The focus of this work is on character. For Aristotle, as for us, the term has to do with a person's enduring traits; that is, with the attitudes, sensibilities, and beliefs that affect how a person sees, acts, and indeed lives. As permanent states, these will explain not merely why someone acted this way now, but why someone can be counted on to act in certain ways. In this sense, character gives a special sort of accountability and pattern to action. Following Aristotle, I will be concerned primarily with good character—with the virtues that guide a good life. Not that Aristotle ignores vice: the virtues are, in all cases, relative to excesses which would lead a person, if not to moral turpitude, at least to foolishness or unsensible ways. But the description of these is in the service of showing what the good life is like—what its constituents are and what sorts of persons are likely to lead it.

As a whole, the Aristotelian virtues comprise just and decent ways of living as a social being. Included will be the generosity of benefactor, the bravery of citizen, the goodwill and attentiveness of friends, the temperance of a non-lascivious life. But human perfection, on this view, ranges further, to excellences whose objects are less clearly the weal and woe of others, such as a healthy sense of humour and a wit that bites without malice or anger. In the common vernacular nowadays, the excellences of character cover a gamut that is more than merely moral. Good character—literally, what pertains to ethics—is thus more robust than a notion of goodwill or benevolence, common to many moral theories. The full constellation will also include the excellence of a divine-like contemplative activity, and the best sort of happiness will find a place for the pursuit of pure
leisure, whose aim and purpose has little to do with social improvement or welfare. Human perfection thus pushes outwards at both limits to include both the more earthly and the more divine.

But even when we restrict ourselves to the so-called 'moral' virtues (e.g. temperance, generosity, and courage), their ultimate basis is considerably broader than that of many alternative conceptions of moral virtue. Emotions as well as reason ground the moral response, and these emotions include the wide sentiments of altruism as much as particular attachments to specific others. The claim is not the familiar one argued by some that sentiments and attachments enable us to fulfil the moral requirements determined by a more impartial reason. That would be far too Kantian. Rather, it is that emotions themselves are modes of moral response that determine what is morally relevant and, in some cases, what is required. To act rightly is to act rightly in affect and conduct. It is to be emotionally engaged, and not merely to have the affect as accompaniment or instrument. It is to reason and see in a way that brings to bear the lessons of the heart as much as the lessons of a calmer intellect. An action motivated by the right principle but lacking in the right gesture or feeling falls short of the mean; it does not express virtue. Indeed, for Aristotle, to act for the right reasons, as the person of practical wisdom does, is to act from the sort of wisdom that itself includes the vision and sensitivity of the emotions. Moral choice issues from that wisdom without necessarily presupposing the reflections of an impartial agent. Emotions and attachments need not be stripped or, more weakly, justified from a higher-order perspective, where one asks how others, similarly circumstanced, would respond.

This point is not new. The impartial standpoint characteristic of modern moral theory (Kantianism and consequentialism alike) is not one rooted in ancient moral theory. And apart from the hedonistic theory found at the end of the Protagoras, procedural methods of assessing correct choice are not particularly emphasized.1 This is not to deny that impartialism will have its place. In Aristotle's account, the *phronimos* or person of practical wisdom will need to correct for biases and preferences that interfere with the deliberation at hand; but recognition of this never leads to the identification of the impartial point of view with the point of view of ethical assessment in general.2

Aristotle's account can thus be seen as shedding some light on the current debate between impartialist and particularist moral theories. With the particularist, he will argue that the point of view of moral assessment does not require a higher-order perspective of impartiality. It is not merely that the detail of situations is often lost in the retreat to coarser-grained principles. It is that our judgement of particular cases and our knowledge of how to 'compose the scene' is itself part of the moral response. Discerning the morally salient features of a situation is part of expressing virtue and part of the morally appropriate response. Pursuing the ends of virtue does not begin with making choices, but with recognizing the circumstances relevant to specific

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2 Thus, in general, Aristotle is eager to distinguish practical reason both from the top-down, deductive methods of *epistèmê* and from the procedural methods of *techne*. *Epistèmê* or scientific understanding is a kind of knowledge which has as its subject-matter unqualified and unchanging truths; given the contingent circumstances of human action, the model will not work for ethical theory (cf. 1141225). In contrast to *epistèmê*, the subject-matter of *techne* is what is contingently produced by our efforts; but still Aristotle insists that the reasoning characteristic of such productions (*poiesis*) is fundamentally distinct from the reasoning characteristic of action (*praxis*; 1140b6). Productions, he continues, have ends extrinsic to the producing, while the ends of *praxeis* are immanent in *praxeis*. For problems with this latter distinction see David Charles's 'Aristotle: Ontology and Moral Reasoning', in Julia Annas (ed.), Oxford Studies in Philosophy, iv (Oxford University Press, 1986), 121-43. His claim is that the excessively simple distinction undermines the fact that *praxeis*, too, are done for the sake of certain end states, though end states that are internal rather than external consequences of the action, and which occur without any change being produced in another object (1143a-43). The worth of the *praxeis* (say courageous activity) thus depends not upon achieving planned results, but upon a courageous state being exemplified. I believe this rendering of *praxeis* is compatible with the notion I go on to develop of intrinsically fine action in ch. 3, sect. 7.
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ends. In this sense, character is expressed in what one sees as much as what one does. Knowing how to discern the particulars, Aristotle stresses, is a mark of virtue.\(^3\)

In a general way, then, this book will address issues that figure in contemporary moral debate. But it takes its lead from Aristotle's own views and texts. In this sense, it is an interpretative work, and the method combines argument with exegesis. The objective is to understand Aristotle's ethical theory, not to construct a theory which uses Aristotle, or other historical figures, to illustrate its particular positions. While I have no objections to the latter approach, it is not the one I have adopted here. Still, as with any interpretative work, the hope here is to make Aristotle come alive on particular issues, and to deliver his insights in a way that has relevance to questions which concern us now. In a sense this is the aim of interpretation—to show the permanent importance of a text to issues of fundamental human concern. And Aristotle himself urges us to take this role seriously: time (and future generations), he says, must be co-workers and co-discoverers in the development of his theory (1098a22).

2. THE INSEPARABILITY OF CHARACTER AND PRACTICAL REASON

The focus of the book, as I have said, is on character. But to talk about character requires one to talk about practical reason. For it is practical reason that integrates the different ends of character, refining and assessing them, and ultimately issuing in all considered judgements of what is best and finest to do. The inseparability of character and practical reason is often inadequately appreciated by readers of the Nicomachean Ethics. The reason may be Aristotle's own classification of virtue or excellence (areté) into that of character (ēthikēς) and intellect (dianoēthikēς) in NE II. 1, and his announced plan of treating each separately. But while he offers some sort of sequential treatment, with the excellence of intellect the special focus of NE VI, and to some extent NE X. 6–8, the descriptions of the virtues of character are in all cases descriptions of character states which are at once modes of affect, choice, and perception. The definition of virtue makes this painfully clear: to have virtue is to be able to make the choices characteristic of the person of practical wisdom. 'Virtue', Aristotle says, 'is a character state concerned with choice, lying in the mean relative to us, being determined by reason and the way the person of practical wisdom would determine it' (1107a1). And he is again at pains to make the point, as he concludes his account of the practical intellect in NE VI: 'it is not possible to be fully good without having practical wisdom, nor practically wise without having excellence of character' (1144b31–2).

My own interpretation will follow these leads, examining different aspects of practical reason concerned with character. In particular, I shall be considering at least four aspects of practical reason, centring on moral perception, choice-making, collaboration, and finally the development of these several capacities within moral education. A brief outline of the argument that follows might be helpful preparation here.

Most accounts of Aristotle's theory of practical reason begin with the practical syllogism. We start out with some end, and then decide how to act. But this is misleading, both as an interpretation of Aristotle and as an accurate account of what we in fact do. The process begins further back with a perception of the circumstances and a recognition of its morally salient features. Before we can know how to act, we must acknowledge that action may be required. And this reaction to circumstances is itself part of the virtuous

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response. It is part of how the dispositional ends of character become occurrent. In Chapter 2, I argue that Aristotle has much to offer on this issue, though for the most part it has been overlooked in the literature.

But equally the account of deliberation is much more complex than the simple model of the practical syllogism suggests. To have character requires the integration of different ends and interests in a unified life over time. As such, choice-making will not simply be a linear process of promoting the means to single ends, but a process of promoting ends in the light of other ends, where overall fit and mutual adjustment of ends will be as important as efficiency. I shall argue in Chapter 3 for an account of deliberation along these lines. As part of this extended account of deliberation, I shall oppose the view that Aristotle's practical syllogism necessarily issues in immediate action. The conclusion, I argue, can be a present or future intention to act.

Mediating the perceptual and deliberative aspects of practical reason is a collaborative dimension, which I take up in Chapter 4. Virtuous agents conceive of their well-being as including the well-being of others. It is not simply that they benefit each other, though to do so is both morally appropriate and especially fine. It is that, in addition, they design together a common good. This expands outwards to the *polis* and to its civic friendships and contracts inwards to the more intimate friendships of one or two. In both cases, the ends of the life become shared, and similarly the resources for promoting it. Horizons are expanded by the point of view of others, and in the case of intimate relationships, motives are probed, assessed, and redefined. Not surprisingly, the family will be entrusted with the role of cultivating affiliative capacities, and I shall be exploring the origins of attachment in this chapter. *Philiai* or relations of affection and caring will characterize the child's earliest relation to the social world, and through various transformations will be preserved as an essential element of adult moral life. Attachment thus stretches backwards to childhood and forwards to maturity; there is no moment of self-sufficiency which marks full independence from others.

The process by which character is shaped is examined more fully in Chapter 5. Contrary to the popular interpretation according to which ethical habituation is non-rational, I argue that it includes early on the engagement of cognitive capacities. Thus, habituation is not mindless drill, but a cognitive shaping of desires through perception, belief, and intention. These capacities are involved in acting from character, and, to a different extent and degree, in acquiring character. Thus, moral education will itself cultivate the perceptual and deliberative capacities requisite for mature character. If excellence of character is inseparable from practical intellect, then an account of moral education must recognize this fact. I shall argue that Aristotle provides a developmental account that does this.

In an important sense the argument of these chapters will be cumulative, with the same topic returned to more than once in connection with the different aspects of practical reasoning. Thus, while discernment of ethical salience will be an issue in the next chapter, it will also be returned to in the chapter which follows as part of a more complete account of how we promote our ends, and again in the final chapter in the description of how emotions are reformed. The arguments of later chapters will fill in and supplement what has been said in earlier chapters and vice versa.

### 3. A PRACTICAL THEORY

Aristotle's ethical theory is ultimately practical. It includes educational method within its purview, and conceives of friendship, and the family, as serving important educative goals. But, on Aristotle's view, to engage in ethical inquiry is itself a practical matter. The intended audience of his lectures are those who already care about virtue (1095b4-6), and the end is to deepen their commitment (and ability) to lead a good life. Aristotle reminds us of this as he concludes the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

Since we have now said enough in outline about happiness and the virtues, and also about friendship and pleasure, should we thus think that our decision to examine these matters has achieved its
end? On the contrary, as it surely is said, the end of practical theory is not to study and know each thing, but rather to act on that knowledge. Hence it is not enough to know about virtue, but we must also try to possess and exercise it, or become good in any other way. (1179a33-b4)

As suggested, the inquiry itself is meant to deepen one’s commitment to the good life. It is a clarification that will guide action. By and large, the inquiry proceeds by dialectical argument, beginning with the accepted beliefs (ta endoxa) of the many and wise, working through the difficulties and puzzles (hai aporiai), and arriving at first principles that are essentially a refined and systematized version of some subset of ta endoxa. Together they form a system of claims about the necessary features of the good towards which human beings must ultimately aim.

It would not be amiss at this point to summarize briefly the early findings as they emerge in the first book of the Nicomachean Ethics. The argument, as it appears there, is generally recognized as one of the best examples of the dialectic at work. The account will include: formal features of


5 That the book reports the beliefs of the ‘many and wise’ is explicit from the outset in its pronouncement that ‘every craft and method, and equally every action and choice, is thought [dokei] to aim at some good’. Cognates of the term dokein are repeated at pivotal moves in the argument. Other celebrated examples of dialectic are the discussion in NE VII of ukrasia, and the discussion at IX. 9 of the place of friendship in the self-sufficient life.

the good, e.g. that it must be unqualifiedly complete, in the sense that other things are chosen for it but never for anything else (it is thus the best or chief good); that it must be self-sufficient, in the sense that the end is choice-worthy and lacking in nothing (required for an essentially human life). It will also include substantive features which meet these criteria. While it is agreed by most that eudaimonia or happiness satisfies the formal criteria (1097b22), the identity, Aristotle asserts, is essentially empty (1095a20) since happiness means different things to different people. The remaining task of the Nicomachean Ethics, indeed its primary theoretical task, is therefore to specify that content—to say in what way happiness is realized through certain recognized intrinsic and external goods, e.g. virtue or excellence (aretê), reason, pleasure, and honour, on the one hand (1097b1), and good fortune, wealth, skills, and friends on the other. As part of that task it will be established early on that it is not mere possession of excellence (aretê), but excellent activity (energeia kai areten), that will characterize the most complete good (1098a7, 1098a16, 1099a1), that the best and most complete excellent activity (1099a16, 1102a15) will involve primarily the excellences of character and intellect (1103a15), and that complete excellent activity will be to some extent dependent upon external factors (1099a32). These, in outline, are the early findings. The fuller project requires a specification of the several virtues and an account of their internal unity and their relation to the operations of practical reason, pleasure, and desire.

But the overall project of specifying the constituents of the highest good also goes on at the individual level. The choices the virtuous agent makes require refinements of more vaguely grasped ends, as well as their assessment in terms of overall fit within a coherent conception of good living. A grasp of the relationship of specific virtues to each other, an understanding of their more qualified and unqualified forms, and an appreciation of the external goods
the proper place of fame or money in a life, or of the value to be placed on family and friends. Equally, one may gain insight about how a responsible civic life can be combined with the serenity of contemplation. The reflection will draw upon one’s own convictions, but also upon those embedded in the culture and in the views of the intellectually most respected. It is this perspective, of course, that is most akin to the one Aristotle himself assumes in the theoretical inquiry. But my point now is that it is part of the deliberative mode. We often move to it when we ruminate about the ramifications of specific actions: it is the cost of particular actions that makes us question the value of the ends they promote, and the suffering of actual damages that puts into perspective the place of the lost value in the overall plan of things. In this sense, the move from particular deliberations to the reflective mode is continuous and a part of the same complex process of determining what is good in life. The practically wise individual is thus in a certain way a theoretical, capable of a reasoned conception of happiness achieved through the dialectical skills of the ethicist. 'To a certain extent he must be able to collect and distil the meaning of ta endoxa and assess through argumentation and analysis which views are best justified. And, conversely, the Aristotelian ethicist must be practically wise. For the theory ultimately requires familiarity with the particular circumstances of human life; it is based upon experience, and it is about individuatatable particulars, even if the account it gives is not detailed or precise enough to determine choice (1094b22–7, cf. 1107a28–32). As theory, it remains inexact, awaiting the more determinate operations of practical reason in its perceptual and decision-making roles.

Ethical theory, then, is practical in so far as it is part of a greater project of setting a goal which guides actions. As Aristotle urges, the purpose of his inquiry is to give us a

7 See Irwin, ‘First Principles’, and ‘Aristotle’s Methods of Ethics’, in D. J. O’Meara (ed.), Studies in Aristotle (Catholic University Press, 1981), and Richardson, ‘Rational Deliberation of Ends’. The claim that the theoretical enterprise is essentially deliberative is disputed by John M. Cooper in Reason and Human Good in Aristotle (Harvard University Press, 1975), 59–71. His view is that the deliberative process works towards an ultimate, fixed end in a way that the dialectical process does not. That end, set by the virtuous person through moral intuition, can be established independently by dialectical reasoning. I have argued that the process of dialectically arriving at such an end is continuous with the process of determinately constructing, through deliberative choice, a conception of the good life. This seems to be required to make sense of Aristotle’s claim that a practical ascent to first principles (archai; 1095b1–8) must have practical import for how one lives. To arrive at the telos for a human, he insists, is just to set a practical mark (skopos) at which to aim. For we cannot order the goods in our lives unless we have such a target; ‘. . . everyone able to live according to choice must set down some target [skopon] of good living . . . (since not to arrange one’s life with regard to some end is a sign of great foolishness) . . . ’ (EE 1214b8).

8 On Aristotle’s conception of ‘the particulars’ see Irwin’s helpful notes in his translation of the Nicomachean Ethics (Hackett, 1985), 418–19. In general I have found his translation and notes of enormous benefit, and have been guided by them at many points. Cooper’s notion of ‘perceiving the particulars’ as including ‘the capacity to recognize things of all the relevant specific types’ (43) is in essential agreement with my above point; cf. Cooper, Reason and Human Good, 30–43.
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Knowledge [gnōsis] of the good that will have great influence on our lives. And like archers who have some target [skopon] to aim at, with this knowledge we shall be more likely to hit upon what is right' (1094a22-4). The Eudemian Ethics, too, reiterates that to establish an end (telos) is just to set a practical mark (skopos) for fine living (1214b8). In the chapters which follow we shall be exploring the various aspects of practical reason involved in fine living.

Aristotle goes on to say that this knowledge is the concern of political inquiry (politikē). As Irwin notes ('First Principles', 258), political inquiry (politikē) in NE VI. 8 is a kind of practical reason concerning the affairs of the city (hē peri polin phronēsis, 1141b23-5); since the two are the same state of mind (hexis), and practical reason is deliberative, the suggestion again is that the inquiry will be deliberative: it will be a figuring out of how to live. L. H. G. Greenwood is helpful in sorting out the narrower and wider uses of phronēsis and politikē in this chapter; see his commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics, Book VI (Cambridge University Press, 1909; repr. Arno Press, 1973), 60-4. Note that I understand politikē to be deliberative not merely in the narrow, popular sense, which Aristotle himself takes to be too restrictive at 1141b28-9.