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Ways to Inhabit the Deliberative-Aspirational Point of View: Practical Reason and Objective Goods

AQ1

Veronica Rodriguez-Blanco*

In “Practical Reason’s Foundations” John Finnis expands and refines his view on the relationship between objective goods and practical reason. In this paper Finnis rejects the Humean conception which denies the possibility of practical reason, or at least presents an emaciated version of it. For Hume, desires just happen to us and there is no interaction between desires and beliefs. The Humean and neo-Humean positions, Finnis rightly tells us, have a powerful influence on how we understand practical reason, including our interpretation of Aristotle’s conception of practical reason. I will call this the “bifurcation” thesis. Following Finnis’s conception of practical reason and his rejection of a bifurcation between reasons and desires, and between intellectual virtues and virtues of character, I advance an Aristotelian-inspired model of deliberation and practical reason that is narrow and immersed. It recognizes the difficulty of understanding the Aristotelian analogies of practical reason as if it were both a craft and theoretical reasoning to illuminate and demonstrate the existence of practical reason. However, I also argue that this narrow or immersed model is in continuity with a deliberative-aspirational perspective that we are able to inhabit. We explain how reflection without losing immersion is possible and explain how we can move in the direction of practical reason that guides actions and makes possible the realization of objective goods in our lives. Finally I will explore how the law advance proleptic thoughts whose content are values and invites the citizen to inhabit a deliberative-aspirational perspective.

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Keywords: Practical reason, ethics, Aristotle

I. Introduction

In *Natural Law and Natural Rights*,¹ John Finnis advances the view that there are objective goods and lays particular emphasis on the role of the objective good of practical reasonableness to show that law is in continuity with our exercise of

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¹ John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). See also John Finnis, “‘The Thing I am’: Personal Identity in Aquinas and Shakespeare,” *Social Philosophy and Policy* 22 (2005): 250-82.

practical reasonableness. He warns us, however, that this should not be interpreted simply as a list that we can apply to our daily lives. On the contrary, these objective goods are ends that require our engagement and reasoning in order to determine *what* they entail in each particular case. In “Practical Reason’s Foundations”² Finnis expands and refines his view on the relationship between objective goods and practical reason. In this paper Finnis rejects the Humean conception which denies the possibility of practical reason, or at least presents an emaciated version of it. For Hume, desires just happen to us and there is no interaction between desires and beliefs. The Humean and neo-Humean positions, Finnis rightly tells us, have a powerful influence on how we understand practical reason, including our interpretation of Aristotle’s conception of practical reason³. I will call this the ‘bifurcation’ thesis. In the above paper, Finnis also rejects Irwin’s interpretation of Aquinas’s account of *synderesis* in selecting the ends of practical reason. Contra Irwin’s interpretation, Finnis advances the view that *prudentia* or intellectual virtue plays a key role in selecting our ends and therefore intellectual virtue *is not only* about the selection of means, but also about our engagement with ends. In other words, Finnis rejects another version of the bifurcation thesis that emanates from reading Aquinas and Aristotle as establishing a contrast between our desires and passions and our thoughts, i.e., a separation between our virtues of character through which we apprehend our ends and our intellectual virtues through which we select our means. This is an important thought upon which I would like to expand in order to advance an Aristotelian-inspired model of deliberation that suggests that we start with narrow or substandard deliberation but are able to move towards a deliberative-aspirational perspective. I explain how our intellectual virtues and virtues of character can interact so that we can inhabit what I call “the deliberative-aspirational point of view” and potentially grasp the particularity of objective goods. This has important repercussions for our understanding of how judges and citizens are shaped by law and inhabit the deliberative-aspirational perspective, though due to constraints of space, I will not be able to elaborate on this in this paper.

In the first part of this paper, I discuss narrow or substandard deliberation, and in the second part I show how the transition from narrow or substandard deliberation to a deliberative-aspirational perspective is possible.

II. Aristotelia-Inspired Deliberation and Practical Reason: A Proposal

A. The Aristotelian-inspired model of Deliberation and Practical Reason

1. *Valuing and desire: key distinctions.* Prior to advancing a plausible Aristotelian-inspired conception of deliberation and practical reason, it is necessary

² John Finnis. “Practical Reason’s Foundations,” in *Reason in Action. Collected Essays: Volume 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

³ See for example, Jessica Moss, *Aristotle on the Apparent Good: Perception, Phantasia, Thought, and Desire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

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to clear the ground and bring some of the Aristotelian archaic ethical notions into the dialogue on our contemporary ethical notions.

In contemporary philosophical literature it is well accepted that we should distinguish between appetites and desires that are thought-dependent or judgement sensitive.⁴ However, Aristotle uses two different terms, *epithumiai* for mere desires such as thirst, hunger⁵ and *orexis* for more thoughtful desires, e.g., eating a good meal, having friends, graduating from college. A number of philosophers refer to desires in general without making the aforementioned distinction⁶ which for Aristotle is fundamental. For Aristotle only *orexis* is the subject of transformation and practical reasoning. *Epithumiai* are natural⁷ and we look to “get rid of them,” i.e., we seek their immediate elimination.⁸ Making errors about our appetites is not an ethical or practical failing but a pathological condition.⁹

After clearing the conceptual ground, we will now proceed to advance a neo-Aristotelian conception of deliberation and practical reason.

2. *Deliberation as an inquiry: settling an answer to the question “What?” through an answer to the question “How?”* In the Aristotelian model practical reason is constituted by both practical argument and deliberation. If there is a hypothetical attribution of deliberation to an agent we are closer to practical argumentation and the role of practical syllogism is key.¹⁰ This should be contrasted with the deliberative stance, i.e., when we act and our action is forward-looking we are neither looking at a past action and reconstructing it, nor are we considering what to do from the purely theoretical perspective. The practical syllogism tends to be a scheme of interpretation of future or past action, not something we engage with when we are actually acting.¹¹

⁴ See Stuart Hampshire, *Freedom of the Individual* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); T.M. Scanlon, *What We Owe To Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), ch. 1; Donald Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Richard Moran, *Authority and Estrangement: An Essay on Self-Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 115.

⁵ Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1118b15-19.

⁶ Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events*. Davidson talks about desires as “the desire to switch on the light” and plays with the ambiguity between mere appetites and judgment sensitive or thought-dependent desires.

⁷ *Nicomachean Ethics* 1118b9.

⁸ *Nicomachean Ethics* 1118b15-19. See also John Hyman, *Action, Knowledge, and Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 109-11. Hyman discusses this feature of “satiability” and compares it with Russell’s conception of desire which is more physiological.

⁹ *Nicomachean Ethics* 1118b19. For a discussion on how temperance is on thought-dependent desires and the potential pathological nature of common appetites, see Charles M. Young, “Aristotle on Temperance,” *The Philosophical Review* 97 (1988): 521-42.

¹⁰ John M. Cooper, *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 14. See also Heda Segvic, *From Protagoras to Aristotle: Essays in Ancient Moral Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 148-150. The core of practical argumentation is the practical syllogism: see *ibid.*, 150-1. It is not true to life and arguably, the practical syllogism truly works as an imputation or scheme of interpretation. See G.E.M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 78-79. See also Sarah Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 226, for a criticism of the schematism of the practical syllogism.

¹¹ Agnes Callard, “Aristotle on Deliberation,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Practical Reason*, eds. Ruth Chang and Kurt Sylvan (London: Routledge, 2021).

Aristotle presents us with a uniquely innovative model that is different from the Socratic idea of deliberation as the science of measurement in which deliberation is reducible to skill or craft, and also very different from the contemporary model of “balancing.”¹² Aristotle aims to show that deliberation and its outcome, a rational decision or choice (*prohairesis*)¹³ is not a skill or craft but has important elements that overlap with what we understand as a craft of skill. At the same time Aristotle shows that there is an important overlap between theoretical reasoning¹⁴ and deliberation. However, deliberation has a proper way of functioning and, consequently, Aristotle’s explanation navigates between Scylla the of a craft and the Charybdis of theoretical reasoning,¹⁵ aiming to show that deliberation is neither reducible to craft nor to theoretical thinking. If Aristotle’s endeavor is successful, it will reveal the possibility of robust practical reason. Let us then first scrutinize the resemblance between craft or skill and deliberation.

A) *The Craft/Skill analogy*

In the modern world as in the ancient world, and in all civilizations, human beings have developed a great variety of crafts that range from origami modelling to practicing medicine. In the contemporary world if we are asked how a medical doctor, who is treating a patient with ovarian cancer stage II-III deliberates to cure her patient, we will say that the medical doctor knows what she is doing because she knows *what* a healthy body is and *what* the appropriate treatment required to obtain a healthy body is. In philosophical terms we can say that she has, arguably, two representations or sets of beliefs when she practices her craft/skill. First, she has a set of beliefs about what constitutes “health,” e.g., good functioning of the patient’s organs, and good functioning of her normal capacities such as speech, breathing and mobility, etc. This is a “formal” set of beliefs or representation of a “healthy human being.” On the other hand, the medical doctor also has a more “substantive” conception of “health.” Since medicine is a

¹² For an emphasis on the difference between the contemporary model and the Aristotelian, see *ibid.*, 32. Callard argues that comparison and balancing is only one aspect of the Aristotelian derivative model. Karen Nielsen argues that Hardie also makes the comparison necessary, but this is difficult to square with the Aristotelian model (Karen Margrethe Nielsen, “Deliberation as Inquiry: Aristotle’s Alternative to the Presumption of Open Alternatives,” *The Philosophical Review* 120 (2011): 386). Nielsen also adds some interesting notes on the comparative model of Aristotle’s deliberation (Alexander of Aphrodisias and Aquinas), *ibid.*, 387.

¹³ There is a variety of translations of the Aristotelian term *prohairesis*. *Prohairesis* or rational decision can be interpreted as the end of deliberation. Hardie advances a good analysis of the word as efficient cause, W.F.R. Hardie, *Aristotle’s Ethical Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 160-4. It is not an intellectual opinion and after choosing and acting, after *prohairesis*, we show our character, *ibid.*, 165. According to Segvic, *prohairesis* is used only once in Plato at the *Parmenides* (Segvic, *From Protagoras to Aristotle*, 162n25). Vigo distinguishes two senses of *prohairesis* Alejandro G. Vigo, “Deliberación y decisión según Aristóteles,” *Tópicos: Revista de Filosofía* 43 (2012): 51-92. He highlights that *prohairesis*-rational decision- is not a commitment but the end of investigation on the basic action where the agent should start the action (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1139 a 30). *Prohairesis* combines cognitive and emotional elements as a result of deliberation (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1113 a 10 ff).

¹⁴ See Hardie, *Aristotle’s Ethical Theory*, 225-8.

¹⁵ See *Nicomachean Ethics* 1139b18-1140a20. There is the tendency among theorists of practical reason, however, to collapse practical reasoning into theoretical reasoning. This leads to a mistake on the role of the practical syllogism.

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technical discipline, we can say that the substantive conception of health and the technical conception of health overlap. Thus, in the example of the patient who is suffering ovarian cancer stage II-III, the doctor's goal is that the treatment results in the total elimination of the mass of abnormal cells that are currently contained within one part of the body and prevents metastasis, i.e., the spreading of cancerous cells into other healthy organs.

For Aristotle, deliberation is an inquiry or investigation into "*what*" the agent should do. Both the question and the answer need to be given by the agent and the reason why this is so will become clearer as we develop this conception of deliberation. For Aristotle the answer to the question "*What* should I do?" can be provided if I, the agent, can state *how* I should do it. Consequently, in this conception the *what* is determined by the *how*.

This is certainly puzzling and interesting for the modern conception of deliberation that is hostage to the image of the neo-Humean bifurcationist thesis and its corollary the balancing model of deliberation where evaluation and comparison of alternatives seem to be what is required from the agent. According to the latter the *what* is given by the agent's desires-based ends and the *how* is also given, i.e., there are multiple means to achieve the different desires-based end. There is clarity and determinacy of the *what* and the multiplicity of *how*,¹⁶ and therefore the task is to compare and evaluate the multiplicity of means -the *how*. By contrast, we will see that in the Aristotelian model of deliberation the *what* is indeterminate and the *how* is what I need to think or investigate in order to bring the *what* close to myself and therefore, to my action, and make the action clearer to myself and my practical understanding.

This is still very cryptic but perhaps the simile of Neurath's boat can help us explain the Aristotelian type of deliberation. If we are at sea in a boat that must be repaired, we need to repair the boat plank by plank since if we try to reconstruct the boat from the bottom up, we will certainly sink. As sailors we are engaged in the activity of sailing, we are at sea and there is no choice but to repair the boat. Similarly, in the Aristotelian model of deliberation, we are in the world acting and we need to deliberate *what* we should do.¹⁷ However, as I will defend later in this paper, our vision of the *what* is indeterminate and key aspects of the substantive *what* are unknown to us. This is a corollary of one key feature of deliberation, i.e., that it concerns only what is contingent and, therefore, particular

¹⁶ For example, for the internalist theorist the deliberator knows the content of his internal reasons for action, e.g., desires that belong to his motivational set and the means to achieve these desires, see for example Bernard Williams, "Internal and External Reasons for Actions," in *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1994). For the externalist, the deliberator has a reason for action to the extent that the reason is a normative reason and applies to him or her. According to the externalist, the deliberator has the capacity to grasp these normative reasons and therefore has clarity on them and is able to act accordingly, see Derek Parfit, "Reasons and Motivation," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 71 (1997): 99-146. See Chapter 4 of my forthcoming monograph *The Grammar of Responsibility for Negligence in Law and Ethics: Aspiration, Perspective and Civic Maturity* for a detailed discussion of the balancing model.

¹⁷ This is also central to Finnis's explanation of practical reason, see Finnis, "*The Thing I am*': *Personal Identity in Aquinas and Shakespeare*."

and circumstantial.¹⁸ Consequently, we need to hold the vague and indeterminate *what* as we hold the other planks of Neurath's boat and focus only on one plank at a time. Each plank is a set of particular circumstances that supports the *how*. Thus, the focus of deliberation is the *how*. The *how* gives us more clarity on the *what* and in the process, we can revise the *how* in light of what we have learned from the *what*. Furthermore, this process goes backwards and forwards, i.e., we revise the *what* in light of what we have learnt from the *how* and reconsider the *how* in light of the way the *what* is now presented to us, at this new stage of the deliberation. This continues until we reach the point of insight, i.e., we have brought the *what*, or *what now is the end* to ourselves. The means impregnates and illuminates the end and *vice versa*. The cycle will continue with further "what" and "how" questions in light of our deliberations and performed actions.¹⁹

Let us give it an initial formulation (F1): *Deliberation as the shaping of the What on the basis of the How and Vice Versa*. This position presupposes the following:

- (a) The *what* of deliberation is indeterminate.
- (b) Deliberation is an inquiry into the *what* to make it more specific and determinate.
- (c) At the first stage an inquiry into the *how* illuminates the *what*.
- (d) The *what* is presented under a new light and, more specified, we can then proceed to revise the *how*.
- (e) This process can be repeated a number of times, including at moments when we are performing the action.

In a previous paragraph, however, we said that Aristotle establishes an analogy between craft or skill and deliberation. The medical doctor has a formal representation and a substantive -technical- representation of both what a healthy body looks like and the necessary technical knowledge or "know how" to cure the cancer patient.

Thus, an objector might protest, there is no need to hold an indeterminate image of the *what* while we are considering the *how*. Furthermore, the simile of Neurath's boat does not bring any clarity to the explanation. It seems that we do not need to hold the indeterminate *what* and work plank by plank as we have a precise representation, which is both technical and substantive, of *what* is required, and the example of the medical doctor clearly shows this. We do not need to revise the *what* in light of the *how* and vice versa.

But this is where the craft analogy breaks down. Aristotle aims to avoid the collapse of deliberation into a craft or skill. He explains that deliberation *is not* a skill or craft like the practice of medicine because as human beings we seek and hope that our lives go well, and this gives us a formal *what* for seeking what we should do. However, this *does not* give us a substantive *what* which is determined, shaped and specific as in the case of technical knowledge, like medicine.

Let us think about the following example to illustrate our point. Alessandra, who is a mother of two children, drives to collect her children at the hockey

¹⁸ See *Nicomachean Ethics* 1141 b14-25.

¹⁹ For Broadie, Aristotle requires the continual re-evaluation "in the light of means, means to means, and their consequences." *Ethics with Aristotle*, 245.

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pitch. She leaves her dog in her vehicle while she collects her children from hockey practice. The children argue with each other resulting in temper tantrums that delay her return to the car. When she returns her dog has died of a heat-stroke. Alessandra is a mother who wishes for her life to go well and prior to having children, she imagined a number of possibilities, e.g., having a loving family, being healthy and having a healthy family, enabling educational success for her children within their talents and capacities, achieving good job opportunities for her and her husband, having a good balance of work and life, living in a place where she and her family can flourish, living in a country that respects human rights and civil liberties, living in a country with a consolidated democracy, having good friends, being exposed to good aesthetic experiences, e.g., food, art, etc. Like most of us when we were teenagers, Alessandra had a formal image or picture of what living well entailed but she did not know in a determinate manner *what* this would look like. The *what of her life* was open to her. It would be absurd to think that we can deliberate in the abstract about all these goods or that Alessandra would be able to compare and evaluate these goods or even know their content, or as if the content were determinate prior to engaging in deliberation and action. However, this seems to be required by certain views within the bifurcationist model and its corollary, the ‘balancing’ model. Arguably, the latter is grounded on an artificiality about how we think about our ends and the possibility of having and grasping their specific contents.

Aristotle’s point is precisely that the only thing we can actually do in virtue of our nature, which has both an animality element and a rational aspect, is to engage in narrow deliberation, i.e. to deliberate about the *what* in specific circumstances from the standpoint of our own particular circumstances (i.e., from *here*), and therefore as the *what* is indeterminate and even opaque, we need to put it on hold while we determine the *how*.

It is true that in the background we find the formal *what* of living well, but the latter takes shape and determination as we live our life and engage in narrow deliberation.²⁰ In the example of Alessandra, she aims to give her children the best opportunities to practice sports so she registers them in weekly hockey lessons, and she aims to give them the joy of caring for a pet and buys them a dog. Nevertheless, she needs to solve the *how* of harmonizing both goals, i.e., caring for the family pet and caring for the physical health of her children. She does not know *what* this combined state of harmony of both goals looks like, neither does she fully grasp, prior to registering the children in hockey and buying the dog, the *what* of her deliberation. Becoming a “mother” and a “pet owner” are indeterminate prior to engaging in deliberation and subsequent action. But even once she has taken her decision on the basis of her deliberation, and while executing her decision, she is continually grasping and shaping her *what*, i.e., *what* being a

²⁰ Since D.J. Allan, “The Practical Syllogism,” in *Autour d’Aristote* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires de Louvain, 1955), it has been argued that to understand practical deliberation we need to look at books 3, 6 and 7 together. Wiggins has argued that there is continuity in Aristotle between the reading of books 3, 6 and 7. David Wiggins, “Deliberation and Practical Reason,” in *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 215-237. See also Finnis, “Practical Reason’s Foundations.”

mother and pet owner entails, in light of executing the *how* that she has deliberated. After achieving a more specific determination of the *what*, she would still need to pause in order to revise her *how*, and subsequently continue with a new specification of the *what* which is now impregnated with and shaped by the new understanding of the *how*.

The craft analogy is of enormous help because it brings to our attention the fact that in deliberation, as well as in crafts and skills, the idea that the end—the *what*—shapes the means—the *how*—and the means—the *how*—shape and determine the ends—the *what*. It also sheds light on the idea that deliberation can only transform particulars and deals with specific circumstances. In our example above the medical doctor, relying on her expertise, engages in actions to cure the patient's ovarian cancer and aims to bring about a specific state of affairs for the patient, i.e., cancerous cells are eliminated, and the body becomes healthy. Other crafts and skills clearly show how this practical engagement can result in the transformation of elements and materials in the world into something else. For example, a carpenter, relying on his knowledge as an experienced carpenter to produce a table, will choose the appropriate wood and design to make the best possible table as he sees it in his particular circumstances. There is a transformation of materials in the world through technical knowledge, a *know how*, towards something, i.e., a product. Most importantly, this "something" that is produced by craft or skill is determined by an external standard. For example, a good table, appropriate for a specific use, is determined by an external standard. The healthy and non-cancerous patient is determined by an external standard. In other words in crafts and skills there are rules, standards and codes of what is good or what is best. By contrast when we deliberate, choose or decide and perform an action according to what we have deliberated there is no external standard according to which our action will be determined as right or good. Thus there is a formal good, *living well*, that receives substantive content as we deliberate, act and live.

On the other hand, Aristotle establishes that excellence in deliberation is determined by the person who has practical wisdom (*phronimos*)²¹ i.e., the person who engages in the excellent exercise of their practical reason, both in deliberation and practical argument. This is to emphasize that excellence in deliberation, practical argument and, therefore, practical reason cannot be codified and cannot be about a set of *a priori* rules, but is rather an engagement of ourselves as persons in a process of aspirational transformation towards becoming a person of practical wisdom.

Following the craft or skill analogy, what kind of aspirational transformation is involved in the process of deliberation? There are primary materials upon which we deliberate and act, which are our desires as construed in section II.A.1. We work on a transformation of ourselves and the primary material upon which we work is our desires.²² However, here again the analogy with craft and skills breaks

²¹ *Nicomachean Ethics* 1106b36-1107a.

²² *Nicomachean Ethics* 1144a8-10 states "Virtue ensures the rightness of the end we aim at, Prudence ensures the rightness of the means we adopt to gain that end." Broadie's interpretation of these lines is as follows, "Virtue ensures that whatever is aimed for is aimed for rightly at any stage and pursued only in terms of what is best. As reflection brings out new considerations, the value of O under the circumstances (its worthiness to be an end) is judged and rejudged, and the

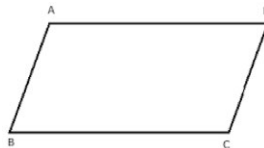
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down. There is no external standard when we deliberate and act accordingly, but there is the possibility of an aspirational point. In aspirational transformation reason operates transforming our lower desires.²³ Further details of how this is possible are discussed in Section III.

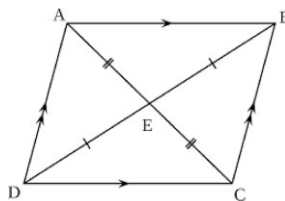
So far, we have been engaged with the use of the craft or skill analogy in Aristotle. We have said that for an illumination of what deliberation is, Aristotle navigates between deliberation as craft and deliberation as theoretical reasoning, and that he tries to avoid any reduction of deliberation to either. We now turn to the latter analogy -deliberation as theoretical reasoning.

B) The Theoretical Analogy

Aristotle invites us to think about deliberation as focusing on the question *how* we trace a geometrical figure.²⁴ Let us say we need to trace a parallelogram as the figure below shows:



We need to engage in analysis and see what would be the most basic parts or elements of the parallelogram. Thus, after deliberating and investigating we discover that it is composed by four triangles as follows:



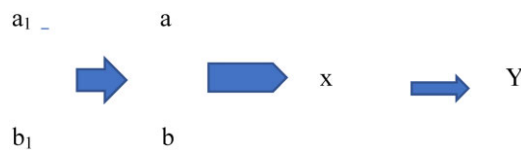
This more basic compositional element of a parallelogram enables me to start tracing *from it* the parallelogram. As Aristotle puts it, “And the last thing in the

rightness of these judgements depend on character. Moral virtue is active throughout wise deliberation not only in the form of a general thrust or readiness to discern and to do the best whatever it might be, but as a plexus of specific evaluative dispositions expressed in a series of differently focused but mutually cognisant responses.” Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle*, 245. In other words, the rightness of those judgments depends on character all the way through. See also Segvic, *From Protagoras to Aristotle*, 153, who argues that there is a transition of one set of desires to another and that desires are transformed by reasons.

²³ *Nicomachean Ethics* 1139a20-30. Commenting on these passages Kosman asserts that acting is a form of thinking and at the end, deliberation is a deliberative desire. Aryeh Kosman, *Virtues of Thought: Essays on Plato and Aristotle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 289-91. Deliberation is a process that leads to preparedness to act (Segvic, *From Protagoras to Aristotle*, 164). Deliberation is not a mere activity of reason. If he had thought in these terms Aristotle would have needed to accept non-deliberative volition. (Ibid. 165).

²⁴ *Nicomachean Ethics* 1112b 15-24 and 1142a23.

analysis would seem to be the first that come into being.”²⁵ In deliberation we transform through our thinking the mean x in order to achieve the end Y , which is indeterminate and unspecified, and discover that x is also composed²⁶ of a and b . After further inquiry we determine that b is composed of a more basic mean which is a_1 , but also discover that b requires b_1 . Similar to an investigation on *how* to trace the parallelogram, through thinking, we discover that the parallelogram is composed of four triangles. In this case, through thinking, we specify that by doing a_1 and b_2 , I do a and b , and by doing a and b , I do x . We now have the insight into how to do it and a performance that is close to us because this something that is possible and immediately actionable. In action we now have the series of *hows* that will get us to the *what*. The series would be the following:



Engaging in thinking, I specify and shape the series of the means to do Y , i.e., what I need to do to get a from a_1 , b from b_1 , x from a and b and finally Y from x . It is *not an inferential process* as from premises to a conclusion, it is rather a transformational thought process where a_1 and b_1 become a and b and a and b become x and consequently, a_1 , b_1 , a and b and x become Y . But at the same time the transformational thought process is not like a production because a) there is no product external to the agent who engages in deliberation and b) there is no external standard to assess the performance of the agent. It is through thinking²⁷ that the transformation and subsequent insights operate.

However, there is a complication with this transformational process through thinking which is neither present in crafts or skills nor in theoretical thinking. Thus, in deliberation and rational decision (*prohairesis*) emotions and desires are involved but they are not states or static entities. So far, we have avoided the word “practical” when using the term “thinking” as “practical thinking” or

²⁵ These lines are stated in the following context where Aristotle introduces the analogy with a geometrical figure: “Rather, we lay down the end, and then examine the ways and means to achieve it. If it appears that any of several means will reach it, we examine which of them will reach it most easily and most finely; and if only one mean reaches it, we examine how that means will reach it, and how the means itself is reached, until we come to the first cause, the last thing to be discovered. For the deliberator would seem to inquire and analyse in the way described, as though analysing a diagram— for, apparently, all deliberation is inquiry, though not all inquiry-in mathematics, for instance-is deliberation. And the last thing in the analysis would seem to be the first that comes into being” (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1112b 15-24).

²⁶ See Wiggins, “Deliberation and Practical Reason,” 224-5, on the focus that there is a decomposition.

²⁷ We can also call it a “deliberative imagination.” Two key authors, Bernard Williams, “Internal Reasons and the Obscurity of Blame,” in *Making Sense of Humanity: and Other Philosophical Papers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 38, 42; “Internal and External Reasons for Actions,” in *ibid.*, 105, 110; and Iris Murdoch, “The Darkness of Practical Reason,” in *Existentialists and Mystics* (New York: Penguin, 1997), 198-201; “The Sublime and the Good,” in *ibid.*, 213-19, seem to think that imagination is key for deliberation. This wider way of using the term “thinking” will be analyzed in section III below

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“practical reasoning” is precisely what *we are trying to demonstrate is possible*. The practicality of the thinking or reasoning comes from two elements. First, the focus on specifying and grasping what is particular about the *what* and the *how*. In other words, grasping my own situation as a deliberator, the deliberator’s “*from here*.”²⁸ Second, the fact that desires are not states or static entities. On the contrary they evolve through our thinking about the *how* which shapes and determines the *what*. Thus, by discovering that *a* and *b* are constituted by *a*₁ and *b*₁, I have started to develop desires and emotions in relation to *a*₁ and *b*₁. I have now also gained a perspective in relation to *a* and *b* that I did not have and this perspective transforms the quality, understanding and depth of my desire for *a* and *b* and *x*.

Let us think about the example of Beatrice to illustrate our point. Beatrice takes as her *what* (which she puts on hold as its specification and content will be provided by the *how*), “the best possible physical health for her child.” When her child is a toddler, she only has a very vague idea of the content of this *what*. However, as this Aristotelian-inspired conception tells us that we make “stabs in the darkness,”²⁹ she registers her daughter in gymnastics lessons, but after only a few lessons it is clear to Beatrice that her daughter has a strongly competitive streak that gymnastics amplifies into aggression, or something that looks like aggression. Beatrice does not want to encourage this aggression and begins to think she should withdraw her daughter from gymnastics lessons. As result of deliberating and engaging in *how*, *x*, Beatrice has also grasped a new perspective on *what*, *Y*, and this leads her to have a better specification of the *what*, i.e., she desires the physical health conceived in harmony with a balanced competitive spirit. Beatrice is developing right desires and transforming herself in an aspirational way, i.e., being a mother that deliberates correctly and is developing the right desires concerning the best physical health for her child in the context of their particular circumstances.

Let us think about an alternative variation of the previous example. Beatrice registers her daughter in gymnastics classes and discovers that her daughter also has great flexibility and a natural sense of rhythm; Beatrice now thinks that ballet and tap lessons will help her daughter to develop her natural sense of rhythm and improve her flexibility, and the development of both the former and the latter will facilitate her daughter’s gymnastic abilities. Beatrice has now a better grasp of

²⁸ See Bernard Williams, “Moral Luck,” in *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 35.

²⁹ This metaphor is provided by Segvic, *From Protagoras to Aristotle*. See also Burnyeat, “Aristotle on Learning to be Good,” in *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 73, who argues that the *what* is presupposed. See also Wiggins, “Deliberation and Practical Reason,” 225, where in his interpretation the ends are assumed. However, Wiggins seems at some passages to suggest that the end is indeterminate, there are no rules and the discovery and specification of the end is an intellectual problem, but practical which involves excellence in practical deliberation, i.e., practical wisdom (ibid., 230-1, 234). Wiggins seems to advance the view that practical reasoning consists in appreciating the specific situation of our practical question or search and relating it to the complex ideal that the agent tries to achieve in living well (ibid., 237). “Deliberation identifies ends by clarification rather than selection.” Howard J. Curzer, “Aristotle’s Practical Syllogisms,” *The Philosophical Forum* 46 (2015): 138.

her daughter's physical health and therefore of the content, quality and “thickness” of her desire for her daughter’s physical health. This involves x (becoming a good gymnast) by doing a and b (developing rhythm and flexibility) and by doing a_1 and b_2 (taking ballet and tap lessons). We will see in section III that this is still a simplistic characterization of exactly what is happening in the transformation process of Beatrice’s desires concerning her child’s and family’s “living well.” For now, we only need to keep in mind that our thinking transforms and specifies desires and emotions and that there is the possibility of a right transformation of desires and emotions, i.e., aspirational transformation.

The importance of holding onto the indeterminate and unknown end to engage in deliberation cannot be underestimated in psychological and logical terms. Imagine the contrary view where there is neither a substantive nor an indeterminate end. We merely need to analyze the situation of the agent so that she can decide what to do. Thus, the deliberator should only focus on his particular situation, or perhaps on a set of principles and rules to determine what to do. In the example of Alessandra we could say that she is a human being, a mother who has beliefs about the physical health of her children, who has a dog and who has registered her children in hockey lessons. How is this all connected in a way that enable us to determine what Alessandra should do? If the agent knows everything about her situation nothing follows from this. We could provide a more sophisticated view and say that there are rules and principles about mothers and the physical health of children and that this set of rules or principles applies to Alessandra. However, how she sees her particular situation will depend on her desires and emotions, and their connection with specific principles and their capacity to serve as guidance for the *particular* circumstances is also problematic. How can what she *ought* to do follow from any set of principles?

In summary, practical deliberation means investigating and searching for the basic elements of the performing action that are close to us at the level of possibility and gaining insight into our unique circumstances that would settle the answer to the question ‘*What* should I do?’ Thinking in this piecemeal fashion enables us to start the action and, in this way, I bring the *what* to myself through insight into and understanding of the *how*. This is why there is no gap between deliberation, rational decision (*prohairesis*) and performing the action because the transformation of my desires has already happened when I reach the point of insight into *what* to do, i.e., when I get to the basic performance of the *how*. In trying to find the *how* I have not only engaged my reasoning or thinking about the *how*, but I have also engaged my desires which were transformed as I was decomposing and translating x into a and b and b into b_1 and a into a_1 .

The contemporary gap, which results from the bifurcation thesis and its corollary the ‘balancing’ model of deliberation, where the agent supposedly chooses between a set of open options, between external and internal reasons, between reason and desires, between reason and motivation, disappears. In the Aristotelian-inspired model thinking reveals the basic elements of the action in the particular circumstances as experienced and viewed by the deliberator. Thinking refines the desire at each stage of the process until insight and desire are

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merged and the action follows practically. The elements, x , a and b , a_1 and b_2 do not follow inferentially like in theoretically reasoning, nor causally like in the natural world, but this does not mean that the thinking is not immersed in the natural world. It is immersed because the thinking and the desire are intertwined in a special way. Thinking shapes, specifies and determines the desire.

Given that we have emphasized deliberation upon an action, is it possible for an action *not* to follow after having been deliberated upon? It is certainly possible and many of our actions are failures to achieve what we have already deliberated upon; “there are many slips between the cup and the lip.” *Akasia* is the best example of this.³⁰ But lack of performance is not due to lack of motivation or the required conditions of judgment as understood in contemporary moral psychology and moral philosophy, but due to a lack of integration of character with practical reasoning.

For now, we can say that if Beatrice deliberates and decides that her daughter’s aggressive competitiveness is amplified by her gymnastic lessons and fails to cancel the lessons, having in mind the desire to develop the physical health of her child, we would explain it as a lack of integration between her character and deliberation.

In the text above we provided the simile of Neurath’s boat and the importance of keeping in mind that the *what*, even in the case of narrow deliberation, remains indeterminate. A number of philosophers have resisted this image of an indeterminate and vague *what* and have attempted to show an alternative interpretation of Aristotle’s conception of deliberation. According to this alternative image the deliberator, who engages in action from the first-person perspective, can grasp the *what* as a grand end and her deliberation is a search for means-ends that fit her vision of the grand end. Our deliberation under this interpretation is presented as an upward journey of connections between means as constitutive towards a grand end. Furthermore, there is clarity about its content, or at least the grand end is implicit and lurking in the background of our deliberation.³¹

I will problematize this interpretation and develop a number of arguments in defense of the indeterminate and vague *what* or end which I will call the conception of the “upward journey towards specification of the *what*.”³²

³⁰ I engage in an analysis of *akrasia* and negligence in my forthcoming monograph *The Grammar of Responsibility for Negligence in Law and Ethics: Aspiration, Perspective and Civic Maturity*.

³¹ For the idea that the grand end is implicit, see Segvic, *From Protagoras to Aristotle*, 159-60, who says our conception of “living well” is triggered by opportunity. In other passages, however, she asserts that the grand end is a hypothesis or a presupposition (*ibid.*, 156). For a defense of the grand end view, see Richard Kraut, “In Defense of the Grand End,” *Ethics* 103 (1993): 361-74; and Terence Irwin, “Ethics with Aristotle by Sarah Broadie,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 90 (1993): 323-9.

³² The main defender of this view is Sarah Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle*. I have chosen the term “upward journey” instead of her own terminology, ground-level, to emphasize that there is an aspirational element. The term “upward journey” is indirectly connected to Scott’s interpretation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* in Dominic Scott, *Levels of Argument: A Comparative Study of Plato’s Republic and Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), Part II. It is also inspired by the work of Katja Vogt, see Katja Vogt, *Desiring the Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), who emphasizes the connection between narrow deliberation and large and medium scale deliberation. Segvic, *From Protagoras to Aristotle*, at some key passages seems to

Contemporary models of practical deliberation rely on the idea of the bifurcation between belief and desire and its corollary which is the idea that we need to select one option among several, which are clear to us. *For the balancing view all premises are equal starting points.* We infer that we have clarity on our ends—the *what* in deliberation—and that we are facing our desires in advance of deliberation.³³ There is a tendency to read Aristotelian deliberation in light of both the key presuppositions of the bifurcation thesis³⁴ and its corollary the balancing model. This reading gives us the view that either explicitly or implicitly³⁵ there is a substantive end—a *what*—upon which we can start our deliberation. The formal end of “living well” fuses with the idea of a substantive end that guides our deliberation and actions. Aristotle’s comparison with theoretical reasoning and use of the example of a geometrical figure, which is analyzed in section II.A.2(b), might invite us to think that Aristotle’s analogy leads to the fusion of practical deliberation and theoretical reasoning. However, the focus of the analogy between deliberation and tracing a geometrical figure is about something different. Thus, we need to presuppose and hold the *what* and, consequently, formulate the question and articulate an answer *as if* we knew the *what*.³⁶ The analogy also helps us to understand that we fragment and translate the *what* into parts until we have insight into how to start acting.

also accept this interpretation. For example, according to Segvic, the agent’s own conception of a good life relies on previous results of the agent’s previous deliberations (ibid., 167). She accepts that our conception of “living well” is incomplete (ibid.), but not that it is completely indeterminate as Broadie’s suggests in her *Ethics with Aristotle*.

³³ Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle*, 236-237. Cooper, *Reason and the Human Good in Aristotle*, 10, distinguishes between justification and explanation. Therefore, to make sense of the former we need the grand end view (Vogt, *Desiring the Good*, 130n50). We also need to endorse a hierarchy of ends where the ultimate end cannot be decided by deliberation. Therefore, we need to presuppose it (Cooper, *Reason and the Human Good in Aristotle*, 18, 58). The grand end is the agent’s conception of what kind of life is best (ibid., 59-67). The thesis of a chain in deliberation, where we do not deliberate about ultimate ends but about means-ends that are constitutive of the grand end, is accepted by a number of Aristotelian contemporary interpreters, see Wiggins, “Deliberation and Practical Reason”; Cooper, *Reason and the Human Good in Aristotle*.

³⁴ For criticism of this reading, see John McDowell, “Some Issues in Aristotle’s Moral Psychology,” in *Mind, Value and Reality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 31; and Norman O. Dahl, *Practical Reason, Aristotle, and Weakness of the Will* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). See also Finnis, “Practical Reason’s Foundations”; Michael Weinman, *Pleasure in Aristotle’s Ethics* (London: Continuum, 2007), 84. The latter proposes a harmony between reason and virtue -desires. A few passages later, however, we see an indirect adherence to the bifurcation thesis in ibid., 88.

³⁵ Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle*, 236. For a complete definition of the grand end view, see Cooper, *Reason and the Human Good in Aristotle*, 76. For a clear delineation of the view and criticism of the view, see McDowell, “Some Issues in Aristotle’s Moral Psychology,” and John McDowell, “Deliberation and Moral Development in Aristotle’s Ethics,” in *Aristotle, Kant and the Stoics: Rethinking Happiness and Duty*, ed. Stephen Engstrom and Jennifer Whiting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). McDowell calls it the “universal blueprint.” Burnyeat, “Aristotle on Learning to be Good,” 83, seems to endorse the grand view, as does Irwin, “Ethics with Aristotle by Sarah Broadie.”

³⁶ Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle*, 236-7. See also Kraut, “In Defense of the Grand End View.” This is also a plausible interpretation of Finnis’s set of objective goods. They remind us, and specially judges and legislators, of the *what*. In their decisions they need to act *as if* they know the content of the *what*. Arguably, legal principles operate in this way. Judges hold on to them and presuppose them but at the same time, modify and refine their content as they try to determine the answer to the legal question that has been posed.

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If we follow the previous thought on bifurcation, we can see that the idea that supports the grand end view is that we need a justification of our action and deliberation. The idea of a “grand end” precisely offers this grounding. We choose to do x as a means to Y because Y is good or the best. The deliberator’s value judgment is that the end *-what-* is worthy and therefore deliberation and actions that lead towards its reaching are impregnated by the worthiness of the end.³⁷ But to know its worthiness the deliberator cannot question whether in this particular circumstance this is the best way to act.³⁸

By contrast, in the “upward journey towards the specification of the *what*” conception, the grounds of deliberation and rational decision are not the ends since the ends are unveiled in the process of deliberation. But the unveiling, refinement, discovery and re-discovery of the end *-the what-* is a task concerning both the transformation of desires and the performance of our intelligence and thinking. Therefore, it is always sensible to ask whether pursuing the end *-the what-* under this particular circumstance is good or the best. Thus, in the latter picture, to discover that x , a , b , a_1 and a_2 are the *how* to obtain a more determinate end *-the what-*, is to pursue it now and therefore to start doing a_2 . However, if the end *-the what-* has been unveiled and the deliberator has now a better grasp of the *what*, it always make sense to revise it, change it, or even abandon it. By contrast, since the grand end view entails the conflation of formal and substantive ends, they cannot in principle be questioned. Furthermore, if there is a grand end or substantive end, this remains unchanged and identical through the circumstances. Furthermore, the grand end could be codified in a set of rules and principles³⁹ and it would solve the problem of guidance, which we now turn to.

³⁷ The importance of the role of the grand end in deliberation is emphasized in *ibid.*, 262. Wallace’s interpretation of McDowell also offers us this picture (R. Jay Wallace, “Virtue, Reason, and Principle,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 21 (1991): 469-95). We can make sense of people’s plurality of desires in terms of other desires and what organizes this plurality is a substantive end *-the grand end-*. Thus, a conception of ‘how to live’ renders the election intelligible, *ibid.*, 479. McDowell believes that there is clarity at the abstract level though specification operates while we are deliberating (McDowell, “Some Issues in Aristotle’s Moral Psychology,” 33). For McDowell, the agent has a conception of doing well, *ibid.*, 28. McDowell formulates two stages, a large-scale formal end and a medium one that is indeterminate, *ibid.*, 32-3. See also Vogt’s discussion in *Desiring the Good*, chapter 2. McDowell clearly criticizes the “grand end view” (McDowell, “Some Issues in Aristotle’s Moral Psychology,” 41) as “living well,” but says that it is an attribute of a whole life, which might encourage a softer version of the grand end view (*ibid.*, 43). In *Ethics with Aristotle*, Broadie seems to advocate a more radical view in which there is no clarity at the abstract level. Other authors are ambiguous in relation to the grand end view. For example, Sherman thinks that the commitment to the grand end can be the pre-condition for long term and coherent integration of life. Character coherence becomes dependent on/or constrained by how well we can integrate our multiple ends (Nancy Sherman, *The Fabric of Character: Aristotle’s Theory of Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 76). A few pages later, however, at *ibid.* 89-90, she seems to advocate Broadie’s view, i.e., perception of the particular situation is not a “sense,” but a result of an investigation. The particularism of McDowell is criticized in Vogt, *Desiring the Good*, 39-40. See also Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

³⁸ Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle*, 239.

³⁹ The grand end is necessary for principles. According to Cooper, *Reason and the Human Good in Aristotle*, 82-85, we need principles to act well. If we have no principles, rational planning is not possible.

Arguably, the bifurcation thesis and its corollary the balancing model⁴⁰ tends to focus on justification of the action. This means that as deliberators we need to focus on our connections between reasons for actions, internal or external, our means and their connection to other means and certain ends, to make sense of and justify our actions.⁴¹ One of the strongest points of the ‘upward journey towards the specification of the *what*’ is the idea that we are thrown into the world⁴² and have no option but to deliberate and decide. This means that we are forced to make salient certain particularities of the world and grasp our circumstances, what has also been called our position *from here*.⁴³ The “grand end” view theorist assumes that everything that matters is in the substantive end—the *what*. But Broadie’s interpretative point on Aristotle is that he wants us to focus on the particular and contingent as the object of deliberation. To truly grasp the complexity and richness of the particular, we need a deliberative process in which desires and emotions are connected to intelligence and reasoning.⁴⁴

To start deliberation from the *what* as abstract, universal, given and known, and then apply it to the particular instance is to bypass the process of truly seeing the particular as particular. Thus, in the example of Beatrice, the grand end view presupposes that she already has clarity and full knowledge of what the physical health of her daughter entails, i.e., it involves a harmonic development of personality and the recognition of her skills, such as flexibility and rhythm. The question that arises concerns the source or origin, or perhaps mechanism, of this particular piece of knowledge. Aristotle’s point is that we can only have this knowledge from experience, but experience in the peculiar way of deliberating and thinking about *what* should we do. A general idea of the *what* is easy; the challenge is specifying the *what* in our life, with our peculiar capacities, limits, skills and unique circumstances.

⁴⁰ Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 80 and Callard, “Aristotle on Deliberation,” highlight the view that Aristotelian deliberation does not involve the evaluation of alternatives. Sherman tries to show that deliberation involves specification of the end. It is not only the business of ends-means coherence (Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 71).

⁴¹ C.D.C. Reeve, *Action, Contemplation, and Happiness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012). Kraut also insists that we need to give a justification and presses for a clarification of the stage at which the justification can be given (Kraut, “In Defense of the Grand End View,” 367). This is the role given to practical argument and practical syllogism. Arguably, within the grand end view, there is some circularity in the conception of practical wisdom as the determining of the grand end. If the standard is the man of practical wisdom, how should we even determine the rightness of the grand end if we reject the intuitionist explanation. See *ibid.*, 368. Practical wisdom seems to include the grand end and *vice versa*. For Broadie, we obtain practical wisdom as we exercise intelligence and integrate it with our desires and passions (Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle*). MacIntyre defends the grand end view and argues that it is key for legislators and judges who are the audience of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Alasdair MacIntyre, “Rival Aristotles: Aristotle against some modern Aristotelians,” in *Ethics and Politics: Selected Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 24-5.

⁴² See Joseph Raz, “Being in the World,” in *From Normativity to Responsibility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) for an interesting approach on “being in the world.”

⁴³ See also Bernard Williams, “Moral Luck.”

⁴⁴ See Reeve, *Action, Contemplation and Happiness*, 186-9. There is no change in the conception of happiness. Rather, the change is in the agent.

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III. Becoming Good: Potential Responses

In the previous section we showed that desires are the work of intelligence which implies a process of thinking and transformation. When making judgments about responsibility we tend to focus on reasons for action and/or rational capacities, and on the desires and beliefs as mental states of the performer of the action. We have learned that within the balancing model, reasons for actions, desires or beliefs happen at a particular time. Action is a snapshot of what the deliberator happens to apprehend at any given moment. As the standard model of deliberation is the balancing model, the focus is on desires as given states and beliefs that make the necessary connection with either normative reasons or desires within the so-called motivational set. By contrast in the Aristotelian-inspired model of deliberation, our desires are transformed through thinking.

Burnyeat has pointed out that the *what* in Aristotle can be integrated by a *why*. He calls it the “because” of the deliberation. In our previous example of Beatrice, we focused on the way she learned *what* to do through her reasoning of the *how*, her thoughts on *Y* led her to *x*, which led her to *a* and *b*, and hence to *a*₁ and *b*₁. Arguably the *what*, *Y*, gradually becomes clearer for her. We could say that Beatrice now better understands that ensuring the physical health of her daughter includes becoming less competitive, developing gymnastic abilities, achieving harmony with her body and so on. However, in order to answer the question *why Y*, Beatrice would need to engage on reflection, on locating her newly acquired view of the physical health of her daughter within a larger picture of goals, desires, meanings and ends for herself and her daughter. Arguably, what we called the narrow deliberation presented in the previous section cannot answer the question *why* in terms of a wider perspective of our lives.⁴⁵ It can answer the *why* within the narrow or substandard deliberation. Thus, Beatrice chooses ballet lessons *in order* for her daughter to develop rhythm and the development of rhythm is chosen *in order to* obtain physical health. But this narrow “in order to” does not reach further goals, values and ends. Furthermore, we have rejected the “grand end view” and, therefore, the possibility of a grand end that can encompass the narrow deliberation becomes doubtful. In the previous section we also learned that deliberation involves the transformation of *how* to achieve the end in terms of digestible particulars, the *how* for the *what*. This conception is primarily immersive⁴⁶ or sub-standard.⁴⁷ Thus it might be asserted that narrow deliberation is the empirical surrogate of animal movement and that, consequently, as a

⁴⁵ See my book *Law and Authority Under the Guise of the Good* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2014), where I attempt to show that the *why* question in Anscombe’s theory of intention applies to the structure of practical reason and law. In the book the question *why?* is used as a way to reveal the deliberative structure of an intentional action. I show how this way of understanding practical reason illuminates legal authority. My focus here on *why*, following Burnyeat’s “Aristotle on Learning to be Good,” is more along the lines of Aristotelian deliberation and the way that narrow deliberation is connected to wider goals, good and right. In my forthcoming monograph *The Grammar of Responsibility for Negligence in Law and Ethics*, I apply this to the key role of negligence law.

⁴⁶ Callard, “Aristotle on Deliberation,” 19.

⁴⁷ Nielsen, “Deliberation as Inquiry: Aristotle’s Alternative to the Presumption of Open Alternatives,” 403.

surrogate, narrow deliberation is not properly empirical but emulates the empirical world and the way animals pursue their goals. This view emphasizes the immersive and empirical-like character of deliberation and its Aristotelian roots.

By contrast our everyday experience of deliberation shows us another face or aspect of deliberation. Looking back at our lives we can see that we have larger goals, values or ends, and we can see the failure of some of our projects and the success of others. Looking into the future we envisage a number of medium term and long term projects.⁴⁸ The former might include, for example, refurbishing the house, landscaping the garden, or travelling to an unfamiliar part of the world; and the latter could include, for example, pursuing a Masters degree, getting married, having children, writing a book, learning to play an instrument, committing oneself to a noble cause, or practicing a religion. Medium and long term ends are, like the ends in narrow deliberation, also uncertain, indeterminate or unknown in terms of their specific features or components.

I have tried to show that thoughts and intelligence are crucial for action. Thus, if thought leaves us it is more likely that our action will be judged as compulsive. On the other hand, if thought is confused it will lead to the wrong action or *akrasia*.

The problem that now arises is the following: if thinking in terms of narrow deliberation is immersed or sub-standard, how can we correct our thoughts within an immersed vision? Furthermore if, as I have tried to show, thoughts transform our desires and character, we need to make sure that our thoughts are directed towards what is right or correct in order to transform our desires towards right desires⁴⁹ and form a character that approximates excellence.⁵⁰ We seem, nevertheless, trapped within the limited vision of our own narrow deliberations. The previous discussion on Neurath's boat said that we would need to put in brackets the question of whether the end was good, or rather take as a hypothesis that the end to be pursued is good, and pursue the *how* as we repair one plank at a time whilst navigating rough seas. The other planks remain untouched and stable and in a similar fashion the conception of the end as good remains stable. However, we see ourselves not only immersed in short term goals, e.g., whether to register our daughter in ballet, gymnastics or tap lessons, but in medium- and long-term projects, goals and plans. Following the metaphor of Neurath's boat, we can also imagine ourselves standing at the shoreline, seeing the entire boat, dismantling it to repair it, and seeing it again fully repaired and admiring it in its entirety.

It is not only a matter of establishing a bridge between the digestibly particulars and more abstracts rules or principles, though we reject this way of conceiving deliberation and practical reason. It is rather how the 'upward journey towards the specification of the *what*' can involve medium and longer term

⁴⁸ Vogt, *Desiring the Good*.

⁴⁹ If practical truth is the function of practical reason, and practical truth is "right desires," how can we obtain "right desires"? It is not correct to think of truth as related to theoretical truth. Practical truth is clarity and coherence in choice. We should emphasize the disanalogy with theoretical truth. See Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle*, 226-7, 230.

⁵⁰ This will be the character of the *phronimos*.

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projects and plans *without losing* the acquired practical knowledge and insights of narrow deliberation, and replicating the depth of *that knowledge* on a larger scale.

One potential answer is to say that we need to reflect on our medium and long-term goals. The modern conception of reflection might be presented as a potential answer.⁵¹ But how shall we understand reflection without losing the immersed perspective?⁵² A complication to the problem of reconciling reflection and immersion should be mentioned at this stage. Thus, when I ask myself the question “What shall I do?” and engage in narrow deliberation which has a continuity in time, it is not only that the object of deliberation changes but also that I change, it is the *entire self* that changes. It is not only my reasons and thinking about what do to that undergoes change but also desires and, therefore, character⁵³ and emotions.⁵⁴ Some authors see this trajectory as the “seamless” journey of deliberation. They assert that the intermediary between ethics, i.e., actions that are good and/or right, and physical actions, is intelligibility.⁵⁵ But the question is how we transit from intelligibility to goodness or rightfulness or -more precisely- how we are learners and eventually whether “becoming good” is even possible. Thus, the uncritical or un-ethical person also engages in a transformation of herself and thus the narrow deliberation account does not say much about the direction of journey or the trajectory to becoming good.⁵⁶

Virtues of character and desires are active throughout wise deliberation as a nexus of evaluative dispositions expressed in focused responses.⁵⁷ Character and desires are shaped.⁵⁸ Thus stage by stage character and desires are revealed.

⁵¹ The problematic character of reflection in the Aristotelian *corpus* is recognized by McDowell in “Some Issues in Aristotle’s Moral Psychology.” For him our values are subject to reflection. Reflection, however, does not mean “stepping outside,” Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Glasgow: Fontana Press, 1985)). One key concept is the concept of practical wisdom (*phronesis*). For McDowell, for example, the state of motivational propensities is a reflective adjusted form.

⁵² Some contemporary authors like Bernard Williams think that this is not possible. He sees reflection as detachment, as the view from nowhere, and therefore it entails that the deliberator does not grasp the particularity that characterizes Aristotelian models of deliberation (Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*).

⁵³ Virtue ethics is devoted to understanding the role of virtue in our ethical lives; however, we cannot understand the role of virtue and character in our ethical lives if we do not provide a sound explanation of how practical reason and deliberation works. Virtue should not be understood in isolation from complex questions related to thinking in practical terms. For a criticism on virtue ethics, see Martha Nussbaum, “Virtue Ethics: A Misleading Category?” *The Journal of Ethics* 3 (1999): 163-201.

⁵⁴ Nussbaum remarks that Aristotle’s project is highly rationalistic (*ibid.*). According to this rationalistic project, we accept that emotions can be transformed: “Emotions and desire are not simply mindless pushes, but complex forms of intentionality infused with object directed thought. They can be significantly shaped by reasoning about the good” (*ibid.*, 180).

⁵⁵ Kevin L. Flannery, *Action and Character According to Aristotle: The Logic of the Moral Life* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of American Press, 2013). See also Finnis, “Practical Reason’s Foundations.”

⁵⁶ The complexity of thinking towards a transformation of excellence in character virtue and the connection between these two components is highlighted by Aristotelian commentators as unclear. See Hardie, *Aristotle’s Ethical Theory*, 238-239; and also Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*.

⁵⁷ Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle*, 245.

⁵⁸ Kosman, *Virtues of Thought*, 291, interprets key passages of Aristotle as stating that choice is a form of cognition and an ability to act and a form of thought.

Arguably, under the grand end interpretation of Aristotelian deliberation the virtuous person is able to grasp the major premise and successfully apply it to the facts of the circumstances, which are represented in the minor premise. Action, therefore, should be successfully ensured. However, the problem with rules and principles is that it presents a gap between the agent's knowledge of her position, e.g., Beatrice's endeavors to realize the physical health of her child, and her practical conclusion, i.e., that she ought to register her daughter in both ballet and tap lessons. The principle or rule "Mothers should pursue the physical health of their children when possible" bridges the gap between her position and the practical conclusion. Thus, the conclusion is rationally generated because there is a justificatory principle or rule.

But we have already rejected the grand view and the possibility of a major premise from which we can infer a conclusion. Further criticism of the schematism of the practical syllogism as the paradigm of practical reason has been developed elsewhere.⁵⁹

The problem arises at a previous stage when the deliberator is trying to transform her character and desires, when virtue has not been obtained. The challenge is how we learn to be virtuous and act in a right and good manner. How we become good is the crucial question.

At the lower level and within the domain of narrow deliberation the realization of the good becomes clearer. If you do not know what to do, you really do not have knowledge of the circumstances.⁶⁰ Furthermore, after narrow deliberation and rational choice, the thought that *Y* needs to be done is identical with the impulse to pursue *Y*.

In other words, we need to understand the way in which we acquire the knowledge that will direct us towards not only our narrow goals but also our medium and long term goals. In the next section we will explore some potential answers and show their deficiencies. I will show some deficiencies of the contemporary model of reflection and show that learning to become good entails bringing attention to ourselves⁶¹ and the ways that this is possible without losing the knowledge acquired through the immersed perspective.

I aim in the following sections to provide a more precise account of how we are actually learners and to identify some of the conditions that enable us to become good.

A. Becoming Good: Further Responses

The fact that we focus on deliberation in the narrow way does not mean that there is no vision on human goodness, though it is not always formulated universally or, furthermore, that a universal formulation will be of no help in action.

⁵⁹ See my forthcoming monograph, *The Grammar of Responsibility for Negligence in Law and Ethics*.

⁶⁰ Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle*, 249.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 253.

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Deliberation is an activity, a seeking of desire and thought⁶² to settle the question “What shall I do?”⁶³ Thought transforms desires and therefore our character until they are aligned, best exemplified in the actions of the *phronimos*. Many Aristotelian theorists see the limits of the “immersed” conception of narrow deliberation and search for further evidence of something closer to a reflective stance. For example, Cooper⁶⁴ focuses on models of deliberation and justification; Segvic recognizes that weighing cannot be external;⁶⁵ and Vogt states that deliberation is not sufficient.⁶⁶ Maybe *prohairesis* could help us to incorporate the deliberation with medium-scale goals and show us how we understand in reflection.⁶⁷ Vogt tells us that the “why” question leads to large scale goals⁶⁸ and the solution she herself presents has elements of the grand end. It is part of the reflection *but not deliberation*. There is, however, no explanation on how to transform lower desires.⁶⁹ This concern over the integration between narrow deliberation and medium- and long-term goals is the motive behind the grand end view.

Another strategy among Aristotelian commentators is to advance a developmental conception of character that can lead us to an apprehension of what is good and, arguably, to an apprehension of the good in medium- and long-term ends. The focus of these developmental conceptions is diverse. Some authors focus on pleasure,⁷⁰ others on habituation and learning by doing,⁷¹ others on intentional guidance,⁷² and inculcated feelings can also play a predominant part.⁷³ Kosman’s conclusion, for example, is that emotions are action dependent. Thus, moral education tells us about wrong and right ways of feeling. One has control over the actions that aim at realizing desires and feelings are inculcated by habit. We can engage with actions that makes us feel a certain way. Does it mean that feelings are, therefore, not chosen? Kosman, for example, argues that according to Aristotle, feelings are chosen in Aristotle.⁷⁴ Feelings are indirectly transformed in *prohairesis*. The state of character is the key condition of action.⁷⁵ But here we are talking again about *prohairesis* and therefore deliberation in a narrow sense. Is

⁶² Ibid., 217.

⁶³ Finnis, “‘The Thing I Am’: Personal Identity in Aquinas and Shakespeare.”

⁶⁴ Cooper, *Reason and the Human Good in Aristotle*.

⁶⁵ Segvic, *From Protagoras to Aristotle*, 98-106, 147, 160, and 168.

⁶⁶ Vogt, *Desiring the Good*, 43-5.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 132.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 115n2, 119 and 1and 3.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 136, 137 and 66.

⁷⁰ Burnyeat, “Aristotle on Learning to be Good.” For a development of Burnyeat’s view on pleasure and shame, see Marta Jimenez, *Aristotle on Shame and Learning to be Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020). See Susan Sauvé Meyer, “Living for the Sake of an Ultimate End,” in *Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics: A Critical Guide* ed. Jon Miller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 25-6; Olfert, *Aristotle on Practical Truth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 190-7, for a discussion on pleasure in learning to become good.

⁷¹ Gavin Lawrence, “Acquiring Character: Becoming Grown Up,” in *Moral Psychology and Human Action in Aristotle* eds. Michael Pakaluk, Giles Pearson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 272-9.

⁷² Ibid., 250.

⁷³ Kosman, *Virtues of Thought*, 69, 72-76.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 76.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

this accumulative? How are medium- and long-term goals integrated? Some other authors advance a combination of all these elements. The noble is acquired as learning rules and habit of pleasure.⁷⁶

But there are two criticisms that can be advanced against the developmental approach. First there is an ambiguity concerning the outcomes of habituation.⁷⁷ Second, habituation is for reasons. But here reason does not influence desire, neither at the start nor at the later stage. *Phronesis* and reason are just added. The stages of habituation and development are unclear.⁷⁸

The development approach is rich and interesting, but it tells us that the possibility of a correct trajectory towards our transformation depends on contingencies such as habituation, development of pleasure, etc. This is especially illuminating as it explains human ways of becoming good but also embraces the fact that we share features with other creatures in the animal kingdom. It explains becoming good within the possibility of empirical features. The developmental account gives a rich and active conception of our empirical features. However, the question of trajectory and direction of transformation poses a question about the role of our intelligent thinking and how our intelligent thinking shapes our rich empirical features, (i.e., desires and character) and shapes the journey towards good and/or right. Similarly, we need to better understand the way our character and desires shape our practical thinking and intelligence. Our intelligent thinking is able to interact with our empirical self and we need a better explanation of this.

Aristotelian-inspired rational choice (*prohairesis*) is the bridge between character and the empirical features that are relevant for choice, desires, pleasure, and habit.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, in developmental accounts the phenomenology of choice disappears. The entire self or person is not the master of what happens. It is a process of training. For example, in the case of Alessandra we would say that she left her dog in the vehicle as result of her children arguing. But it is not the case that her character, being a rush person, being a person who loses her thoughts when her children argue, caused the action. The problem that emerges is why she can be held responsible for her character if it emerges as a result of contingencies. Furthermore, everyday judgements and experience tells us that we consider Alessandra and her entire self, not only her ethical character, to be the cause of what happens.

B. The Deliberative-Aspirational Perspective and Other Perspectives

We need to provide a sound explanation of “the upward journey to the specification of the *what*” that embraces our medium and long term goals and *is able to retain the acquired practical knowledge of immersed or narrow deliberation*.

I have already mentioned that contemporary philosophy tends to focus on reflection and that one difficulty that arises on thinking about reflection in the practical domain is that we are both object and subject. This means that we need

⁷⁶ Ibid., 264-266.

⁷⁷ Lawrence, “Acquiring Character: Becoming Grown Up,” 276.

⁷⁸ Cfr. Kosman, *Virtues of Thought*, 280-284.

⁷⁹ Kosman, *Virtues of Thought*, 284, 292, 293, 295-6.

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to pay attention and therefore think intelligently about our actions prior to acting, while we are acting and after acting. When we are confronted with the question of what we should do we need to engage in an investigation of the particulars and circumstances of the action to determine the *what* though the *how*. At the same time, we are subjects of our actions because while investigating and deliberating what to do, we transform our desires and character and these desires and character change our vision of the *what*. We are not only subjects of our actions, but also objects.

Furthermore, Aristotle emphasizes that in ethical matters and *praxis*, as opposed to crafts or *technē*, the transformation of ourselves can be in the right or wrong direction and therefore the development of our desires⁸⁰ can go in the right or wrong direction and can lead to the contortion of our selves. In ethical matters there is no knowledge when we get it wrong, there is only contortion and deformation.⁸¹ Thus, for example, we can show our knowledge of grammar through purportedly making errors and the more subtle the errors, the more the expert on grammar shows her knowledge. An engineer can show her knowledge of applied physics and building bridges by building a defective bridge, but she has not lost her knowledge by building a defective bridge. By contrast, when we act, if we act wrongfully, then the entire self-manifests itself in contortion and error, our character and desires are altered and our entire self is altered.⁸²

The challenge is how to achieve the correct understanding of reflection when we are at the same time the subject and object of our actions. Reflection can be understood as detachment which can be interpreted in different ways. First, it can be conceived as an observational or perceptual stance. The perceptual model of self-reflection and self-knowledge applied to agency presupposes that we can look inside of ourselves at our states, desires, intentions, character and determine their nature. This perceptual knowledge of our desires and character can assist us in our actions and in determining what we are going to do.⁸³ By contrast the outward-looking model of self-reflection and self-knowledge establishes that you need to engage with the world and with features of the world to determine what to do.⁸⁴ It presupposes the transparency conception of self-knowledge and rejects the idea that we can perceive our own mental states (which can eventually generate knowledge). Thus, there is a paradox when I say “p, but I do not believe it” or “not p, but I believe it.” The paradox emerges⁸⁵ because these sentences seem

⁸⁰ In the vicinity of this issue, is what is called practical truth, NE 1139a29-31. For a detailed analysis of practical truth in Aristotle, see Olfert, *Aristotle on Practical Truth*.

⁸¹ *Eudemian Ethics* 1046a26-1246b13.

⁸² For a discussion of the *Eudemian Ethics*'s passages on contortion as a result of defective practical reasoning, see Flannery, *Action and Character According to Aristotle*, ch. 7.

⁸³ On perceptual reflection D.M. Armstrong, *A Materialist Theory of the Mind* (London: Routledge, 1968). cf. Sydney Shoemaker, “Self-Knowledge and ‘Inner Sense,’” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 54 (1994): 291-314. See also Moran, *Authority and Estrangement: An Essay on Self-Knowledge* for a criticism.

⁸⁴ This has an ancient pedigree, see e.g., Plato's *Charmides* trans. W.R.M. Lamb (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927).

⁸⁵ See G.E. Moore, “Moore's Paradox,” in *Selected Essays* (London: Routledge, 1993); Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), 162-4; Moran, *Authority and Estrangement: An Essay on Self-Knowledge*.

to show us that we are able to settle our mental states, desires, beliefs and intentions without perceiving them or having an interior view of them. If I am asked, “Do you believe p ?” I do not need to look at my mental state in order to decide whether I should believe p or believe $\sim p$. On the contrary I need to investigate and decide whether p is true or not. I need, in other words, to engage with the content of the belief to assess whether I should actually believe. Similarly, if I am asked whether I desire the *what*, Y , I do not look at my mental state to decide whether I should desire Y . I need to engage in the *how* to determine the *what* and see whether I should continue desiring the *what* or rather desist in my desire. Furthermore, the perceptual stance requires that in order to observe myself, I—as a subject—inevitably become the object. Some authors tend to reject this view as what we learn about ourselves is purely our empirical nature.⁸⁶ Thus, for example, I am able to learn that I have certain psychological features, e.g., I am ambitious, impatient and so on. However, this model does not answer the question of what I am going to do. Do I take into account these psychological features, or shall I ignore them? Shall I transform them, and if I am going to transform them how do I accomplish this? Worse, it does not show us any directionality, i.e., the path to becoming good. To conclude, if the detached view is interpreted as an observational or perceptual stance it is a deficient and, therefore, an incomplete way of learning about ourselves as both the subject of our actions and the object of transformation through action.

Another conception of reflection emphasizes looking at features of our relationships with others, looking carefully at our desires and aims over time and at how changes to our thinking alter our view of the subject matter, e.g., our relationships, features of others, conceptions of good and right. Although there is a change in our thinking and vision, there is no acting that mirrors these changes. This is a model advanced by Iris Murdoch and she illustrates it with her well-known example of the mother-in-law whose thinking about her daughter-in-law changes with time, though there is no external action that reflects her thinking. Let me quote the example as its detail will become crucial in our analysis:

A mother, whom I shall call M, feels hostility to her daughter-in-law, whom I shall call D. M finds D quite a good-hearted girl, but while not exactly common yet certainly unpolished and lacking in dignity and refinement. D is inclined to be pert and familiar, insufficiently ceremonious, brusque, sometimes positively rude, always tiresomely juvenile. M does not like D’s accent or the way D dresses. M feels that her son has married beneath him. Let us assume for the purposes of the example that the mother, who is a very ‘correct’ person behaves beautifully to the girl throughout, not allowing her real opinion to appear in any way. We might underline this aspect of the example by supposing that the young couple have emigrated or that D is now dead: the point being to ensure that whatever is in question as happening happens entirely in M’s mind. This much for M’s first thoughts about D. Time passes, and it could be that M settles down with a hardened sense of grievance and a fixed picture of D, imprisoned (if I may use a question-begging word) by the cliché: my poor son has married a silly vulgar girl. However, the M of the example is an intelligent and well-intentioned person, capable of self-criticism, capable of

⁸⁶ See Moran, *Authority and Estrangement*.

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giving careful and just *attention* to an object which confronts her. M tells herself: "I am old-fashioned and conventional. I may be prejudiced and narrow-minded. I may be snobbish. I am certainly jealous. Let me look again." Here I assume that M observes D or at least reflects deliberately about D, until gradually her vision of D alters. If we take D to be now absent or dead this can make it clear that the change is not in D's behaviour but in M's mind. D is discovered to be not vulgar but refreshingly simple, not undignified but spontaneous, not noisy but gay, not tiresomely juvenile but delightfully youthful, and so on. And as I say, *ex hypothesi*, M's outward behaviour, beautiful from the start, in no way alters.⁸⁷

Like us, Murdoch believes that language-games provide the framework for our ends, values and experiences and that words acquire their meaning through context. However, the way we experience language and describe matters enriches and modifies our shareable concepts. "The concept does not give us an experience with immediately self-contained unambiguous sense."⁸⁸ However, values, ends, desires and sensations can be described in an infinite number of ways and therefore the meaning, initially given by context and our language-games, is shaped by our multiple descriptions of values, ends, desires and sensations.⁸⁹ Our thoughts depend on our concepts and we think because we have learned concepts; however, contrary to some interpretations of Wittgenstein's criticism of private language, this does not mean that thoughts and our inner life do not exist. It is rather that, if we follow a reading of Wittgenstein's arguments against private language, our psychological concepts like desire, beliefs, intentions, thoughts or imagining, do not refer to an internal state or private event. There is no substantive and particular event our psychological concepts. There is, however, a thinking that we engage with, where our learned and shareable concepts acquire shape, color and depth. The example of the changes that the mother-in-law experiences in relation to her daughter-in-law are elaborations and re-elaborations of thoughts.⁹⁰

Notice that the attitude, actions and general behavior of the daughter-in-law have not changed. What has changed is the way we describe and re-describe our thinking about her. Thus, the changes in our thinking are characterized by three key features. First, there is no correspondence with a substantive or empirical reality, a referent that determines the shape of our thoughts. Thus, the daughter-in-law has not changed her behavior or attitudes, everything remains the same. The changes are at the level of thinking and perspective of the mother-in-law.

⁸⁷ Iris Murdoch, "The Idea of Perfection," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 312-313.

⁸⁸ Iris Murdoch, "Nostalgia for the Particular," in *ibid.*, 54 also shows us that between "everything is public" and "everything is an internal event," there is an intermediate position. There are our thoughts that work with concepts as mediators of reality, but our own perspectives that constantly change and give us a vision and clarity on the matter to be considered do not depend on our behavior or the behavior or the interpretation of the behavior of others. This is what the example of the mother and daughter-in-law aims to show. She also refers to forms of life, Iris Murdoch, "Vision and Choice in Morality," in *ibid.*, 97; see also Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (London: Penguin, 1993), 327: "Living is making distinctions and indicating order and pattern."

⁸⁹ Murdoch, "Nostalgia for the Particular," 44-6.

⁹⁰ Murdoch calls it "inner experiences" to emphasize that it does not depend on our will, nor on conduct that we manifest outwardly. It is all an internal process of elaboration and re-elaboration.

Second, there is no act of will that explains the changes in the description and re-descriptions that the mother-in-law makes in relation to her daughter-in-law. Somehow the descriptions and re-descriptions are imposed on us. “The Language and the object are merged.” Arguably there is a transparency of the object that is presented to us and there is no separation between the meaning and the event. Language-games are intermediary and define the contours of our experiences, but our elaborations and descriptions give them the shape. At the same time the object, e.g., the character and attitudes of the daughter-in-law, changes due to changes in our vision, attention and appreciation. The more we focus on the object and think about it, the sharper our vision becomes, and we obtain clarity on the object. In parallel the concept becomes more exact.⁹¹ If we focus on the empirical matter only or the essential properties of the world—what Murdoch calls the “substance of the world”⁹²—then we stop being reflective and she conceives reflectivity as this process of describing, re-describing, elaborating and re-elaborating our own thoughts.

For Murdoch reflection is not detachment as in the perceptual model of self-knowledge and self-reflection, rather reflection is looking carefully at and paying attention (with all our conceptual apparatus and language resources) to the content of our beliefs desires and thinking. In this way we exercise our freedom and learn to see the world differently.⁹³ Our thinking is not limited to a specific time or space but displays its own changes; we see things and relationships differently. Third there is emphasis on a respect of truth and avoidance of fantasy that distorts our thinking, we need to develop careful attention to the object. Fantasy is opposed to imagination.⁹⁴ Fantasy resists changes of thoughts and resists attention. It could be said that fantasy focuses on our experiences for our experience’s sake and, consequently, while fantasizing our attention is removed from the object. The object of fantasy is our sensations or inner thoughts. Fantasy, as opposed to imagination, is a “barrier to our seeing ‘what is really there’”⁹⁵ By contrast the object of imagination is outside us, it is the subject matter of our attention, we direct ourselves towards the object and are open to its features and to different presentations of it.⁹⁶ “To be a human being is to know more than one

⁹¹ Ibid., 53.

⁹² Iris Murdoch, “Metaphysics and Ethics,” in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 66. Murdoch reiterates that moral concepts do not move about within a hard world separated by science and logic (Murdoch, “The Idea of Perfection,” 320).

⁹³ Murdoch, “Metaphysics and Ethics,” 70-3.

⁹⁴ “Imagination is a type of reflection on people’s events.” Murdoch defines imagination as follows: “Imagination as restoration of freedom, cognition, the effortful ability to see what lies before one clearly, more justly, to consider new possibilities, and to respond to good attachments and desires.” *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 322. The particular can be brutalized, not respected, absorbed into private fantasy (ibid., 340).

⁹⁵ Iris Murdoch, “The Darkness of Practical Reason,” in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 199.

⁹⁶ This openness is characteristic of the human power to an indefinite and extended rational capacity (Murdoch, “The Sublime and the Good,” 216). She also claims that love is knowledge of the individual (Murdoch, “The Idea of Perfection,” 320). One way to interpret this is to argue that, for example, through narrow deliberation I grasp the specific end and learn to see all the different features. This knowledge is love if we do not resist our desires but continue developing our grasp of its particularities with both our thinking and deliberating.

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can prove, to conceive of a reality that goes ‘beyond the facts’ in these familiar and natural ways.”⁹⁷

Imaginative thinking is going beyond the facts, but it is also being close to the subject matter through consideration, description and re-description of it. Changes in our thinking through careful and proper attention to the subject matter, through our imaginative thinking, generate new moral visions and concepts.⁹⁸ Therefore the notion of choice as the determination and exercise of the will is minimized.⁹⁹ Ethical differences and ethical disagreements are presented as differences and disagreements in visions and perspectives.¹⁰⁰

To conclude, for Murdoch reflection entails seeing beyond mere facts and the substance of the subject matter. Reflecting means moving towards the object and focusing our attention on it. Ethical reality is not there for every observer to determine its nature.¹⁰¹ Ethical reality is neither an inner mental state that is projected onto the world and nor an inner shadow of our thinking,¹⁰² our describing, our elaborations and re-elaborations.¹⁰³ Ethics is a matter of thinking clearly and this entails shifting our perspective and vision. Ethical action is not the moving of our will as an independent reality from our thinking. Murdoch presents us with the possibility of our thoughts and imaginative thinking changing, though there is no external manifestation of those changes.

I think that she is right in saying that our perspectives of others change and that there are *open and closed ways of seeing others* and what changes is not the ethical reality as if our language can capture it. However, *it is implausible*, or so I will argue, that our intelligent, imaginative and open thinking about matters, including the people in our lives, goals, ends and desires, have no repercussion in our actions. Let us go back to the example of the mother-in-law’s changing attitudes towards her daughter-in-law. There are some problems with the example. At the start of the illustration, we are told that M is a correct person and that she behaves beautifully towards the daughter-in-law, not allowing her thoughts to be revealed to the daughter-in-law. If this is the case, then the example is not truly realistic and believable. From our own experiences with relationships with in-laws it is far more likely that at the start of the relationship—when the mother-in-law

⁹⁷ Murdoch, “The Darkness of Practical Reason,” 199.

⁹⁸ For Murdoch advances in ethics are insights generated by thinking. “Vision and Choice in Morality,” 83.

⁹⁹ Murdoch criticizes Kant’s notion of the will and the will of existentialists like Sartre. For a criticism of her interpretation of Kant, see Carla Bagnoli, “Respect and Loving Attention,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 33 (2003): 483-515. For a criticism of her interpretation of Sartre’s existentialism, see Richard Moran, “Iris Murdoch and Existentialism,” in *The Philosophical Imagination: Selected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

¹⁰⁰ Murdoch, “Vision and Choice in Morality,” 93.

¹⁰¹ The example is powerful and illustrates this. M’s thinking is an activity but there are no observers. The activity is hard to characterize, not because reality is hazy, but because it is moral (Murdoch, “The Idea of Perfection,” 317). M is trying to determine what in this context is justified and what is loving. M’s activity is perfectible as she is engaged in an endless task. For Plato and Aristotle, thinking is activity, see Kosman, *Virtues of Thought*.

¹⁰² Murdoch rejects that the inner is a shadow of the outer in “The Idea of Perfection,” 315-6. This is reminiscent of Wittgenstein’s private language criticism.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 304.

thinks the girl is vulgar, lacking in dignity and unpolished—there ought to be some manifestation of her attitude. It is true that the mother-in-law can behave beautifully but there is always a wrong gaze, a guarded conversation, a long silence, cues that betray our best possible intentions and efforts. The mother-in-law, inevitably, becomes reserved or is on her guard in her conversations or interactions with her daughter-in-law. When she changes her opinion and sees her daughter-in-law as gay and delightfully youthful, then something in her conduct must have changed, some openness in her conversations and interactions with her daughter-in-law must be visible.

In addition, the way the example is set up is question begging. Murdoch tells us that for the example to work better, we can imagine that the young couple have emigrated, or D is dead. However, this last requirement is puzzling as the point of the example is to demonstrate that our actions and interactions with others do not affect our thinking about them. However, we are told that we need to suppose that there are no interactions at all. The example works only if we isolate the mother-in-law from the daughter-in-law. Murdoch's point is important, but it needs softening. Our thinking and perspective towards others change, but our actions and interactions with them are not irrelevant.

What Murdoch highlights is that our intelligent, open thinking changes our perspectives on matters such as our attitudes to other people and who they are. We can extend this analysis to desires and therefore to the development of character. In order to decide *what I should do*, we need to settle on what to desire and what to believe but we do not look at our psychological concepts, beliefs or desires as if they were internal events. On the contrary we need to look at features of the world and pay careful attention to people, goals, ends and values as they are presented in particular contexts and circumstances. True, we do change perspectives and our ways of thinking about a specific matter, and it also seems inevitable that we act accordingly to what we have acquired in our thinking. We move our thoughts in certain directions, and we pay, or do not pay, attention to matters that afterwards might or might not become part of our narrow deliberation. The changes in our thinking are important and might lead to action. Murdoch's point is that action does not follow immediately from thought. Arguably, our thinking and changes in our thinking are part of our narrow deliberation and can contribute to it at any point during the exercise of narrow deliberation. Thus, imagine that the couple in Murdoch's example did leave town 10 years ago, and that the mother-in-law meets the daughter-in-law in her new home after all these years and the death of her son. She sees her now as gay, delightful and dignified. She engages in narrow deliberation and puts careful thought into making a nice meal and making the encounter a special moment for her daughter-in-law. We now see that these actions are informed by her change in thinking concerning the qualities of her daughter-in-law.

Let us recall that our initial problem was how to maintain the insights of our immersed or narrow deliberation but also how to locate ourselves within a wider perspective that includes medium- and long-term goals, ends and values, and projects and plans, though we recognize that they are indeterminate and

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uncertain. Furthermore, we are faced with the challenge of whether it is possible to soundly grasp medium- and long-term goals, ends and values and become good, without losing sight of the immersed perspective, which defines our empirical reality and the way we deliberate and, as a corollary of this, how we can engage with deliberation that is non-immersed without losing the immersed perspective.

I will show that it is possible to grasp medium and long term ends and values and become good without losing our immersed perspective and, therefore, also achieve an understanding of how we can engage with deliberation that is non-immersive. I will argue that we can inhabit a deliberative-aspirational perspective, that this is what is required when we are learning about the good and the right, and that this is sufficient to show that there is a possible trajectory towards the “specification of the *what*” that embraces medium and long term ends and values.

We have shown that our thinking can change, and this entails a change of perspective and thinking about the subject matter, which includes the content of our desires, goals, beliefs and other psychological concepts. For Murdoch the mother-in-law is well-intentioned, and this seems to be sufficient to occupy a critical space for our thoughts. It is not the case, however, that there is an internal mental event that we are trying to grasp and represent or refer correctly when we think about the content of our attitudes or desires; rather it is our perspective or vision of the subject that changes. However, it is difficult to believe that in paradigmatic examples persons are self-critical and self-reflective in this way. Furthermore, in her example, Murdoch downplays the role of time, the fact that the mother-in-law has become more mature, and this entails the transformation of her desires and character; she has had experiences, for example, meeting other couples and young people that has caused her views to change, and she has probably seen positive changes in her son after his marriage. She has become a grandmother which has also adjusted her view of her daughter-in-law, has got ill or has suffered in ways that have made her change her thinking about her daughter-in-law. We pay attention to the subject matter and look carefully, but this might not be sufficient. There is something richer missing in the experience. Furthermore, fantasy, distractions and self-deception can all hinder our vision and intelligent thinking.

We recognize that in Murdoch’s example the mother-in-law has been active in her thinking, but not infallible. Murdoch tells us that she is self-critical and re-examines her own attitudes to the daughter-in-law, “*I am old-fashioned and conventional. I may be prejudiced and narrow-minded. I may be snobbish. I am certainly jealous. Let me look again.*” The question that arises is precisely how the mother-in-law can see herself as “old-fashioned, narrow-minded, snobbish and jealous.” This is an important question that Murdoch does not address. Perhaps other experiences have made her reflect on the person that she is. For example, prior to changing her views concerning her daughter-in-law, maybe she developed a friendship with a young person and paid attention to how she interacts with her and how the young lady acts with others. Through this friendship she learned

that her way of looking at life is rather old-fashioned and narrow-minded. She has also become friends with people of a different social status who have made remarks on her snobbish attitudes. In general, my point is that her change of perspective does not occur merely by pure thinking; there are experiences and relationships that the mother-in-law has engaged with that has forced her to look again at her views on her daughter-in-law.¹⁰⁴

I will argue that narrow or immersed deliberation and self-reflection on our narrow deliberations illuminate the path for transforming our thinking, desires and character and for how we engage with our medium- and long-term goals and projects.

In transparent self-knowledge and self-reflection, I focus on features of the subject matter and try to understand the particularities of the subject matter. In the example of Beatrice, Beatrice tries to determine the way rhythm, competitiveness and harmony are all key components of physical health and when considering how to achieve the physical health of her daughter, she engages with the *how* to determine the *what*. At every step she has engaged in a specification of the *what* and an apprehension of the features that constitute “good” physical health. She discovers this due to her immersed or narrow deliberation. She can continue paying attention to features of her daughter in relation to her physical health. At the same time through her interactions with other mothers she learns that worrying excessively about her daughter’s physical health can undermine her daughter’s self-confidence. She now also starts to recognize that she is engaging *too much* with the matter of her daughter’s physical health and can recognize that this is a feature of being an obsessive mother. Beatrice has gained a perspective that she did not have prior to engaging in the narrow deliberation of how to obtain her daughter’s physical health and there is now an additional layer of thinking that has resulted from her engaging with other mothers and also from deliberating and thinking about her own deliberations and the actions of others. The value of the physical health of her daughter becomes for Beatrice ‘thicker’ and acquires a depth that it did not have before.

I will argue that Beatrice is now inhabiting a “deliberative-aspirational perspective.” She recognizes features of herself, not as merely empirical or as objects, but as something she needs to take into account in future deliberations. Of course, she can either avoid features such as the obsession with her daughter’s physical health, or she can recognize and improve them. The learning is through a perspective that she has been forced to take. The emphasis is that deliberation not only takes place when the *how* determines the *what*, but also when we experience relationships and think about others, their actions and ways of thinking, and therefore acquire knowledge of them and have rich interactions with them. This is something that all human beings do. We also learn to see and think about ourselves as we deliberate and interact with others. Additionally, what happens *between* each discrete narrow or immersed deliberation and aspirational deliberation

¹⁰⁴ Murdoch recognizes that the “outward initiates the change.” *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 331.

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is crucial. It is also practical reasoning as it focuses on a) particularities and b) evolving desires.

The way we occupy different perspectives and whether we recognize and inhabit them through thinking and deliberating narrowly or aspirationally accordingly or avoid and stop inhabiting them is well illustrated by Cavell in his examination of the slave owner.¹⁰⁵

Cavell interprets the denial of the fantasy of the private language in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* as a denial of a reference or mental events when we use psychological concepts like desire, belief, intention, imagining, and so on. However, he tells us, this denial does not entail that there are no inner thoughts. Inner thoughts acquire a different character and if we reject the "mental event" or "referent" model, then what is the inner thought about? For Cavell, *they are about perspectives and different layers of perspectives*. Let me explain. When I say "I am in pain" I demonstrate that I want to tell you something about my soul and body, but I am also presenting myself, telling you something about myself. However, the fantasy of private language is pernicious as it leads to a portrait of mysterious mental events and mental entities. It leads, consequently, to confusion as if there is something that uniquely refers to your pain and that I cannot grasp, something mysterious that will be always inscrutable for the other.

Cavell demonstrates that skepticism of other minds, i.e., the idea that there is something inscrutable and incomprehensible in how others use psychological expressions, concepts and words, is not possible and this argument will be crucial to demonstrate his point on perspectives. The argument is complex but can be summarized as follows. In the case of skepticism on our knowledge of things and objects, we suppose that there is a demon who plays with our appearances. The demon is able to deceive me about, for example, whether the desk in front of me is really there and leads me to question whether the desk in front of me is truly real or only appears to be real. For this kind of skeptical argument to work the demon needs to know more than me as she needs to produce the illusion of appearance and she needs to understand the difference between what is real and what merely appears to be real. The demon is in a better epistemic position than me.

However, skepticism of other minds cannot work in this way. We have immediate knowledge of our own desires, values, intentions and so on. In our example Beatrice *knows* that she intends to register her daughter in ballet lessons, and she knows why. Could Beatrice doubt all her intentions? Because she has answered the question "What shall I do?," she knows what she is doing and why. This is a knowledge she has acquired and for the demon to undermine her knowledge *the demon needs to know more than her about her own intentions*. The demon needs to know what her real intention is and also her apparent intention. But if intention is the result of engagement with the world and settling the question 'What shall I do' in this particular circumstance reflects *why* and *how* Beatrice sees the matter, then the demon *cannot* have more knowledge than Beatrice about her own intentions. Similarly, when someone tells me about Beatrice's desires or intentions,

¹⁰⁵ Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 376-8.

what I hear is her own perspective of the matter and I cannot be skeptical about what she desires or intends. I cannot have more knowledge about her or deny that she really knows what she desires and intends. Nor can I establish that there is a true and hidden desire or intention that she does not know. However, this seems to contradict our own daily experiences. There are many occasions in which we act according to what we think our desires are only to later discover, usually with surprise, that we actually had different desires. Similarly, friends tell us what they intend, or desire and we might later discover that they truly had another intention or desire. The temptation is to think that our psychological words refer to a mental reality or refer to something and, therefore, changes or discoveries of desires are conceived as the 'discovery' of hidden desires or intentions, i.e., mental states that were always there but that now can be brought to light. In this way skepticism of other minds might arise: others are truly inscrutable; they have intentions and desires that we really do not know with certainty and probably will never know.

But if we deny the fantasy of the private language account, the fact that I express another desire or intention after deliberating and acting reveals simply a change in perspective in my deliberations or actions, or perhaps both. For example, Murdoch's mother-in-law can now see that her daughter-in-law is not so undignified as she previously thought and that she is gay and polite. There is no new mental state that is now present to her, nor is there a unique referent that corresponds to her past or current thoughts. *The mother-in-law has changed perspective.*

Imagine that I am a very close friend of the mother-in-law (let us call her Sylvia) and that I knew her prior to her changed perspective. Sylvia tells me about the way her views on her daughter-in-law have changed. It would be wrong to infer that others are inscrutable to us or that there are mysterious mental events that I need to interpret and reinterpret in light of others' actions and my interactions with them. Rather, from our conversations and Sylvia's actions, I assume that Sylvia is struggling to take the right perspective and that she is trying to make herself intelligible to both herself and to me.

More interestingly, like Sylvia, we usually struggle to have coherent perspectives and can avoid or recognize some of our perspectives or visions as being in tension with some of our other perspectives or visions. These changes in perspectives or visions and their recognition or avoidance are clearly illustrated by Cavell's example of the slave owner,¹⁰⁶ though I have modified the example to emphasize my point. Imagine a slave owner who allows his slaves to eat with him, who goes hunting with them, who lets his children play with those of the slave, and who allows his slaves to call him by a nickname, and that this pleases the slave. For the slave owner the slave is a good man, a good hunter, a good father and a humorous person; however, the only space that the slave owner does not recognize for his slave is the space of justice. He thinks it is right that his slave is disenfranchised, and that his slave does not have freedom or autonomy. Imagine that this relationship between the slave and the slaveowner occurs at the

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

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end of the 19th century in a certain country and that a new statute abolishing slavery has recently been enacted by parliament. Furthermore, abolitionist movements have for some time articulated their views and propagated them to the population of this country. Our slaveowner might remain unmoved by their arguments but, Cavell asks, for how long he can continue to avoid taking a new perspective and depriving his slave of justice. How consistent is this with his other perspectives and thoughts about his slave, i.e., being a good man, a good father and a humorous human being. Can he still deny justice and dignity for him?

I have also tried to show that the deliberative-aspirational perspective is key. Avoidance might lead us to fantasy and lack of attention. Recognition is the way we inhabit the deliberative-aspirational perspective. Once we recognize a particular feature in its particularity, we can think about it and change our views but, at the same time, we transform our emotions and desires when this recognition and thinking becomes part of our deliberations. Beatrice, for example, recognizes her obsession with the physical health of her daughter and needs now to decide whether to continue paying for ballet lessons or to stop. She can desist in her quest for the physical health of her daughter and decide to “let it go.” Her thinking about herself as “obsessive” has now changed her desires and her deliberations. The key is that movement in either direction, recognition or avoidance, is of the entire self. The transformation includes our emotions and desires and therefore has an impact on the development of our character. But these transformations do not occur *only* as a result of training our desires, emotions and character, but as the consequence of taking a perspective, i.e., thinking about the subject matter and recognizing it, or avoiding the subject matter and not examining it. Training might still play a role but not because of the repetition of actions, but because we get used to inhabiting a perspective multiple times and learn the depth and complexity of such a perspective.

But how does inhabiting this deliberative-aspirational perspective enable us to also engage with medium- and long-term goals and ends without losing the immersed or narrow deliberative perspective. We have learned that changing our perspectives through both thinking and experience does not involve contemplating our inner experiences and thoughts as if they were mere events or objects. We reject the view that we can be impartial or detached from our experiences without losing something important. We have rejected the perception model of self-reflection and the objectification of our self. We advocate a model of self-reflection as transparent where the agent has demands on settling the question “What shall I do?” but also engages with careful thinking about the features of the subject matter, i.e., relationships, what is good, what is right. The agent looks outward to the world and finds that her interactions with others are lacking. The recognition or avoidance can be taken on as material for further narrow deliberations. When we are confronted with others through relationships and experiences and when we pay careful attention to the features of the world and our relationships, we become able to aspire to medium- and long-term goals and ends within the narrow or immersed deliberative perspective. The depth and richness of the

latter enable us to better understand if or how our current position is lacking. In the example of Beatrice her recognition of herself as an 'obsessed mother' forces her to see the medium- and long-term goals and ends of, for example, achieving internal peace and personal freedom. Grasping these medium- and long-term goals is possible because there is a trajectory from the immersed perspective to inhabiting the aspirational-deliberative perspective. However, it is still within the confines of the immersed perspective as Beatrice has absorbed all the wisdom acquired through her deliberation. The medium- and long-term goals and ends are uncertain but can form part of future immersed or narrow deliberations. Beatrice can engage with the good of internal peace and attend yoga lessons or develop a new spiritual practice that will challenge her current mindset.

If the denial of the fantasy of private language is sound and extends to our deliberations and thoughts on what is good, worthwhile engaging with, or right, we see that there cannot be a private vision of the good. We cannot have a private space where our referent of the good is only intelligible to us and inscrutable to others. If I feel the lack or deprivation of my perspective through guilt, shame and regret, I cannot find refuge in a special notion of good or right which I myself only inhabit.

IV. Conclusion

Following Finnis's conception of practical reason and his rejection of a bifurcation between reasons and desires, and between intellectual virtues and virtues of character, we have advanced an Aristotelian-inspired model of deliberation and practical reason that is narrow and immersed. It recognizes the difficulty of understanding the Aristotelian analogies of practical reason as if it were both a craft and theoretical reasoning to illuminate and demonstrate the existence of practical reason. However, we have also argued that this narrow or immersed model is in continuity with a deliberative-aspirational perspective that we are able to inhabit. We explain how reflection without losing immersion is possible and explain how we can move in the direction of practical reason that guides actions and makes possible the realization of objective goods in our lives.