoning and

– most interesting for this book – the much-decried Practical Wisdom (*phronēsis*)[1].

At the top of the Aristotelean intellectual hierarchy stands, as was to be expected from a philosopher (a body builder would certainly vote for something else), the theoretical wisdom (*sophía*) in which the theoretical mind concretizes. *Sophía* and self-sufficiency are reserved for gods; they are not attainable to deficient human beings who can realize them at best for a short moment[2]. It is Practical Wisdom and emotions that belong to the human domain. They hold sway in the human sphere, they can be realized in a good or a bad manner, they (but also the external circumstances) decide whether a life is to be called good and happy or bad and unhappy. Since Aristotle in the NE wants to focus on the life and morals of the 'normal' citizen, he does not talk much about theoretical wisdom and its happiness. He mentions it only in the 6th and the 10th book as a theoretical maximum preserved for the philosopher, concentrating instead on emotions and Practical Wisdom; which are perhaps most attractive to the modern reader. However, the 'metaphysical' framework of superhuman wisdom as an optimum should not be forgotten.

According to Aristotle, the activity of the emotional (*epithymētikon*) and of the rational part (*logikon*) of the soul is the basis for a virtuous and happy life. The perfect functioning (*energeia*) of these parts is called virtue. A look at the Greek text shows why it is called by this name. The Greek word for virtue is *arete*, which is to be connected with the adjective *aristos* meaning 'the best'. In Greek thought virtue is always an optimum. This implies that every reasonable person will go for it without being forced. If someone does not behave correctly or acts contrary to virtue, he is at best unreasonable, if not mentally ill. The translation of the Greek *arete* with optimum needs some further explanation. Virtue is a habitus (*hexis*), a condition, of the soul, but it is not static. It is, as Aristotle says,

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[1]   Aristotle gives an overview of the different intellectual capabilities in 139b14-38. On nous and aisthēsis, which are not discussed here, cf. Renero, 2013, pp. 103-120.

[2]   On the bios theoretikos cf. most recently Herzberg, 2013.

implemented and trained by acting virtuously. So, it is rather an active psychic condition. To give an example, justice is not a title given to someone, but has to be enacted permanently. You are only righteous, if you are consciously acting in a just way and if acting so has become your habit (*ethos*). Only then you can be called a just person (1103a23-03b25).

In reference to the two main functions of the soul, Aristotle distinguishes between two types of virtues: the moral (*ethikai*) virtues and the intellectual (*dianoetikai*) ones. Both types are firmly connected with each other. You can speak of virtue in the real sense of the word only if emotions and intellect work together in harmony (1144a11-20).

4   Moral virtues and emotions

What are moral virtues, and how can they be obtained? Again, Aristotle starts by discussing popular and philosophical opinions on the issue and extracting from them what seems best to him[1]. At the core of his system lie three of the four cardinal virtues as known from Plato, courage (*andreia*), self-control (*sōphrosyne*) and justness (*dikaiosyne*); the fourth Platonic cardinal virtue, wisdom (*sophía*), being an intellectual virtue. In addition, there are several 'minor' virtues like liberality, magnificence, greatness of soul, urbanity etc., which are sometimes difficult to express, because in English, there are no exact equivalents to the Greek words. Aristotle treats all these virtues fairly extensively, thus creating an entire coordinate system of human behavior.

In this system, the virtues are a kind of golden mean *(mesotes)*; a small path which passes in the middle between two vices (1104a11-27). The Aristotelean definition of courage (*andreia)* may serve as an example. Courage is to be placed between the negative extremes of daredevilry and cowardliness (*deilia*) defined in reference to it as an excess or lack of courage or, the other way around, as an excess or lack of fear. The middle position of virtue is no medioc-

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[1]   Aristotle gives an overview of them in NE 1107a32ff; cf. Dirlmeier, 1960, p. 313.

rity (*mediocritas*) or arithmetic middle. On the contrary, achieving it can be regarded as something of a quantum leap (1107a6-9). Aristotle knows well that men have different talents. *Non omnes omnia possunt*. A professional boxer needs other food than an average person! Therefore, when looking for the right middle you have to be aware of your own nature and inclinations (1109a33-09b7). The right mean has to be judged by the individual case and is very difficult to find (1109a24.34-35).

In general, all moral virtues refer to actions and emotions (1106b24-28). In contrast to other ancient philosophers, Aristotle regards emotions (*pathē*) as a fundamentally human quality with not only negative, but also positive effects. Accordingly, emotions should not be eliminated altogether; rather there should be limits (*metriopatheia*) to the extent to which they ought to be expressed. Aristotle was no champion of complete equanimity (*apatheia*), as was postulated by the Stoics later on. His 'soft' position on this point was heavily criticized in antiquity by his opponents, but is attractive nowadays, because his conception of happiness seems to be very humane and realistic. All emotions, Aristotle goes on to say, are connected with pleasure (*hēdonē*) and pain (*lypē*), so your soul has to be conditioned appropriately with respect to these feelings. Since the subject is dear to him, Aristotle discusses pleasure extensively twice in the NE; once in the 5th and again in the 10th book.

Emotions are first guided from the outside by education (*paideia*), the importance of which is already stressed by Plato (1104b11-13), later in life, if your education was successful, by Practical Wisdom (*phronēsis*), which defines the right middle (1107a1), or if not successful, by law. The child who itself does not have *phronēsis* will be trained to act in a moral way. Thus, certain patterns of behavior and emotion will be established that become a habit later on and shape its future moral concepts (1103a14-03b25)[1]. For example, if a child is prevented from stealing by being punished (pain), or is encouraged to imitate

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[1]   On the matter of hexis cf. most recently Liske, 2014, pp. 259-288; on the training of virtues cf. Anagnostopoulos, 2014, pp. 219-222.

behavior. Seneca weighs up two options against each other: Either you do not participate in public licentiousness, thus showing that you do not agree with this kind of behavior, or you participate, but only to a certain extent. In the first case, you act courageously and uncompromisingly, in the second case, you act moderately and willing to compromise for the sake of social harmony. Seneca's words show that the moral choice takes place between two ethical cardinal virtues, between courage (*andreia*) and moderation (*sōphrosyne*), which form the basic premises of the moral thought. It is obvious that to make the right decision is a difficult thing and that there is often more than one alternative. In his example, Seneca leaves the decision to the reader, writing only that a courageous person would not take part in the party, a moderate one rather in moderation. As can be seen from this example, the choice you make between these two legitimate ways of acting depends on your disposition and on your inclinations. The golden mean, as Aristotle also notes, is always to be found in reference to your nature (*physis*). However, whatever your choice, it is most important that it is founded on moral meditation and that your decision (*prohairesis*) reflects your Practical Wisdom (*phronēsis*).

The example taken from Seneca refers to an individual choice, but *phronēsis* expresses itself also in a broader social context (1141b23-33). To understand this, we have to look back to Aristotle's definition of man as a social being (*zoon politikon*) whose existence cannot be thought of outside of the framework of society; that is, the family (*oikos*) and the city (*polis*) in which he lives. As we have already seen at the beginning, being human implies that you have to fulfill your social functions within your family and as a citizen (*politēs*). Practical Wisdom within the bounds of your household is called *oikonomia* by Aristotle, whereas that of the citizen goes by the name of 'politics' (*politikē*) – not to be understood in modern sense.

Based on the categories of genus (*genos*) and species (*eidos*), Aristotle makes a distinction in the field of political wisdom between legislature (*nomothesia*) and politics proper, which he further divides into acting as a public councilman (*bouleutikē*) and acting as a judge (*dikanikē*). Aristotle's method of differentiation (*dihairesis*) may seem rather meticulous to modern readers, but by this

way it is guaranteed that no civil function of an Athenian is left out. In contrast to citizens of modern states who delegate everything to professionals, an Athenian took part in political debate and decision making, actively decided by voting about important matters such as war and peace, and, could volunteer to act as judge. To sum up, according to Aristotle, individual and public *phronēsis* are both equally important if you want to lead a happy life.

6   Conclusion

True happiness (*eudaimonia*) is, according to Aristotle, an active and at times a very demanding thing. It is nothing for lazybones. It manifests itself through both moral and intellectual virtues. Its degree depends on how you fulfill the individual and public 'duties' imposed on you by nature and social status. By distinguishing between a private and a public person in reference to happiness and by giving both equal share in it Aristotle disagrees with his teacher Plato. He replaces Plato's utopian and rather totalitarian concept of *eudaimonia* by a broader one which seems more in tune with the realities of human (Athenian) life. However, there remain some notions which are highly problematic in modern thought because they contradict the principle of equality and can lead to political suppression if used mistakenly in a normative way (see also Frede, 2014, pp. 298-305).

The difficulties arise from Aristotle's supposition that happiness is possible only by degree and in steps. Most happy, as said at the beginning, are those who possess theoretical wisdom (*sophía*) which is only attainable for gods (and philosophers). The next most happy are those who in private as well as in public possess Practical Wisdom comprising all ethical virtues. Those are the happy people, but what about those, we ask, who are not included in this group and do not have a share in wisdom of any kind? Aristotle's answer to this question would be: Sorry, but those unfortunates do not have a share in happiness either. Such an answer is very elitist, indeed, but as far as the private aspect of happiness is concerned, there are no practical consequences for these persons. It becomes more problematic if we have a look at the public aspect of happiness. According to Aristotle, it consists in performing your social role as is your

due, and if you do not act voluntarily, you may even be forced to attain happiness. It may even be your role to be forced by those who claim Practical Wisdom for themselves, and thereby define what is good and bad.

Aristotle himself, when speaking about women and slaves, shows to which error of judgement or even abuse this kind of argument could lead. He attributes to women a sort of Practical Wisdom in private life, but it is nevertheless tied to chauvinistic notions of 'a female role' (Pol. 1254b13-14). In political life, there is, according to Aristotle, no room for women, as was shown to him by his experience in Athens where only men were admitted to politics. Even worse is the situation of slaves who, following Athenian practice, Aristotle excludes as moral subjects from political society admitting, however, that slaves, as human beings, can act virtuously in private life. Analyzing the factual situation of slaves in Athens, Aristotle interprets the existing inequalities not as a social phenomenon, but as natural facts. The natural role of a slave, he argues, is to be a slave and to obey his master (Pol. 1253b32-55a3). His 'happiness' consists of living up to this potential, and if he does not want to do so voluntarily, then he has to be compelled. Only in this way does a slave make his due contribution to civil society. A most horrible conclusion! However, what may be a small comfort, slaves remain human beings for whom their master is obligated to care for, both in private and in public interest. It is against Aristotelean *phronēsis* to let him perish by hunger, to treat him badly without reason, or to kill him. The premise that man is a *zoon politikon* leads to the conclusion that you have to care for your fellow human beings and society.

The strong and the weak points of comprehensive ethical theories like Aristotle's can be summarized as follows: On one side they offer, especially in the mild neo-Aristotelean form, many concrete, useful and far-reaching tips regarding the private and the social life. While looking for happiness, they do not sacrifice emotion on the altar of reason but consider both together as the basis for a happy life. Against 'overtrumping' individualism which tries to use the opportunities of political life only for its own advantage, these ethical theories (like the Christian faith) stress the importance of charity (*caritas*) and hold up the prima-

cy of reason against senseless consumption and ruthless waste of natural resources.

On the other side, inductive reasoning makes ethical theories of this kind vulnerable to misuse. Subjective analysis of factual circumstances may be presented as natural law and imposed on others.

When abused as an ideology on a grand scale, the consequences of this kind of argument are demonstrated by the history of Marxism, which in totalitarian communist states like the Soviet Union and China has led, and still leads, to the oppression and death of millions of persons who fall short of ideological standards.

To a lesser extent, the problems of neo-Aristotelean ethics also appear in normal philosophical and political discourse, when charity turning into paternalism cements a social hierarchy, and divergent thought is discredited by excluding its adherents from the 'communication community'. In Germany, for example, the subtle forms of assignments of social position and of marginalization express themselves in the language used in the debate about the welfare state and democracy. The label, *Sozialhilfeempfänger [social welfare recipients]* fixes the position in society of recipients of financial assistance; 'populists' and 'neoliberals', according to their opponents, do not understand the principles of intelligent political debate. There is no remedy against this type of intellectual arrogance, (which often goes together with a firm conviction about what happiness and the right way of life should be), other than to be modest with respect to your own wisdom and to find out, as Aristotle did, whether your opinions are right by engaging in permanent dialogue with others, and to see them as a contributing to the common debate about happiness and the happy life, which hopefully, will not end as long as there are human beings on earth.

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1   Introduction

Wise women, wise men, wise people are urgently needed in business and socie-
ty these days. We might, for instance, think back to the far-reaching leadership
failures and business scandals of the past few decades: the collapse of Enron,
the bursting of the dot.com bubble and the ensuing loss of trillions of dollars in
both stock and real estate wealth, and more recently, the tinkering with the
LIBOR, the consumer deceptions in the food and automobile industries, etc. –
all clear evidence of a lack of Practical Wisdom in leaders and managers.

Moreover, we might also call to mind the state of our planet to appreciate the
manifold and complex issues facing societies today and in the future. Issues like
climate change, scarcity of resources, refugee and migration flows, the growing
gap between rich and poor, but also far-reaching societal transformation pro-
cesses like digitalization, globalization or radicalization, to name but a few, are
all calling for Practical Wisdom among those who assume leadership roles in
business and society. The need to incorporate Practical Wisdom into our global-
ized world and its various management contexts is summarized by Bachmann
and colleagues (2017, p.16), who note that in times "when the need for excel-
lence in judgment, character, and perspicacity appears to be higher than ever,
Practical Wisdom promises to become a valuable resource for management
that might counteract some conspicuous management failures of late".

Small wonder then, that an increasing number of scholars are beginning to
rediscover Practical Wisdom as an antidote to managerial misbehavior and as
an outstanding quality of successful leadership (e.g. Intezari & Pauleen, 2017;
McKenna, Rooney, & Boal, 2009). In general, these and other approaches to
Practical Wisdom in management have been focused mainly on bridging the gap
between purely theoretical knowledge and practice-oriented skillfulness, while
simultaneously integrating moral and social aspects (cf. Bachmann, Habisch, &
Dierksmeier, 2017). Studies explore the role of Practical Wisdom in various
areas of management, including leadership (McKenna et al., 2009), entrepre-
neurship (Dunham, 2010), decision-making (Intezari & Pauleen, 2017), strategy
(Statler, Roos, & Victor, 2007), sustainable management (Roos, 2017), and
management education (Bachmann, 2014).

However, when reviving the centuries-old concept of Practical Wisdom (as described in detail by Jan Radicke in Chapter 1 of this volume) in the modern business world, the characteristics and conditions of modern societies have to be considered. They are diverse and by far transcend the limits of this essay. Undoubtedly, however, due to the socio-economic and socio-cultural effects of globalization and digitalization, people are nowadays experiencing culture, ethnicity, religion and value differences to an extent that has never existed before (cf. Genkova's chapter in this volume). Therefore, a modern re-interpretation of Practical Wisdom must prove its adaptability to this new, highly diverse environment. For instance, what exactly is or should be a practically wise decision or action if the meaning of "the right way" or "the right thing" is based on diverse and even competing values and worldviews? And vice versa: What might Practical Wisdom contribute when dealing with social phenomena such as individualization, pluralism, changes in values or fragmentation of life concepts?

Although I certainly do not have all the answers to these fundamental questions, I hope that the following will at least shed some light on the centuries-old concept of Practical Wisdom – recently rediscovered in management literature – and its possible connections to Diversity Management. First, using as a basis the argument that Practical Wisdom becomes manifest when its eight core features – action-oriented feature, integrative feature, normative feature, sociality-linked feature, pluralism-related feature, personality-related feature, cultural heritage feature, and limitation-related feature – are combined to the largest extent feasible (Bachmann et al., 2017), I explore the implications of this conceptualization for management practice. I then link the stream of Practical Wisdom-oriented research to the emerging field of Diversity Management which constitutes the second pillar of this volume and suggest avenues for further research.

2   Practical Wisdom Revisited

In order to grasp what Practical Wisdom is and to make sense of the thoughts and arguments developed in the following articles, it is worth taking a step back

to examine Practical Wisdom more closely. In our everyday life, most of us probably have some sort of understanding of wisdom (or stupidity). We might associate wisdom with insight, reflexivity, experience, responsibility, creativity and so on. It is also likely that we assume to, more or less, understand what others mean when they speak about a wise person or an unwise decision. Narratives of wise role models exist in all cultures and in all regions of the world. However, if asked to concisely describe or even to define wisdom, we will most probably face serious difficulties in coming up with a satisfactory answer. This is to say nothing of the virtually impossible task of finding a commonly agreed upon definition of wisdom with people from various cultures and with highly different understandings of wisdom.

It is therefore hardly surprising that also in academia there is considerable controversy about the nature of Practical Wisdom and its meaning. A thorough review of the relevant literature reveals that Practical Wisdom is a complex and multidimensional issue which has its roots in ancient times, but has attracted much attention in contemporary research in diverse disciplines such as philosophy (Tiberius & Swartwood, 2011), theology (Bachmann, 2016), psychology (Walsh, 2015), management studies (McKenna et al., 2009) and others. Indeed, Practical Wisdom appears to be a much broader phenomenon than one usually might expect at first sight. It was probably the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle who first developed a systematic understanding of what constitutes a practically wise person. Especially in book VI of his Nichomachean Ethics, he includes Practical Wisdom (*phronesis*) as one of the five intellectual virtues. In sum, the Aristotelian *phronesis* requires first the openness to receive and understand each particular situation as it is, second the theoretical knowledge and the experience to choose and apply the appropriate means, and third the excellence of character to define the right ends.

In the occidental philosophy of the Middle Ages, it was principally Thomas Aquinas who revived the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis* in his Summa Theologiae (II-II, 47-56) in the Latin term, *prudentia*. By echoing Aristotle, he describes Practical Wisdom as "right reason in matters of action" (*recta ratio agibilium*; II-II, 47,2 sed contra), which applies universal knowledge to a particular

case (cf. II-II, 47,3 ad1). Other wisdom traditions, for instance, can be found in the ancient Chinese scripture Yi Jīng (or Book of Virtues), which points out that the sense of balance between polarities is crucial for practical wise living. Also throughout the Islamic traditions, concepts of Practical Wisdom (al-Hikmah) were widespread. They can be defined as "a total insight and […] sound judgment concerning a matter or situation through understanding cause and effect phenomena" (Beekun, 2012, p. 1005).

Contemporary academic studies on Practical Wisdom can broadly be classified into two lines of research. On the one side, scholars have sought to theoretically conceptualize and contextualize Practical Wisdom (cf. Bachmann et al., 2018). They refer to particular virtue traditions, ranging from Aristotelian, Catholic, and Confucian traditions which embrace Practical Wisdom as necessary and partially constitutive for human flourishing (e.g. Melé, 2010) to modern-day adaptations such as neo Aristotelian-Thomistic action theory (Rhonheimer, 1994) or Confucian re-interpretations (Yu, 2006). Others extract a set of qualities (McKenna et al., 2009), abilities (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 2011), components (Intezari & Pauleen, 2017) or competencies (Bachmann, 2014) which jointly constitute Practical Wisdom, wise decisions or wise actions. In a complementary perspective, others have sought to operationalize Practical Wisdom through an empirical lens striving to identify scientific criteria for control, replication, and prediction regarding the nature and development of wisdom (cf. Walsh, 2015). Mainly in the field of psychology, scholars have developed multiple measurement scales (Thomas, Bangen, Ardelt, & Jeste, 2017) and presented several varieties or subtypes of wisdom (Trowbridge, 2011).

3   The Anatomy of Management's Practical Wisdom[1]

This review, which is by no means exhaustive, shows that there is no unanimous consent on what Practical Wisdom means and highlights a broad diversity of interpretations, approaches and terminologies within contemporary wisdom

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[1] This section is based on and draws extensively on Bachmann et al. 2017 and 2018.

research. Here, combining conceptual considerations with empirical findings I define Practical Wisdom as:

Practical Wisdom in management is the capacity to combine its eight core features to the largest extent feasible: integrative feature, normative feature, sociality-linked feature, pluralism-related feature, personality-related feature, cultural heritage feature, limitation-related feature, and action-oriented feature.

This definition argues that Practical Wisdom improves managerial reasoning, decision making, and acting, by concurrently (1) integrating and balancing several, often competing interests, rationalities, emotions, challenges, and contexts, (2) orienting towards normative guidance of human flourishing, (3) considering the indispensable sociality of every human being as well as (4) today's multi-layered diversity in life and society, (5) acting appropriately and authentically in a self-aware manner, (6) rediscovering transmitted cultural and spiritual heritage, (7) being aware of the incompleteness of human existence and humble in the face of one's own achievements and capabilities, and (8) targeting always realization in practice. In the following, I elaborate on this and illustrate how it draws on already existing key definitions.

Integrative-feature: Since ancient times, Practical Wisdom has fundamentally been linked to the particular circumstances or concrete occurrences within a given situation. It thus includes the integrative ability to perceive and understand the true complexity of reality in its multi-layered facets in an open-minded and holistic way. From the Aristotelian *phronesis*, the Confucian *yì*, the Islamic *al-Hikmah,* and Aquinas' *prudentia* up to current wisdom literature, Practical Wisdom requires deliberative and appropriate judgment for each particular situation.

Taking this cue from the other disciplines, contemporary research on Practical Wisdom in management emphasizes the ability to appropriately respond to a specific situation, while considering the contextual framework of time, space, and sociality (Malan & Kriger, 1998, p. 246). This is particularly relevant in times of increasing complexity, information gaps, ambiguities, and unpredictability of today's business world (Clark, 2010; Intezari & Pauleen, 2014). For this purpose,