The *Phronimos* Deliberates About *Eudaimonia*

by

Nathan Carson

Baylor University, 2010
Introduction

In the *Nicomachean Ethics (EN)*, Aristotle repeatedly states that “we do not deliberate about ends,” but only about means to ends.¹ However elsewhere in *EN*, Aristotle seems to say that we also deliberate about the nature of eudaimonia, the highest end or good for human beings attainable by action. It would seem that we both do, and do not deliberate about ends. This is the puzzle on which my attention will be focused in the paper. I will argue that for Aristotle, deliberation about means to the end of specific virtuous actions necessarily entails deliberation about the highest end, eudaimonia. To establish this claim, I will investigate the uniqueness of phronetic deliberation, as distinct from deliberation confined within a certain techne.

The need to establish such uniqueness is motivated by two things. First, following Aristotle’s example, the use of techne deliberation to illumine phronetic deliberation remains prolific in recent scholarship without sufficient attention to the differences between the two deliberative activities.² Second, many commentators do point out these differences, but fail to provide specific examples of what this phronetic deliberation might look like.³ In what follows, then, I will argue that while phronetic deliberation is rooted in particular situations and engaged in constituent-means deliberation, its tele (virtuous actions as ends in themselves), the aim of the phronimos, and the absence of universal and particular fixity, together entail deliberation about the final end of eudaimonia. I hope to show that this argument is defensible, quite apart from passages that are often taken as direct evidence for deliberation about general ends. Rather than relying on these passages, my argument will hinge on the contention that virtuous activities are constituent

---

¹ All citations from the *Nicomachean Ethics* will be taken from the Ross translation (1998), and any divergence from Ross will be self-evident (i.e. use of the Greek).

² Cf. e.g. Hughes (2002, 94) and Tuozzo (1991, 199-200).

means to and immediate parts of the final end of eudaimonia, the highest activity of living well. In other words, this highest activity is the inclusive sum of these parts, and phronetic deliberation about these parts just is, in a unique way, deliberation about the whole. If successful, this argument should accomplish two things: (1) it should dissolve the basis for denying the inference from deliberation about particular-contextual activities to deliberation about the whole of eudaimonia; and (2) it should call into question the advisability of using techne deliberation to illumine phronetic deliberation. In the closing section, I will also attempt to make a contribution by providing a concrete example of what unique phronetic deliberation might look like, apart from any examples drawn from deliberation within a specific techne.

I. Instrumental versus Constituent Means

In Book III of EN, Aristotle clearly and frequently asserts that unlike boulesis (wish), both choice and deliberation are not of the end but about things that are προς τὰ τέλη. While the latter phrase is sometimes translated simply as “means” (cf. Ross), more literally, προς τὰ τέλη refers to something that is “toward the end” or “related to the end.” Here is a paradigmatic passage:

We do not deliberate about ends but about the things that are προς τὰ τέλη. For a doctor does not deliberate about whether he shall heal, nor an orator whether he shall persuade, nor a statesman whether he shall produce law and order, nor does anyone else deliberate about his end. They assume the end and consider by what means it is to be attained… For the person who deliberates seems to

4 Cf. EN II.4 and III.3, in conjunction with I.7. A crucial cross reference here will be Eudemian Ethics 1219a35-39.

5 From my description here it should be clear that I am taking Aristotle’s view to be that of reflective methodological eudaimonism. On this view, behind Aristotle’s analysis of each virtue is an ordinary generic human activity, and in front of each virtue is an end, each virtue possessing a self-sufficient end, all of which add up to an inclusive and total end of eudaimonia (Roberts, Baylor course lecture, 2008). Cf. also Ackrill, who contends for the (somewhat different) “inclusivist view” that the most final of all final ends is eudaimonia entire (not theoria or nous), which itself is “inclusive of all intrinsic goods” (Ackrill, 1980, 22-23).

6 Roopen (2006), for example, argues that the particularized context in which all deliberation occurs necessarily precludes deliberation about final ends: “we do not deliberate about ends because deliberation has a very specific action-related meaning for [Aristotle]” (199).

7 Ackrill, Wiggins, Sorabji (1980), Roopen, Tuozzo and Nussbaum (2001) are among some of the many commentators who have discussed this distinction.
investigate and analyze in the way described as though he were analyzing a geometric construction …and what is last in the order of analysis seems first in the order of deliberation. EN III.3.1112b1ff.

Commenting on this passage, Wiggins notes that \( \pi\rho\delta\tau\alpha\tau\epsilon\lambda\eta \) actually identifies two different relation types which Aristotle never explicitly distinguishes in \( EN \): (1) “the relation \( x \) bears to \( \tau\epsilon\lambda\sigma \) \( y \) when \( x \) will itself help to bring about \( y \),” and (2) “the relation \( x \) bears to \( y \) when the existence of \( x \) will itself help to constitute \( y \).”\(^8\) The first type of deliberation is characteristic of the means of \textit{production} that belong to the arts (\textit{technai}), in which the means are largely instrumental, a procedure that is causally efficacious in producing a specific product of some kind.\(^9\)

Interestingly, all of Aristotle’s examples in our passage appear to be precisely of this kind of productive means-end deliberation. The doctor does not deliberate about the end (health), but about the instrumental means of bringing this end about for a particular patient.\(^10\) The second relation, however, is said of something “whose existence counts in itself as the partial or total realization of the end,” as a \textit{constituent} of the end,” or “closer specification” of that in which the end consists.\(^11\) Commentators often note that unlike the product-means deliberation in the above examples, this second type of constituent-means deliberation can account for one chief aspect of the deliberative

\(^8\) Wiggins, 224. Cooper’s (1986) comments here are a helpful corroboration of Wiggins’ account: “...in describing deliberation as the discovery of ‘means’ to ends Aristotle includes among ‘means’ not only means properly speaking, i.e. causal conditions, but also (1) constituent parts and (2) the results of defining what something consists in” (22). Cooper credits Greenwood with being the first to make the distinction between “external” or “productive” means and “constituent” or “component” means, “the former being causal conditions while the latter are parts of wholes rather than proper means to ends.” This proves important, says Cooper, when we consider the relation between morally virtuous activities and the ultimate end of eudaimonia (22). For other treatments of the difference between productive-means and constituent-means, cf. Ackrill, Sorabji (p. 202), Nussbaum (p. 297), and Roopen (p. 191).

\(^9\) Wiggins, 224.

\(^10\) Hughes comments on this, saying that each of Aristotle’s favored examples “assume that the major premise of a practical argument is simply given: doctors aim at health, navigators at a safe arrival at the desired destination, architects at a weatherproof and convenient building. What needs deliberation is how to act in such a way that the desired outcome results” (103).

\(^11\) Wiggins, 224.
mode employed by the *phronimos*: deliberation produces a closer *specification* of that in which virtue or *eudaimonia* consists.\(^{12}\)

While I hope to show that this is basically right, we can’t overlook some problems here. It is true that often, the doctor or statesman deliberate merely over which settled procedure or technique will be most conducive to health or persuasion in a given situation. However, one might object that this is not always the case. The doctor encounters a new and unknown malady, or the statesman has to persuade a group of foreign dignitaries, whose culture, interests and alliance concerns are unknown to him. It is not true that, like the *phronimos*, both doctor and statesman have to ask *constituent* questions? What will constitute health or persuasion in *this* circumstance, given that no previously settled procedure clearly applies?\(^{13}\) This begins to look very similar to the deliberation of the *phronimos*, whose question some would argue is: what constitutes virtue in this circumstance?\(^{14}\)

However, we can expect some qualitative deliberative difference in light of Aristotle’s distinctions, between both *techne* and *phronesis* themselves, as well as the actions resulting from the deliberation in each.\(^{15}\) In Book III however, this uniqueness remains unclear for two reasons.

---

\(^{12}\) E.g. Nussbaum (p. 297) or Wiggins (p. 228).

\(^{13}\) The validity this objection is only strengthened by the fact that, for Aristotle, deliberation is always undertaken in situations in which it is, to *some* extent, unclear how things will turn out, or in situations that lack well-defined parameters (*EN* III.3.1112b8-10). Cf. also Pakaluk’s helpful comments on this issue (2005, p. 137).

\(^{14}\) This may appear to be a straightforward issue, but it is not. For instance, it is not clear that a simultaneity of action and goal-achievement applies only to the *phronimos*. Pakaluk’s example—“In falling on the grenade, the soldier acted heroically”—aptly shows this simultaneity. However, we might ask, can’t the physician’s administered treatment and the restoration of health be equally simultaneous? In other words, just making the instrumental-means and constituent-means distinction doesn’t in itself explain how it is that the *phronimos* might deliberate about ends in a way that is different than the physician. Additionally, there is confusion over what constituent-means deliberation entails. For Broadie, defenders of the constituent-means interpretation have their deliberator ask normative *whether* or *should* questions regarding the objective, rather than simply *how to* questions (262-263, nt. 51). In my argument however, the *what* question is central in terms of the need for *specification*. In fairness to Broadie, she might say that for interpreters who are interested (wrongly, in her view of Aristotle’s concerns) in moral reasoning that provides moral *justification* of the specified ends, the *whether* and *should* questions will get answered on the way to the finally specified *what*.

\(^{15}\) Already in II.4 Aristotle has made an agentially *qualitative* distinction between actions in the arts from actions performed in accordance with virtue. A grammanian simply *is* acting in accordance with the grammatical knowledge he possesses, while the virtuous agent must act not only in accordance with knowledge (which notably has “little or no weight”), but from a virtuous state of character, which is a necessary condition for the performance of virtuous acts (and
First, as Wiggins says, Aristotle is “hoping that he can use the intelligibilities of the clear means-end situation…to illuminate the obscurities of the constituents-to-end case.” Second, though, the “clear means-end situation” isn’t all that clear, because even here Aristotle hasn’t given us a purely instrumental, i.e. Humean, account of deliberation. Whatever Aristotle’s hopes or intentions, we need a better grasp on just what it is that makes the deliberation of the phronimos distinct, with the ultimate aim of showing how this distinctness entails deliberation about the inclusive end of eudaimonia itself. For distinctions between techne and phronesis regarding deliberative context, tele, and relation to eudaimonia entire, I now turn to Book VI.

II. The Immediate Telos of Phronetic Deliberation

As we move to Book VI, there are distinct similarities with Book III. Regarding the practical syllogism, for instance, Aristotle suggests that while character excellence secures the correct end, intellectual excellence (via deliberation) secures the correct “means” (ta pros touton). However, Book VI also contains passages suggesting that deliberation is precisely about ends, perhaps even about the highest end of eudaimonia, the activity of living well as an inclusive whole. Starting in VI.5, I will look at some key passages that might initially invite this interpretation:

vice versa). While deliberation is not discussed in II.4, the contrast between the effective implementation of “bare knowledge” and phronetic dispositional requirements is one clue to the uniqueness of phronetic deliberation.

Wiggins notes that in this latter type, “a man deliberates about what kind of life he wants to lead, or deliberates in a determinate context about which of several possible courses of action would conform most closely to some ideal he holds before himself, or deliberates about what would constitute eudaimonia here and now…. For the purposes of any of these deliberations the means-end paradigm that inspires almost all the Book 3 examples is an inadequate paradigm….,” (225). Wiggins cites the following passages as examples of constituent-means deliberation: Met. Z 7.1032b27, Politics 1325b16 and 1338b2-4. However, having examined these passages, it is not at all clear to me that there is anything other than technical means-end productive deliberation at work here.

Pakaluk’s comments on the passage quoted above are helpful here: “Aristotle is certainly not claiming, in the spirit of David Hume, that reason is purely ‘instrumental,’ and that we therefore can never evaluate goals on reasonable grounds: recall that, for Aristotle, a goal is simply a good, and the entire Ethics is a project of reasoning about the relative worth of goods” (137-138).

Now it is thought to be a mark of a man of practical wisdom to be able to deliberate well about what is good and expedient for himself, not in some particular respect [kata meros], e.g., about what sorts of thing conduce to health or to strength, but about what sorts of thing conduce to the good life in general [poia pros to eu zen holos]. This is shown by the fact that we credit men with practical wisdom in some particular respect when they have calculated well with a view to some good end which is one of those that are not the object of any art [techne]. EN VI.5.1140a25-31

This passage lays out some distinctions between a techne practitioner and the phronimos, but Tuozzo has argued that it is also one of only two in Aristotle’s corpus in which he could be interpreted as saying that “the phronimos determines his general ends by means of deliberation.”

Does the passage say that the phronimos determines general ends by deliberating? The text says that the practically wise man deliberates about “what is good” not kata meros, but about “what sorts of thing conduce to the good life in general [poia pros to eu zen holos].” The two crucial interpretive issues are the plural use of poia, and the nature of the part-whole relation. Taken together, these mark out both a similarity and a difference between techne and phronetic deliberation.

Taking the first, Tuozzo argues that the plural poia (“sorts”) does not point to a deliberation issuing in the adoption of a plurality of general ends, where “what sorts of thing” means what sorts of goods, qua general ends, add up to the good life in general. Rather, says Tuozzo, the plural poia refers to a plurality of “particular acts of deliberation,” where “what sorts of thing” means what sorts of [good] actions conduce to a good end in specific deliberative contexts. Wiggins, by contrast, contends that this passage indicates how practical wisdom is “concerned both with the attainment of particular formed objectives and also with questions of general policy—what specific objectives to form.” In context, Tuozzo’s reading is preferable because the concluding line emphasizes phronetic deliberative focus on “some good end,” which implies a particular good end that is different than the particular good ends that are the objects of techne. On this reading, both

---

19 Tuozzo, 198. The one other passage is, according to Tuozzo, Rhet. 1366b20-22. However, analysis of that passage is fraught with translation and interpretive difficulties, and lies beyond the scope of my present inquiry.

20 Tuozzo, 199.

21 Wiggins, 228. Irwin (1978, 257) offers a similar, but more cautious interpretation, as does Greenwood (1909, 45-46).
physician and *phronimos* could engage in constituent-means deliberation with regard to some particular situational good: What constitutes health/virtue in this situation?

However the issue of the part-whole relation complicates this equation. Tuozzo argues that *kata meros* and *holos* simply mark out a difference in deliberative “subject matter,” and not a species-genus relation between *techne* and *phronetic* deliberation. Although “both are concerned with action in particular situations,” “medicine and gymnastics are forms of technical reasoning” while the *phronimos* “deliberates with respect to a moral end.”

While this reading captures the sameness of deliberative context for *techne* and *phronesis* (i.e. particular situations), it begins, but fails to complete, the difference of deliberative tele between them: virtuous actions versus products. Tuozzo is right to say that the part-whole relation is not a species-genus distinction between *techne* and *phronesis* deliberation, however he misses the part-whole relation that is surely suggested between the parts of virtue and virtue entire. Certainly both are concerned with actions in particular circumstances (“some good end”). However, a *techne* employs either instrumental or specificatory deliberation about what “sorts of thing” are conducive to a productive end beyond the undertaken actions. Unlike products of a narrow *techne*, the “sorts of thing” with which *phronetic* deliberation is concerned, are virtuous actions which are ends in themselves, and as such just do “conduce to the good life in general.” Indeed, even apart from the aim of the practically wise man, which isn’t in view in this passage, the activities with which his deliberation is concerned simply are, in themselves, constituent parts of *eudaimonia* as a whole, conducing to “the good life in general.” I take it that Aristotle’s unambiguous comments to this effect in Book I undergird this reading.

---

22 Tuozzo, 200.

23 The only indication of a “view” in the passage is “a view to some good end,” which we take to be a particular end, a particular virtuous action.

24 Cf. especially I.7.1098a13-20, where Aristotle defines *eudaimonia* as “activity of the soul exhibiting excellence.” And, while activity of the soul in accordance with the moral virtues alone certainly doesn’t add up to virtue entire, it is clear that the performance of virtuous actions are, in the very moment of their performance, immediate constituents of *eudaimonia* in a way that products are not. This is the only claim we are making here.
Hence, while both techne and phronetic deliberators may ask, “what constitutes $x$ in situation $y$,” the objects of phronetic deliberation alone are constituent-means to the whole of eudaimonia.\(^{25}\)

I now sum up my interpretation here: (1) Aristotle does not affirm that the phronimos deliberates directly about general ends, for deliberation is focused on “some good end” in a particular situation. However, (2) the telos of phronetic deliberation, a virtuous action as an end in itself, is a part that is essentially related—is a “constituent means”—to the whole of “the good life in general.” In short, the phronimos deliberates in determinate situations about constituent-means to the end of eudaimonia, just by virtue of the character of the resultant actions themselves.

III. The Aim of the Phronimos

If the tele of phronetic deliberation entail this unique part-whole relation, other passages make it equally clear that the aim of the phronimos himself, further clarifies his deliberative uniqueness.\(^{26}\) In the context of his discussion of the excellence of deliberation as “correctness of thinking” (VI.9), Aristotle distinguishes between “unqualified” deliberative excellence on the one hand, and deliberative excellence “with reference to a particular end” on the other. The former type of deliberative excellence is itself an “unqualified” excellence, because it succeeds with reference to

---

\(^{25}\) An objection might arise here: Is it not true that health, as a bodily good, is a constituent part of eudaimonia as well? If so, deliberation over what constitutes health entails deliberation about eudaimonia itself. My answer is that as a bodily good, health (like external goods) is a necessary condition for happiness (I.2.1101a16-20), and hence only a contingent rather than essential constituent part of eudaimonia. The physician’s deliberation about health is, at best, deliberation about the necessary conditions for eudaimonia, not about the activity of eudaimonia itself. In separating external goods, goods of the body and goods of the soul, Aristotle explicitly identifies the final end of eudaimonia with activities of the soul (En I.8.1098b10-17). What is more, when commenting on the Delphic oracle, Aristotle explicitly displaces “health” as “the best,” with virtuous activity qua happiness: “the best, noblest, and most pleasant thing in the world” (EN I.8.1099a20-25).

\(^{26}\) By introducing the “aim” or “view” of the phronimos here, and not in VI.51140a25-28, I am registering my disagreement with McDowell, who interprets that passage as saying that “excellence in deliberation with a view to living well in general is characteristic of the person who possesses practical wisdom” (20). While this is certainly true of the phronimos in general, on my reading of VI.5, the “view” of the phronimos isn’t in play at all, but only the distinction of subject matter between techne and phronesis, the latter of whose deliberative objects, just of themselves and apart from the aim of the phronimos, “conduce to the good life in general.” I take the immediate connection Aristotle sets up in Book I between virtuous activity and virtue entire as support for my position.
an “unqualified” object, “the end in the unqualified sense.” In the context, Aristotle is distinguishing full deliberative excellence from lesser versions, and it would seem that the same part-whole relation between virtuous activity and virtue entire is in play here again. However, does this passage imply that excellent deliberation does not succeed regarding a particular end—the “some good end” or part in the part-whole relation—thus contradicting my reading of VI.5? This passage is clarified when juxtapose with another, where “unqualified” deliberative excellence is mentioned again and the particular deliberative object retained:

The man who is without qualification good at deliberating is the man who is capable of aiming in accordance with calculation at the best for man of things attainable by action. Nor is practical wisdom concerned with universals only—it must also recognize particulars; for it is practical, and practice is concerned with particulars.” VI.7.1141b8-12

Putting both passages together, both the universal and the particular poles are clarified. Regarding the universal, it seems that unqualified deliberative excellence is that which succeeds with reference to the unqualified end, “the best for man of things attainable by action,” which elsewhere Aristotle identifies as eudaimonia. Does the VI.7 passage say that the phronimos deliberates about this final end? It appears not. Here Aristotle reveals an agential intentionality or concern that wasn’t immediately in view in our VI.5 passage above. Practical wisdom means “recognizing particulars” and deliberating about particular actions, while concurrently aiming at, or keeping in mind, the good life in general. Here it is not deliberation as such that does the aiming, but rather the man of practical wisdom who, possessing the requisite moral virtues and situational aisthesis, aims “in accordance with calculation” or deliberation, at the final end of living well.


28 Here we recall EN I.4, where Aristotle specifically identifies the aim of political science—“the highest of all goods achievable by action”—as eudaimonia, or living well.

29 Some commentators have taken this passage as evidence of deliberation about final ends. However, both its syntax and Aristotle’s previous equation of deliberation and calculation in VI.1, make this reading more than problematic. As I see it, my reading applies equally well to other passages that are taken as direct evidence of deliberation about ends: practical reason is concerned with living well in general (1140a25-28); with what is good and bad for human beings as such (1140b5-6; 20-21); with the end simpliciter (1142b30); with what is good and useful to oneself and what is “good
Unqualified deliberative excellence, then, is that which succeeds with reference to this unqualified end because it is deployed under this aim at the whole of eudaimonia, even while confined to the particular practical context.

Summing up, then, phronetic deliberation is distinguished from techne deliberation (and simply characterized) by two things: (1) its tele (virtuous actions), which are constituent-means to the end of eudaimonia, and (2) the aim of its agent, who aims at eudaimonia. While we’ve retained the similarity that techne and phronetic deliberation both operate in particular situations, the physician (for instance) aims at health while the phronimos aims at “living well” writ large.

IV. The “No Fixity” Clause

Here is where a distinct problem arises for phronetic deliberation, again setting it apart from that of a techne. As McDowell points out, with practical wisdom we have a unique gap between the end proposed and action undertaken with a view to it.30 If the end is simply “the best” for man, “living well” or eudaimonia, then what is the content of deliberation in accordance with so unfocalized an end? What is more, how are we to undertake actions in a particular situation with a view to that end? As correctness of thinking, deliberation needs a determinate object in order to get off the ground at all. As McDowell points out, the problem here isn’t technical or instrumental; the excellence of such deliberation simply cannot be measured by its effectiveness at all.31

for men in general” (1140a26; b9). Any argument against my reading would at least entail the identity of practical wisdom with deliberation, which in light of VI.9 will be challenging. We recall here that one aim of this paper is to establish that, quite apart from dependence on passages that suggest deliberation about ends, the phronimos can still be said to deliberate about eudaimonia.

30 McDowell, 20.

31 McDowell, 20-21. Wiggins also points out the difference involved in non-technical deliberation: “But the standard problem in a non-technical deliberation is quite different. In the nontechnical case I shall characteristically have an extremely vague description of something I want…and the problem is not to see what will be causally efficacious in bringing this about but to see what really qualifies as an adequate and practically realizable specification of what would satisfy this want. Deliberation is still zetesis, a search, but it is not primarily a search for means. It is a search for the
The issue is exacerbated by the fact that most of the examples Aristotle gives are, as stated above, cases of technical deliberation or at best, partial constituent-means deliberation. We are never given a clear example of what it means to deliberate well with a view to “the best” or “living well” as a whole.\(^{32}\) For the mathematician in Book III, the end is clearly set, and practical question is just to figure out what means or measures work most effectively, and then plot them out. More significantly, while the doctor might ask himself specification questions (“what constitutes health in this situation?”), he is working with a growing, but determinate body of knowledge, expertise, or skill set. Thus when Aristotle says that “Matters concerned with conduct and questions of what is good for us have no fixity, any more than matters of health,”\(^{33}\) we must keep in mind that, although the physician and the phronimos surely both employ specification-type deliberation, matters of health do have some disciplinary fixity which matters of ethical conduct do not, rendering the deliberation regarding the former ultimately reducible to the question of efficacy.\(^{34}\) For the phronimos alone—against Aristotle’s early inclusion of medicine and navigation in the “no fixity”

---

\(^{32}\) Gottlieb, 219.

\(^{33}\) EN II.2.1104a7.

\(^{34}\) We hope to have answered here the question we raised at the end of section I above. It is not the case that, like the phronimos, both doctor and statesman have to ask constituent questions? For example, what will constitute health or persuasion in this circumstance, given that no previously settled procedure clearly applies here? We now see that there is a crucial difference between these cases and the deliberation of the phronimos. For the doctor and statesman the question is reducible to determination of the correct procedure, as they draw upon their respective disciplinary bodies of expertise and knowledge. The phronimos, on the other hand, is drawing on his larger conception of what “living well” means, a conception that does not amount, as Wiggins, McDowell and Broadie have argued, to an algorithm or blueprint he can apply to cases.
clause—is there no fixity at all\(^\text{35}\) regarding either the “general account” (ethical theory) or “particular cases.”\(^\text{36}\)

This absence of general or particular fixity, combined with my other points above, brings me to two important conclusions. First, we can reinstate the general validity of Wiggins’s insight that, in the particular situation, the phronimos must deliberate about “what objectives to form.”\(^\text{37}\) Second, the validity of continued scholarly attempts to illumine phronetic deliberation by means of the physician’s deliberation ought to be questioned. Aristotle himself used this comparison, but there are many points at which the analogy breaks down. What is constituent-means deliberation for the phronimos, if we leave physicians and other techne deliberators aside? Examples are hard to come by in the literature, and in what follows I will attempt to construct one. Along the way, the combination of unique tele, the aim of the phronimos, and the “no fixity” clause will together form the grist for my main argument, that phronetic deliberation about particular-formed objectives—virtuous activities as constituent-means—entails deliberation about the final end of eudaimonia.

V. Phronetic Deliberation about Eudaimonia

What does the deliberating phronimos have to work with if neither the ultimate end nor the particular goal is fixed? I have already said that the phronimos aims at “living well” as a whole.

---

\(^\text{35}\) This is not to deny that clearly, for Aristotle, there is a physis fixity regarding eudaimonia as a whole. However, what is the phronetic deliberator to do with this information, even if he had it, in a particular deliberative circumstance? However the physis fixity of eudaimonia bears on the deliberative situation, it certainly cannot have remotely the same cognizable fixity as does a determinate body of techne knowledge.

\(^\text{36}\) EN II.2.1104a7. This point constitutes my disagreement with Tuozzo, or with any of the many commentators who use physician examples from either EN or the well-known Metaphysics 7.7 passage. Tuozzo, for instance, collapses the fixity distinction between the physician and the phronimos: “…one must remember, again, the lesson of Metaph. 7.7: in deliberation one does not start from a comprehensive, non-situation-related conception (of health or of eudaimonia) and then seek to relate it to one's present situation. Rather one sees some end as appropriate to the circumstances and seeks a way to realize it” (202). Against this, I want to emphasize the fixity distinction: the doctor does start with a non-situation-related conception of health (a body of medical knowledge), while the phronimos has a far less cognitively determinate telos to work with. In fairness, Tuozzo is rightly trying to circumscribe the deliberative context for both to the particular situation, but he misses the import of this distinction nonetheless.

\(^\text{37}\) Wiggins, 224.
However, we need an *account* of how *phronetic* deliberation finds a purchase on this *telos*. For starters, in order to aim at “living well,” the *phronimos* has to have some conception of *eudaimonia*. For Aristotle, a conception of “living well” in general is informed by two major factors: rightly habituated character and practical wisdom with its deliberative activity. The virtuous agent, her habituated character having been rightly-formed, comes to any deliberative situation with a larger desiderative concern for and some concept of *eudaimonia*. In the absence of a fixed blueprint, ethical rule, or technical body of knowledge as a referent, all of the weight of specifying the end or practical aim is placed on the shoulders of the deliberative process with a view or “aim” toward living well. The *phronimos* doesn’t deliberate about her end in the sense asking whether or not to pursue *eudaimonia*; rather, as we have seen, in the determinate practical situation the specification of what counts as *eudaimonia* here and now, is where the agent has to start.

Looking specifically for an account of *phronetic* deliberation, I will discuss a deliberative case involving liberality. The rightly habituated person has a settled state of character that disposes her to care about the activity of expressing her largesse, to *enjoy* it, and to have a concern for largesse-expression itself as a constituent part of her overall view of what living well means. However, we have seen that she will neither be drawing on a fixed blueprint, nor will she have (arguably) a harmonious complex of desiderata compresently activated at the onset of the situation.

---

38 However, this need not be a fully conscious harmonious complex of desiderata organized under the concept of the noble. Rather, these concerns and concepts can, as Broadie points out, be held as “implicit premises,” one aspect of which is activated by a deliberative situation. Broadie, 236.

39 Broadie’s critique of the Grand End view of agential deliberation comes closest to my account here: “The mythical Grand End agent is one whose object is seen by him as the best under all circumstances, and the particularity of any new situation in which he finds himself only sets the stage for repeated pursuit of the same. The Aristotelian agent, by contrast, always deliberates with a view to the best [which] is different in different particular situations.” For example, Broadie continues, the doctor always deliberates with a view to healing, but what healing itself is will differ with different patients. (239). My account is close to this, but we have stressed the inadequacy of the medical analogy, in that the *phronimos* has no technical body of medical knowledge on which to draw. Hughes’s use of the physician example to illustrate the practical syllogism is even more misguided than Broadie’s, as he appears to ignore the distinction Aristotle makes between the arts and *phronesis*. He passes off the medical syllogism as a case of what the *phronimos* might do, beginning with the *productive* major premise: “Physicians aim at producing healthy patients” (94).

40 *EN* I.8.1199a20.
Hence, when confronted with a situation in which deliberation and action is required, she does not start with an explicit major premise: “Expression of largesse is virtuous,” as if she were motivated toward largesse under the aspect of some property it possesses. Rather, she starts with inquiry into the minor premise, “what should I do in this situation?” It is here that all of her concerns, interests, emotional responses, deliberative thoughts and intuitive judgments transpire, while her larger view of eudaimonia, as the unqualified end, simply supervenes on the situation, but only those portions which are relevant in the context of the deliberation.

Now, we want an account in which liberality is involved, so let’s suppose our phronimos is confronted with the following situation. On the same day and within a few minutes of one another, a neighbor and a representative of the local food bank come knocking on the prudent person’s door. The neighbor asks for $500 because he is short on grocery money this month, and promises to pay the loan back within a few weeks. The phronimos knows from previous interactions with the neighbor, that he is an alcoholic and a spendthrift, but also that he struggles to hold down a job, and might really need the money for groceries. She is unconcerned about being paid back. As the neighbor departs a representative of the local food shelter comes knocking, saying that due to the

---

41 Of course Aristotle speaks frequently about the intention of virtuous action under the aspect of “the noble.” While these comments surely demonstrate strains of motivational eudaimonism in Aristotle, my account is proceeding on the supposition that the overall picture Aristotle provides a reflective methodological eudaimonism. In any case, the particular problem of “the noble” lies outside the scope of what we can address here. Cf. McDowell for a thorough argument that habituated character brings a primitive phronesis to the deliberative table, under the motivational and conceptual apparatus of “the noble.”

42 Abizadeh (2002) notes that recently, many moral philosophers have embraced “the revived Aristotelian insight that good practical reasoning systematically relies on the emotions.” Rather than emotions being a hindrance to the deliberative process, Abizadeh argues, emotions are in fact indispensable: “according to Aristotle, character (ethos) and emotion (pathos) are constitutive features of the process of phronetic practical deliberation: in order to render a determinate action-specific judgment, practical deliberation cannot be simply reduced to logical demonstration (apodeixis)” (267).

43 I take it that at least one way in which this supervening occurs is through the “seeing-as judgments” involved in the bidirectional movement of nous. On this account, nous enables the movement from a general conception of eudaimonia to the “seeing” of a particular activity “as” an instance of it. On the other hand, nous moves from the particular to the general, by grasping the minor premise that enables apprehension of the end: “…the intuitive reason involved in practical reasonings grasps the last and variable fact, i.e. the minor premises. For these variable facts are the starting-points for the apprehension of the end, since universals are reached from the particulars; of these therefore we must have perception, and this perception is intuitive reason.” EN VI.11.1143a39-45.
The *phronimos* knows that this agency has been struggling and that it has an impeccable reputation for good stewardship of its resources. She is now faced with two deliberative options, and has to ask, “what constitutes liberality in this situation?” In both cases, the *phronimos* draws on knowledge of some sort, but it is rooted in the particulars of the situation. She is not working from an utilitarian (or any other) principle of the greatest good for the greatest number; this might make the choice for the food bank automatic. Rather, she aims at “living well” under the particular situational aspect of largesse expression. In this case, it is feasible for her to give to either, but one deliberative option causes the emotion of disgust (in light of the neighbor’s prodigality) and conflicts with her general conception of *eudaimonia*, while the other causes delight (in light of the food bank’s good stewardship) and aligns with both liberality in the particular case and her general conception of *eudaimonia*. She sees the right course of action through perception and situational knowledge as well as through her emotions, and this amounts to the minor premise: *In this situation, giving $500 to the food bank would be the proper expression of my largesse*. This generates the major premise, which following Wiggins, “is not evaluated for its universal acceptability…but for its adequacy to the situation”⁴⁴: *Expressing liberality means giving gifts to responsible institutions*. Her rationally desired choice finishes off the syllogism: *I will give $500 to the food bank.*

However, in other situations the major premise could have been different. For instance if additional factors became known (the food bank is run by a vicious, greedy man), the major premise might have been “Expressing liberality means giving gifts to *irresponsible* people,” if the neighbor’s prodigality didn’t somehow trump either delight in largesse expression or the larger

---

⁴⁴ Wiggins, 234.
conception of eudaimonia. The major premise could also have easily been “Expressing liberality means to withhold gifts,” or to give anonymous gifts, or any number of other things as well.

**Conclusion**

I hope to have shown here that deliberation plays a major role in identifying what counts as liberality in the situation, and we must recall that the actions resulting from this specificatory work just are parts of and constituent-means to eudaimonia entire. As the phronimos deliberates about constituent-means to the end of eudaimonia, the liberal actions generated in a given context will, over time, alter her conception of the end of eudaimonia itself. In other words, the specifying work of deliberation in particular contexts is a situational adjustment to her universal concept of eudaimonia, and therefore deliberation is about ultimate ends. With all the relevant pieces of unique phronetic tele, an aim at living well in general, and the no fixity clause, my argument can be formalized in this way:

P1. The *phronimos* deliberates about what constitutes a determinate virtuous activity.

P2. A determinate virtuous activity is a constituent-means to the end of eudaimonia.

P3. These constituent-means are immediate components of eudaimonia as a whole.

C. Therefore, the *phronimos* deliberates about what constitutes eudaimonia as a whole.

For the *phronimos* alone, then, deliberation about what relates to or conduces to the goal [πρὸς τὰ τέλη] in a particular situation just is deliberation about what the goal itself is. In short, to deliberate about the constituent parts of eudaimonia is to deliberate about the whole. The cumulative effect of numerous deliberated actions, we can suggest, is itself the progressive formation of a normative rationality centered around the *phronimos*, which gets worked out in the particulars.

---

45 Aristotle notes that the truly liberal person knows when to retain wealth, when to give wealth away would entail prodigality. *EN* IV.1.1120b20-25.
Bibliography


