

## Filip Grgić / *How to Do Philosophy with Aristotle: An Example*

### Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* VIII.1

[Translation used: Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, ed. by B. Inwood and R. Woolf, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, occasionally modified.]

(Socratic) assumption: Virtue is knowledge

General assumption: Knowledge is two-sided

#### (A)

If knowledge is two-sided, then virtue is also two-sided. If virtue is two-sided, then it is possible to perform vicious actions based on virtue.

**(T1)** “One might wonder whether it is possible to use each thing both for its natural purpose and otherwise – and this either in itself or, on the other hand, incidentally.” (1246a27–29)

Is it possible to use each thing both for:

- (a) its natural purpose and
- (b) otherwise, and this:
  - (b1) in itself or
  - (b2) not in itself?

**(T2)** “For example, an eye; one might use it to see or also otherwise, to mis-see, by displacing it so that one object appears as two. Both of these use it as an eye, because it is an eye, but there is another, incidental use; for instance, if it were possible to sell it or to eat it.” (1246a29–32)

The eye: one can use it

- (a) to see and
- (b) otherwise, and this:
  - (b1) in itself (to mis-see) and
  - (b2) not in itself (by selling it or eating it).

(T3) “So too for knowledge. One can use it genuinely and also to make a mistake; for instance, when one voluntarily writes incorrectly or uses one’s knowledge as ignorance, as when one twists one’s hand out of place; and dancing girls sometimes use their feet as hands and vice versa.” (1246a32–36)

Knowledge: one can use it

- (a) genuinely and
- (b) otherwise, and this:
  - (b1) in itself (by voluntarily making a mistake)
  - (b2) ?

Thus,

- (1) Knowledge is two-sided.

**(T4)** “If all virtues are forms of knowledge, it would also be possible to use justice as injustice and one would then commit injustice by performing unjust acts on the basis of justice, as one can also perform ignorant acts on the basis of knowledge. But if this is impossible, it is obvious that the virtues would not be forms of knowledge.” (1246a36–b2)

- (2) If virtue is knowledge, then virtue is two-sided.
- (3) It is possible to perform ignorant actions based on knowledge (from (1)).
- (4) If virtue is knowledge, then it is possible to perform unjust actions based on justice.
- (5) If it is not possible to perform unjust actions based on justice, then virtue is not knowledge.

**(T5)** “And if it is not possible to be ignorant on the basis of knowledge, but only to make a mistake and to perform the same actions as are done on the basis of ignorance, then certainly one will also not do anything based on justice as though it were based on injustice.” (1246b2–5)

Two meanings of “S performs ignorant actions”:

- (a) S is ignorant.
- (b) S performs actions that S would perform if S were ignorant.

Thus, (3) can mean:

(3a) It is possible to be ignorant based on knowledge, or

(3b) It is possible to perform the same actions based on knowledge as would be performed based on ignorance.

(3a) is not true. Hence,

(6a) It is not true that it is possible to be unjust based on justice.

But (3b) is true. If virtue is knowledge, then it should also be true that:

(6b) It is possible to perform the same actions based on justice as would be performed based on injustice.

**(T6)** “But again, if practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) is knowledge and something that is true, then it too will behave in the same way. It would then be possible to act foolishly (*aphronōs*) on the basis of practical wisdom and to make the same mistakes as a fool would make. But if the use of each thing as what it is were simple, then in acting that way people would also be acting wisely.” (1246b6–9)

(7) If practical wisdom is knowledge, then it is possible to perform the same actions based on practical wisdom as would be performed based on foolishness.

(8) If practical wisdom, knowledge, and virtue are one-sided rather than two-sided, then a person performing the same actions based on practical wisdom as would be performed based on foolishness acts wisely.

### **(B)**

**(T7)** “At any rate, for other forms of knowledge it is a distinct authoritative knowledge that produces the conversion. But which form is authoritative over the one that has authority over all others? It can no longer be knowledge. And it is certainly not virtue either, since it is using virtue; the virtue of the ruling element makes use of the virtue of the ruled element. So what is it?” (1246b10–13)

(9) If knowledge is two-sided, then there exists another kind of knowledge that determines the direction in which knowledge will be actualized.

(10) If practical wisdom is a kind of knowledge, then practical wisdom is the kind of knowledge that determines the direction in which other kinds of knowledge will be actualized.

(11) If practical wisdom is knowledge, then there exists another kind of knowledge that determines the direction in which practical wisdom will be actualized.

## (C)

*The Principle of Symmetry*: If knowledge is two-sided, then virtue is also two-sided. If virtue is two-sided, then not only is it possible to perform vicious actions based on virtue, but it is also possible to perform virtuous actions based on vice.

**(T8)** “Or is it the way that lack of self-control (*akrasia*) is said to be a vice of the irrational element in the soul, and also the person who lacks control (*akratēs*) is said to be a kind of undisciplined man who retains his reason? But assuming that if his appetite is powerful it will produce conversion and his wisdom will reach the opposite conclusions, then it is clear that if there is actually virtue in this element and ignorance in his reason, in this case they will reverse their functions – so that it will be possible to use justice unjustly and badly and to use practical wisdom unwisely, so that the opposite results will also occur.” (1246b13–19)

According to the mental conflict model of *akrasia*:

(12) Appetite (non-rational part [NP]) converts practical wisdom (rational part [RP]).

Then, by the Principle of Symmetry, it also follows that:

(13) Ignorance (RP) converts virtue (NP).

From this it follows that:

(14) It is possible to use justice (NP) unjustly and practical wisdom (RP) unwisely.

**(T9)** “For it would be strange if, on the one hand, when wickedness gets into the irrational element it should convert the virtue in the calculative element and make it ignorant, but on the other hand when there is ignorance in it the virtue in the irrational element should not convert this ignorance and cause it to make wise and appropriate judgements. (And conversely, wisdom in the rational element will cause the indiscipline in the irrational element to act temperately – that is what self-control (*enkrateia*) seems to be.) So it will be possible to act wisely on the basis of ignorance.” (1246b19–26)

Another consequence of the Principle of Symmetry:

(15) If vice (NP) can convert knowledge (RP), then virtue (NP) can convert ignorance (RP).

Likewise:

(16) Practical wisdom (RP) can convert indiscipline (NP), which is *enkrateia*.

Hence, by the Principle of Symmetry:

(17) It is possible to act wisely (here NP) on the basis of ignorance (RP).

**(T10)** “These results are strange, especially the notion that one can behave with wisdom on the basis of ignorance; for we do not see this in any of the other forms of knowledge – just as indiscipline converts medical or grammatical knowledge but if it is the opposite it does not convert ignorance, because there is no excess present in it. Rather, it is virtue in general which has this relationship to vice. The just man can in fact do everything that the unjust man does; and in general, the ability to do things includes the ability not to do them.” (1246b26–34)

(18) (17) is strange (it would be as if we were to demonstrate a geometric theorem based on ignorance of geometry).

While it is true that:

(19) Indiscipline (NP) converts knowledge (RP),

it is not true that:

(20) Indiscipline (NP) converts ignorance (RP),

because the Principle of Symmetry holds for the pair virtue–vice, and both indiscipline and ignorance are vices.

(21) The ability to  $\Phi$  includes the ability not to  $\Phi$ ;

hence,

(22) The ability of a virtuous person to perform vicious actions includes the ability not to perform them.

**(T11)** “So it is clear that human practical wisdom is accompanied by having the non-rational element in a good condition; and that the Socratic point is correct, that nothing is stronger than practical wisdom. But his claim that practical wisdom is knowledge is not correct. For it is a virtue and not knowledge, but rather some other type of cognition.” (1246b35–39)