Truth in Practical Reason: Practical and Assertoric Truth in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics**

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The concept of truth, though crucial in many Aristotelian texts, does not serve a single distinct purpose throughout the corpus. In some epistemically oriented passages, 'truth' is called upon to separate science from dialectic (*APr.* 65a36–37) and knowledge from opinion (*APo.* 89a1–10), while in more general contexts Aristotle refers to his predecessors in theoretical philosophy as "those who philosophized about the truth" (*Metaph.* I, 983b2–3). The predicate 'true' or the verbs ἀληθεύειν and ψεύδεσθαι follow the same pattern: they normally refer to propositional sentences (*Int.* 4, Met. IV, 1011b26–27), but in various other instances they are attributed to things, capacities and virtues, some of them not of linguistic nature at all.[1] Thus, it is no surprise that the most recent scholarship is far from reaching a consensus on the central meaning or function of truth in Aristotle's

    [1] See e.g. Arist. *Metaph.* 1024b17–26, 1139b15–16.

philosophy. To complicate matters even further, in one of the most enigmatic passages in his Ethics, Aristotle speaks of 'practical truth', a term that has justifiably generated much controversy especially after a revival of interest in his moral philosophy in recent decades. In the following study we will try to capitalize on various approaches to the notion of 'practical truth', in order to delineate a comprehensive idea of truth that connects both with practical and theoretical reason.

1. Truth varieties

For a philosopher with such sensitive 'antennas' for homonymy and ambiguity, Aristotle seems rather uninterested in clarifying a central or 'focal' meaning for truth. In his influential study on the subject, Paolo Crivelli (2004: 45) admits that Aristotle never explicitly addressed the problem of the multiple 'bearers' of truth and falsehood in his philosophy, to which we may add that there is not much talk about different 'kinds' of truth either – although one could say that there are some distinct manifestations thereof.

Some examples might be instructive here. In *Nicomachean Ethics* VI Aristotle says:

[T1] ἔστω δὴ οἷς ἀληθεύει ἡ ψυχὴ τῷ καταφάναι ἢ ἀποφάναι, πέντε τὸν ἀριθμόν· ταῦτα δ' ἐστὶ τέχνη ἐπιστήμη φρόνησις σοφία νοῦς.

Let the states, by which the soul has truth in positive or negative predications, be five in number: *techne, episteme, phronesis, sophia* and *nous*. (Arist. *EN* 1139b15–17)

Here the predicate 'has truth' (ἀληθεύει) is coupled with positive and negative predications, but the most important feature of the passage is that, whereas the first clause still adheres to a linguistically oriented definition of truth (καταφάναι and ἀποφάναι), the second clause includes states (ἕξεις), i.e. intellectual virtues that have little to do with linguistic properties as such. One of them, *nous* (understanding), is elsewhere emphatically described as an immediate perception of singular forms of which there is no combined *logos* (*EN* 1142a27). Moreover, in *De Anima* (*de An.* 427b11–12) the αἴσθησις τῶν ἰδίων, i.e. sensory perception of data exclusive to each of the senses, which does not rely on *logos*, is described as 'always or mostly true', since in this case perception perceives exactly that for which it is designed. These faculties appear to be infallible and true, *because* they do not need or allow for the connection or composition of terms that necessarily occurs in propositions. And at the same time, it seems to be this very property of composition that allows propositional speech to partake in truth and falsehood, as opposed to a single meaning expressed by a single word. Furthermore, not all combinations of meaningful words entail truth or falsehood. Aristotle puts it this way:

[**T2**] ἔστι δὲ λόγος ἅπας μὲν σημαντικός, οὐχ ὡς ὄργανον δέ, ἀλλ᾽ ὥσπερ εἴρηται κατὰ συνθήκην· ἀποφαντικὸς δὲ οὐ πᾶς, ἀλλ᾽ ἐν ᾧ τὸ ἀληθεύειν ἢ ψεύδεσθαι ὑπάρχει· οὐκ ἐν ἅπασι δὲ ὑπάρχει, οἷον ἡ εὐχὴ λόγος μέν, ἀλλ᾽ οὔτ᾽ ἀληθὴς οὔτε ψευδής.

Every *logos* has meaning, not as a tool, but, as we have said, by convention. Yet not every *logos* is a proposition; only those in which there is truth or falsity. There is not truth and falsity in all: a prayer is a *logos* but is neither true nor false. (*Int.* 16b33–17a4)

Notably, in this example the concept of truth is not presented as the product or result of propositional structure. What happens is the exact opposite. Truth is the *definiens* of assertoric *logos*. In *Metaphysics*, however, it seems to be the other way around: Aristotle defines truth as saying what is and falsehood as saying what is not (*Metaph.* 1011b25–28). As it is always the case when truth is concerned, the context is important. While Aristotle's intention in *Int.* is to *define* assertoric *logos* setting it apart from other kinds of *logos*, in *Metaphysics* IV his aim is to defend the principle of non-contradiction, which can only be done within the confines of logic and predicative speech. With regard to the exact relationship and definitional priority between assertoric *logos* and truth, the evidence in both texts seems inconclusive. This is not to say that assertions or combinations of meanings in thought do not enjoy a prominent place when truth comes into play. To name one example, Aristotle associates truth with *dianoia* in *Metaphysics* IV.4 (*Metaph.* 1027b27), where dianoia is clearly meant as discursive thought that combines or divides things, which is a prerequisite for the capacity to form beliefs and express them in *logos*. Correct combinations of things and their predicates is a recurring theme in other texts as well.[2] With these examples in mind, most of the apparent inconsistencies in the terms *aletheia* or *aletheuein* throughout the corpus could be resolved by clarifying the relationship between truth-bearing objects (to which Aristotle ascribes priority) on the one side and true or false propositions and beliefs in *dianoia* or *logos* on the other. Such efforts have already been made by scholars in the last two decades, with some significant results.[3] There still remains an outlier, though: Aristotle's notion of *practical truth* resists both the aforementioned pattern of object-related explanation and the most common understanding of truth throughout the history of philosophy.

Let us now cite the passage most central to our inquiry, a passage that at the same time marks the one and only occurrence of the term 'practical truth' in Aristotle's work:

[**T3**] ἔστι δ᾽ ὅπερ ἐν διανοίᾳ κατάφασις καὶ ἀπόφασις, τοῦτ᾽ ἐν ὀρέξει δίωξις καὶ φυγή· ὥστ᾽ ἐπειδὴ ἡ ἠθικὴ ἀρετὴ ἕξις προαιρετική, ἡ δὲ προαίρεσις ὄρεξις βουλευτική, δεῖ διὰ ταῦτα μὲν τόν τε λόγον ἀληθῆ εἶναι καὶ τὴν ὄρεξιν ὀρθήν, εἴπερ ἡ προαίρεσις σπουδαία, καὶ τὰ αὐτὰ τὸν

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[2] See especially *Met.* V.7 and *Met.* IX.10.

[3] Of central importance here Crivelli (2004); his approach is followed by Reeve (2012) and is obviously the background for Rangos (2009).

μὲν φάναι τὴν δὲ διώκειν. αὕτη μὲν οὖν ἡ διάνοια καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια πρακτική· τῆς δὲ θεωρητικῆς διανοίας καὶ μὴ πρακτικῆς μηδὲ ποιητικῆς τὸ εὖ καὶ κακῶς τἀληθές ἐστι καὶ ψεῦδος (τοῦτο γάρ ἐστι παντὸς διανοητικοῦ ἔργον)· τοῦ δὲ πρακτικοῦ καὶ διανοητικοῦ ἀλήθεια ὁμολόγως ἔχουσα τῇ ὀρέξει τῇ ὀρθῇ.

> What assertion and denial are in the case of thought – that, in the case of desire, is precisely what pursuit and avoidance are. So, since virtue of character is a deliberately choosing state and deliberate choice is deliberative desire, it follows, because of this, that both the *logos* must be true and the desire must be correct, if indeed the deliberate choice is to be an excellent one, and the very things the one says, the other must pursue. So this is the practical intellect and truth. The good or bad in theoretical intellect – when neither practical nor productive – is the true and the false [respectively], since this is the case in all intellectual work. As for the practical and intellectual good, though, [it is the] truth corresponding to the correct desire. (*EN* 1139a21–31)

The information provided by Aristotle in this passage is not enough to build a seamless connection between practical truth and the common versions of the concept summarized above. More importantly, the central role of desire and the way Aristotle unhesitatingly combines it with truth demand certain interpretative steps to reconcile it with other passages about truth *simpliciter*, and especially with the most prominent, assertoric type.

Given the complicated nature of the issue, it is no surprise that practical truth is singled out – and ultimately left out – by Crivelli (2004: 40) as an isolated case within the spectrum of Aristotle's truth-related arguments. His deliberate omission has been recently challenged by Olfert (2014 and 2017), on the grounds of an elaborate theory about practical truth's importance and its conformity to the standard theory of truth in Aristotle (more on this later, section 2). Be that as it may – and regardless of our effort for a unified theory – there are several reasons why we should focus on practical truth: as an essential part of practical reason, practical truth (and falsehood) is connected to decision making, which in turn is of paramount importance for moral and political matters. Moreover, it seems to have a privileged, if not exclusive relationship with particular cases, where things "can be otherwise" and demand deliberation. And it is also the only kind of truth directed to particulars with respect to the predicate *agathon* (good), which, along with *dikaion* (just) and *sympheron* (contributive to goals), marks a property exclusively accessible to humans through their capacity of reason (*Pol.* 1253a9–10), setting their practical lives apart from other animals. For all these reasons, it is important to address both practical truth as such and in its connection with truth in general.

2. Focusing on practical truth

To give a sense of the controversy around this notion: the views of scholars range between the thesis that "there is no such thing as practical truth" (Kenny 2011: 2) to a most recent praise of Aristotle's innovative notion of practical truth as the cornerstone

upon which the distinctness of practical reason relies (Olfert 2017). Other scholars who have stressed the significance of practical truth include Broadie, who already in her commentary (Broadie 2002: 362) notes that without a plausible notion of practical truth Aristotle "should either abandon the principle that truth is the proper work of rational thought or the doctrine that practical wisdom is an excellence of reason". For Richardson Lear (2004), this notion is central to her project of reconciling the (first-rate) happiness assigned to the theoretical way of life in *EN* X with the (second-rate) happiness assigned to the practical way of life in accord with the virtues of character and practical wisdom in the rest of the *EN*. In her conception, the bridge that unites both is that practical activity is 'for the sake of *theoria*', as an approximation of the latter. In other words, practical activity resembles theoretical activity by being a mode of grasping truth.

What lies at the heart of the controversy is a question both about the distinctiveness of practical reason itself and about the unity of practical and theoretical reason in Aristotle's thought. From this point of view, it would be worthwhile to focus on Olfert's (2014/2017) account, not only because her recent book *Aristotle on Practical Truth* is the most extensive account on the topic but also because it takes [T3] as a basis to argue for specific conditions (Olfert 2017: 86–92) that, according to her, every account of practical truth should satisfy.[4] Out of these conditions – or *desiderata* in her own terminology – the most relevant to our inquiry is the one that directly addresses the integration of practical truth into the standard interpretation of the term, that is, propositional truth.[5] Olfert's effort, if successful, would be a first step towards a unified concept of truth, as it would show that there is indeed a way to integrate even the most distant versions of truth into a single, 'standard' model – assuming that the standard for Aristotle is indeed "assertoric thoughts and statements standing in a truth-evaluable correspondence relation to the world" (Olfert 2017: 119).

Olfert's interpretation of Aristotle's theory of truth could be summarized as a rigorous focus on the specific features of a particular situation that come into question in practical syllogism. Her reconstruction of practical truth relies mainly on two distinct points:

> First, practical truth is the truth about what is good for someone without qualification, that is, what is good and an end for her in the highest and strictest sense. Second, practical truth

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[4] In a nutshell the *desiderata* are the following: (1) Priority: we should not derive the distinctness of practical truth from the distinctness of practical reason, but the other way around. (2) Function-specifying: the notion of practical truth must contribute to establishing practical reason as a distinct form of reason (namely, how its concern with practical truth is different from other kinds of reasoning). (3) Truth: the notion of 'truth' in 'practical truth' must be understood as 'truth' of the same general kind presented in Aristotle's theoretical works. (4) Practicality: we should explain how this truth is practical. (5) Unity: we should integrate the rationality and the practicality of practical reason into a single function responsible for 'action and truth'.

[5] Olfert calls it 'the Truth Desideratum' (Olfert 2017: 88).

is the truth about what is unqualifiedly good relative to a particular person in a particular situation (Olfert 2017: 105).

The first seems to refer to ἁπλῶς ἀγαθόν (happiness) as a concrete plan a person chooses for her life. The second seems to denote the particular instantiation of this plan in particular circumstances. A strength of this twofold account is that it allows for general truths about human happiness to be context-sensitive and in a sense personalized (Olfert 2017: 114–116), emphasising the element of specification or application as integral in the function of practical thought.[6] It seems that, in Olfert's terms, this specification is precisely what does the heavy lifting of practical truth's practicality. Practical truths are normatively connected with our specific desires and with particulars that can change from situation to situation, whereas, by contrast, theoretical truths are normatively disconnected from our specific desires. Universal (καθόλου) claims about human happiness cannot be applied directly to specific desires nor be action guiding, except (as Olfert rightly notes), via some specification of human happiness. It seems, then, that practical truth ultimately consists in a *true specification*. In other words, a "mediation by a translation of some kind – a translation from theory to concrete particulars, provided by practical reason" (Olfert 2017: 117).

This interpretation is largely supported by Aristotle's account of practical syllogism, but the problem is that in Olfert's view, if practical truth deserves its name, it should be understood in terms of the standard version of the concept of truth, which means that it has to fall under some version of correspondence between an assertion and reality. Thus, practical truth finds its expression in an actual proposition or thought of the type "the particular X is good", which must be both true for a particular agent and practical in that it directly motivates her rational desire. Now, given the process of specification of this particular good and Aristotle's typical portrayal of such process, an assertion of this type should find its way in the actual practical syllogism itself. For it would be rather peculiar if Aristotle, while talking about practical reason, relied on the truth of an assertion that does not ever appear in a practical syllogism at all. Assuming now that practical truth is a predicative truth appearing in or as a result of a practical syllogism, let us go through what this might entail. Consider the following formalization of a practical syllogism, which summarizes most of Aristotle's own examples:

[example A][7]
(i) Happiness is X for a person of the type T
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[6] This is an important insight and (to be fair) it is reminiscent of Gadamer's emphasis on the element of specification or application as inseparable from practical thought properly conceived. See, e.g., Gadamer (2004: 316) for the significance of application/particularization in practical thought.

[7] Modelled after Arist. *MA* 701a7 ff.

(1) G (universal) is good (where G follows from the definition of happiness as X)
(2) This particular and possible (for me) thing to do[8] is G (a member of the G-class)
(3) → doing M

In this example it is worth noting that the premise (i) is implicit in every practical syllogism made by a prudent agent.[9] The qualification 'for a person of the type T' is necessary, since Aristotle does not believe that every person capable of action can achieve the highest order of *eudaimonia* in every political environment. Nonetheless every person must be able to define the good for their whole lives when they reach maturity.[10] Between (i) and (1) in the example above, many intermediate steps may be taken before the appearance of the universal G. It is crucial, though, that the very last step before the conclusion be the recognition of some possibility of concretely realizing G in the specific situation the agent finds herself in. Furthermore, in order for our abstract model of the syllogism to account for most of Aristotle's examples, we should think of G in the broadest terms, as potentially representing not only a class of good things, but also a class of good situations: G could thus stand for "man has a house", which in the second premise would appear within a realization of the fact that I am also a man and I can also recognize what it means for me to have a particular house. Provided this reconstruction is correct, the successful course of the practical syllogism depends on the middle term G that is both known, as a universal, to be contributory to happiness and recognized, as a particular, in the particular circumstances of the agent making that syllogism. Aristotle is clear that not every step of this reasoning needs to be consciously uttered in the mind of an agent. Even implicit, though, it still exists as a *logos* that contributes to the action.[11] What Aristotle is also unambiguous about is the immediacy in the practical enactment of the conclusion implied by the practical syllogism:

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[8] In *De Motu Animalium* Aristotle refers to the components of a practical syllogism as ἀγαθόν and δυνατόν (*MA* 701a23–24). It seems that he distributes those two qualities to the major and minor premises respectively: αἱ δὲ προτάσεις αἱ ποιητικαὶ διὰ δύο εἰδῶν γίνονται, διά τε τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ καὶ διὰ τοῦ δυνατοῦ. It could also be that both refer to the second premise. The only option that seems rather far-fetched is that the δυνατόν just refers to the first and major premise, since what makes the terms of the major premise (the καθόλου part) actually possible is the minor premise. And that could also be what Aristotle means to say here.

[9] This particular premise represents the 'grand end', or the ultimate goal of one's life. For a differentiated view of this notion see Reeve (2012: 186–187). In the case of a prudent agent we can speak of a virtuous life or a life in accordance with *theoria*, although it should be noted that Aristotle doesn't think that every person is capable of the latter. For the presence of a universal, highest good as part of practical syllogism, see also Nielsen (2015: 32–33).

[10] See Arist. *EE* 1214b5–9 and *NE* 1140a26–28: πρὸς τὸ εὖ ζῆν ὅλως. Aristotle emphasizes at the beginning of *NE* the importance of experience and maturity. In *Pol.* 1335b32–35 and *Rh.* 1390b9–11 it is indicated that the age of intellectual maturity is around 50; see also Reeve (2012: 252).

[11] Arist. *MA* 701a25–30. See Reeve (2012: 176).

[**T4**] ἣ μὲν γὰρ καθόλου δόξα, ἡ δ' ἑτέρα περὶ τῶν καθ' ἕκαστά ἐστιν, ὧν αἴσθησις ἤδη κυρία· ὅταν δὲ μία γένηται ἐξ αὐτῶν, ἀνάγκη τὸ συμπερανθὲν ἔνθα μὲν φάναι τὴν ψυχήν, ἐν δὲ ταῖς ποιητικαῖς πράττειν εὐθύς·

For one is a universal belief, whereas the other is concerned with particulars, which perception already controls. But when a single belief comes about from these, the soul, in one sort of case, necessarily says what has been concluded, whereas in productive cases it acts straightaway. (*EN* 1147a25–28)

The ἔνθα of the first infinitive clause probably refers to theoretical syllogisms – but in any case, it is there to draw a contrast with the last clause where πράττειν εὐθύς is introduced as the result of a practical syllogism (see also *MA* 701a10–14). Hence the conclusion (3) from example [A] is not an assertion but an actual activity.[12] Olfert's view that the standard concept of truth consists in a proposition or thought that is isomorphic to reality, combined with the thesis that this must also be the case for *practical* truth, implies that the latter is realised in an assertion of the type "this X (or doing X) is good" – since 'good' for Aristotle is a predicate that could very well be used in an assertion. But this presents us with a problem: Aristotle specifically states in the passage introducing the practical truth that the two components in practical intellect and truth, i.e. *logos* and *desire*, point to the same thing but in different capacities:

[**T5**] τὰ αὐτὰ τὸν μὲν [λόγον] φάναι τὴν δὲ [ὄρεξιν] διώκειν

the very things the one [*logos*] says the other [desire] pursues. (*EN* 1139a25–26)

Assuming Aristotle uses the standard assertoric concept of truth, we should now be able to refer to the syllogism, in order to find what the *logos*-related component of practical truth is. If practical truth is of the assertoric type, we should be able to locate it in the *logos* of the practical syllogism.

The first and major premise ("G is good") is obviously excluded from being the *practical* truth, because it is not really about a particular, hence not really practical in the strict meaning needed for Olfert's argument (and Aristotle's, for that matter). However, the second premise also does not state that something is good – hence it cannot be what we need either. The assertion we need, to verify Olfert's desideratum, i.e. "this *particular* G is good," would therefore necessarily be the *conclusion* of the syllogism, but as we see, the latter does not appear as a *logos* to be uttered, but as an action to be done and in a fairly different form. Obviously, this does not sit well with Aristotle's explicit definition: "the

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[12] See Reeve (2013: 8): "The conclusion of the argument (…) is not a further proposition but an action"; see also Reeve (2012: 169–170).

very things the one says, the other pursues. So this is the practical intellect and truth" (*EN* 1139a25–27, included in [T3]).

One could argue that we take this φάναι too literally. After all, Aristotle never says that every part of the syllogism should be explicitly present in it – in fact, he alludes to the opposite. But in the case of the *conclusion* of the practical syllogism, which is now at issue, things are different. The conclusion of a practical syllogism is not a self-evident, trivial fact or a piece of always active knowledge in the agent's mind, like the statement "I am a man", which may be omitted from the explicit steps of a syllogism. Moreover, the verb φάναι, as used in our passage, is employed in its eminently literal sense when Aristotle emphasizes the difference between practical and theoretical syllogism both in [T3] and in [T4].[13] Hence the absence of an explicit conclusion in a practical syllogism and its replacement by the action is not just optional, but a matter of principle. If by *logos* in [T5] Aristotle meant the conclusion of practical syllogism, why would he use φάναι for something that is not supposed to be said, but only enacted?

In conclusion, if the assertion "this particular G is good" – the only fitting to Olfert's desideratum – is supposed to retain the standard/assertoric sense of truth in the practical realm *and* at the same time explicitly assign the predicate 'good' in practical syllogisms, then it is definitely a curious candidate for the task, for Aristotle converts it directly to an action without the need of an actual φάναι. Even assuming that the φάναι here refers only to an implied assertion which, paradoxically is never to be said but done, another argument against insisting on this particular predication ("this particular G is good") is that, in our text, Aristotle states that the *logos* says or names the exact same things, which desire pursues (καὶ τὰ αὐτὰ τὸν μὲν φάναι τὴν δὲ διώκειν). If the pertinent *logos* were a conclusion of the type "this particular X is good", it is hard to imagine how this sentence has the same intentional content as the desire: if my correct desire is towards me having a house, what the desire pursues is me having a house. Conversely, if the conclusion tilts towards the avoidance of X, it should tell me to "avoid this" (*EN* 1147a34: λέγει φεύγειν τοῦτο). Both are not assertions of the type "This particular G is good/bad".[14]

This is not to say, of course, that Aristotle has no room for assertions such as "this particular M is good for me" like the ones Olfert's argument seems to rely on. We simply claim that the attempt to equate a proposition within the practical syllogism with what

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[13] Synonyms and circumlocutory equivalents are used in other similar cases when referring to practical reasoning (e.g. *MA* 701a10–14, 31–32 and 1147a34, where the same argument is made using the verb λέγειν). In the syllogism of the ἀκρατής in 1147a34 ff. the conclusion of a correct syllogism says that something should be avoided but the ἀκρατής does the opposite, which draws a contrast between what is said and what is done. This cannot be the case in practical truth, where the syllogism is completed by the action.

[14] One could perhaps think that the conclusion of a practical syllogism is not a standard predicative sentence but an imperative in the form of "do this". However, taking Aristotle's description in *Int.* 4 into account, it is hard to imagine how an imperative clause would take a truth value. If εὐχή, a form of plead, is excluded from being true or false, the same should be the case for an order/encouragement. And even if such clauses were considered as translatable into assertions of the type "X is good", this wouldn't change the fact that the most intuitive reading of the τὰ αὐτά in [T6] is as a reference to the actual *things* desired and evaluated as good, not to *evaluations* in the case of *logos* and to things in the case of desire.

desire pursues is destined to fail. There are, however, alternatives to consider: the word λόγος might be representative of the content of the whole syllogism – a meaning the word λόγος frequently has. This would result in a much more natural reading of this extremely dense passage, but it does not sit well with the assumption that practical truth is of the standard semantic/assertoric type.[15] For, if true *logos* in [T5] refers to the truth of the practical syllogism as a whole, then the practical truth cannot be of the standard version of assertoric truth, not only because of the broader scope of a syllogism compared to an assertion but also because the practical syllogism is not a standard type of syllogism.[16] In any case, Olfert would be wrong in her third desideratum, which carries a lot of her whole argument.

Perhaps more importantly, we should reserve judgement as to what the φάναι of *logos* in [T5] refers to and what really makes up the truth of practical syllogism, until we know more about its relation to desire. For all we know, this φάναι could be used for singular terms or for combinations of terms that do not necessarily reach the level of an assertion: those terms could name perceptible things and situations, perceived either by νοῦς or αἴσθησις – things necessarily *included* and *named* in our practical reasoning, whose main difference from theoretical reasoning is its orientation towards the last particular (*EN* 1143b3: τοῦ ἐσχάτου καὶ ἐνδεχομένου καὶ τῆς ἑτέρας προτάσεως). Terms signifying such particulars may be crucial in the truth of a *logos qua* syllogism or in a part thereof, so much so, that they can very well summarize its content, without having to be true in the same sense as the *logos* (syllogism) itself is. Hence the *logos* in our passage could stand for a whole syllogism, *within which* a particular thing/situation is truthfully recognized (and 'said' in the soul of an agent) as something belonging to the class G, which is designated in the major premise as good, and therefore, once found in a particular situation, desired. Moreover, in light of Aristotle's assurance that in practical truth the same is said and desired, desire might prove essential in illuminating the *logos*-component as well. After all, since the agent is personally involved in interpreting the present situation, and since the situation falls already into the spectrum of practicable things for her, desire

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[15]   Interestingly, this conclusion fits other aspects of Olfert's theory of truth as explained in her book (2017): "Truth is, roughly, a way of getting things right in which the contents of our thoughts and statements reflect or correspond to the way the world is. For Aristotle, as for Plato before him, this way of getting things right is something we aim for whenever we engage in *reasoning* (...) However, Aristotle and Plato also hold that when we reason about what to do and how to live – that is, when we engage in 'practical' reasoning – we are also attempting to "get things right" in the sense of acting correctly and living a good life." Notice how a shift in the meaning of "getting things right" takes place. The first "getting things right" can be more or less strictly applied to assertions and predications. The second one is different, since living a good life is obviously not an assertoric act. If truth in Plato and Aristotle means "getting things right" in a broad sense – an opinion towards which we are very sympathetic – it is fair to say that this is not the standard used by Olfert in her 3rd desideratum.

[16]   We would also have to define truth *from* the type of syllogism involved in practical reasoning which Olfert also rejects. However, as already demonstrated by Broadie (2019: 262), the reasoning behind Olfert's desideratum 1 – where truth has to be what we derive practical reason's distinctness from and not the other way around – is flawed.

is from the outset implicated in interpreting the situation in question.[17] Practical truth necessarily involves both the φάναι of the correctly desirable thing *and* the truth of all the components of practical *logos* in the broad sense. How and why this is possible and plausible – this we will show in the next chapter.

Let us now concisely summarize the analysis up to this point. In our view, if an interpretation – as the one, we think, Olfert offers – presupposes all of the following:

1) practical truth is a truth of the assertoric/semantic type, assigning the predicate 'good' to a particular thing or state of affairs;

2) the truth of practical *logos* is connected to desire in the following sense: what is said in that *logos*, the same (τὰ αὐτὰ) must be what is desired;

3) the aforementioned *logos* belongs in the practical syllogism;

then it contradicts at least one of the features of practical syllogism and practical truth described by Aristotle. It seems to us that (2) and (3) are well founded in Aristotle's passages on practical truth and practical syllogism. Hence what needs to be altered is (1), so that the concept of truth proposed by an interpretation of passage [T3] must be modified accordingly. Inevitably, the first step towards a broader understanding of practical truth with regard to its logical component cannot be other than applying it to the whole syllogism. At a later stage, we might have to adopt what Broadie calls a 'richer' sense of truth, like the one Aristotle alludes to when speaking of 'philosophizing about the truth'.[18]

Even in this case, though, there are still problems to be addressed: first, we now assume two senses of truth which are – or should be – connected, and their connection

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[17] As Rapp (2019: 204–206) notes, this is a first-person perspective or from the point of view of the desiderative attitude towards our being wherein our investigation of "is it good to do X for the sake of X?" is entangled from the outset with pleasures and pains. In other words, the good wears from the outset a certain (pleasant or painful, attractive or repellent) guise. An ὄρεξις that is already "trained" or educated to be attracted by good things, is motivated as soon as the ἔσχατον and πρακτόν in the minor premise is recognized.

[18] The term 'rich-sense of truth' is taken from Sarah Broadie's latest article about practical truth. Regarding the nature of practical truth, Broadie (2019) rejects the priority of an assertoric sense. According to her interpretation, *aletheia* in Aristotle "connotes the full measure of cognitive success", and practical *aletheia* is the "culminating intellectual achievement of *practical* inquiry", adding that "truth, on this proposal, is not claimed to be assertoric truth" (Broadie 2019: 263). Given our analysis above – and also the various instances in the corpus, where truth is obviously not meant as assertoric – we cannot but accept a broader understanding of the term 'truth' in the phrase 'practical truth'. However, Broadie's rich-sense of truth, defined as a cognitive achievement (Broadie 2019: 259), is so broad that it is difficult to explain why Aristotle speaks specifically about practical truth. Broadie admits that there's little added value in speaking of truth in such a broad sense regarding good deliberation and good *prohairesis* (Broadie 2019: 267), so the reason she gives is Aristotle's effort to fend off scepticism about the intellectual dignity of practical reason (Broadie 2019: 268–269). This is a plausible account, but it raises the question: if so much is at stake, why does Aristotle refer to practical truth only once? We believe that an alternative explanation for practical truth's presence in [T3] is the realisation on behalf of Aristotle that practical truth is the result of a specific type of syllogism that needs to be dealt differently than theoretical syllogism. It will be shown that practical truth marks the specific target of deliberation in a way that cannot be identified otherwise, especially since the result of practical syllogism is not an assertion but an action.

must be made clear and specific. Secondly, the relationship between practical truth and desire is yet to be explained.

3. Practical *logos* and *akrasia*

Regarding the first of our problems, Broadie's solution is that, within the whole of practical truth, there still remains an assertorically true *logos*. But since an assertorically true *logos* cannot account on its own for truth being specifically practical, it needs to have "correct desire at its side" (Broadie 2019: 264). Thus, "given an assertoric truth as to what it is good to do, the concordant correct desire is the source of its practical implementation and thereby of its elevation from being a mere assertoric truth to being an instance of *aletheia*". Broadie uses the word *aletheia* as representing a richer sense of truth, of which *practical* truth is an action-related version. The richer sense of *aletheia* circumvents the pitfalls created by equating practical truth with a kind of assertoric truth, one of which is the phenomenon of *akrasia*, where a true *logos* is present but a correct desire is not: "the acratic's *logos* is assertorically true", but the necessary desire to do what it says is missing. At the same time, the necessity of a combined presence of truth and desire indicates a solution to our second problem: *logos* and desire do not necessarily co-exist, but when they do, practical truth emerges. As to how and why they coexist, Broadie leaves it to the reader to fill the blanks – and the so-called Guise of the Good is perhaps the best candidate for that job. Olfert explicitly invokes this principle, according to which, for Aristotle, whatever seems good is also motivating desire. It is fair to assume that on this issue Broadie's approach is no different from Olfert's.

    We now have a peculiar situation where two opposite positions result from the exact same premises: Olfert seems to believe that in a prudent agent's soul the coinciding, due to the Guise of the Good, of a desire and an assertion about good is exactly what justifies her view that practical truth is assertoric (standard) and practical at the same time,[19] and it is this very coincidence that gives an otherwise standard, assertoric kind of truth its

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[19] See Olfert (2014: 229). Olfert's interpretation of 'the Guise of the Good' is not as self-evident as it may at first seem. For many scholars the Guise of the Good is something akin to a perceptual characteristic in things in case they appear good (see Richardson Lear 2004: 137). For a thing to be perceived as good means that desire is attracted to it. This can be interpreted in different ways, which are succinctly described by Charles (2015) as 'intellectualist and desired-based', along with his own interpretation, which he coins 'the third way interpretation'. From his point of view, *phronesis* unites truth and practicality into a single state that is neither belief nor desire, not even their combination, insofar as this unified phenomenon cannot be decomposed into successful thinking, on the one hand, and correct desiring, on the other. In any case, the Guise of the Good in Olfert's view seems to be attached to an assertion that something is good, in order for the latter to be prescriptive (Olfert 2014: 230). One could ask, however, if for X to appear good an assertion or a practical conclusion of the type "X is good" is necessary. And if the Guise of the Good is enough to explain the practicality of assertoric practical truth as Olfert assumes, Broadie's objection with regard to the acratic is entirely valid; we would need to explain why someone who reaches an assertion "X is good" doesn't act accordingly. In our interpretation, which will become clear in the next section, such an explanation is not needed, since the aforementioned assertion does not represent the actual process resulting in practical truth.

special, *practical* character. Broadie, however, believes that if practical truth were assertoric in the standard sense, then there should be no case of non-coinciding of desire and assertion about good. The acratic's failure to desire and act on what she knows is good would prove that an assertion about what is good is not enough and desire is also needed in a way that is not directly implied in the assertion itself (Broadie 2019: 258–259).

Our view is obviously more sympathetic to Broadie's, although not for reasons related to *akrasia*. For one thing, even in Broadie there still remains a question as to which assertion in a practical syllogism is supposed to agree or disagree with desire – which brings us back to the problem of the previous section. Second, in discussing the case of *akrasia*, Aristotle doesn't seem to support the idea that the acratic's *logos* is assertorically true in any *practically* meaningful way. More specifically, in dealing with Socrates' thesis on *akrasia*, which is, roughly speaking, that knowledge of the good automatically entails a desire for it, Aristotle seeks to qualify it rather than *tout court* reject it: it is because of the volatility of the minor premise, he proposes, not of the universal one, that "the result Socrates was looking for would seem to come about" (*EN* 1147b14–15). Indeed, in his practical syllogism the acratic does something quite peculiar:

[**T6**] ὅταν οὖν ἡ μὲν καθόλου ἐνῇ κωλύουσα γεύεσθαι, ἡ δέ, ὅτι πᾶν γλυκὺ ἡδύ, τουτὶ δὲ γλυκύ (αὕτη δὲ ἐνεργεῖ), τύχῃ δ' ἐπιθυμία ἐνοῦσα, ἡ μὲν οὖν λέγει φεύγειν τοῦτο, ἡ δ' ἐπιθυμία ἄγει· κινεῖν γὰρ ἕκαστον δύναται τῶν μορίων· ὥστε συμβαίνει ὑπὸ λόγου πως καὶ δόξης ἀκρατεύεσθαι.

When one universal premise is in the agent preventing tasting, as well as another (that everything sweet is pleasant) and this is sweet (and this one is active) and there happens to be an appetite in him [the acratic], the one premise says, "Avoid this!" but the appetite leads him on (since it can move each of the parts), the result is that, in a way, from reason and from belief he acts without self-control. (*EN* 1147a31–b1)

According to this example, two conflicting major premises co-exist in the acratic's mind. Driven by appetite, the acratic chooses the one saying "everything sweet is pleasant" and forgets the first one – or avoids deliberating altogether.[20] Formally speaking,

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[20] This is a matter of interpretation. Since Aristotle says that appetite moves the body and that the major premise of a true practical syllogism is swapped for a premise that *happens* to conform to appetite, the end result is hardly a practical syllogism. Elsewhere, Aristotle asserts that pleasure and pain already co-exist with perception (see *de An.* 413b21–24) in animals, so that we shouldn't need a syllogism to tell us that something sweet is pleasurable. But the acratic seems to be already engaged in a syllogism, because he also has knowledge of the correct universal (sweets are harmful). Therefore, in order to ignore the correct major premise, he shifts focus to a universal (pleasurable) that may be a correct predicate for the thing at hand, but it is irrelevant to the practical syllogism, insofar as a practical syllogism should strive for good. Aristotle adds that this (irrelevant) universal is just accidentally connected to *akrasia* (συμβαίνει (...) οὐκ ἐναντίας δὲ καθ' αὑτήν, ἀλλὰ κατὰ συμβεβηκός), since the knowledge that sweets give pleasure is not acratic *per se* (the wise have it too). Nevertheless, the exact process of the akratic's thinking is difficult to recreate on the basis of that text. To add more confusion, Aristotle seems to shift his focus from the major to the minor premise rather abruptly – though it may be the case that in Aristotle's

the assertions in his *actual* syllogistic process – provided he still engages in reasoning – are true (everything sweet is indeed pleasant) *and* the desire that motivates his action is compliant to a syllogism containing the premise "everything sweet is pleasant". The only explanation for the acratic's behaviour is therefore *not* that he has assertoric truth in his disposal, but that he chooses the wrong assertion as a starting point for his action. Generally speaking, the acratic has access to the true assertion but not when it matters, i.e. during the action or the deliberation leading to that action. That is why Aristotle speaks of an ἄγνοια ('ignorance') in the case of the acratic: during the process of decision-making, the acratic's knowledge becomes 'ignorance' (in the sense that it becomes inactive and gets temporarily annulled). Furthermore, this temporary ignorance of the first and major premise of the true practical syllogism seems to be connected with or caused by the actual volatility of the minor and last premise that pertains to the particular thing: whatever I know about sweets is absent or forgotten (*EN* 1147b10–12) when I see *this* sweet in front of me. Appetite makes it so that either I can't even correctly categorize what I see (I can only think of pleasure), or I forget whichever quality of the sweets is against the one I care about: pleasure. *In either case, assertoric truth about good is either absent or replaced by one* (e.g. all sweets are pleasant) *whose truth is incapable of leading to correct desire.*

Now, if this analysis is correct, the connection between true *logos* and correct desire cannot be explained in terms of simple co-existence of a correct assertion and a desire (in the case of practical truth), or their divergence (in its absence). For better or worse, Aristotle's conception of possessing true knowledge of something is not monolithic. A crucial part of it is the way it is achieved and the way it is put to work in the relevant context – in which case the formal assertoric standard for truth might prove to be secondary. An interpretation of true *logos* and its relation to practical truth should be able to account for this fact, which can be very hard to do if we strictly adhere to the assertoric model of truth. However, a true *logos* doesn't have to be a statement asserting that "X is good", and an assertion of this kind doesn't have to be why Aristotle speaks of practical *truth*. According to Aristotle's exact wording in [T3], what we need is a true *logos* that at some point makes obvious – by saying/naming it – that which the desire pursues. Neither does this *logos* have to be just one particular assertion nor does it need to name the desirable thing in the form of a conclusion stating "X is good". But in order to account for every aspect of practical truth named so far, a rethinking of the entire process of practical syllogism and its connection to truth is necessary.

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mind the acratic uses the minor premise ("this is sweet") as an anchor, in order to produce an antagonistic major premise (all sweets are pleasurable). When that happens, though, the acratic does not necessarily return to the process of practical reasoning with a new premise. He could just forgo the process altogether, otherwise Aristotle would have no reason to say that the acratic either doesn't have the minor premise or ignores it, as though he were asleep. The minor premise is vulnerable to feelings and it is easily moved around because of them, meaning that every general, prudent piece of universal knowledge we have about the thing it presents becomes inactive, because pleasure (or pain) replaces all other predicates we might assign to it.

4. *Logos*, desire and practical truth

In order for our proposal to work, we first need to make sure that *logos* in general can indeed be interpreted as syllogism, and that a syllogism, just like a proposition, accepts the predicates 'true' or 'false' in Aristotle. The answer is affirmative in both cases.[21] The word *logos* is notorious for having multiple meanings not only in philosophy but in colloquial Greek as well. When trying to pinpoint its specific meaning, context must always be taken into account, as well as the idiolect of a writer. In the case of Aristotle, on the one hand, it cannot be denied that in most cases he uses the phrase λόγος ἀληθής to designate true predicative assertions and not syllogisms. But on the other hand, when he does this, it's usually clear *which* assertion or what type of assertion he refers to. In the context of *EN* VI, the word λόγος appears mainly in the complex ὀρθός λόγος, which in turn seems to represent more often a reasoning about the median than just an assertion. Furthermore, in the context of *prohairesis*, within which the discussion of practical truth takes place, λόγος designates a βούλευσις, i.e. a reasoning about what to choose, and not a single predication.

The truth of a syllogism depends on the truth of its premises and the correctness of the syllogistic process, not on the truth-value of its conclusion alone (see *Top.* 162b3–22, 176b29–33). Another prerequisite, however, is for the argumentation to be appropriate for the subject matter (κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν μέθοδον): If the syllogism is done within a therapeutic process, it has to be medicinal, and not just seem like one. The same goes for geometry or dialectics, Aristotle notes.

It might sound curious to our modern ears that Aristotle differentiates methods of syllogism in accordance with kinds of knowledge, but in this case, it can also be extremely helpful: practical syllogism is indeed a specific type of syllogism. Taking Aristotle's approach in the *Topics* to its full extent, differences in syllogistic objectives translate into different syllogistic methods. For instance, medicine, unlike geometry and dialectics, cannot rely on exclusively universal terms, for medicinal knowledge must be applied in real cases of sickness. Thus, a doctor might know that poultry is healthy in general, but this doesn't mean that she should advise poultry to every patient. A specific patient has to be identified as having a specific illness; and poultry should be administered if and only if in this particular case it is beneficial *and* available. Otherwise, a medicinal syllogism would only have theoretical value, and theorizing is not what we expect from a medical doctor.

Such problems do not arise in mathematical and dialectical syllogisms, which are of a strictly theoretical nature. Hence it is tempting to say that the shared qualities of the

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[21] The word *logos* can represent a syllogism in numerous occasions in the *Analytics* (see Bonitz 1870: 435). See also *Top.* 162a35–39. The predicate 'true' or 'false' with regard to syllogisms can also be found in many passages, some of them enumerated by Broadie (2019: 261–262): *Top.* 162b3–5, *APo.* 88a20–22 and *EN* 1142b21–26; she correctly remarks that, in several instances, the truth of a syllogism does not directly refer to the truth of an assertion.

above medicinal syllogism with the practical ones make it so that practical syllogism – or, for that matter, practical truth – is about finding the *means to an end* in particular situations. The πρακτόν, i.e. the last thing that needs to be considered in the minor premise of a practical syllogism in order to be executed in the action (an action, which is also the conclusion of said syllogism) must be particular and possible to do (δυνατόν: cf. *MA* 701a24–25). But there are some important differences between the practical and the technical syllogism. Finding the means to an end and recognizing it as such is not enough for the practical reasoning. A *techne* like medicine is oriented towards a result, and its final goal is to produce such a result (the ποιητόν). The doctor has to know how and why this result can be produced, but his technical syllogisms are true even if:

a) the doctor doesn't care or does not actually want to help the patient;
b) is generally a bad doctor, but happened to know what to do in this situation;
c) uses his medicinal capabilities to poison people instead of curing them.

No practical syllogism should be considered valid and no practical truth obtained in any of these three cases, and this illustrates once more the crucial Aristotelian distinction between practical and technical knowledge.[22] Finding a thing that contributes to good life is not enough, if the *prohairesis* is not good, since good life and happiness can only be achieved if the agent is striving for good in general. Doing the right thing for the wrong reason or accidentally runs against the specifics governing action and virtue and, therefore, against the οἰκεία μέθοδος of practical syllogism.[23] This is why we now have to consider the other important component of practical truth: the correct desire.

At an elementary level and in all animals, desire is connected with perception, which, in turn, is always accompanied with pleasure or pain, giving rise to appetite (ἐπιθυμία). Appetite, as defined by Aristotle, is the desire of such pleasure (τοῦ ἡδέος ὄρεξις; *de An.* 413b21–24, 414b4–5). For animals in possession of understanding, this model of explaining desire via attraction is expanded to ἀγαθόν and κακόν as conceived through understanding and reason, a fact which also accounts for conflicts in our desires:

[**T7**] ἐπεὶ δ᾽ ὀρέξεις γίνονται ἐναντίαι ἀλλήλαις, τοῦτο δὲ συμβαίνει ὅταν ὁ λόγος καὶ αἱ ἐπιθυμίαι ἐναντίαι ὦσι, γίνεται δ᾽ ἐν τοῖς χρόνου αἴσθησιν ἔχουσιν (ὁ μὲν γὰρ νοῦς διὰ τὸ μέλλον ἀνθέλκειν κελεύει, ἡ δ᾽ ἐπιθυμία διὰ τὸ ἤδη· φαίνεται γὰρ τὸ ἤδη ἡδὺ καὶ ἁπλῶς ἡδὺ καὶ ἀγαθὸν ἁπλῶς, διὰ τὸ μὴ ὁρᾶν τὸ μέλλον).

This occurs whenever *logos* and the appetites are opposed, and this comes about in those with a perception of time (since understanding encourages a pulling back because of the future, whereas appetite operates because of what is already present – since a present pleasure appears

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22   For a similar analysis of the differences between practical and technical syllogism, see Reeve (2012: 189).
23   See Arist. *EN* 1105a27–33.

to be an unqualified pleasure, and an unqualified good, because of its not seeing the future). (*de An.* 433b5–8)

It seems that pleasure appears as the only ἀγαθόν when there is no consideration for life in the future. However, the proper good for human beings can only be defined as the best activity in life as a whole (ἐν βίῳ τελείῳ), not just for a day or some brief period of time (*EN* 1098a18–20). Without reasoning (λόγος) and understanding (νοῦς), we have no access to concerns about the future or to life in its entirety, since that access presupposes an ability to grasp universals and to apply the conclusions from these universals in particular situations.

How can the universal character of 'good' or, more specifically, the end of *eudaimonia*, be grasped by understanding? The process for the discovery of every universal, as described in *Posterior Analytics* II.19, is induction and it involves accumulating experience of the sort of things we make the universal of. This is what Aristotle believes to be the case in practical universals too;[24] for we need experience (*EN* 1143b13–4) and maturity (*EN* 1143b8) to reach the universals of good action. This experience is not just an observation of raw perceptual data; it is experience in actions. If this is true, then in our inductive formation of our idea of happiness – which we will then use as a starting point in practical reasoning – desire has a significant role to play, since it is the only part of the soul that can move us to action. Its role in understanding's grasping of the universal 'good', is what we now need to clarify.

Aristotle remarks that reasoning and understanding, in contrast to desire and perception, are not fully formed in children; he rather regards them to be progressively developing capacities. The apparent mismatch in developmental stages between desire and understanding has the interesting consequence that, with regard to education, Aristotle finds it advisable to first take care (ἐπιμέλεια) of desire *for the sake of understanding* (*Pol.* 1334b27–28). Conversely, in *EN* I he notes that the desiring part of the soul takes at least some part in *logos* by listening to it as someone listens to their friend or father (*EN* 1102b30–33). We already saw in [T7] that desire's orientation towards good is dependent on understanding, so the only way these features of desire and understanding can work together is a mutual, quasi *synergetic approach* in realizing what is good for human life. If that is true, it will have some interesting consequences for the universal ἀγαθόν and for its relationship with both capacities.

According to Aristotle, no movement (and therefore no action) can be produced without desire (*MA* 701a30–35, *de An.* 433a18–32, 433b27). What desire moves us towards is a good (ἀγαθόν), or something that appears good (φαινόμενον ἀγαθόν), insofar as they both are within our power to act (πρακτόν ἀγαθόν – *de An.* 433a28–29). This means that

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[24] For a similar approach in grasping the universal of *eudaimonia* see Reeve (2012: 161): "Happiness is the unconditional end (*EN* 1139b2–4) at which practically wise people aim (*EN* 1142b29-33), it is something we reach, as we do for all universals, not by deliberation but by induction". See also Charles (2015: 88).

the *universal* ἀγαθόν to be reached by our understanding will be inextricably connected with desire, for every particular ἀγαθόν exists as desire's intentional correlate.[25] In other words: true understanding of the ἀγαθόν *is understanding it qua* desirable. We have already seen how desire pursues pleasure and avoids pain in the case of animals. Our desires, though, are not just desires of animals, but of beings with understanding and reason. It follows that the ἀγαθόν for such beings is different than the one of animals. It is a difference that can be more accurately explained when we consider two things: First, for Aristotle, the intentional objects of desire for all animals – including humans – are necessarily captured by imagination (*de An.* 433b29);[26] second, the ability of imagination differs substantially between beings with and without reason: in beings with understanding and reason, imagination can go beyond perceptual pictures, because it is capable of calculation and deliberation (*de An.* 434a7). We already saw (example [A] in ch. 2) that deliberation involves universals. Without universals, our actions are no different than those of animals.[27] Thus, in an ideal scenario of practical reason (as in practical wisdom), understanding provides desire with a universal ἀγαθόν worthy of human life (and with universals that specify it further), while the most noble feature of this life is understanding itself. We could describe this as a perfect alignment between understanding and desire: understanding shapes the universal ἀγαθόν as something to be *desired* in practical life – for without desire (to begin with), there is no such thing as practical life – while this universal is only such as it is *because* the animal in question has the capacity of understanding. Conversely, the raw material for the understanding in order to develop this idea of ἀγαθόν is the instances where desire has taken its direction from reason.[28]

Because of its practical origin and purpose, the universal ἀγαθόν standing at the top of practical syllogism is already oriented towards implementation in particular situ-

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[25] This idea as well as some of the following thoughts in this section presuppose a certain view on Aristotle's understanding of universals. In Reeve's words: "Aristotle is not an *ante rem* theorist of universals, like Plato, but he is an *in re* theorist of them, not a nominalist or some other sort of antirealist or someone who thinks that universals exist only in the mind" (Reeve 2013: 32).

[26] Aristotle presents some questions concerning animals with very limited perceptual capabilities and the ability of imagination. This aspect of his analysis of animal imagination is not important for the present discussion.

[27] See Arist. *EN* 1147b4–5. In another passage we also learn from Aristotle that while animals desire and move according to pleasure, only humans have a sense of the good, because of their ability to reason (λόγος) (*Pol.* 1253a10–17). This sense (αἴσθησις) cannot be a perception of exclusively particular beings if indeed λόγος is necessary to acquire it. In order to perceive ἀγαθόν, a perception of universal forms is necessary, which is probably also why νοῦς (understanding) has to be involved in the discovery of the ἔσχατον and πρακτόν as explained in *EN* 1143a35–b11. Practical perception, i.e. perception of doable things, cannot be entirely sensual, for it involves access to possibilities (see the already mentioned *MA* 701a24–25 and [T7]).

[28] This does not presuppose a fully developed idea of good. Acting according to understanding and reason can be achieved gradually and that is probably why in the already quoted passage of *Politics*, 1334b27–28, Aristotle suggests that we start the ἐπιμέλεια (taking care of) of desire for the sake of understanding (meaning obviously: *practical* understanding) and not the other way around. Natural virtue is also important in the development of full virtue, but it needs the 'eye of the soul', which is understanding (*EN* 1144a29–b14). Habituation in virtues will produce the kind of pleasures worthy of a human life (see Charles 2015: 78, 88) led according to our most noble feature (understanding), which, as we saw in T7, has the advantage of accounting, among other things, for time and durability. Having this kind of experience is necessary for understanding in its task to form

ations in real life. Without any participation in practical life, we wouldn't be able to form the universal idea of 'good'. Application belongs to the universal ἀγαθόν in an essential way. Hence the idea of such ἀγαθόν already points to the last (ἔσχατον) and practicable thing (πρακτόν). Similarly, the understanding that grasps it remains, in one way or another, involved in practical life, which is why Aristotle speaks of *practical* understanding (πρακτική διάνοια)[29], since any real grasp of ἀγαθόν must be concerned with its actual specific implementation. Having a general idea of *eudaimonia*, without desiring it, means not really having it – it is similar to the inactive knowledge of someone who is asleep, drunk or just parroting words of others (*EN* 1147a17–20, b11–12).[30] This peculiarity of understanding the good and desiring good is what allows Aristotle to speak interchangeably of 'desiderative understanding' or 'thought involving desire' in cases of an ideal deliberate choice (προαίρεσις σπουδαία): practical understanding, if it really is understanding of the good, can only be as desiderative understanding. And desire for an ἀγαθόν that fits human life as a whole – and as it is most proper to this life – is necessarily engaged in thinking.[31]

Going back to practical syllogism, we can now see how this conceptual framework reflects on practical truth: As already mentioned, desire moves us immediately after the identification of a concrete possibility that represents an instantiation of the ultimate goal, the ἀγαθόν. But that doesn't mean that desire is otherwise in a dormant condition, as if it had to sit and wait for an explicit conclusion of practical syllogism. Desire is already implicated in the first and major premise containing the universal ἀγαθόν. As the cause of movement, desire can only move us in specific, material situations, that is why we are compelled to search, through deliberation (*EN* 1142b), for a specific implementation of ἀγαθόν that is possible (δυνατόν) in our particular circumstances. That is also why practical understanding, which is driven by ἀγαθόν, is directed both to the universal starting point as well as to the last particular.[32] Desire can only initiate movement when

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the universal idea of good. Another indication of desire's ability to be attracted by higher kinds of goals is the fact that Aristotle feels the need to re-evaluate the notion of pleasure in order to accommodate pleasures pertinent to noble acts. Pleasure is what drives desire in general, so there has to be a form of pleasure that accompanies the οἰκεῖον ἀγαθόν of human life – otherwise we would hardly be motivated to pursue it. As animals with reason we should have the ability to experience pleasure in activities led in accord with that reason (ἡδονή οἰκεία – *EN* 1176a3). The ability does not necessarily entail its transition to actuality, since we first have to experience this kind of pleasures before we pursue them. And that is why ethical virtues are a prerequisite for the correct desire.

[29] For the purposes of this analysis, we will not focus on potential differences or overlaps between uses of the concepts νοῦς and διάνοια in Aristotle's practical philosophy.

[30] This observation is similar to Pakaluk's arguments concerning the "robustness" of practical reasoning (2010: 155). His approach is focused on singular assertions about what is good which, in our view, can only partially account for the meaning of practical truth.

[31] As far as we know, this interpretation was first introduced by Charles (2015).

[32] Aristotle makes clear that understanding can work in both directions (καὶ ὁ νοῦς τῶν ἐσχάτων ἐπ' ἀμφότερα), i.e. universals and particulars, where there can be no *logos*, since we must grasp the final terms, of which any combination through *logos* is made. It follows that for practical syllogism understanding has a double role: 1) grasping the universal – which must have been done already before one deliberates, 2) grasping the particular to be acted upon, which must happen in deliberation (*EN* 1143a35–b11).

actual and material conditions allow the universal of the major premise to be realised in actual, particular conditions taking over as soon as the understanding identifies the last thing, the *eschaton*. However, the last thing can only be desired *as* a representative of what desire has been striving for all along: the good – whether this good is a fully formed idea of one's good, or a still developing one. And that is why desire can immediately move the parts of the body as soon as this good is understood to be possible in a concrete situation. Importantly, Aristotle repeats more than once that desire moves us *immediately* into action, once the identification of the ἔσχατον has been performed. This is an essential part of practical deliberation, otherwise Aristotle would need to explain why someone waits before acting and in which way another moment to act is chosen – which means that another deliberation will be required *ad infinitum*. Desire, on its part, seems to have no need of a conclusion in order to motivate the body to action. It does not wait for such a conclusion, because it is supposed to produce the conclusion of practical reason, which, as Aristotle asserts, is not a theory (*MA* 701a10–12). Desire is already expecting an instance of the good and when deliberation provides it, desire moves us immediately. The implication for practical syllogism is that its conclusion is not a *logos* but an action – and necessarily so.[33]

All those things happening in the background of what Aristotle names 'practical truth' and all those steps that have to be completed in the right way and in a specific practical sense before practical truth comes to be do not fit in the standard model of assertoric truth. What can be said of practical truth is that it is the truth of a syllogism of a non-standard type, since it is inextricably intertwined with desire. There is no question, of course, that assertions are and must be included in the process. For instance, a significant part of practical truth is the correct identification of a possibility that instantiates the correctly defined universal good, as in the minor premise of practical syllogism. What makes the desire correct, though, is not this minor premise alone. For if desire is not already on the look for the instantiation of the universal good regarding a person, it will simply not be there when the time to act on the specifics of this last premise has come. Desire is correct insofar as it is driven by the understanding of good (and universals that derive from it) prescribed by the first and major premise. And it is this very premise that gets ignored by the acratic. However, the minor premise is the one producing the necessary last term, the πρακτόν, for the sake of which desire activates motion. Both are needed, not only for epistemic, but also for practical reasons.

The specific practical character of the minor premise might seem obvious. And while one might think that the major premise is purely scientific – as a result of induction's culmination in a form to be grasped by the understanding – we should bear in mind

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[33]   See again Reeve (2012: 173-175). Notice, however, that practical truth does not mean that the action will definitely be successful or completed, since a lot of unpredictable things might go wrong during the action itself. The action itself is not the source or the validation of practical truth and practical truth is not a correspondence between the reality of an action and a statement describing it either. In that sense, our interpretation differs from Anscombe's (1965) and stands in agreement with Broadie's (2019: 266) and Olfert's (2014: 215) reservations.

that it is not enough to *know* the universal good or the *eudaimonia*, but we also have to desire it when engaging in practical syllogism. The counterexample is given by Aristotle himself: the concept of good in the understanding of an acratic person might have been formed through various theoretical processes, but, as Aristotle maintains, it isn't really more active knowledge than the knowledge of someone asleep or drunk. The crucial universal of practical reasoning, the ἀγαθόν for human beings and indeed for ourselves as agents, *is* actually formed by the accumulating effect of virtuous deeds (and pleasures), so that it can be truly grasped when our desiring capability is already in a good shape, i.e. developed and educated in agreement with our most noble abilities of understanding and reason. Practical reasoning does not take place in a desire-less vacuum, where desire emerges from obscurity only after the correct πρακτόν is found. In the same vein, the 'agreement' between desire and understanding, expressed by the ὁμολόγως in 1139a30, means something more than just a reiteration of the already stated; the phrase τὰ αὐτὰ τὸν μὲν φάναι τὴν δὲ διώκειν in 1139a25–26, denotes something more than a momentary alignment of judgement and wish. It refers to the entire framework of the practical syllogism that proved to be true.

In our interpretation, correct desire will not appear as a result of a good practical syllogism that starts without it. If it were so, Aristotle wouldn't have to explain in the very next sentence that the *prohairesis* cannot be without moral habituation (ἠθικὴ ἕξις), for it is the latter that must have shaped desire *already* in agreement with understanding. The εὐπραξία, that is the well-doing in action, which is what desire is striving for (ἡ δ' ὄρεξις τούτου), is not meant just for a single action produced by a particular practical syllogism but is a general goal for human beings – that is why Aristotle emphasizes the universality of this principle by saying that the intellectual desire defined this way is a starting point founded in the essence of human beings (καὶ ἡ τοιαύτη ἀρχὴ ἄνθρωπος). And if that is true, then *all* steps in practical reasoning have to be true, not just in a logical sense, but in a way that involves action-related elements from the very beginning.

5. Practical truth and truth in general

In the previous section we saw how every step in practical reasoning is irreducibly *practical* and, if the syllogism is to be successful, true as well. But, given our initial discussion, in what sense is practical truth indeed *truth*?

If, generally speaking, truth signifies an agreement to reality, then there are a lot of things in a practical syllogism reflecting this. First, happiness and good life are real conditions, not abstractions for the mind of the agent, so failure to conceive them as what they are is a real possibility – indicating that truth and falsehood in the sense described in *Metaphysics* III (*Metaph.* 1011b21–28) is still right in place. Second, even if we get the definition of happiness right, there are intermediate steps needed in our practical reasoning, before the final premise names the πρακτόν: the universal ἀγαθόν has, as every other universal with its definition, specifications and properties that derive from it, named

by further universals.[34] And since deducing such universals is the work of Aristotelian science, we can assume that discovering them is what makes scientific knowledge in ethics useful. For it would be indeed unreasonable to expect that every particular act be directly inferred from the universal good. Dealing with more 'localised' universals though, is also not enough, even when we are equipped with many of them and their respective rules to achieve them. 'Reading' the situation *and* its potential for the realisation of what ultimately can lead to happiness is a necessary and perhaps the most important step in practical reasoning.[35]

An intellectual ability to know what is and what is not in every step of the process is of great importance, but 'what is' involves our desiring part as an essential component of the state of practical affairs. Correct desire is not a necessary condition for the universal human good to be recognized as such, but for this universal to exist in the first place. This does not necessarily mean that practical truth is a distinctive practical truth only because of its different object.[36] It is a different kind of truth because, unless the agent is already capable of true practical reason, its object is not even there. Does this mean that correct practical syllogisms are impossible from the standpoint of an impartial spectator? A third-person perspective cannot possibly be denied in practical matters, and indeed the capacity to make correct evaluations in such cases has its own name (*sunesis*) in Aristotle's moral philosophy. However, even in this case, the spectator has to rely, in one way or another, on her own practical and political experience and on her own sense of good. Based on her already developed practical perception, which she already has as an agent in her own life, she can make correct judgements about practical matters, in which she is not involved.[37] Practical truth, though, in its definitive form introduced in *EN* VI.2, can only be achieved from a person with the correct desire – which means: a person involved in the particular situation.

In conclusion, our interpretation seems to agree with those who believe that truth must be understood as an intellectual accomplishment, whose function is to connect the goals of understanding and reason with reality. There are many scholars accepting that Aristotle's primary sense of truth is a combination of objects in reality, which is then reflected in assertions. Those 'objects' can be both universals (forms) and material

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[34] This is one of the possible interpretations of the term καθαυτά συμβεβηκότα, in *APo*. 75b1 ff.

[35] In a statement applying to political as well as individual conduct, Aristotle says that "not everything is regulated by [universal] law, for there are some things about which a law cannot be established, so that decrees are needed instead. For the standard applying to what is indefinite is itself indefinite" (*EN* 1137b27–30).

[36] We agree with Olfert at this point; see Olfert (2017: 105).

[37] Arist. *EN* 1143b11–14: "experienced and older people or practically-wise ones (…) because they have an eye formed from experience, they see correctly". On the subject of moral judgements by spectators, also see Kontos (2021: 1.3): "To see the noble one must have a certain acquaintance with the interconnection between goodness, choiceworthiness, and pleasure (*Rh*. I.9, 1366a33–34). And one cannot have such an acquaintance unless one already has some experience of the noble from within the sphere of one's own deliberate choice. That is why a base person or an intemperate one is never a good judge of nobility and, likewise, never displays comprehension. Spectators' capacity to see the noble is partially dependent on their experience as agents."

things (which are themselves combinations of form and matter), so that in the same vein we could say that practical truth is not just a recognition of such a combination made in a statement, but a real combination of things and on multiple levels, be it desire and the good, or both of these with a *prakton.* This truth could then be recognized as such on an assertoric or intellectual level, so that a perfectly standard/assertoric type of truth would apply to practical truth. But if that were the whole story, we would miss why Aristotle chooses to speak of *practical* truth and *practical* thought. Practical truth is a distinctive kind of truth, not only because the conclusion of a practical syllogism must be performed in praxis and not spoken, but also because this is the direct consequence of an alignment of desire and understanding such that our own enactment of the universal good is itself part of the underlying state of affairs we recognize as true. In that sense, practical truth represents the correctness of our grasp of states of affairs as stated in every part of a practical syllogism, where the distinctly practical part consists in that the realities of these *logoi* depend on the actual state of the agent who makes them.

The involvement of the 'subject', as we would say in modern terms, is perhaps characteristic of practical truth in a very distinctive way, but it is not entirely absent in other cases of truth. As already stated before, knowledge (for Aristotle) has to be an active state for those who have it. Knowing the reasons why something is the case is also an essential part of knowing the truth – having stumbled upon a correct assertion about the state of affairs is not enough. There are different stages and different ways to be actively involved with truth and knowledge – as it is obviously shown in *EN* VI – but it must be clear that an interpretation of truth in Aristotle depending heavily on the assertoric model as the 'standard' can prove quite misleading. There is no doubt that truth can be achieved by our soul by using λόγος. However, predicative λόγος is one – perhaps the most important even – but not the only way to grasp truth.

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Truth in Practical Reason: Practical and Assertoric Truth in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*

Truth has always been a controversial subject in Aristotelian scholarship. In most cases, including some well-known passages in the *Categories*, *De Interpretatione* and *Metaphysics*, Aristotle uses the predicate 'true' for assertions, although exceptions are many and impossible to ignore. One of the most complicated cases is the concept of *practical truth* in the sixth book of *Nicomachean Ethics*: its entanglement with action and desire raises doubts about the possibility of its inclusion to the propositional model of truth. Nevertheless, in one of the most extensive studies on the subject, C. Olfert has tried to show that this is not only possible but also necessary. In this paper, we explain why trying to fit practical truth into the propositional model comes with insurmountable problems. In order to overcome these problems, we focus on multiple aspects of practical syllogism and correlate them with Aristotle's account of desire, happiness and the good. Identifying the role of such concepts in the specific steps of practical reasoning, we reach the conclusion that practical truth is best explained as the culmination of a well-executed practical syllogism taken as a whole, which ultimately explains why this type of syllogism demands a different approach and a different kind of truth than the theoretical one.