

12. Prudence as part of a worldview: historical and conceptual dimensions

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*What is most desirable for each and every man is the highest he is capable
of attaining.*

Aristotle (*Pol.*, 1333a)¹

12.1 INTRODUCTION

As Sison (2015, p. 232) remarks, ‘politics’ in Aristotle could mean at least three different things: (1) a kind of life; (2) a qualifier for the virtues of justice and prudence; or (3) a body of knowledge. As a body of knowledge, its object is happiness (*eudaimonia*), which is the supreme human good. Happiness ‘is not a mere object of knowledge (*gnosis*) but action (*praxis*); in particular it consists in “living or doing well” (NE 1095a), in accordance with the proper function of human beings, which is rational activity (NE 1098a)’ (ibid., p. 233). Aristotle puts particular emphasis on the injunctions of practical wisdom:

[H]is ideal of a good man must unite two different kind of virtues: (i) practical wisdom (*phronēsis*), the intellectual virtue necessary for conceiving of the right decisions of the means and ways to carry them out, and (ii) the moral or character virtues (*ēthikē aretē*), the habitually acquired, appropriate emotional attitudes towards acting and being affected. (Frede, 2013, pp. 126–7)

In order to conceptualize prudence – *phronēsis* – one must distinguish it from other forms of excellence that reason might acquire according to its different activities. Aristotle identifies three kinds of human activity (*energeia*) (NE, 1178b): contemplation (*theōria*), action (*praxis*) and production (*poiēsis*), each governed by a different kind of rational excellence (*aretē*). Thus contemplation is governed by theoretical reason (*sophia*), action by moral – practical – reason (*phronēsis*) and production

by technical reason (*technē*) (Murphy, 1993, p. 87). Aristotle does not contrast thought (knowledge) with activity (action), recognizing that all complex human activity is marked by a unity between conception and execution and that, in relation to it, there are three kinds of thought (*dianoia*) (*Metaphysics*, II 2 y VII 1): theoretical thought, which speculates on something; practical thought, which works; and productive thought, which makes.²

Each of the various uses of reason (theoretical, practical and technical) gives rise to a differentiated kind of knowledge – or science in the broad sense – depending on the object of its study. Whereas theoretical reason enables us to know the essence and causes of things, which is fundamental for an overall view, practical reason allows man to reflect on his actions so that they are organized towards their own perfection. Technical reason, on the other hand, moves only in the realm of means and is aimed at results. To adequately account for this difference, it is important to acknowledge the moral quality of human action.

However, as this chapter explores, in modernist thought there has been a radical change in the understanding of rationality, which does not trust reality and truth (Weber, 1985). This change resulted in the consideration of man as an individual, who can act only by using his thinking mind in pursuit of certainty. This is the foundation of the transition from a language of culture and tradition in favour of a supposedly universal, objective language, whether in its natural form (physics) or its abstract form (mathematics), and ultimately applied to human action, which is reduced to mere externality. The understanding of practical reason thus became problematic and is now sometimes considered a theory and, at other times, a technique (Berthoud, 2002).

This chapter addresses the evolution of the notion of prudence and aims to sketch a summary of the main positions that thinkers have taken on throughout history, gathered generically – although not arbitrarily – into two major paradigms, classical and modernist. While there are many authors and ideas that, because of space, cannot be fully developed herein, this chapter is an attempt to synthesize the major currents of thought in relation to prudence. It highlights an original misunderstanding of the concept of prudence that led to the misinterpretation of human action's practical dimension, that is, of its intrinsic morality. This misunderstanding then comes full circle in the twentieth century in an attempt to go back to basics and recover human action's practical dimension. This attempt calls for a renewal of the foundations of economics and management, which to some extent has already begun to emerge.³

12.2 CLASSICAL THOUGHT

Aristotelian ethics is premised on a proper human function (*ergon*) that expresses reason. Human excellence or virtue resides in rightly fulfilling this function in accordance with reason (Sison, 2015, p. 242). Aristotle defines virtue as ‘a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e. the mean relative to us, this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it’ (*NE*, II-6; 37). Virtue cannot be achieved without prudence because ‘all the virtues are forms of practical wisdom’ (*NE*, VI-12).

Traditionally, prudence is considered one of the four cardinal or hinge virtues, along with temperance, fortitude and justice.⁴ Its name comes from the verb *provideo*,⁵ meaning to see from afar or to see in advance; and the Latin word *prudētia* is a translation of the Greek *phronēsis*. Aristotle (384–22) defines it as ‘a true and reasoned state of capacity to act with regard to the things that are good or bad for man’ (*NE*, VI-5). Indeed, prudence is the leading virtue (*auriga virtutum*)⁶ of human life, allowing man to achieve happiness (*eudaimonia*). Its primacy over the other virtues is found in the roots of classical philosophy.

The fact is that nothing less than the whole ordered structure of the Occidental Christian view of man rests upon the pre-eminence of prudence over the other virtues. The structural framework of Occidental Christian metaphysics as a whole stands revealed, perhaps more plainly than in any other single ethical dictum, in the proposition that prudence is the foremost of the virtues. That structure is built thus: that Being precedes Truth, and that Truth precedes the Good. (Pieper, 1957, p. 58)⁷

Prudence is the only virtue that has a bivalent character: it is an intellectual virtue that perfects reason in its practical function, and, as moral virtue cannot be exercised without it, it thus acquires a moral character. Both types of reason – intellectual and practical – are different faculties within the same potency rather than elements that correspond to different parts of the soul (Aquinas, *STh*, I ps., q. 79, q. 11). According to Aristotle, intellectual virtues increase with education, while moral ones increase with custom or repetition of similar acts based on thoughtful choice (*NE*, III-2 and 3). So prudence can be achieved through education within a community, and with experience. Such learning is not theoretical but, rather, is practical and is found in deliberation and action. In order to attain it, one must look to the man who is capable of deliberating, that is, who has practical wisdom (*NE*, VI-5). ‘We deliberate about things that are in our power and can be done’ (*NE*, III-3); and the very act of

prudence is to deliberate rightly in favour of the good life. Deliberation is a moral act since the good is an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue (*arete*). Prudence perfects human capacity to deliberate on what contributes to happiness; for Aristotle, prudence deals with what is just, noble and helpful (*NE*, VI-12). Only the virtuous man can achieve happiness, his ultimate end. Human will is by nature oriented to this purpose (Aquinas, *STh*, II-II, q. 47), but it does not automatically achieve it. Thus it needs prudence's help to provide the means to that end (*NE*, III-3).⁸

For Aquinas (1225–74),⁹ who follows Aristotle (see Westberg, 1994; Aquino, 2001), practical reason guides human action in accordance with the human good (*STh*, II-II, q. 94). Prudence intrinsically perfects practical reason and is, therefore, an intellectual virtue because it knows the good in any action (*STh*, II-II q. 47; see Sellés, 1999, p. 28).

Practical reason also apprehends reality, but practical apprehension adds the idea of the good to the theoretical apprehension of reality in as far as it is true. Thus practical reason is secondary in relation to theoretical reason; otherwise we would not be able to distinguish a *genuine good* from an *apparent good*. (Sellés, 2000, p. 27)

Prudence applies universal principles to the particular conclusions of practical matters (*STh*, II-II, q. 47),¹⁰ that is, to the contingent elements within our reach. All human beings have an innate capacity to discover the precepts that guide proper action, which in turn refer to *lex naturalis*, thanks to the faculty of *synderesis*. As 'the first principle of practical reason is one founded on the notion of good' (*STh*, I-II, q. 94, 2), practical rationality is related to the human good. 'Moral precepts and human discovery and knowledge of them are importantly connected to the human end – an end grasped only dimly at the outset of moral enquiry, but seen with increasing clarity as human life progresses morally' (D'Andrea, 2006, p. 313).

Prudence is based on previous habits that Aquinas called 'potential parts', although they are requirements rather than strictly parts of it. There are four acts, from which the said habits derive, and they express right reason applied to action: simple practical understanding (also called simple intelligence), taking counsel (*consilium*), judging what one has discovered (*iudicium practicum*) and commanding, that is, putting counsel and judgement into action (*praeceptum, imperium*) (*STh*, II-II, q. 153). Their corresponding habits are: concept, which conceives of reality as good; good deliberation (*eubulia*) or the art of knowing how to consistently give good advice, good judgement on ordinary matters

(*synesis*) that allows one to judge well and evaluate what is feasible, that is, to perfect practical judgement, and good judgement on extraordinary matters (*gnome*). Finally, prudence properly understood controls the process that comes before action (*STh*, II-II, q. 49; see Sellés, 1999, pp. 53–80).

Aquinas develops prudence extensively and he also highlights other requirements, which he calls ‘quasi-integral parts’, without which virtue cannot be exercised. Of these, five belong to the cognitive dimension of prudence: memory, discursive reasoning, shrewdness, docility and wisdom; and three to its mandatory dimension: foresight, circumspection and caution. They are also related to the main habits of practical reason: memory, reason and docility influence the habit of *eubulia* (whose vice is precipitateness); circumspection and caution facilitate *synesis* (which opposes thoughtlessness), while shrewdness and wisdom are related to prudence (whose vices are negligence and inconstancy) (*STh*, II-II, q. 51–5).

Aquinas, following Aristotle (*NE*, VI, 8), presents another classification, taking into account the subject that exercises prudence, which he calls ‘subjective parts’. Thus he differentiates between domestic, governmental or regnative, civic or political and military prudence (*STh*, II-II, q. 48). Of these, the governmental one is the most perfect because it is the most closely related to the common good (*STh*, II-II, q. 50). Only a prudent man can govern well, as prudence allows him to arrange all the means necessary for a society’s common good.

Aquinas addresses economic issues from a moral perspective (see Langholm, 1992; Vigo, 2006). For him, exchanges oriented to the common use of goods are the foundation of production and division of labour, thus making the expression of a common need possible. Producing better goods is a requirement of justice and it is reflected in the price. For Aquinas, as well as for the scholastics in general, price has to do with the determination of what is just, which is a result of a common estimation between the buyer and seller, who use human law and the common good as a reference. The ‘just price’ is determined by right judgement of practical reason, and justice in exchange is not incompatible with profit, as long as it is not contrary to the common good. Profit becomes unfair when a particular interest undermines the common good. Usury is objectionable because it is a way of distorting money – a symbol of the common need – and ignoring the reality of things, and therefore it impedes the objective measurement of the common need. In order to consider the specific circumstances of each case, Aquinas thought well-established markets, with prudent and experienced merchants, were necessary to minimize damage to the common good.

12.3 MODERNIST THOUGHT

There is no unanimous agreement on the beginning of modernity;¹¹ however, the Scottish theologian John Duns Scotus (1266–1308) demonstrates a perceptible departure from Aristotelian thought, as well as from scholasticism (see Polo, 2001, p. 339; Gilson, 2007, p. 625; Muralt, 2008). One of the most characteristic features of Scotism is its insistence on the freedom of the divine will and the contingent nature of its effects, showing a voluntaristic understanding of human freedom; formally, freedom lies in the will alone (Scotus, 1891, vol. III, *Disputato tertia, De intellectu et voluntate*, section XV). That which is possible emanates from that which is necessary through an act of freedom; that is, God creates if he wants to and because he wants to (see Benedicto XVI, 2006). As Schulz (1961, p. 32) argues, ‘from the beginning of the Modern Age there is a gulf between theology and philosophy’, which Scotus’s philosophy initiated.

Scotus questions the metaphysical conception of the universal that prevails in Plato, Aristotle and Aquinas, making a way for the individualism of modern philosophy (see Muralt, 2008, pp. 37–9). William of Ockham (1287–1347) later took this reasoning to its logical conclusion (see Miralbell, 1994, p. 16) by strongly opposing the realism with which medieval philosophy responded to the ‘problem of universals’. For him, universals are mere names; they do not exist outside of thought. As a result, the particular and contingent are the only things that are real and substances are only made up of individual things and their properties. That which is real is purely empirical, numerical, singular and enclosed (that is, it does not remit to anything). While, for Aquinas, science is universal – although properly speaking only the individual exists – for Ockham, only the individual exists and it is science’s exclusive object (see Polo, 2001).

Following Scotus, Ockham understands human freedom as self-determination, as wanting or rejecting something concrete, but, unlike him, he does not believe that the will moves towards infinite good. Human access to God is voluntary rather than a matter of knowledge; that is, it is not natural but, rather, is achieved with supernatural faith, falling into a kind of fideism that later became difficult to overcome (see Gilson, 2004, pp. 78–9). This new nominalistic path – *via modernorum* – was based on the will, in faithful acceptance of revealed truths irrespective of reason and natural tendencies (Cruz Prados, 2015).

Ockham’s theory of knowledge directly affected the ethical sphere since the moral law no longer had a way to prove it was necessary and

absolute. Ockham based ethics on the omnipotent freedom of God, deriving moral behaviour from duty. The intrinsic morality of human action was put into question, such that the law no longer came from a divine wisdom that moves human beings from within but, rather, adopts an extrinsic criterion that amounts to the will of a legislator God expressed in mandate and supported by a system of sanctions and rewards. Ultimately, Ockhamist voluntarism is an expression of an unreflective ethics of love, since to do good amounts to an act of pure love towards God, as well as an entirely autonomous way of self-determination that lacks any natural tendency or desire for happiness. The cosmos, formerly the natural way for discovering truth and the good, became a mechanism, a set of physical forces without any *telos*. This also affected the social order; as God is the great lawgiver who arbitrarily imposes a law that is unrelated to nature or reason and that is made known to men through revelation alone, divine wisdom no longer rules men and is overtaken by power. When the law loses its relationship to reason in order to become reason itself, principles of practical reason, which require human learning in a community and tradition, are replaced by the principles of theoretical reason, which are themselves self-evident (see Bastit, 2005).

Luther (1483–1546) rejects all philosophical approaches – scholasticism as well as nominalism – to rely on the word of God alone. He magnifies divine omnipotence (Gillespie, 2008, p. 107) such that man can only be saved by faith, and faith comes from grace, according to the scripture (*Sola fides, sola gratia, sola scriptura*). Thomas Aquinas had attempted to harmonize the divine and human will by subordinating both to reason, which, for Ockham and his followers, called into question the absolute power of God and divinity. Luther's doctrine affirmed the omnipotence of the divine will and highlighted human insignificance.¹² Man can do nothing but sin (Marius, 1999, p. 197) and human works have no merit before God; nor are they necessary because God in his infinite mercy sacrificed himself to save man. Natural virtues, therefore, seemed suspect. Through grace, God dwells in man and becomes the source of his salvation. However, as grace acts individually in man, no intervention is necessary, whether sacramental or institutional. The Church, especially the corrupt one of Luther's times, had no authority to intercede between God and men (see Oberman, 1989; Marius, 1999). 'Luther's radical transformation of theology had a decisive impact on his view of man. In nominalistic fashion, Luther sees humans not as a species but as individual' (Gillespie, 2008, p. 119).

In the Catholic realm, Jansenism – due to a misinterpretation of St Augustine's ascetic – also held that human nature had been corrupted by

original sin, making human actions that lack the help of grace sinful. Both this absolute distrust of human nature and the ascetic desire for security lead, despite an apparent appeal to tradition and culture, to the elimination of the traditional concept of practical reason (Martínez Echevarría, 1999a, p. 378). Only grace can cause goodness in human action, such that actions that are not carried out for God's sake have their origin in human vanity (*amour propre*) and therefore a rigorous ascetic life is the only path to doing good works. This led to a continual doubt of intentions, as well as to denying that human works are guided by some kind of kindness, making it impossible to educate men in the exercise of prudence. In this context, though he never declared himself a Jansenist, Pascal (1623–62) distrusted prudence, which he considered to be mere cunning in search of social advantage. Both Jansenists and Reformers conclude that humans are isolated individuals surrounded by corruption and moved by passions of a corrupt nature (*ibid.*, p. 380).

With this background, Hobbes (1588–1679) found it impossible to reach a social agreement because man is a threat to himself. Hobbes understood very well the anthropological significance of nominalism. His famous thesis, *homo homini lupus*, is a consequence of Ockham's voluntarism. Hobbes was a nominalist as well as hypersensitive (Polo, 1993, p. 57). In response, he proposed resorting to the repressive power of the *Leviathan* to correct the consequences of original sin and lay the foundations for a just and lasting political order (Hobbes, 2007). Mandeville (1670–1733), supported by a Hobbesian interpretation of natural selfishness, offered an alternative to repression and sought a social benefit from lust or 'private vices'.¹³ Distrustful of virtue, which he considered a denial of the passions, he claimed that luxury, deception and pride would benefit society (Copleston, 2004, p. 142; see also Mandeville, 1997, pp. xxviii–xxxiii).

Hume (1711–76) proposed abolishing prejudices toward the corruption of human nature. For him, morality is based on social success – or failure – and is the result of man's ability to produce admiration – or revulsion – from others mediated by passions. He distinguished between direct passions (pain, pleasure, sorrow, fear, despair, joy, hope, security, aversion), which are the result of one's actions, and indirect passions (pride, admiration, envy, humiliation, scorn, shame, hatred), which reflect one's action towards others. Individual identity emerges from the latter. Social motivation ultimately relates to external goods and is constituted in ownership, but it does not aim to satisfy human needs, but, rather, aims at garnering respect, credit, rank and admiration (see Mercado, 2013, pp. 203–30).

Society becomes a complex web of passions and feelings, structured around private property, which is the only objective foundation of identity. Conceptions of the good become the result of majority opinion, which, in turn, is a spontaneous result of prejudice, habituation and belief in sociable individual tendencies. Society is unified by human nature's tendency to promote behaviours that engender admiration and pride – the desire to be praised and envied. From this desire, virtuous behaviour emerges, reinforcing the social status quo, whereas vice provokes humiliation and disapproval. Prudence thus becomes an instrumental virtue; as Hume notes:

Take the example of speed in business: if someone isn't fast enough, he'll make no progress in any project; if he goes too fast, he'll act precipitately and won't co-ordinate his doings properly with those of other people. That's the sort of reasoning we use in deciding what is the proper and commendable 'middle' in all moral and prudential contexts; and we never lose sight of the advantages that result from any character or habit. These advantages are enjoyed by the person who has the character – or habit – we are judging; so whatever it is that makes the view of them agreeable to us, the spectators, and prompts our admiration and approval. (Hume, section 6.1, p. 36)

Hume's understanding of practical reason deviates even more from the classical interpretation and falls into utilitarianism. It is at the service of stimuli from a homogeneous and unchanging nature, which eschews teleological natural tendencies and instead prizes maximum efficiency. Reason simply calculates the most efficient ways to take advantage of human passions (see González, 2006). Hume falls into a 'moral emotivism', arguing that moral assessments are the result of feelings and are therefore contingent and *a posteriori*. Reason no longer guides the passions; rather, it is their slave (ibid., p. 7). If practical reason does not determine virtue, but, rather, is pragmatically defined in terms of prosperity, morality is equated to economics – not in an absolute way, but subject to the exercise of a technical reason that would take advantage of human passions for the overall benefit of society. The passions drive this process, but reason does not govern it and therefore remains at the mercy of Fortune (Martínez Echevarría, 1999b, p. 120).

Smith (1723–90) refined these intuitions in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Smith, 2002), published in 1759, where he introduced an aesthetic sentiment in relation to the human imagination. Since then, the idea that 'the first principle of economics is that every agent acts only in its own interest' (Edgeworth, 1881, p. 16)¹⁴ has become dogma and was thereafter attributed to Smith. Self-interest was a way to overcome Hobbesian selfishness because it includes others (Lázaro Cantero, 2002,

p. 229) and because man is interested in benefiting others to achieve approval (Smith, 2002). Self-interest also became a moral principle because it was seen as the only motivation for the practice of virtue, such that the virtue of prudence is concerned with the command of one's self-interest.

Smithian reason is calculating and, together with intelligence, enables us to discern the consequences of our actions, revealing the advantage or disadvantage likely to result from them (Lázaro Cantero, 2002, p. 235). On the one hand, Smith accepted (and regretted) the fact that calculated interest guides most human behaviour in modern commercial societies, as well as the moral consequences that result from it. On the other hand, he considered modern economics a system with admirable complexity, whose very conception justified the desire to get rich. In that system, passions and interests acquire a positive connotation – they are the engine for wealth creation – and one should take advantage of them (Hirschman, 1977 [1999]; Force, 2006). Smith's optimism has theist foundations according to which society possesses a natural harmony or order in which each individual, seeking to meet his needs and guided by his natural passions, unwittingly contributes to a universal order.¹⁵

It should be noted that all these thinkers were concerned with the concept of virtue; however, 'each of them held different views about the virtues, their nature, their origin, and their functions, either with or without a religious or legalistic basis' (Frede, 2013, p. 138; see also Schneewind, 1997). Kant (1724–1804) did not accept the use of passions to explain moral action; however, he also refused to appeal to metaphysics. He rejected material ethics and proposed a formal, theoretical one, building his philosophical system on two principles that he considered indisputable (see Kant, 2004, introduction), namely Newton's physics and moral obligation. These principles also constituted the most evident confrontation between necessity and freedom (Sotolongo Codina et al., 2006, p. 224).¹⁶

Kant sought some kind of justification for the existence of moral law, starting from the premise that, from a normative point of view, the will is self-sufficient and, properly speaking, good; that is to say, it is autonomous (Polo, 1995, p. 133; see also MacIntyre, 1967, p. 192 and Kant, 1993, p. 21). For Kant, nothing is good without qualification, except for a 'good will', an inner disposition that leads to action. External factors, such as the desire for happiness or a legislator's will, cannot influence human conscience. Practical reason, in so far as it is pure reason, ensures the objectivity of its laws by grasping at them in the *faktum* of duty; that is, in the imperatives that men formulate for practical matters (Polo, 1995, p. 132). Thus morality, independent of any external legality, rests

on duty, which emerges from every man and drives him to do certain things and avoid others, regardless of pleasure or pain and all external motivation. Kant did not see prudence as a virtue, but rather as an intelligent self-love without moral value (see Kant, 1993, II; 2004, I, I).

As man cannot rely on his natural tendencies, the feeling of duty becomes an *a priori* law of morality, a ‘categorical imperative’, and an unconditioned moral mandate valid for all that is represented in the ‘ought’ that obliges absolutely. Subjective rules of conduct that each individual imposes on himself arise from that sense of duty. Moral perfection is equated with fulfilling one’s duty and following maxims that can be established as universal principles, as stated in the categorical imperative: ‘Act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law’ (Kant, 1993, p. 30). With this in mind, the true path to virtue is through duty, both in theory and in practice.

12.4 THE TWENTIETH CENTURY’S ATTEMPT TO ‘RECOVER’ VIRTUE ETHICS

In recent years, many critics of the modernist strain have emerged, proposing a recovery of classical thought.¹⁷ MacIntyre’s (1981 [2007]) *After Virtue* project,¹⁸ of all the attempts in its genre, is perhaps the most thoughtful, rejecting both the Kantian conception as well as all attempts to build enlightened morality (Tugendhat, 1993, p. 185). In *A Short History of Ethics* he shows the evolution of moral reflection from Homeric times with a clear Aristotelian preference. He stresses that the English translation of *phronēsis* for ‘prudence’ is incorrect, because ‘for later generations puritans have connected prudence with thrift, and especially with thrift in monetary matters (it is the “virtue” embodied in life insurance), and so in modern English *prudent* has something of the flavor of “cautious and calculating in one’s own interest”’ (MacIntyre, 1967, p. 74).¹⁹

Convinced of an epistemological crisis (MacIntyre, 1977), MacIntyre expresses his disappointment with the Enlightenment in *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (1981 [2007]). He also stresses the importance of history and anthropology in moral philosophy, as well as the notion of tradition. Given current philosophy’s inability to understand moral phenomena and to reach a rational agreement, he proposes a recovery of human life’s narrative dimension; that is, to understand reality as a story. The moral voluntarism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries rejected classical teleologism and thus the possibility for human actions

to achieve some conception of the unifying purpose of all action, of the final and complete good. The proposals set forth by Hume, Smith and Kant – as well as by Kierkegaard and many other modern thinkers – were, according to MacIntyre, doomed to fail. The Enlightenment project's attempt to provide morality a rational and secular justification was unfeasible (MacIntyre, 1981 [2007], p. 62).

For MacIntyre, Weber's thought holds many keys for understanding today's world: 'Weber's thought embodies just those dichotomies which emotivism embodies, and obliterates just those distinctions to which emotivism has to be blind. Questions of ends are questions of values, and on values reason is silent; conflict between rival values cannot be rationally settled' (ibid., p. 26). As a rational agreement is not possible, the logic of power imposes itself and becomes bureaucracy's ally: '[O]n Weber's view no type of authority can appeal to rational criteria to vindicate itself except that type of bureaucratic authority which appeals precisely to its own effectiveness. And what this appeal reveals is that bureaucratic authority is nothing other than successful power' (ibid.). Thus practical reason is reduced to mere instrumental rationality, since 'bureaucratic rationality is the rationality of matching means to ends economically and efficiently' (ibid., p. 25).

According to MacIntyre, the modern project finished with Nietzsche (ibid., ch. 9), whom he considered the last representative of liberal individualism; thus, in direct contrast to Nietzsche, the final chapter of *After Virtue* proposes a recovery of Aristotelian ethics, which MacIntyre considers superior, especially given its legitimization in different contexts (for example, Greek, Islamic, Jewish and Christian). Precisely for this reason, he highlights the virtues as the most important element of this tradition and, in so doing, brings us full circle to the original meaning of prudence:

[P]ractical rationality guides individual action but it derives from the practices that structure society. Practical rationality comprises the rationalities of particular practices and of individuals as practitioners. As such, it opposes the ideology of expertise that seeks to replace direct relations between practitioners with hierarchical administration and to replace reasoning with routine. (Knight, 1998, p. 12)

Thus, to rethink virtues today, we need three things: the idea of a practice, a narrative order of a single life and a moral tradition.

A practice is 'any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity during which goods internal to that form of activity are realized because of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form

of activity' (MacIntyre, 1981 [2007], p. 187).²⁰ Furthermore, '[a] practice involves standards of excellence and obedience to rules as well as the achievement of goods' (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 31). It involves external goods, also called 'goods of effectiveness', and internal ones or 'goods of excellence'. External goods, when achieved, are always an individual's property, whereas the achievement of internal goods is a good for the entire community that participates in the practice. As for virtue, it 'is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods' (MacIntyre, 1981 [2007], p. 191). The development of virtue is essential not only because relationships with others are defined through them, but also because 'without them ... practices could not resist the corrupting power of institutions' (*ibid.*, p. 194).

The notion of a narrative order is required because of the fragmentation that took place in modernity, which Weber (1967; 2003 [2008]) brilliantly dissected. Human action acquires a deeper understanding when it is placed within a set of narrative stories, highlighting its historical meaning. Action and narration find a common ground in intelligibility, while the changeable nature of human life coexists with teleology, making projection into the future possible (González Pérez, 2006, p. 81). Personal identity is configured within this narrative, in which intelligibility and responsibility are essential, and where the unity of life reveals the virtues' purpose and content.

Practical rationality does not exist in a void; rather, it is always embedded in a tradition. Tradition is built through the concurrence between historical and social human identity – that is, through the fact that man belongs to different communities. These relationships, which influence practices, link virtues with the tradition of a community.²¹ A living tradition continues a not-yet-completed narrative in dialogue with the goods that a community intends to achieve. Ultimately, the practice of the virtues helps to achieve the internal goods that are intrinsic to them, as well as keeping a tradition alive. These three essential elements of virtue are related to prudence in the sense that they allow us to rediscover the practical dimension of human action, which is neither strategic nor instrumental but is, rather, moral.

NOTES

- * Both authors contributed equally to this chapter.
1. Aristotle quotations shown as *NE* or *Pol.* are taken from Aristotle (1985); ones shown as *Metaphysics* are taken from Aristotle (1999). Similarly, Plato quotations shown as *Rep.* are taken from Platón (1928) and as *Laws* from Platón (1997), while Aquinas quotations shown as *STh* are taken from Aquinas (2006).
 2. For the distinction between action and production, see Arendt (1958) and Murphy (1993).
 3. This book is an example of that effort. Sison, Brague, Moore and others have also been working on this line of thought. Empirical research on and practical implementation of prudence in business is needed.
 4. This classification appeared in Platonic (*Rep.*, IV, 427e; *Laws*, I, 63c) and Stoic thought, but was permanently incorporated into classic thought thanks to medieval attempts, especially those of Thomas Aquinas (*STh*, I-II, q. 61–2).
 5. '*Nomen prudentiae sumitur a providendo*' (Aquinas, *STh*, II-II, q. 55).
 6. Plato called prudence by this name in the famous Chariot allegory, which Aristotle and Aquinas both used. The latter also named it '*genitrix virtutum*', as he considered it the source of all virtue.
 7. See Aquinas, *STh* II-II, q. 50.
 8. The knowledge of ends corresponds to a higher habit, that of first practical principles.
 9. The key places where Aquinas addresses the issue of prudence include: *In IV Sententiarum*, d. 33, q. 2 and 3; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, 35; *STh*, II-II ps., qq. 47–56 and II-II ps., q. 182. See Sellés (1999).
 10. Moral matter has certain characteristics, including the fact that it is particular as it focuses on the concrete; it is also contingent or unnecessary as it can go one way or the other; it is feasible as only human beings can realize it; and it is temporary like everything that changes.
 11. 'Some date the origin of modernity in 1436, when Gutenberg adopted the printing press; others, in 1520, the year of Luther's rebellion against the authority of the Church; others, in 1648, at the end of the Thirty Years' War; others in 1776 and 1789, in relation to the American and French revolutions respectively; while for a few, modern times did not begin until 1895 with Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* and the rise of "Modernism" in the arts and literature' (Toulmin, 1990, p. 27).
 12. 'Free will is a fiction among real things, a name without reality' (Luther, quoted in Gillespie, 2008, p. 145).
 13. 'Thus every part was full of vice, yet the whole mass was a paradise ... Even the worst of all the multitude did something for the common good' (Mandeville, 1997, p. 15).
 14. Edgeworth was the first to formally state the dichotomy between ethics and economics.
 15. Halévy (1995) called this law 'the principle of individual interests' natural convergence'.
 16. Kant was educated in Pietism, a Protestant sect whose morality was based on the rectitude of subjective intention and which rejected the rites, ceremonies and different kinds of mediation between God and men, promoting instead a direct, subjective and personal relationship.
 17. For instance Anscombe, Pieper, Foot, MacIntyre, Sandel and Taylor, among others.
 18. The project continues with *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (1988) and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (1990). Although he admits that it is not part of the said project, MacIntyre presents *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (1999) as a continuation and correction. See MacIntyre (1999), p. x.
 19. He continues: 'Prudence is not to be confused with a simple faculty for seeing what means will bring about a given end. Aristotle denominates that particular faculty *cleverness* and holds that it is morally neutral, since it is of equal use to the man who pursues praiseworthy and to the man who pursues blameworthy ends. Prudence includes cleverness; it is the cleverness of the man who possesses virtue in the sense that his actions

always flow from a practical syllogism whose major premise is of the form “Since the end and the best thing to do is ...” It is a conjunction of a grasp of the true *télos* of men with cleverness’ (MacIntyre, 1967, pp. 74–5).

20. He then warns against confusing practices with institutions, which are characteristically and necessarily concerned with external goods (MacIntyre, 1981 [2007], p. 194).
21. ‘What I am, therefore, is in key part what I inherit, a specific past that is present to some degree in my present. I find myself part of a history and that is generally to say, whether I like it or not, whether I recognize it or not, one of the bearers of a tradition’ (MacIntyre, 1981 [2007], p. 221).

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