The Inscription of Isocrates into Aristotle’s Practical Philosophy

David J Depew, University of Iowa
Isocrates and Civic Education
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Did Aristotle Have a Close Encounter with Isocrates?

There is a doxographical tradition that when the seventeen-year-old Aristotle first came to Athens he studied for three years with Socrates (Vita Marciana 3). Now that is plainly impossible. Socrates died in 399, while Aristotle was born in 384 and arrived in Athens in 367. It is not impossible, if “Socrates” is a mistake for “Isocrates,” as Anton Chroust has argued that it is (1973). It is significant in this highly speculative connection that Aristotle, having “transferred,” as we would put it, from Isocrates’ school to the Academy, made a name for himself by lecturing publicly on rhetoric. In that role, he would have been in a good position to confute Isocrates’ rhetoric-based conception of education, which he presumably knew firsthand.1

Aristotle would have been prepared for this task by having cut his teeth, as all young Academics did, on Socratikoi logai, which served as instruments for dialectical training within the Academy (Kahn 1996). By devising imaginary conversations between well-known, and in some cases well-hated, personages whose fates were antecedently known to the audience (since they lived as long ago as the 1930s now seem to us), Plato asked his Academic pupils to appreciate subtle links between character traits, conversational style, and dialectical ability. It is probably in this way that Aristotle first encountered Plato’s Phaedrus, which contains some condescending, and possibly ironic, praise of the young Isocrates. Isocrates is said to be more philosophical in temperament than Lysias, the other focal orator in this dialogue (Phaedrus 279a). But, as in the case of figures such as Alcibiades, Charmides, and Critias, one must bear in mind that early promise is not always fulfilled, and that what begins well can end badly—if the burdens, as well as the pleasures, of philosophy are not correctly taken up.

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Aristotle's earliest extant works, such as the *Gryllus* and the *Protrepticus*, give us glimpses of his stump speeches on behalf of the Academy. In spite of sustained efforts to see in them intimations of the philosopher of the *corpus Aristotelicum*, these works exhibit little more than the boiler-plate sublimatory rhetoric of Plato's middle period, which their author would have mastered in the course of his own dialectical education. The puzzle is that during Aristotle's formative period the theory of Forms as we find it in *Phaedo*, *Republic*, and *Symposium* had already been set up as a target for including the elderly Plato himself (Düring 1960). It would appear that Aristotle participated wholeheartedly in this revisionist project *intra muros*, perhaps even while he continued to give or circulate (like Isocrates) *extra muros* the eloquent exoteric speeches for which he became known in antiquity.

Yet Aristotle's close encounters with the school of Isocrates, however they may have unfolded, whether directly or at a distance, seem to have left a mark. For in the course of developing his own philosophy Aristotle took it upon himself, perhaps uniquely among his peers, to produce a philosophical account of rhetoric—a “rhetoric within the bounds of reason,” as Kant might have put it—and to encase this account of rhetoric within a wide-ranging philosophy of “human affairs” (*ta anthropina*). This philosophy of the human sciences, as I will try to show, exhibits more traces of Aristotle's encounter with Isocrates than the limited number of overt references to that figure in the Aristotelian *corpus* might suggest.

I will argue for three points in this connection. First, Aristotle's philosophy of human affairs—by which I mean the doctrines about *praxis* contained in *Politics*, both versions of *Ethics*, and less directly the subordinate *technai* discussed in *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*—can plausibly be read as a critique, more sustained and systematic than it is normally thought to be, of Isocrates' views about topics which, in a text that clearly has Isocrates' *All-in-its-gunsights* (*Nic. Eth. X.9.1181b15–16*), Aristotle calls “*ta anthropina*,” human affairs (*EN VI.7.1141b9; X.9.1181b15*). Second, in criticizing Isocrates Aristotle pays him a backhanded compliment. He cooptively incorporates within his own philosophy of human affairs the meanings that Isocrates (but not Plato) assigned to key terms, notably *phronēsis*. At the same time, he constrains the conditions of applicability of these terms in a distinctly non-Isocratean way, subordinating practical reason (*praxis*) to theoretical (*theorēia*) reason, and in turn subordinating technical reason (*technē*) to practical. Having done so, Aristotle uses this picture to launch a sustained and explicit criticism of Isocrates' claim to be able to teach political science (*politike epistēmē, EN X.9.1181a1–1189a19*).

My final point concerns this critique of Isocrates. Aristotle's ontological privileging of *theorēia over praxis*, and of *praxis over technē*, is not as consistent as he believes with the autonomy he proclaims for *praxis*. Aristotle's interpretive framework is thus vulnerable to a rebuttal by Isocrates, or on his behalf by contemporary appropriators of *praxis*-philosophy and of rhetoric as a “theory of civic discourse.” It is Isocrates, I conclude, who might justly be said to be entitled to the last word on the subject, even if he didn't get it.

**Philosophia in Isocrates and Aristotle**

My point of departure is the claim that to Isocrates' mind there is no limit to the range of an explicitly deliberative, or practical, model of rationality and discourse. If we think or speak at all, he argues, we deliberate—at least where we are not wandering away in the empty, eristic way he accuses the dialecticians in the Academy of doing (thereby making them the Sophists and himself the philosopher). “I do not think it is fitting,” Isocrates writes in *Antidosis* ("to confer the name of *philosophia* on anything that does not help us speak or act (legein, prassein) in the present" [Antidosis 266]). His reason soon becomes clear. Deliberative reason defines for Isocrates the nature and limits of human wisdom (*sophia*):

> Since it is not in the nature (*physis*) of humans to have scientific knowledge (*epistēmē*), the possession of which would enable them to know (*eidēnai*) what is to be done or said [with respect to future actions], from what is left I consider to be wise (*sophos*) whoever is able out of his opinions (*doxai*) to chance upon (*eptiskanein*) what is for the most part the best [course of action and speech], and I consider a philosopher whoever is able by study quickly to get hold of this sort of practical wisdom (*phronēsin*) (Antidosis 271).

This presumption in favor of reason in the deliberative mode reflects a traditional Greek sense that (in spite of constant meddling by the gods, whose ability to shape the future responsibly is compromised by a freedom from death that renders them a bit stupid) humans themselves, especially when
gathered together into poleis, are autonomous agents in a kosmos that neither systematically supports nor opposes their projects. These are projects for which humans are responsible all the way down; they are praiseworthy and blameworthy for outcomes as well as intentions. This picture of humans as autarchic agents was transmitted from the epic and lyric poets to the Attic tragedians. It was reaffirmed by Sophists like Protagoras, whose defense of the poetic tradition (against philosophers of Parmenidean lineage) and of the autonomy of public discourse in a world where "anthrôpos is the measure of all things" is predicated on this very point.

This background understanding of the human condition, and especially the role of discourse as a deliberative instrument, was picked up by Isocrates. Distancing himself from ambulance-chasing logographers, whom he conceded to fall under the weight of Plato’s harsh criticism of Sophists (Antidosis 2), Isocrates boldly attempted to seize back the term philosophy from the word-angling dialecticians, reapplying it to his own reflective, aestheticized brand of published first-person prose, which was designed mimetically and performatively to induce a literate and reflective appreciation in his readers of the interests of their polis and of Greek culture as a whole (T. Pouliakos 1997; Haskins 2001; Haskins, this volume). Isocrates invents for this purpose a form of written epideictic that incorporates and subverts judicial and deliberatory rhetoric, taking distance from the harsh particularity, and to his mind unreflectiveness, of actual judicial and deliberative practice. He appropriates the term philosophy to name the long-range, reflective, but still practical, stance that he commends and purports to teach.

At a crucial juncture in the argument of Politics VII–VIII, Aristotle too uses the term philosophy in a sense that does not restrict it to apolitical intellectuals. Having denied that in an ideal state everyone should be presumed capable of engaging in theoria, at Pol. VII.15.1334a32–34 he remarks that nevertheless all the citizens will “be especially in need of philosophy, temperance (sôphrosûnê), and justice (dikaiosûnê) to the extent that they are in a position to engage in leisure activities (scholizôsasia) in the midst of an abundance of such good things” (Pol. VII.15.1334a32–1335a4). That is clearly a sense of philosophy comparable in its breadth to Isocrates’.

I think we are justified in saying that this claim about the virtues necessary for the proper use of leisure harks back to Pericles’ remark in the Thucydidean Funeral Oration that the Athenians are superior to the Spartans because “we philosophize without softness” (Thucydides, Peloponnesian War 2.40.1). The term “philosophize” refers in this passage to the public display and appreciation of fine things and to the habit of engaging in public criticism of words and deeds. In the Funeral Oration, these qualities serve as a marker of the well-balanced Athenian life in contrast to the overemphasis on brutal gymnastike in Spartan culture. So too in Aristotle. Just before his remark about the need for philosophia in leisure, we find Aristotle engaging in a passionate tirade against the Spartans, in which they are said to be deficient in the ability to practice the virtues appropriate to peace and leisure time, and so must cultivate war not as a matter of justice, but simply to keep from going flabby (Pol. VII.14.1334b10–1334a10). This, Aristotle infers, led to their downfall. He generalizes the point by saying that any state whose legislator does not make the virtuous use of leisure time, diâgôgê en te scholê, including provisions for mousîkê, the aim of his educational system will have to suffer the fate of Sparta:

The legislator of the Lacedaemonians... legislated everything with a view to domination and war. This view, which is ready to be put aside. This view, which is readily refuted by logos, has now been refuted by facts as well. Having lost their empire, we see that the Spartans are not happy and that their legislator cannot have been good... The reason is that he did not educate them to be capable of being at leisure... They lose their edge, like iron, when they remain at peace. (Pol. VII.14.1333b12–13, b22–b23; 1334a8–11, trans. Lord, rearranged slightly).

In his insistence that peace is better than war, that mousîkê is the better half of the mousîkê–gymnastike dyad that makes up paideia or education, and that all citizens should possess some degree of leisureed philosophia in order to live well or happily (Pol. VII.7.1333a31–37), Aristotle is party to the same contrast Pericles had drawn. It is a view to which Isocrates, too, is party. They all stand on roughly the same Athenocentric ground. Admittedly, in his panhellenic solicitations for unity, Isocrates is less critical of Sparta than Aristotle. Nonetheless, he too employs anti-Spartan commonplaces in both Panegyricus and Areopagiticus when he praises Athenians for using their leisure and wealth “to devote themselves to horsemanship, gymnastic, hunting, and philosophy” (Areopagiticus 45, my italics; see Panegyricus 47).

Yet there are significant differences between Isocrates and Aristotle.
within their shared commitment to citizenly philosophia. Isocrates' philosophia is oriented toward deliberation about what is good for the city in the long run, Aristotle's toward enhancing virtuous leisure activities (diasgogé en té schôlê) for their own sake (Pol. VIII.3.1338a9-12; 5.1339b14-21). This difference shows up in their contrasting accounts of the relationship between citizenly philosophia and paideia. Isocrates implies that adult philosophia is continuous with paideia. Aristotle does not.

Stimulated by rhetorical performances like his own, Isocrates' ideal citizen is continuously re-educated himself in the art of practical deliberation by reiteratively reidentifying himself with the aims of his polis among other poleis and of Greece in relation to the barbarian Other (Antidosis 192: 214-216). By contrast, Aristotle's brand of leisureed philosophia—diasgogé en té schôlê—is construed as a successor to paideia, not a continuation of it, in which adults are to devote themselves to all sorts of leisureed learning (mathésis)—including the learning one can derive from the hermeneutics of tragic plots as set forth in Poetics—by using the fixed moral habits and identities they have presumably acquired at earlier stages in their moral development as a platform from which to cultivate whatever intellectual virtues of which they are severally capable (Depew 1991).

There is a still deeper discontinuity between Aristotle's and Isocrates' conceptions of the philosophia that all adult citizens should possess. For Isocrates, philosophia of this sort is philosophia itself. There is no other; as we have seen, it is equivalent to human sophia (Antidosis 271). All citizens can have it, moreover, although to different degrees, depending on their native talent and their explicit training. For Aristotle, on the other hand, not all citizens who know how to use their leisure well, and so possess citizenly philosophia, possess, or even can possess, the political science (politike) that constitutes the supposed raison d'être of Isocratean philosophia. Even more importantly, those who possess Aristotelian politike do not on that account necessarily possess sophia. Aristotle reserves the honorific term sophia for the theoretical science that he calls theology or "first philosophy," and that we call metaphysics (Metaphysics 1.2.983a7-10; EN VI.6.1141a16-19). Those who have practical or technical knowledge are not, for Aristotle, wise. For Isocrates, by contrast, only such persons are wise.

In Aristotle's scheme, first philosophy studies divine things (ta theia). The contrasting systematic study of human affairs (ta anthropina), both the ethical and legislative principles of good praxis and subordinate technai like rhetoric and poetics, is not even "second philosophy." Second philosophy comprises the theoria of natural, as distinct from eternal, objects—humans included, to be sure, but as animals among, and compared to, other animals. No, a philosophy of human affairs, ta anthropina (an objective, not a possessive genitive, since Aristotle proposes to make ta anthropina, including the practice of cultural philosophia, the object of a systematic inquiry aimed at teaching legislators and statesmen what arts and sciences should be cultivated in their poleis) is only "third philosophy," although as far as I know Aristotle does not use this phrase. Accordingly, Aristotle writes in Nicaean Ethics, in what I am strongly tempted to claim is a direct reference to Isocrates' explicit assertion of the contrary, "It is clear that wisdom (sophia) cannot be the same as political science (politike) (EN VI.7.1141a28-30).

Aristotle gives the following warrant for this conclusion. "It would be absurd," he writes, "for someone to think that political science (politike) or practical wisdom (phronësis) is the most noble thing, seeing that human beings are not the best things in the universe" (EN VI.7.1141a20-22; cf. NE VI.7.1141a35-38). Aristotle's firmness on this anti-anthropocentric point derives from two intertwined sorts of confidence, one theological and ethical, the other epistemological. For reasons I will review in the following paragraphs, Aristotle is sure that an anthropocentric perspective—the perspective I earlier ascribed to Greek poetic wisdom, to the sophistic movement, and to Isocrates—will undermine the very possibility of ethical judgment because it necessarily blurs the distinction between intrinsic and instrumental goods. Given the importance of ethical judgment, it is a good thing, then, that epistemologically Aristotle is confident about something that Isocrates explicitly denies at Antidosis 271, namely, that at least some humans, by cultivating a studiously impractical and purely contemplative form of knowledge, can enjoy at least glimpses of God, whose life of leisureed activity and studious indifference to human affairs provides a model by which ethical education, virtuous practice, and theoretical accomplishment for their own sake can be measured (Eudemian Ethics [EE] VIII.3.1249b15-25; EN X.7.1177b19-28).

From these Aristotelian ethical and epistemological principles, it virtually follows that practically wise rulers—rulers who have been wised up by the Lyceum, for example—must be able to distinguish clearly between activities that are intrinsically good, such as those of God and those who study him, and activities that have merely instrumental worth. Anyone who fails to recognize that human affairs (ta anthropina) are not the highest object
of human reflection will be unable to do this. Only by contemplating the god of the philosophers, who engages in no instrumental actions at all, but whose contemplative activities are the very measure of inherent value, can we have cognitively secure access to the ontotheological framework within which what is inherently good about human activity—the performance of virtuous activity for its own sake—can be cleanly separated from human activities that have only instrumental worth. Failing this, humans will necessarily regress to the meddlesome gods of the mythical epics and to the ideological cover they afford to no less meddlesome politicians—and rhetoricians. By this severe standard, as we will see, Aristotle finds Isocrates wanting.

Admittedly, Aristotle takes the study of *ta anthrōpina* to be autonomous from the theoretical sciences in at least one important sense. There are practically wise people (*phronimoi*), such as Pericles, who are no good at theoretical reflection; and conversely theorists who have no practical judgment, like the proverbial Thales, who was laughed at by a servant girl when he fell down a well while trying to look at the stars (*EN VI.1.5.1140b8–11; 1141b2–8*). It is the former who should rule. To postulate this autonomy of practical reason is of enormous consequence for Aristotle. It is what preeminently distinguishes his view of political science (*politikê*), which is closely related to practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) (*EN VI.1.5.1141b23–24*), from Plato’s ill-conceived doctrine of philosopher kings. Unlike Plato, Aristotle does not think that good political practice is reducible to *theoria* technically applied by experts or by slumming apolitical intellectuals, as Plato does in *Republic*; or that humans should regard themselves as robot-like “toys” (*patrignia*) of the gods, rather than as fully autonomous agents, as Plato does in the *Laws* (*Laws 805b*); or that *mousikê*, drama, and *rhetorikê* as actually produced by the free workings of culture, rather than as redesigned by Plato, are a threat to either the good life or to good rule.

None of this is enough to deny, however, that for Aristotle the autonomous sphere of *praxis*, and therefore the scope for *eupraxia* or well-performed activity, is in its very essence circumscribed by the fact that some humans can and do have theoretical knowledge, both theological and natural; and that this kind of knowledge is higher than practical activity and political knowledge. From this fact, it follows that those who in virtue of having *phronēsis* are fit for rule in good states will exhibit their practical wisdom above all in this: they will acknowledge, as Pericles did, that, even if they cannot engage in *theoria* themselves, they will honor those who cultivate the *bios theōrētikos* as living a higher way of life than their own, practical or political life (*bios politikos*); will protect them; and will make the cultivation of leisure activities that approximate to the *bios theōrētikos*—*philosophia* in Aristotle’s broad sense—the very point of the constitution (*EN X.7.1177b5–26*; see Depew 1991).

In this way, Aristotle’s rulers look up toward *theoria*, not down from it, as Plato’s do. When they look up what they see is a god who, although he is the best thing in the universe and the most active in the sense of self-actualized, “engages in no externally and instrumentally good actions at all” (*Pol. VII.1.1323b23–25; 1325b29–30*). If practical men do not regard this state of existence as higher than any that can be achieved by practical wisdom, Aristotle warns that the busy-ness (*a-schēlia*) in which practitioners of the *bios politikos* are necessarily immersed will degenerate into an instrumentalism that will make the virtuous actions done for their own sake on which high-minded nobles (*kalokagathoi*) pride themselves difficult to identify and even more difficult to attain (*EN X.7.1177b11–1178a10; EE VIII.3.1249a15–17*). Warning the potential rulers who study with him against this descent into instrumentalism—including the higher instrumentalism implicit in the Platonic claim that good politics is technically applied *theoria*—is, in my view, the main burden of Aristotle’s *Ethics* and *Politics*. It is the fundamental proposition in what he calls political science (*politikê*). Its correlative burden is to disabuse those leading the *bios theōrētikos* of the contempt for the *bios politikos* or *praktikos* that they usually cultivate in response to the pervasive busy-body-ness (*polupragma­simē, panourgia*) of practical politicians. For when it is constrained by a proper relation to divine things, those who engage in the *bios praktikos* are in a position, Aristotle says, “to achieve much that is noble” (*Pol. VII.3*). 1325a33–34.

In the light of this discussion, we may see more clearly why Aristotle thinks that a good constitution, to the extent that it is good, must be oriented toward the proper use of leisure that has at its pinnacle the theocentric contemplative wisdom that only some can attain, but that also includes under the wider sense of *philosophia* all sorts of intrinsically valuable yet useless forms of learning, including those afforded by art. Only under these conditions, Aristotle argues, can a scale of values be maintained in the *polis* that teaches people in their daily life to distinguish what is inherently fine, including good political activity, from what is merely instrumentally good, or vulgar, or even vicious.
A good case can be made out that under the influence of men like Demetrius of Phaleron this Peripatetic program for politics was, through the force placed at its disposal by the Macedonian military, put into practice in cities like Alexandria, with their museums and libraries. Aristotle’s Lyceum thereby proposes to take up where Plato’s Academy, discredited by its ineffective and imprudent meddling in politics based on a false conception of the theory-practice relationship, had left off in its efforts to re-educate Greece so that it would be worthy of the domination of the barbarians on which the panhellenic crusade shared by Isocrates and Aristotle is predicated.

**Phronēsis in Isocrates and Aristotle**

The distance Aristotle takes from Plato in countenancing a relatively autonomous sphere of political practice is equal to the distance that Aristotle is willing to move toward Isocrates’ stress on deliberative reason. He meets Isocrates, as it were, halfway. My primary evidence for this judgment is that Aristotle’s use of the term *phronēsis*, or practical reason, to name the architectonic virtue of the sphere of *praxis* reflects Isocrates’ definition-in-use of that term, not Plato’s. It is Isocrates’ notion of practical wisdom that is enshrined in Aristotle’s account of human things, although it is then circumscribed within a theocentric framework which Isocrates, in his sophist anthropocentrism, does not countenance, but which Aristotle takes as a necessary precondition for separating what is noble in the sphere of practice from what is not.

I can begin to show this by recalling an old, and now largely resolved, scholarly quarrel. All parties to this quarrel recognized that Plato uses the term *phronēsis* indiscriminately for both practical and theoretical wisdom, albeit with a bias toward the latter, whereas the Aristotelian *corpus*, especially *EN VI*, carefully restricts that term to practical reason: the engagement of the moral virtues with particular, contingent circumstances through the use of deliberative rationality (*bouleusis*) to determine good actions (*praxeis*) (Jaeger 1948: 239–243; Natali 2001). That Plato should not have discriminated between these two uses of intelligence is not surprising. Many of his dialogues retain the Socratic identification of virtue with knowledge, and even when this identification is weakened by the admission that good judgment is dependent on a good upbringing, as it is in *Republic* (Irwin 1977), Plato does not go out of his way to recognize two different kinds of knowledge, practical and theoretical, let alone the third kind that Aristotle mentions, *craft knowledge* (*technē*). Many of what Plato calls *technei*, in his later dialogues especially, are what Aristotle would call *praxeis*, governed by *phronēsis*.

On the basis of this perception, Werner Jaeger set out to demonstrate that Aristotle’s earliest writings, such as the *Protrepticus*, exhibit this generalized Platonic usage, and that the first version of his ethics, the EE, does as well. Aristotle’s own conception of an autonomous practical reason, *phronēsis*, appears, according to Jaeger, only in the presumably late middle books of *EN* (Jaeger 1948). In the vast literature responding to Jaeger, it is generally conceded that the *Protrepticus* does exhibit this indiscriminate meaning of *phronēsis*. This tells us very little, of course, if texts like this were rhetorical performances on behalf of the Academy, as I have already suggested they may have been. Neither does the fact that the generalized meaning seems to persist in the *Topics*, since the identification of knowledge and virtue is, precisely, a *topic*—a claim on which dialectical reasoning can be exercised (Natali 2001). Still, Jaeger has definitively been shown to be wrong in assimilating EE to the view expressed in the exoteric speeches. EE, no less than *EN*, restrictively identifies *phronēsis* with practical wisdom and contrasts it with theoretical intelligence, if not quite as clearly as *EN VI* does (Cooper 1975: 136–139; Kenny 1978; Natali 2001: 6–10).

The argument that EE and NE both restrict *phronēsis* to practical wisdom is as follows. Jaeger’s argument for the persistence of a generalized Platonic intelligence (*phronēsis*) in EE was that at the crucial climax of that version of Aristotle’s ethics—a version that, contra Kenny (1978), I consider earlier than EN for any number of reasons—from the identification of knowledge and virtue as *praxeis* (EE 8.3.1249b16–18). But in saying this Aristotle does not imply that theorists, as theorists, can make such choices. Theorists as theorists do not, by Aristotle’s own account, make any choices (*prohaireses*) at all. Only those who deliberate do that. What Aristotle means is that those who deliberate *well*, or exhibit the virtue of *phronēsis*, measure their choices of external goods in all matters that involve intrinsic worth, both theoretical and practical, by reference to the transcendent value of theoretical wisdom (*sophia*). (See EE 8.3.1249b9–19 and EN 6.13.1145a6–11, where Aristotle says that *phronēsis* does not
give orders to *sophia*, but for its sake [Cooper 1975: 136-139; Dunne 1993: 241-242]. This is substantially the same view that is found at the end of EN.

Nor does Aristotle, in either text, recommend to rulers the asceticism and indifference to external goods (*ta hekta*) that is conventionally associated with the *bios theorētikos* and is consistently maintained by the Stoic tradition. Rather, Aristotle simply notes that no one can make good judgments about political matters unless the god of the philosophers is generally perceived as the highest object of knowledge and reverence. For only then can the right amount of external goods—neither too much nor too little—be employed in pursuing one’s practical ends virtually. Otherwise, external goods such as health, wealth, beauty, fame, and so forth, will become de facto ends, rather than necessary means, and reason will degenerate into a utilitarian instrument for acquiring those goods. This general principle, which I have been reporting as Aristotle’s considered view, is already articulated in EE (EE VIII.3.140b18-23). It is expressed, moreover, by way of a decidedly non-Platonic usage of the term *phronēsis*, which, as in EN VI and X, restricts it to practical reason (although not yet couched in a vocabulary as well adapted to eschewing instrumentalism as the conceptual vocabulary of EN).)

Instead of trying to find precisely where to draw the line between a young, Platonizing Aristotle and a mature, supposedly “empiricist” Aristotle, Jaeger and the scholars who followed him would have done better to have inquired where the deliberation-and-choice oriented usage of *phronēsis* to which Aristotle cleaves might have come from (or minimally with what existing conception it agrees). My suggestion is that it comes from (and explicitly agrees with) Isocrates’ conception of the term.  

Consider again the following passage from *Antidosis*:

Since it is not in the nature (*physis*) of humans to have scientific knowledge (*epistēmē*), the possession of which would enable them to know (*eidenai*) what is to be done or said [with respect to future actions], from what is left I consider to be wise (*sophos*) whoever is able out of his opinions (*doxai*) to chance upon (*entupēgkanein*) what is for the most part the best [course of action and speech], and I consider a philosopher whoever is able by study quickly to get hold of this sort of practical wisdom (*phronēsin*) (*Antidosis* 274).

In the last line, Isocrates, like Aristotle, sees *phronēsis* as deliberative intelligence deployed in pursuit of what is in one’s best interest (EN VI.5.140b10-12; VI.8.141b25-35; *Antidosis* 207). It deliberates about what needs to be acted on by the deliberating agent himself and specifies what course of action to adopt under a particular set of circumstances. It is what we call “common sense.” *Phronēsis*, so construed, stands in contrast to the nondeliberative universality of scientific knowledge (*epistēmē*), quite apart from whether humans can have any such thing or not. In orienting *phronēsis* to practical insight, both Aristotle and Isocrates are in agreement with general Greek usage (see the LSJ lexicon). In this connection, Plato’s assimilation of *phronēsis* to what Aristotle calls *epistēmē* appears as an attempt to legislate meaning, driven by the Socratic tendency to assimilate deliberation to theoretical insight. Isocrates’ identification of *phronēsis* with deliberative rationality constitutes a reflective validation of what the many unreflectively presume, but with an explicit anti-Platonic contrast to theoretical intelligence added. Aristotle agrees. Nonetheless, Aristotle differs from Isocrates in a crucial respect. While both make a firm distinction between the spheres of scientific knowledge and practical reasoning, Aristotle affirms that some humans are capable of the former, whereas Isocrates explicitly denies it. As a result, Aristotle denies the universality of *phronēsis*, its status as the only accessible kind of human intelligence.

For Isocrates, the scope of *phronēsis* is as wide as it is for his old antagonist Plato. It is just that Plato’s bias in favor of universal theoretical knowledge as constituting *phronēsis*, and hence *philosophia*, has been switched by Isocrates in favor of the universality of practical, deliberative knowledge and its status as *philosophia*. I rather suspect, in fact, that it is just because he merely reverses, rather than breaks out of, Plato’s epistemology that Isocrates admits Plato’s view that human affairs fall within the sphere of variable, aleatory, and stochastic opinion (*doxa*). As Isocrates, in a remarkably Platonic spirit, puts it, “All of the things with which we [as human beings] are concerned evade certain demonstrative knowledge (*epistēmē*)” (*Antidosis* 184). In saying that he can make wise men out of those who study human affairs under his tutelage, assuming only that they have a certain modicum of native talent, Isocrates claims no more than that he wants to be the educator of those who make educated guesses (*Antidosis* 185, 189). Aristotle explicitly and categorically rejects in EN VI the agreement between Isocrates and Plato about the universality of *phronēsis* as well as their
equally odd agreement that thinking about human affairs reduces to mere opinion \[\text{[doxa]}\].

At this point, Aristotle's compliment to Isocrates about the autonomy of \textit{phronēsis} begins to turn into a serious criticism, as I will now try to show. It is significant that the same array of terms—\textit{phronēsis}, \textit{epistēmē}, \textit{sophia}, \textit{doxa}, \textit{technē}—that figure prominently in Isocrates' \textit{Antidosis} figure just as prominently in Aristotle's treatment of practical wisdom and the other intellectual virtues in \textit{EN VI}. But they figure in it quite differently. I suspect that Aristotle's parsing of the intellectual virtues in this book has Isocrates' \textit{Antidosis} in its dialectical sights more explicitly than it has Plato, and that disagreements about the relationships among these terms that are registered there can serve as proof of what I have been saying about the complex relationship among \textit{phronēsis} in Aristotle, Plato, and Isocrates.

Aristotle affirms, in the first instance, that scientific knowledge (\textit{epistēmē}), which Isocrates denies to humans, is indeed possible for some people (\textit{EN VI.2.1139a18–b13}). This assertion would be pointless if the Academics were his principal targets; they never doubted it. Having said this, Aristotle goes on to deny just as explicitly that \textit{phronēsis} should be called \textit{sophia} (\textit{EN VI.13.1145a7–11}), which is precisely what Isocrates does call it, as we have already seen. Aristotle also explicitly denies that \textit{phronēsis} is reducible to opinion (\textit{doxa}) (\textit{EN VI.8.1142a7–10; VI.9.1142b8–9}), or to guesswork or conjecture (\textit{euboulia}) (\textit{EN VI.9.1142b2}), or to cleverness (\textit{deinōtēs}) (\textit{EN VI.13.1144a24–29}). If these arguments do not have Isocrates as their explicit target, I would be very surprised. For it must be acknowledged that he fits the profile perfectly; even a charitable reader will find in \textit{Antidosis} precisely the identifications of \textit{phronēsis} with wisdom, opinion, guesswork, and cleverness about which Aristotle complains.

Let us consider these arguments in a bit more detail, beginning with Aristotle's views about \textit{epistēmē} and \textit{sophia}. For Aristotle, scientific knowledge (\textit{epistēmē}) consists of noetic intuitions about the first principles (\textit{nous}) that govern a particular disciplinary sphere, which are arrived at through inductive ascent (\textit{epagogē}) and are then displayed in a sequence of law-like consequences that flow apodictically from these principles (\textit{apodeixis}) (\textit{EN VI.6.1140b30–37;1141a19}). Scientific knowledge so defined bumps up against \textit{sophia} only when it touches on the science of the divine (\textit{in theis}). For \textit{sophia} is the "most exact form of scientific knowledge" (\textit{EN VI.7.1141a16–17}); it is "noetic intuition (\textit{nous}) plus scientific knowledge (\textit{epistēmē}) of the most valuable things, with divine \textit{nous} as its coping stone" (\textit{EN VI.8.1141a16–20}). In a world where humans are not the most valuable things (\textit{EN VI.7.1141a20–22}), and in which some of them can get at least a bit of scientific knowledge about the things that are most valuable, Aristotle thinks that it would be absurd to reserve the honorific term \textit{sophia} for knowledge of human affairs, as Isocrates does.

Aristotle disagrees with Isocrates, then, about whether humans can possess \textit{epistēmē}. In consequence, he even more categorically disagrees with him that \textit{phronēsis} is equivalent to \textit{sophia}. Nonetheless, he concurs with Isocrates in saying that \textit{epistēmē}, and a fortiori \textit{sophia}, does not name the kind of knowledge we require in order to deal with contingent particulars concerning what is to be done (\textit{EN VI.8.1142a23–30}). That requires \textit{phronēsis}, not \textit{epistēmē}. Aristotle thus agrees with Isocrates that \textit{phronēsis} is the intellectual virtue that governs the sphere of practical reasoning, reasoning under particular circumstances calling for decision and action. At the same time, Aristotle denies what Isocrates asserts about \textit{phronēsis} that \textit{phronēsis} is \textit{doxa} (\textit{EN VI.9.1142b7}; see T. Poulos this volume on Isocrates' reasons for saying this); and that, in consequence, it is equivalent to guesswork (\textit{EN VI.9.1142b2}). That is because Aristotle thinks \textit{phronēsis} is as epistemically solid as perceptual recognition (\textit{EN VI.8.1142a27}). If it were mere guesswork, it could not reliably identify or perform actions that have intrinsic worth. \textit{Phronēsis} cannot be acquired, then, as \textit{doxa} can, by mimetic training on a contractual basis, or by educated guessing about how to apply vague rules of thumb to particulars. For Aristotelian \textit{phronēsis} is a distinctive kind of cognition. It is non-demonstrative insight into just the right thing to do in particular circumstances, backed up by its own kind of noetic intuition (\textit{EN VI.8.1142a27; Dahl 1984}).

This form of knowledge, Aristotle asserts, can arise only in persons who have been habituated since childhood into moral virtues and noble values:

Therefore it is necessary for those who can listen profitably to lectures about what is noble and just to have been brought up in good habits (ethically). For the "that" (\textit{hoti}) is the starting point [of such inquiries], and if this is sufficiently clear to a hearer, he will need nothing of the "why" (\textit{dioti}). Such a person will easily grasp the proper starting points [of practical reasoning] (\textit{EN I.4.1095b3–8}; on the distinction in this passage between the "that" and the "why"—a fundamental distinction in Aristotle's philosophy of science—see Burnyeat 1980).
Aristotle asserts this because for him moral virtue (areté), rather than reducing to a certain set of passions, is a mode of having intentionally constituted experiences that light up the world in a certain value-laden way. It is virtue that makes it possible for reason (phronēsis) to identify how, in a specific moment, one must act in a way that embodies a fundamental fact about the world: that some things have intrinsic values, and others do not. This is why Aristotle says that virtue gives the ends and phronēsis finds the means (EN VI.5.1140a26). (The point is even stronger at EE II.2.1227b22–24, where he says that “virtue is the target [skopos] that makes our choices correct.”) It is also why Aristotle provides a (probably false) etymology of phronēsis which makes it mean “preserver of [the moral virtue of] temperance (sōphrosune)” (EN VI.5.1140b11–12). Virtue, by giving access through its performance to a world of intrinsic values, controls and reorients the desires we share with other animals.

What lies behind these arguments is Aristotle’s clean distinction between intrinsic and instrumental goods. A virtuous person recognizes, in what Aristotle regards as a cognitive rather than a merely opininated act, the right thing to do here and now in and through his or her habitually fine (kakos) way of experiencing things. The good person always acts in a way that respects the distinction between the intrinsically good and the instrumentally good, and brings that distinction to bear on particulars. This perhaps explains why Aristotle is so insistent that no one who has not been brought up in good habits since childhood can have phronēsis (EN I.4.1095b8; see Burnyeat 1980). Pace Isocrates, mere opinion, which can readily be acquired and just as readily lost in youth and adulthood, is not strong enough to recognize and apply the distinction between the intrinsically good and the instrumentally good, especially under conditions of duress.

From this moral-epistemic high ground, we may be sure that Aristotle would not be pleased by any tendency to identify what is merely clever (deinon) with what is practically wise (phronēsis) (EN VI.13.1144a24–37). Yet Isocrates tends to think of cleverness and phronēsis as interchangeable terms, or at least to think of cleverness as the same thing as phronēsis when it is viewed from the perspective of admiring audiences rather than deliberative agents. The latter is how Isocrates puts the matter in Antidosis when he remarks proudly that he himself is perceived to be clever, and that Timotheus, the eminent but unpopular general who had been his pupil, and who serves as his model of phronēsis, is a clever man because as a general he knows with whom to go to war, when to do it, and how to raise and deploy an effective force to get the job done (Antidosis 117).

The perceived blurring of the distinction between cleverness and phronēsis in Isocrates’ Antidosis provides a plausible explanation of why Aristotle goes out of his way to say in EN VI that cleverness is not equivalent to phronēsis, since (he says) a clever man may be bad (kakos), while a practically wise man is by definition good, even though on occasion he can, and must, be clever as well (EN VI.123.1144a24–36). (Just why Aristotle puts forward Pericles as his model of the phronimos may seem obscure until we remember that Aristotle’s Pericles is Thucydides’ Pericles, and that the Thucydidean Pericles supports Aristotle’s conviction that philosophia, monikē, and scholē stand at the pinnacle of civic values and norms. It is possible that Aristotle’s choice of Pericles is meant to contest Isocrates’ choice of Timotheus, who exhibited no such sensibilities.)

In general, we may say that traits that appear as moral defects to Aristotle appear fairly often as virtues in Isocrates. Thus in specifying what character traits those who put themselves under his tutelage must studiously cultivate, Isocrates says that they must above all have a burning desire for recognition. They must have a certain pleonexia or urge to seek advantage over others, albeit pleonexia “of the good sort,” he assures us (Antidosis 275–276). For Aristotle, by contrast, pleonexia, grasping for power, always names a vice, and a burning desire for recognition names the moral defect of those who mistakenly want to be honored quite apart from knowledge of whether they deserve to be (EN I.5.1095b23–30; II.1.1107b29–32).

Aristotle and Isocrates on Political Science

So far I have been arguing that Aristotle’s sustained effort in EN VI to distinguish phronēsis from opinion, guesswork, cleverness, and personal advantage may have Isocrates as an explicit (though perhaps not exclusive) target. At the very least, we may conclude that the views expressed in Isocrates’ Antidosis fail to match Aristotle’s criteria for phronēsis. Confusions and conflations of this sort, Aristotle implies, testify to an insufficient discrimination of the morally fine from the merely instrumentally good. But we need not remain content with these suspicious correlations. For this very issue is directly broached in Aristotle’s argument in EN X to the effect that
anyone who fails to distinguish political science (politikê) from rhetoric (rhetorîkê) cannot be judged to possess or be able to teach the former (EN X.9.1118a12–19). There are overwhelmingly persuasive textual reasons to think that this argument is aimed at Isocrates, and to infer that the source of his confusion on this point is, for Aristotle, Isocrates’ prior failure (which we have just reviewed) correctly to discriminate phronêsis from character states that merely resemble it. To this argument I now turn.

The thrust of Aristotle’s argument is as follows. If the conceptual distance is collapsed between political science and rhetoric, a vulgar orientation toward instrumental values will necessarily flood into the space of political decision-making, thereby conflicting with and undermining the possibility of a genuine political science. Aristotle insists on this because he holds (1) that politikê depends on the same cognitive capacity, and character trait, as phronêsis (EN 6.8.1141b23); (2) that this practical cognitive capacity is not the same capacity as that of the technically intelligent person (technites) (EN VI.3.1140a2); (3) that technical forms of knowledge are instrumentally related to ends; (4) that if the ends of politics are to be attained technical forms of knowledge must be subordinated to the decision making of political agents who possess practical reason (EN I.2.1094a27–b5); and (5) that rhetoric is a technical form of knowledge (Rhetoric I.2.1135b26). It follows from these five propositions that conflations of politikê with rhetorîkê, if they are institutionalized in the discourse of a state, will open that state to an inappropriate stress on instrumental values. For the inherent instrumentality of technê, which means it can be exercised in a value-neutral way, will refashion phronêsis, and hence politikê, after its own image.

Aristotle is convinced that phronêsis and politikê cannot be possessed or exercised in this way and still remain faithful to their essence or perform their proper functions (EN VI.8.1141b23–24). As we have seen in the preceding section, what it means to be a practically intelligent person is habitually to perform the noble for its own sake, that is, to do it for reasons having to do with the intrinsic worth of what is done, quite apart from its consequences (which is not the same thing as saying that a good act isn’t aimed at something good or to deny that it presumptively achieves a good result). It is precisely in view of this constraint on what can count as phronêsis that political science (politikê) cannot be an art, and so cannot be identical to rhetoric. Although it thinks on a bigger scale and has a scientific dimension, politikê rests on the same character state as phronêsis and apprehends the same intrinsic values. Politikê (EN VI.9.1141b24) cannot be an art (technê), and so cannot be identical with rhetoric. By contrast, an art is a capacity of realizing opposites. The sign of the artful doctor, for example, is that he or she knows how to kill you as skillfully as how to cure you. So too in the art of rhetoric, which is a capacity for arguing opposite positions. Accordingly, the practitioner of an art may be badly motivated without compromising the claim that it is an art that is being practiced. But it is quite otherwise with phronêsis and politikê. These cannot be pursued for bad ends and still be the kinds of capacities they are.

This is not to deny that the artful quality of an Aristotelian technê depends on pursuing goods internal to that art. Garver (1992; and this volume) has shown quite clearly that it does. What it means is that, because of the different ways in which means are related to ends in technical and practical reason, there is an instrumentalism lying at the conceptual or definitional, and not merely the psychological, heart of any technê. For Aristotle, this instrumentalism must be constrained by the pursuit of intrinsically good actions if good politics is to be practiced—and if the internal goods proper to an art are to be realized as consistently as good politics requires that they must be. Anyone who confounds politikê and rhetorîkê, accordingly, or a fortiori subordinates the first to the second, must run afoul of the subordination that Aristotle requires.

There are textual reasons for concluding that Aristotle has Isocrates explicitly in mind in pressing this point at the end of EN X. Scholars have long been unanimous in identifying the following passage in the argument of EN X.9 as aimed directly at Isocrates:

Those sophists who advertise [that they teach about politics] appear to be a long way from being teachers; for they are altogether ignorant about what sort of thing politikê is, and the sorts of things it is about. For if they had known what it is, they would not have taken it to be the same as rhetoric, or something inferior to rhetoric, or thought it an easy task to assemble laws with good reputations and then to legislate. For they think they can select the best laws, as though selection did not require understanding (sunêsis), and as though correct judgment (krinai orthôs) were not the most important thing, as it is in mousike (EN X.9.1118a12–19, Irwin translation, slightly amended).

We know that Isocrates is Aristotle’s target in this passage because he cites Isocrates’ proposal about laws in Antidosis 79–83 as an instance of

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what we can expect from someone who only believes himself to possess political insight. Isocrates’ proposal is that it would be easy to collect Greek laws, find out which ones are most highly regarded, and put them into effect in every polis. One theme of Aristotle’s accusation seems to be that Isocrates substitutes mere reputation for experienced judgment as a criterion for discerning which constitutions are best (EN X.9.1181b20–22). (The argument is rather like those raised by academics against rankings of top graduate schools based on surveys sent around to professors asking them what they think to be the best programs. Needless to say, the majority of those who are sensitive to this methodological flaw come from universities whose programs don’t make the list.) Behind this accusation, however, lurks Aristotle’s recognition that for the Isocrates of the Antidosis, phronēsis is doxa, opinion, rather than a genuinely cognitive moral discrimination. It is this substitution of mere doxa for habit-based insight into moral particulars that underlies Aristotle’s indictment of Isocrates’ for his one-size-fits-all approach to recommending laws to the Greeks, with its assumption that one constitution will be best for all states.

From this Aristotle infers that Isocrates cannot possibly possess political science. Aristotle says that different laws will improve different states at different times, just as artful doctors will recommend differently for different patients at different times (EN X.9.1181b3–9). Fine discrimination under particular circumstances is required if a good legislator is to turn deviant states into correct ones, which is the overriding aim of the possessor of politikē. But fine discrimination depends on the close, mutually supportive relationship between phronēsis and political science. Phronēsis provides the political scientist with the perception of moral facts on which his science is based; political science gives to the legislator and governor a range of lawlike, though not exceptionless, relationships on the basis of which good, value-laden choices must be made. This is one of the main points of Aristotle’s Politics. Perhaps Aristotle began the laborious job of assembling his famous collection of one hundred and eighty-five constitutions, of which only the Constitution of the Athenians is extant, in order to show that he could do a better, more discriminating—in short, more practically intelligent—job on constitution-making than Isocrates because he, Aristotle, actually possesses politikē, while Isocrates does not.

Assuming that Aristotle does have Isocrates in mind in EN X.9.1181a12–18 as someone who conflates rhetoric and politics, we may infer that Aristotle’s further claim to the effect that anyone who conflates rhetoric and politics cannot be said to possess or to teach politikē may find its ultimate warrant in Isocrates’ confusions of cleverness, ambition, and desire for recognition with phronēsis, which Aristotle attacks in EN VI. For to the extent that Aristotle is successful in associating political science with phronēsis, and in turn dissociating phronēsis from opinion, conjecture, cleverness, and pleonexia, we may find in Isocrates’ failure to make the latter set of discriminations grounds for the following conclusion: Isocrates, in Aristotle’s view, does not possess the concepts and values that underlie phronēsis and so cannot possess politikē, depending as it does on the same values. These confusions all fail to keep the inherently instrumental goods of an art sufficiently subordinate to the intrinsic goods whose pursuit defines the fundamental principle of Aristotelian political science.

Isocrates Vindicatus

It may seem to the reader that I have explicated Aristotle’s critique of Isocrates with a zest that might suggest that I commend it. It is true that I am greatly disposed to favor Aristotle’s view that praxis consists in the habit of realizing intrinsically noble values and that the various technai, having no such intrinsic orientation to the good, must be subordinated to, and oriented toward, good political and moral praxis. Nonetheless, I am not as certain as Aristotle that the distinction between intrinsically and instrumentally good actions is altogether wanting in Isocrates.

My reconstruction of the premises of Aristotle’s argument allows us to see that Aristotle’s argument about the praxis-teknai relation is dominated by his views about the theoria-praxis relation. Aristotle, as we have seen, requires the good politician to recognize that the bios theoretikos is inherently superior to the bios praktikos, since in the absence of this recognition the distinction between inherently good action and merely instrumentally good action will collapse. Two points can be made against this claim. The first is that this may not be true; it may be possible to distinguish between the inherently and instrumentally valuable, and to subordinate the technical to the practical, without privileging theoria. In distinguishing himself from the logographers and sophists, Isocrates may in fact be making this exact distinction. A second objection bears on the conditions under which Aristotle’s thought can be appropriated by moderns. If Aristotle is right that the bios theoretikos provides a source of values on which good practice is in some sense dependent, those who are eager to leave Aristotle’s ontotheological
foundationalism behind and at the same time to retain and recommend his moral theory can easily run into some very heavy weather.

This vulnerability is particularly salient for us today, when even the most ardent advocates of Aristotle's virtue theory, such as Alasdair MacIntyre, find it difficult to rest their case on a return to Aristotelian metaphysical foundationalism and to its essentialism about "natures," human and otherwise. MacIntyre would like to believe that one can retain most of Aristotle's virtue theory while dispensing with his metaphysical and scientific backing for these views (MacIntyre 1981).11 My argument, using Isocrates as its mouthpiece, poses a challenge to this hope by suggesting that Aristotle's conception of good action (eupraxia) is hostage to theoria, whereas Isocrates' is not.12

Aristotle's main idea, as I have shown, is that unless the leisure life of the god of the philosophers is set up as a model of intrinsically good human action, and in consequence good action (eupraxia) is paradigmatically viewed as action devoid of any external conditions and external consequences (Pol. VII.1.1323b23–25; I.3.1325b28–30), interventions in the sphere of human affairs (ta anthropina) must necessarily be compromised by a stress on the external aims to which we direct merely instrumentally good, and often burdensome, actions. This utilitarian stress on means to external ends will, Aristotle is certain, come at the expense of the intrinsic moral worth of actions as expressions of good character. Under such conditions, he goes on to claim, practical rationality will necessarily be conflated with technical rationality, which is inherently instrumentalist. In this connection, Aristotle asserts that the art of rhetoric will be confounded with the morally fine decision-making that is required of the good political agent. On these grounds he proceeds to indict Isocrates as having an inadequately conflated view of both political science and of rhetoric.

One way of undermining Aristotle's argument will certainly not do. This is to say that he regards virtuous action, undergirded by moral habits, purely as means to a life of philosophical contemplation (Kraut 1989; Dunne 1993).13 Such an instrumentalist conception of the value of practical reason is inconsistent with Aristotle's claim that the life of an engaged political agent and householder "realizes much that is noble" in its own right. It is true that Aristotle, unlike Plato, recognizes that phronēsis, rather than theoretical reason itself, must arrange practical matters if theoretical sophia is to be maximized. But nothing follows from this fact that compromises the moral worth of the practical activity of legislating and governing with this end in view.

A more accurate way of stating the relation between philosophical reflection and practical reason is to say that Aristotle lays it down as a fundamental theorem of political science itself that the inherently good values proper to the politically engaged life of practical reason (bios politikos) can be realized only if the life of contemplation is held up by the politically engaged person himself as inherently superior to his own life of politically engaged rationality. The "second best" way of life is not on this account devalued. On the contrary, it is only when the bios theorētikos, which is exemplified by the life of god, is treated as inherently superior to the life of political and householding engagement that the practitioner of these skills will be able confidently to discriminate between the intrinsically good and the instrumentally good on any given occasion. And so he will realize the noble in action, without compelling him to maximize theoria at the expense of praxis in his own life, or in the life of the state in which he is a politikos (Depew 1991).

It is this rather powerful Aristotelian claim that Isocrates must rebut, and not a weaker, Platonic substitute for it. Naturally, he often chooses the easy way out, playing off the weaknesses of the Academy. If he had been forced to confront Aristotle's more powerful argument, however, Isocrates would not necessarily be devoid of some relevant means of persuasion. He might have noted, for example, that Aristotle uses a bit of conceptual legere in advance his argument. He claims that the leisure life of god, and of his philosophical imitators, which in normal usage (and the usage of Hellenistic philosophers, such as the Epicureans) is viewed as inactive in comparison to the busy life of finite beings like us, is actually more active than any sort of human life (Pol. VII.3.1325b13–26).

Aristotle probably thinks this because he stipulatively defines good action (eupraxia) with his own metaphysical notion of actualization (energeia). God is pure energēia. Hence he is purely active (praktikos).14 This is an equivocation, however, which arises from the philosophical habit of asking conceptual definitions to substitute for ideas whose meaning is already fixed by their ordinary uses. We may unmask this fallacy by recognizing that Aristotle's model of god's life, rather than being the model of fine action, is actually an idealization of the "fine and good life" of the Greek nobleman (kalōkagathos). It achieves its rhetorical purchase with its audience...
only because values that have already been ascribed to the ideal of kalókagathia are transferred to a theoretical god, who thereupon appears as an object of appreciation just because he comes to resemble a culturally validated icon.

From this angle, it seems that the ascription of nobility to god's leisured life is actually parasitic on the value already placed by the audience on the life of a kalókagathos gentleman. There is no reason to think that a noble Greek who happens to know nothing of the god of the philosophers cannot make the crucial distinction between intrinsic and instrumental goods. An actual, living kalókagathos gentleman must perform many instrumentally good actions in the very act of maintaining his nobility. He must be clever, for example, in the very act of exhibiting phronēsis; and he must exhibit a certain concern for his reputation (doxa) without either being or appearing vulgar. Isocrates realizes this. By erecting a fully leisured god as the model of intrinsically good action, on the other hand, Aristotle runs the risk of de-valuing, rather than upholding, these admirably strenuous components of the kalókagathos life by demoting them to the status of external trappings or psychological traps.

He doubtless does so in order to ground the strong cognitive status he demands of practical insight (nous praktikos) in a restorative intuition of the bios theorētikos, thereby dissociating phronēsis from opinion and guesswork. The actual result may be to undermine the settled meaning of the term doxa within the performative sphere of Greek culture, where it refers to one's reputation and tacitly to the moral seriousness required to defend and preserve it. Aristotle's theoretical bias can thus devalue the ways in which concern for one's reputation for virtue is a stimulus to the acquisition and display of genuine virtue. Isocrates does not run this risk. For as T. Poulacos argues in this volume, even though he is affected by the Platonic reduction of doxa to mere opinion, he still preserves much of the traditional meaning of doxa.

There are points where Isocrates explicitly recognizes this weakness in the Academic-Peripatetic position. In Antidosis, he asserts that burning ambition, concern with one's reputation, and even a certain eagerness to seize the main chance (pleonexia), far from detracting from the ideal of noble action, will actually stimulate those who would "act and speak well" to conform their behavior to the ancient norms of noble high-mindedness (kalókagathia) rooted in the epic tradition. Isocrates writes:

The man who wishes to persuade people will not neglect virtue, but will above all bend his mind (nous) to how he can attain the good repute (endo-kineiōn) of his fellow citizens. Who does not know that words seem more true when spoken by men of good repute? . . . To the extent that someone's desire to persuade his hearers is strong, then, just to that extent will he zealously strive to be kalókagathos and to enjoy the good repute of his fellow citizens . . . As to the question of seeking advantage (pleonexia), it is the most difficult of those about which I have spoken . . . None are at a greater disadvantage in life, however, than men [who do evil things to gain advantage] . . . On the contrary, those who are most pious and most conscientious in their services [to the gods who will receive] the best from their fellow human beings both in their households and in the public sphere, and will be thought to be the best among them (Antidosis 278–282).

Presumably, Aristotle would not have been much moved by such protestations. For he would undoubtedly have seen in Isocrates' identification of acting well with speaking well, in this passage and in many other places, a misguided attempt to infer what is required for good action (eu-praxia) from what is required for good public speaking (eu-praxein). By subordinating technē to praxis, and more specifically rhētorikē to politiκē, Aristotle contests this conflation. Nonetheless, the theocentric presuppositions of his own subordination of rhetoric to politiκē are counterproductive enough to encourage those who would speak on Isocrates' behalf to look for means by which he might have held his ground.

One way of disrupting Aristotle's train of thought might be the following. Aristotle's conception of political science requires praxis to constrain technē in the same way that theōria is to constrain praxis. To do this, however, Aristotle must not only separate the moral worth of an action from its external conditions and consequences, but the artful quality of rhetoric from its actual conditions of employment. The artfulness of rhetoric is said to reside in argument (logos), and in particular in the way in which appeals to reason manifest the ethos of a virtuous and reasonable speaker who addresses, indeed hails into existence, a would-be virtuous and reasonable audience (Garver 1992). Aspects of rhetorical practice that do not fall within this charmed circle are treated as inessential to its rational, artistic core. Something like this also goes on in Aristotelian poetics. Aristotle prizes the rational skill that is exercised and further developed when a reader works
through the motivational logic of the plot of a tragic script. But in poetics, no less than in rhetoric, what had constituted the performative force of a ritualized social practice is reduced to an external husk (Haskins 2001). Just why Aristotle treats poetic and rhetoric this way is murky. He certainly intends to tell the young rulers who would study “philosophy of human affairs” under his tutelage that they are responsible for “what arts are practiced their states” (EN I.2.1094a35–b2). In contrast to Plato’s repressive attitude toward his own cultural inheritance, he also appears to tell them that they may accept a traditional canon of art works, as well as the highly developed practice of public speaking that has been spontaneously produced by their culture. Still, Aristotle’s attempts to rationally reconstruct rhetoric and poetics within the framework of a theocentrically grounded philosophy of human affairs, and to devise a recondite set of methods for interpreting and judging these productions, expresses, at best, a slightly contemptuous toleration of social practices which, although they are deemed to have a rational core, are in the end judged incapable of doing either much good or much harm in their native setting. There is more Platonism in this than meets the eye. More important in the present context is the fact that it is difficult to see Aristotle advocating in his Rhetoric or the Poetics, as he is often reputed to have been doing (Kennedy 1991; Farrell 1993; Garver 1994), anything that we would recognize as an “art of civic discourse,” especially one that does full justice to the precipitous autonomy that, as Nietzsche recognized, has fallen to our lot now that we have been cut off from the theological and metaphysical bases of our founding culture.

Eighteenth-century virtue theorists are instructive on this topic. Virtue was as important to figures as different as Lord Shaftsbury, Adam Smith, and Edmund Burke as it was to premoderns; utilitarian calculi and formalist rule-based moral technologies had not yet been devised. But eighteenth-century virtue theorists, including rhetorical theorists and practitioners, were all terrified by the potential of both religious and philosophical dogmatism to stir up and justify violence, and so asked the emerging discourse that we call aesthetics to do the warranting work for virtue theory. Some contemporary advocates of aesthetic education as a route to a virtue-based moral and political education, such as Martha Nussbaum and, in a different way, Hans-Georg Gadamer, have trod this path once again, thereby issuing challenges to proceduralist, rule-based versions of ethics and political liberalism that are often more persuasive than those of other praxis-theorists and communitarians (Nussbaum 1986; Gadamer 1977). Nonetheless, writ-

ers like Nussbaum and Gadamer have made what seems to me a mistake in trying to give us an aestheticized Aristotle as a model for contemporary practice. If Greek exemplars are to be sought, a more plausible approach would be to take Isocrates’ conception of the relationship between philoso-
phos and ta anthropologi as a starting point for envisioning the connection between virtue-based morality, political wisdom, and humanistic learning today.

As various contributors to this volume have persuasively argued, Isocrates is much more plausibly construed as an aestheticist moralist than Aristotle. Although he faced the same questions that preoccupied Aristotle, he recognized in the behavior of his student Kalokagathos, and in the poe-

tico-rhetorical tradition that transmitted this ideal, an aesthetic dimension that had normative force and a performative dimension that he believed could be perpetuated in a literate world. It is to Isocrates that contemporary virtue theorists might direct more of their attention. By doing so, we might discover that the scene of fourth-century Athenian discourse was not nearly as indifferent to our own concerns as might be suggested by the inordinate amount of attention that scholars and cultural critics have paid to the Academic and Peripatetic legacy.10

Notes
1. I do not adopt the view which seems to have sprung from a remark of Cicero’s at De Omi-

tere 3.15.141) that Aristotle confronted Isocrates by producing a rival handbook for rhetoricians. Like Eugene Garver (this volume), I do not think of Aristotle’s rhetoric as a handbook at all. It is a “philosophy of rhetoric,” and, as such, part of Aristotle’s project in the human sciences. But I do not infer from this that Aristotle does not wish to confute Isocrates. I will be producing evidence that the confrontation occurs along a much broader front than the pedagogy of rhetoric.

2. All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

3. I stress this anti-anthropocentric aspect of Aristotle in order to qualify views such as those of Sedley (1991), who argues that Aristotle’s extension of teleological reasoning to the kos-

mos as a whole commits him to anthropocentrism. From his own point of view, and in a world where there were many genuine anthropocentrists, Aristotle was at least attempting to be anything but.

4. This point has been made recently by Carlo Natali (2001: 25), although only in passing and without developing it.

5. Kenny (1978) argues that the middle books of EN are the missing books of EE. I disagree. I take EN in general, including EN VI, to be a rewrite of the whole of EE, registering the effect on the human sciences of a new ontological framework that is also found in De
6. It is true that in Eudemian Ethics, phronêsis is represented as a moral virtue among other moral virtues, and indeed as a mean between busyness (panourgia) and innocent simplicity (eurtheia) (EE III.12 1219a12), and not as an intellectual virtue, as in NE VI, Aristotle seems to have changed his mind about that. My point here is a different one. It is that in EN, phronêsis is represented as governing human action just as exclusively as it is in EN VI. Just why it is not yet represented as an intellectual virtue, as it is in EN VI, is a good question, but not one I attempt to answer here.

7. It is possible, if only barely, that the reverse of this claim is true—that Isocrates adopted Aristotle’s usage of phronêsis, and then universalized it. This is not either chronologically or textually plausible. Isocrates’ Antidosis was written, by his own testimony, in 354–353. Thus Aristotle would have known this text long before his departure from Athens in 348, and before the production of any of the works that served as texts in his Lyceum, which was founded only after his return to Athens in 335. It is unlikely, then, that even an early version of any Ethics existed before his departure from Athens. Textual arguments against this possibility are even more convincing. There are no allusions in Isocrates’ texts to Aristotle, although there are plenty of them to Plato’s Academy. But there are many allusions in Aristotle to Isocrates. For these reasons, I set aside the possibility of an Aristotelian influence on the formation of Isocrates’ conception of phronêsis.

8. This does not mean that there is for Aristotle no science (epistêmê) of politics. Although the point is still in dispute, contemporary commentators are coming around to the view that Aristotle does concern himself with sciences whose generalizations are secure enough to sustain the typical movement from epagôgê to essential definition to demonstrative apodeixis, but that hold in particular cases only “for the most part.” Such a science is set forth in Aristotle’s Ethics and Politics. See especially Amangnostopoulos 1994 and Reeve 1995. My own inclination is to think that an appreciation of “moral facts” acquired in the same way that the man of action acquires them is a necessary, but perhaps insufficient, condition for understanding the principles of political science.

9. I proceed here from the difficult question of precisely how to discriminate phronêsis from politikê. It is clear that whatever Aristotle means by saying they have a different “being,” he is confident that they are, or rely on, the same characterological state (EN VI.8. 1141b23–24).

10. Politics ordains which of the arts should be studied in a state, and which each class of citizens should learn, and up to what point they should learn them; for even the most honored capacities (dunameis), such as generalship, household management, and rhetoric, are subordinate to it” (EN I.2.1094a28–b3).

11. This view is closely related to attempts to retain Hegel’s theory of practical reason or Objective Spirit even while decapitating his system of its basis in Absolute Spirit. (Taylor 1975 is a good instance of the genre.) Contemporary appeals to Aristotle as a model for contemporary practical reasoning are often undertaken by people who, like Taylor, Gadamer, and MacIntyre, are quite aware that Hegel himself was explicitly trying to rewrite Aristotle’s theoría praxis-teknê doctrine for modernity. Recently, MacIntyre has modified his views about Aristotle’s biology.

12. Another, no less desperate, approach is to think of modern biology, in the form especially of sociobiology, as underwriting the same claims about human nature that Aristotle makes, and then to use this as a basis for contemporary normative political prescription. The most well developed and well argued version is Arnhart 1995. For my part, I have nothing against getting an “ought” from an “is.” I have considerable doubts about sociobiology, about its consistency with Aristotle’s approach, and about whether the resultant politics can ever get clear of its ideological contamination with conservative causes. No matter how much advocates of this position would like, political thought, as Aristotle recognized, does not take place in a vacuum.

13. Dunne’s (1991) instrumentalist position is not as clear cut as Kraut’s. He affirms, as I do, that for Aristotle practical reason functions autonomously. He also affirms, as I do, that “Aristotle places a higher value on the exercise of the theoretic faculty than on the exercise of phronêsis” (241). Yet he infers from these premises, invalidly and falsely in my opinion, that “Aristotle ... instrumentalizes phronêsis in the service of theoretic reason” (241). Dunne’s treatment of the phronêsis-teknê distinction presents more difficulties. It is based on taking ordinary crafts as paradigms of teknê (240). Dunne then sees complex crafts such as rhetoric and medicine as more like context-dependent phronêsis. He infers from this that Aristotle’s concept of phronêsis itself is “not very deeply embedded in the core” of Aristotle’s architectonic, and indeed is somewhat confused in its identity conditions. But Aristotle does not take ordinary crafts as paradigms of teknê; simply as analogues and examples. In fact, he takes medicine as a fully developed, hence paradigmatic, example of an art, and concentrates on its cognitive, more than its “productive,” aspects. Aristotle’s treatment of rhetoric should be placed in this epistemological context as well. Dunne also takes phronêsis and epistêmê to be mutually exclusive, which they probably are not.

14. For a diagnosis of this fallacy, see Depew 1991.

15. I think it is not an accident that the threat of “intellectualism,” which privileges the theoretical over the practical life by making theory its instrument, is approached most problematically and notoriously at the end of EN. I think this impression is a side consequence of Aristotle’s newly found intellectualist conception of phronêsis in EN, and of his insistence that a practically wise person, such as Pericles, must recognize that the theoretical life is intrinsically higher than the political life.

16. I wish to thank audiences at the University of Iowa and Northwestern University for valuable criticisms of earlier drafts of this paper. I appreciate detailed suggestions and comments from Dilip Gaonkar, Eugene Garver, Michael Left, and Carol Poster.