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Desire, Purpose, and the meaningful life

Desiderio, scopo e vita piena di significato

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> Ethics from the perspective of time is the organization of human biography, that is, what allows the human being to live in time without yielding to the discontinuities of fashion, etc., what allows it to grow [...] with long-term projects the human being faces the future
>
> L. Polo, *Ethics*, "Hope and the future", pp. 173-174.

Abstract

This study links certain Aristotelian anthropological notions with numerous recent psychological studies. The central themes are the relations between desires and behaviour, strongly conditioned by behaviourism in American experimental psychology.

Some experiments with laboratory animals have shown evidence of a perceptual and behavioural breadth that exceeded the explanatory potential of the behaviourist framework.

William James' thesis on purposive behaviour *has guided recent experimental work with human beings more closely linked to everyday activities.*

Plato's and Aristotle's texts on the parts *and functions of the soul offer explanations compatible with the findings of contemporary psychology. Particularly noteworthy are treatments of the relationship between tendencies and emotions, self-control, deliberation, and choice.*

Recent research programmes in psychology emphasise the importance of knowledge and experience in emotions, their malleability and dependence on reason, and the need to integrate them into a coherent ideal of life.

***Keywords**: Desire, choice, will power, meaning, prospection*

Riassunto

Questo studio mette in relazione alcune nozioni antropologiche aristoteliche con numerosi studi psicologici recenti. I temi centrali sono le relazioni tra desideri e comportamenti, fortemente condizionate dal comportamentismo della psicologia sperimentale americana.

Alcuni esperimenti con animali da laboratorio hanno dimostrato un'ampiezza percettiva e comportamentale che ha superato il potenziale esplicativo del quadro comportamentista.

La tesi di William James sul comportamento intenzionale ha guidato il recente lavoro sperimentale con esseri umani più strettamente legati alle attività quotidiane.

I testi di Platone e Aristotele sulle parti e le funzioni dell'anima offrono spiegazioni compatibili con i risultati della psicologia contemporanea. Particolarmente degni di nota sono i trattamenti del rapporto tra tendenze ed emozioni, autocontrollo, deliberazione e scelta.

I recenti programmi di ricerca in psicologia sottolineano l'importanza della conoscenza e dell'esperienza nelle emozioni, la loro malleabilità e dipendenza dalla ragione e la necessità di integrarle in un ideale di vita coerente.

***Parole chiave**: Desiderio, scelta, potere della volontà, significato, prospezione*

CONTENTS

1 STRUCTURE AND METHODOLOGY

The aim of this paper is to show some fundamental relationships between cognitive and desiderative human capacities[1]. At different points, I refer to these relations in terms of *harmony*, that is to say, of an action in which the different motors of action are not excluded but rather integrate in order to make constructive plans, thereby establishing increasingly intense and fruitful relations with other human beings. The presentation of subjects is *minimal*, i.e., it displays an elementary reasoning of Platonic and Aristotelian texts that justify the presence of internal principles of the human psyche, which explain our way of acting.

The opening remarks are based on a few particular cases of psychological experimentation in the 20th century. The first of these is a fortuitous discovery that pointed Karl Lashley to an approach unexplored by behaviourism. A rat trained in a laboratory seemed to have a vision of space, that was impossible for it to perceive because of the conditions in which it lived and interacted in the maze. The animal 'guessed' the easiest way to food without having experienced it before. Later on, Edward Tolman claimed that animals can develop *mental maps* beyond the conditioning of experimentation. Such capacity is at the service of the satisfaction of elementary needs. In short, those desires have a direction, and organisms assimilate information in order to satisfy their cravings.

In the late 1950s, from variants of studies in which rats struggled in desperate situations, one of the fundamental conclusions was that the most basic desires, such as staying alive, depend on preceding interactions. Moreover, such experiences make possible the generation of certain expectations whose effects—continuing to strive for survival—do not manifest themselves in the absence of certain kinds of collaboration.

In the third part, I show the arguments of Platonic-Aristotelian psychology which explain the internal powers that account for this assimilation of experiences that allows the development of resources in ordinary behaviour. Including this classical proposal implies that I still consider it valid as a theoretical approach to be used fruitfully in connection with contemporary psychology.

[1]The present paper is a longer and updated version of Juan A. Mercado, *Harmonising reason and emotions: Common paths from Plato to contemporary trends in psychology*, in *Desire and human flourishing*, M. Bosch (ed.), Springer, Cham (CH) 2020, pp. 89-105. There is a slightly different Spanish version: "La orientación del deseo. De Platón a algunos descubrimientos de la psicología contemporánea", in D. Salgado & L. García (eds.), *Donde una una persona, hay un pedagogo*, EUNSA, Pamplona 2021, pp. 107-156.

I build some bridges with proposals from contemporary psychology, such as the *flow* theory, the consideration of pleasure in positive psychology and Paul Ekman's classification of emotions. The aim is to briefly analyse the richness of the relationships that structure the activity of human beings, who share with animals an instinctive base and broad behavioural plasticity.

Such directionality of desires connects with the autonomy of animal behaviour and is consistent with human free will. Virtues seem necessary to construct a harmonious activity between the different powers.

In the fourth part, I present six proposals that promote the harmonisation of the internal faculties along the lines of classical authors.

I have relied on bilingual Italian editions for the ancient texts, and all translations from English and the italics are my own. In order not to increase the number of footnotes excessively, I have included in the text, in brackets, most of the references to Plato's and Aristotle's works.

2 DESIRE, FRUSTRATION, AND ALTERNATIVES IN THE LABORATORY

2.1 Directional organisms

Peter Railton reports a significant accident in the laboratory of Karl Lashley in the late 1920s.[2] One day, a rat escaped the start box of its maze, climbing up on top of the structure. The conditioned response model predicted that the rat would walk 'x' steps forward, turn right, walk 'x' steps, turn right again, and find the food. After all, that was the motor pattern that had been so assiduously reinforced. But instead the animal

> scampered diagonally across the top of the maze, directly to the food station (Lashley, 1929). Laboratory conditions prevented the rat from "following its nose" to the food—somehow, it was following something else, something more abstract that it had learned while running trials in the maze.[3]

The incident meant a turning point in the way of understanding the basis of the behaviour of laboratory animals: "they might not be slaves to stimulus-response conditioning" but elaborate

[2]Throughout the paragraph I follow P. Railton's exposition, *Intuitive guidance: Emotion, information, and experience*, ch. 2 of M. E. P. Seligman, C. Sripada, R. F. Baumeister & P. Railton, *Homo Prospectus*, Oxford University Pres, New York 2016. Hereafter I will refer to this work as *Homo Prospectus.*

[3]*Homo Prospectus*, p. 67. Railton summarizes K. S. Lashley's, *Brain mechanisms and intelligence: A quantitative study of injuries to the brain*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1929. doi.org/10.1037/10017-000.

> mental representations of locations and paths extending in space, permitting them to respond flexibly and intelligently to entirely novel opportunities afforded by the world. Not only that, but the novel behavior had never been reinforced. Could learning really take place in light of internally represented values or goals ('purposes'), without the external carrot of reward or stick of punishment?[4]

Some years later, Edward Tolman at Berkeley took the next step. He claimed that rats could learn without external reinforcement about their environment through normal experience. He propounded that rats

> developed a 'cognitive map' of the spatial layout of the maze that was not tied to any specific pattern of motor responses. In a series of experiments in which rats had to perform novel actions to get to the food, such as swimming or managing to put together a sequence of rolling or rotating movements enabling them to turn right after their ability to turn right directly had been surgically removed, his hypothesis held up (Tolman, 1948).[5]

He came to consider rats as purposive creatures whose cognitive maps enabled them to pursue goals in an autonomous manner, extracting information from their confined experience of the maze "to build general-purpose mental representations that give them an ability to shift the way they pursue their goals without new incentives."[6]

These ideas about 'autonomy' and 'purposive behaviourism'—a sort of *ritornello* in Seligman's, Railton's, Sripada's and Baumeister's book—are very much in line with the experiments explained by William James in the second chapter of his *Principles of Psychology* on the non-linear results of the vivisectional operations of the different nerve-centres of frogs. It seemed that the organism tried to keep some elementary functions despite the excisions, struggling to compensate for the lack of some of the neural system connections. Even if James was cautious in his conclusions, he included *teleology* and *purposiveness* as terms with a significative explanatory power of non-conscious actions.

I will be using in a heuristic way—and not merely as keywords—these ideas related to the *direction* of our basic resources to handle life trials by anticipating future scenarios, and will explain how they can improve through *constructive relations* and *experience*.

[4] *Homo Prospectus*, pp. 67-68.

[5] Railton sums up Tolman's famous paper *Cognitive maps in rats and men*, «The Psychological Review», 55/4 (1948), pp. 189-208. There is a transcription of the article in http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Tolman/Maps/maps#f1 [22/02/2022].

[6] *Homo Prospectus,* p. 68. Railton refers to several recent studies that corroborate Tolman's conclusions.

2.2 The conditioning of expectations

Curt P. Richter of the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine carried out some famous and terrible experiments on helpless rats in 1957.[7] The experiments consisted of observing the behaviour of animals thrown into large cylinders filled half full of water. Since the walls of the cylinders were smooth, the only thing the animals could do was to stay afloat for as long as their strength permitted.

The first group consisted of 12 tame rats. Richter left them in one of the half-filled containers. One of the rats swam on the surface of the water for a few minutes. Then, it dived to the bottom to look for a way out. It died two minutes later. Two more rats behaved in the same way and quickly succumbed. The other nine, however, swam for several days before dying.

The second group of wretched beasts consisted of 34 rats. The most savage and aggressive were thrown in the ill-fated water-filled cylinder, and all died within the span of a few minutes.

In the next stage of the experiments, rats of the different categories—i.e., savage and 'socially trained'—were dropped into the cylinders and taken out a few minutes later. Then, after a period of rest, they were thrown back into the water. To the astonishment of the scholars, they all swam for more than three days before giving up in exhaustion. The rescued animals dogged on like most of the domesticated beasts in the first phase of the tests.

The overall conclusion was that the rats that waited on the possibility of being rescued again had a goal, namely, to stay alive until the subsequent rescue. With no experience of the relief situation, the other group lacked a purpose and gave up.

Richter summarised his findings with hope as the central plank of the conclusions: in the first situation, the rats were not offered an alternative, such as flight or fight, or to defend themselves in any way. The most they could do was explore the container in search of a way out, only to be left to die soon after the frustrated exploration. The situation for the second-stage animals changed radically after the relief experience. The short pause in misadventure made a big difference. Richter claimed that the rats quickly learnt from the experience of

[7]The following lines summarize Joseph Hallinan's work on Richter's experiments and the paper *On the phenomenon of sudden death in animals and man*, «Psychosomatic Medicine», 19 (1957), pp. 191-198. Cf. J. T. Hallinan, *The remarkable power of hope*, Blogpost, https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/kidding-ourselves/201405/the-remarkable-power-hope [22/02/2022]. Martin Seligman developed with his colleagues more sophisticated and less drastic experiments in the early days of his studies on *learned helplessness*. See M. E. P. Seligman, & G. Beagley, G., *Learned helplessness in the rat,* «Journal of Comparative and Physiological Psychology», 88 (1975), pp. 534-541, and C. Peterson, S. F. Maier, & M. E. P. Seligman, *Learned helplessness*, Oxford University Press, New York 1993. Gulliford offers an updated overview of Seligman's achievement (L. Gulliford, *Virtue in Positive Psychology*, «Acta Philosophica» 29/1 (2020), pp. 91-112, pp. 95-97).

rescue, and the expectation of receiving help sustained them in the effort to stay alive. In other words, they had developed something similar to what we call *hope* in humans.

3 THE HERITAGE OF PLATO AND ARISTOTLE

3.1 Plato's Republic and the manifesto of human powers

The Ancient Greek tradition gives one of the most developed models of human nature and human education. Plato and Aristotle worked on it from the perspective of what Continental Philosophy calls *philosophical anthropology* or *the philosophy of person.*

Long discussions about the structure of the human soul are reported in Plato's *Republic.* Guthrie asserts that the *Republic* is "Plato's full and final answer to the question in [an earlier dialogue] the *Gorgias,* 'How to live'."[8] It is Plato's comprehensive treatment of the good life, the wider context in which the question of justice is set and to which the question of justice is crucial.

One of the most celebrated of the debates in the *Republic* is illustrated by Glauco through the Myth of Gyges (359c-360d).[9] The myth deals with the corruption of the conduct of an ordinary man due to the enticement of special powers. Gyges was a young shepherd in the service of the King of Lydia. One day he was out with his flock and, suddenly, an earthquake opened a crevice into the ground. He descended into the fissure where he found a human skeletal form possessing a golden ring. Later, during a meeting with his fellow men, Gyges noticed that if he twisted the ring on his finger, he disappeared. With this ability to become invisible, he used his magic ring to gain the graces of the queen, whom he seduced. Afterwards, he managed to conspire with her to kill the king and to take over the kingdom. Glauco's conclusion is that any man with similar power would do the same. So, the judgments about injustice and corruption come from those unable to attain power in any circumstances.[10] There is no intrinsic reason to be just. The only reason to be just is to avoid the consequences of unjust actions. In making this point, Glauco also highlights an anthropological underpinning for this view, namely, the idea that people are, by and large, selfishly motivated.

This puzzling conclusion justifies Adeimantus's plea to Socrates in Book II,

[8] W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek philosophy, v. 4. Plato, the man and his Dialogues: Earlier Period.* 1st ed. v. 4., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1975, p. 435.

[9] References to and citations from Plato's and Aristotle's works are in brackets within the text.

[10] On this classic debate, the conclusive remarks of J. A. Mercado, *Intention and the construction of society: Carrying forward Anscombe's rediscovery of moral intentionality*, «Philosophical News», (European Society for Moral Philosophy) 18 (2019), pp. 77-95, pp. 93-95.

i.e., to "show us what it is that each [justice and unjustice] inherently does to its possessor" and explain the reasons why justice cannot be reduced to such a utilitarian manouvering (367a-e).[11]

Socrates and the other guests of the dialogue develop an intense activity to present Plato's systematic proposal of the plexus of our internal powers out of very elementary notions, i.e., tendencies and reason. The objective is to explain their interaction in the good life, as posed at the beginning of the *Republic* (cf. I, 329a-d). But the path to the inner parts of the soul starts with the image of a stable city. Glauco and Socrates agree that order is necessary to the subsistence of the *polis*, a commonwealth that should be "wise, brave, sober and just" (*σοφή τ' ἐστὶ καὶ ἀνδρεία καὶ σώφρων καὶ δικαία*) (IV, 427e).[12] So the diversity of functions require the harmonization of its different active forces (IV, 427e-435b).

The ultimate version of the Platonic tripartite "division of the soul" develops in that same Book, where Plato clearly enumerates some elementary desires, their corresponding pleasures, and hints at the necessity to be virtuous in order to rule them (IV, 435c-436b).[13]

All the discussants find it unavoidable to recognize that there are tendencies or desires (*ἐπιθυμίαι*) that serve fundamental needs, such as hunger and thirst (IV, 437d). In the same stream of reasoning, they acknowledge that the way individuals respond to these universal requirements has a wide range of nuances and degrees and that it is necessary to apply qualitative terms to refer to them, such as *enough, convenient, excessive,* or *proportionate.* At this point, the explanation becomes a thread composed by natural needs, the manifold responses we can manifest and the ruling abilities that transform them into something constructive, especially temperance and justice (IV, 439-444).

The most powerful explanation of the internal dynamics of the soul appears in Book X (611a–612a).[14] There we find a symbolic image of these principles of the soul: the rational part is portrayed as a human being. Desires depend on the irascible or 'high-spirited' part—the lion—and the concupiscible or 'appetitive' part—a many-headed beast. The inner human being seems to be divine and immortal, while the other two belong to the composite only through the soul's union with the body and so seem to be mortal. Plato uses *ἐπιθυμητικὸν* (the same root as general desires) to refer to the concupiscible part of the soul, and *θυμοειδὲς* (*thumoeides*) to the irascible, high-spirited part. Their corresponding desires are

[11]Shorey's translation, LOEB Classical Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA) 1937, in www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3atext%3a1999.01.0168 [22/02/2022]

[12]Greek texts from the *Perseus Digital Library*, http://www.perseus.tufts.edu.

[13]W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History*, v. 4. cit., p. 474.

[14]See also S. Knuuttila, *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval philosophy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2004, p. 11.

ἐπιθυμία (*epithumia*) and θυμός (*thumos*).[15]

The main point of the argument is the question of whether the three main forms of psychological activity—intellectual, 'spirited' and appetitive—can be exercised by a single unitary *psyche*, or instead whether each presupposes a distinct faculty or element.[16]

All this description requires a more sophisticated development of human internal powers, i.e., the right combination that allows us to accomplish certain tasks: "for Plato the virtues are *dynameis*, 'powers to do something', thereby conforming to the Greek *areté*, so pitifully translated by our 'virtue"' as Guthrie claims in his commentary on the *Republic* 433a.[17] Virtues are perfections or excellences of character that allow one to direct the internal energies to specific positive functions (I, 353b), and justice is in the soul when each part of it is functioning as it should (IV, 443d-443e) or "doing its own."[18]

Conford's version of the conclusive part of this argument highlights the choral approach of Plato's explanation:

> The just man does not allow the several elements in his soul to usurp one another's functions; he is indeed one who sets his house in order, by self-mastery and discipline coming to be at peace with himself, and bringing into tune (συναρμόσαντα) those three parts, like the terms in the proportion of a musical scale (443d).[19]

So, for the Greek Author the relations among the parts of the soul have their ideal in a constructive spiritual blending of its different drives and must be ensured by education.[20]

But there is a significant nuance missing in this and other versions of the text, i.e., the idea that in this harmonic balance "man becomes a friend to himself" (φίλον γενόμενον ἑαυτῷ). It remains concealed behind the terms *order* and *self-mastery*, or even in the more poetical interpretation of Shorey referring to a "beautiful order" attained in the soul.[21] This subtle difference seems to be of significance to underscore the basics of a proposal regarding the education of desire: in the end, for Plato (and Socrates), order, balance, and harmony acquire full meaning only in the perspective of right love for oneself. Aristotle develops this idea in his celebrated passages on friendship, as explained in §3.10 below.

There is a close connection between the rational order and a sense of harmony in this internal dialogue. The coherent person lives supported by an inner natural

[15]Cf. S. Knuuttila, *Emotions,* cit., p. 7.
[16]W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History*, v. 4. cit., p. 474.
[17]W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History*, v. 4. cit p. 473.
[18]W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History*, v. 4. cit. p. 166-167.
[19]F. M. Cornford (transl.), *Plato. Republic*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1945.
[20]W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History*, v. 4. cit., p. 475.
[21]Shorey associates the text with *Gorgias* 504.

symphony (cf. *Rep* IV, 432a) (*κατὰ φύσιν συμφωνίαν*). The 'Master of himself' depicted in *Gorgias* (491d-e) is the master of an orchestra as well.

3.2 Aristotle. Reason and feelings

Aristotle resumes the task of explaining the sensitive elements of the soul with reason in different writings. He always strives to find an inclusive response to the permanent tension between reason and spontaneous tendencies. There is a passage of the *Magna Moralia* which recalls Hume's incipit of the third book of his *Treatise on Human Nature*. Aristotle asserts that, speaking generally, reason is not the principle and guide to excellence,

> but rather the feelings. For there must first be produced in us (as indeed is the case) an irrational impulse to the right, and then later on reason must put the question to the vote and decide it. One may see this from the case of children and those who live without reason [...] But if they have received from reason the principle that leads to right, the feelings do not necessarily follow and consent thereto, but often oppose it. Hence a right disposition of the feelings seems to be the principle that leads to excellence rather than the reason (*Magna Moralia*, VII, 1206b18-28).[22]

This provocative assessment should be confronted with a number of texts in which it is clear that the Aristotelian proposal is based on a finely integrated relation between the internal powers. He displays a more systematic approach to the different forms of desire than Plato, but the main notions are substantially the same.

The Stagirite includes the different kinds of desires under the term *ὄρεξις* (*orexis*), using the Platonic terminology and refining it in a different way. He opposes a desiderative *orexis* "according to reason" to a merely impulsive one (*epythimia*), i.e., the *man* and the *lion* in the Platonic imagery. A third element emerges when the Stagirite states that a part of the irrational principle is obedient to reason "as to a father" (NE I, 1103a3).[23]

For the sake of clarity, we can summarize the distinction by explaining that there are three species of *orexis*:

- *epithumia*, merely impulsive or irrational;
- *thymos*, non-rational but docile to reason;

[22] The Aristotelian texts are from the edition by Jonathan Barnes, *The complete works of Aristotle. The revised Oxford translation*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1984.

[23] 'NE' stays for *Nicomachean Ethics* in the whole text. When there are several references in a row to the same source, only Bekker's numbering will be indicated. The text admits a reading in which the distinction regards the rational part, i.e., reason can be distinguished between a purely rational element and a *tendential* or moving one. See also *On the soul* III, 432b5-7.

– *boulesis* (βούλησις), *rational*, *deliberated* or βουλευτικὴ ὄρεξις, closely linked to *proairesis* (προαίρεσις), i.e., *choice.*[24]

In different texts the opposition is reduced to that between *epithymia* and *boulesis.*[25]

Aristotle underscored the fact that our appetitive base depends on sensitive knowledge to activate. The reason for choosing how to satisfy different impulses, assumes that these tendencies are 'blind' and utterly dependent on cognitive resources. This blindness of the impulses implies that reason cannot move them directly, but only through a persuasive presentation of the objects of desire. The Stagirite goes on assessing that this indirect guide is of a political type since there is no room for a despotic command. Reason foresees the eventual consequences of actions in the long run and must convince the will or rational desire (*boulesis*) so that it starts moving in a specific direction.[26] The harnesses of the charioteer of the platonic winged chariot cannot force their powerful horses but whisper in their ears to invite them to act in the best possible way. And the horses need the foresight of reason.[27]

The need to overcome the potential conflict between reason and tendencies applies only to human beings, i.e., "beings that possess a special capacity for grasping or perceiving time."[28] They possess a particular openness to temporality that allows them to step back from present stimuli and

> facilitates the possibility of integrating the perspective on the medium and long term in decision-making, and of configuring their *praxis* in agreement with a total project of their life.[29]

[24]Cf. NE III, 1111b10 ff.; *Eudemian ethics* 2, 1223a26 f.; *On the soul* 4, 414b2. See also G. Pearson, *Aristotle and Scanlon on desire and motivation*, in *Moral psychology and human action in Aristotle*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2011, pp. 95-118 and A. Vigo, *Action, reason and truth : Studies in Aristotle's conception of practical rationality*, Peeters, Leuven 2016, pp. 152-153.

[25]Furthermore, Aristotle uses the same term (the noun *boulesis*) to signify what here we understand as *rational desire* or *desire guided by reason*, and the activity of *deliberation.* On the textual and theoretical problems of terminology, see W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek philosophy*, v. 6, *Aristotle: An encounter*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 284-287; 348-353, G. Reale, *Storia della filosofia antica II*, v. 2, *Platone e Aristotele.* 6th ed., Vita e Pensiero, Milan., pp. 517-521; C. Natali (ed. trans., & com.), *Aristotele. Etica nicomachea*, p. 470

[26]The medieval term *voluntas* is not described as a complete faculty in Aristotle. It is therefore more appropriate to speak of a *voluntary* or *wilful act* when considering deliberation and other specific acts that will be explained later.

[27]Cf. NE I, 1102b-1103a9, III, 1119b5-18 and *Politics* I, 1254a34-b9. Aristotle compares the direct command that reason exercises over some parts of the body, with its indirect guidance over the tendencies.

[28]A. Vigo, *Action, reason and truth*, cit. p. 153

[29]A. Vigo, *Action, reason and truth,* cit., p. 154. Cf. *On the soul*, 443b7 f. See §§3.9 and 4.

3.3 Virtuous enjoyment and the good Life

Now we can consider some other Aristotelian ideas that can widen the perspective of human action to trace important elements of continuity and overlap with contemporary psychology. It might be fruitful to link the classic theory with the practical approach in order to foster a constructive exchange among the faculties.

The first notion is about the consideration of enjoyment within time. Aristotle considers that pleasure seems to be "out of time" but depends on time and the way we experience it. There is an intriguing text that matches some important elements regarding pleasure that have been studied intensively within positive psychology:

> What *is* pleasant is the *activity of the present, the hope of the future, the memory of the past*; but most pleasant is *that which depends on activity*, and similarly this is most lovable (IX, 1168a13-15 emphasis added).

A second notion is the acknowledgment that human beings experience delight or displeasure depending on several conditions. Some of the conditions are internal to the individual, who may take advantage of the flexibility of his or her general abilities to improve them in a certain way (cf. X, 1176a15 ff.).

The ability to feel pleasure and evaluating its fulfilment in the future while exercising demanding activities depends on the command of the basic skills of the concrete discipline. That is why we can feel pleasure while playing the flute (cf. X, 1175b1ff.)

Pleasure seems to be part and parcel of the very same activity, but Aristotle does not understand pleasure as a *product* of the activity but as a kind of gift. It is an aspect of the perfection of the action "and completes the activity [...] as an end which supervenes as the bloom of youth does on those in the flower of their age" (IX, 1174b32-33).[30] Enjoyment is something intimately linked to the activity but at the same time irreducible to it.[31] This pleasant situation or intrinsically rewarding action is different from mere sensible pleasure, as Martin Seligman and several other authors within the positive psychology movement have stressed in the last twenty years.[32]

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi coined the term *autotelic experience* to describe the intrinsically rewarding experience that flow brings to people—the fact of doing something for its own sake: *auto* (self) and *telos* (goal)[33]. As Ribera and Ceja point out, in such activities:

[30] See M. Cruz, *'Hedoné'. Aristóteles y el placer*, EUNSA, Pamplona 2013, pp. 87-95.

[31] The *Nicomachean Ethics* presents two long discussions about the nature of pleasure (Books VII and X). Manuel Cruz offers a detailed explanation of the texts (M. Cruz, *'Hedoné'*, cit. pp. 62-80.)

[32] Cf. M. E. P. Seligman, *Authentic happiness*, N. Brealey, London 2003, pp. 102-115.

[33] Cf. M. Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow and the foundations of positive psychology*, Springer 2014, p. 145.

> there is no need for extrinsic rewards as the most important gratification is found within the activity the individual is engaged in. It is generally upon reflection that the autotelic facet of flow is realized and provides increased motivation toward spotting new challenges and experiencing more flow.[34]

Aristotle formulated the notion of the σπουδαῖος (*spoudaios*) or upright man as a synthesis of the right way of feeling and thinking.[35] He describes the virtuous person and the close correlation between his actions and his deeply rooted way of being (ἦθος, *ethos*, character). One of the main factors of this relationship is the role of pleasant situations for this kind of man:

> Those who *act rightly* win the noble and good things in life. Their life is also in itself pleasant. For pleasure is a state of soul, and *to each man that which he is said to be a lover of is pleasant*; [...] just acts are pleasant to the lover of justice and in general excellent acts to the lover of excellence. Now *for most men their pleasures are in conflict with one another because these are not by nature pleasant*; and *excellent actions are such, so that these are pleasant for such men as well as in their own nature.* Their life, therefore, has no further need of pleasure as a sort of adventitious charm, but has its pleasure in itself. For, besides what we have said, the man who does not rejoice in noble actions is not even good (1099a5-17. Emphasis added).

This tuning between actions and feelings is one of the positive internal outcomes of virtue because moral excellence is concerned with pleasures and pain, and it is on account of pleasure that we perform bad actions, and on account of pain that we abstain from noble ones. As Vigo underscores, the cluster of faculties of the virtuous man becomes *connatural* (συμφυῆναι, *symphuehai*, lit. 'grow together') with good and beautiful things and situations: faculties should *develop together* while exercising good actions over time.[36] Here we find an unambiguous correspondence with the ultimate version of the upright man in the *Republic*, and an extension of the positive effects of the sound relationship among internal powers to their connection with external goods.

Aristotle continues with a quote from Plato in order to underline the significance of good upbringing:

> we ought to have been brought up in a particular way from our very youth [ldots] so as both *to delight in and to be pained by the things that we ought; for this is the right education* (II, 1104b9-24. Emphasis added. Cf. also II, 1103b23-25).

[34] A. Ribera & L. Ceja, *Flow. Flourishing at work*, in *Personal flourishing in organizations*, J. A. Mercado (ed.), Springer 2018, pp. 91-119, p. 105. There is deeper correspondence between Csikszentmihalyi's proposal and Aristotle's metaphysical consideration of internal human activities. Cruz offers a good summary of them (M. Cruz, *'Hedoné'*, cit., pp. 74-79). On the perfection of the activities and the simultaneity of the possession of the ends in some of them, see J. A. Mercado, *Origins of the metaphysics of the living*, «Acta Philosophica» 22 (2013), pp. 35-56.

[35] Aristotle alternates the use of σπουδαῖος and φρόνιμος (*phronimos*) in his various explanations of the *wise*, *prudent* or *upright* person.

[36] A. Vigo, *Action, reason and truth*, cit., pp. 141-142.

This general remark is confirmed through a quite demanding discipline of our feelings:

> For instance, fear and confidence and appetite and anger and pity and in general pleasure and pain may be felt both too much and too little, and in both cases not well; but *to feel them at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right aim, and in the right way, is what is both intermediate and best, and this is characteristic of excellence* (1106b15-1107a1).[37]

That is why Aristotle believes that a person with a well-formed character not only acts well, but also feels in the right way, at the right moment, in accordance with stimuli. In fact, one can say that this *spoudaios*, or person of value, acts well precisely because he first feels that which one must feel (pleasure, fear, anger, etc.) and because he is capable of responding actively and proportionately to the demands of the moment (I, 1098b-1099a, III, 1113a24-31, IX, 1169a32): all of these, thanks to the sophisticated interlacement of good dispositions or excellences of character. This development is based on the harmonisation of his internal powers through an education and exercise that allows the individual to endure in the tension towards future situations that himself considers as better than others.

In his celebrated book on emotions, Paul Ekman directly refers to Aristotle's text on the way of behaving and feeling of the upright man while explaining the need for temperance to handle our emotions in a constructive way. He assesses as well that "these are very abstract ideas, but they do explain the reasons we sometimes regret afterward how we have behaved"[38]

From the Aristotelian point of view, the *spoudaios*, decides to act rightly no matter the external outcome, and sometimes it is important to act this way in anticipation of negative consequences. Robert Spaemann comments on this position explaining that it fulfils the olympic adage: to be there is everything, no matter what the outcome of the game:[39] the righteous person is ready to take the risk of living coherently and keep growing regardless of the external outcome. In the contest of life, it is important to act well, increase our sense of humanity, and progress to full maturity. All this because we are betting on our lives, not on money or external goods.[40] This perspective poses the Platonic questions of

[37]Inciarte insists emphatically on the harmony between *right reason* and *right desire* in Aristotelian thought as a condition for the goodness of choices and of actions (cf. F. Inciarte, *First principles, substance and action. Studies in Aristotle and Aristotelianism*, Olms, Zurich, pp. 415-420).

[38]P. Ekman, *Emotions revealed: Recognizing faces and feelings to improve communication and emotional life*, H. Holt & Co., New York 2007, p. 53.

[39]Cf. R. Spaemann, *Happiness and benevolence*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh 2000, p. 24.

[40]Cf. G. Abbà, *Felicità, vita buona e virtù. Saggio di filosofia morale*, 5th ed., LAS, Roma 1995, pp. 40-48, J. Annas, *The morality of happiness*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1993, and P. Force, *Self-Interest before Adam Smith: A genealogy of economic science*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2003, p. 23.

selfish behaviour in a completely different perspective.

3.4 Acquiring a healthy relation with reality

When Elizabeth Anscombe first ventured into the teaching of ethics, she argued that to establish what is good or harmful, key terms such as action, intention, pleasure, and desire needed to be clarified beforehand.[41] The Cambridge scholar claimed that Aristotle's effort in this regard was a good launching pad for re-thinking philosophical ethics.

Several discussions within the *Nicomachean Ethics* present threads of notions that explain the difficulties in determining the good for the human person: on the one hand, there are absolute goods and good actions but, on the other, there are many situations in which goodness depends on the permanent or transitory conditions of the subject. Sometimes the conditions refer to accidental aspects of actions, i.e., the amount of food required by a sportsman or by an 'average' person (cf. II, 1106a36-b6). It presupposes that eating is good in general, so it is necessary to include these elements in order to evaluate what is better in different situations for different subjects. That is why *excellence* (virtue) is a permanent disposition "lying in a mean relative to us," but "determined by reason and in the way in which the man of practical wisdom would determine it" (II, 1107a1).

As already pointed out in the previous paragraph, Aristotle illustrates the relationship between *good* and *truth*, linking the choices of the wise person to nature through a comparison with the capacities of a healthy body. Then he proposes an argument to overcome the problem of subjectivism regarding the good: in absolute terms, good is the object of desire, but for each person the *apparent good*. But

> that which is *in truth an object of wish is an object of wish to the good man, while any chance thing may be so to the bad man*, as in the case of bodies also the things that are in truth wholesome are wholesome for bodies which are in good condition [...] For each *state of character* has its own ideas of the noble and the pleasant, and perhaps the *good man differs from others most by seeing the truth in each class of things, being as it were the norm and measure of them*. In most things the error seems to be due to pleasure; for it appears a good when it is not. We therefore choose the pleasant as a good, and avoid pain as an evil (III, 1113a23 -1113b1. Italics added).

There are important points of correspondence between Abraham Maslow's conception of the *self-actualizing individual*,[42] Carl Rogers' ideas on *the full functioning human being*,[43] and these Aristotelian theses regarding the *healthy relationship* between knowledge and reality. The humanist psychologists stress the

[41] G. E. M. Anscombe, *Modern moral philosophy*, «Philosophy» 33/124 (1958), p. 16.

[42] Cf. A. Maslow, *Motivation and personality*, Harper & Row, New York 1987[3], pp. 104, 159.

[43] Cf. C. R. Rogers, *Client-centered therapy: its current practice, implications and theory*, Consta-

tight bond between sensitive and intellectual knowledge in order to have a more refined assimilation of their experience,[44] an efficient relation with reality, and the ability to face it with serenity;[45] better developed human beings distinguish means and ends, enjoy every single moment of activity, and behave proactively.[46] I underscore these hints from Maslow and Rogers because there are conspicuous parallelisms with Classical thought that there will be no opportunity to develop further in this paper.

3.5 Using powers and things for Good

In line with several remarks throughout this paragraph, the integration of desires and pleasures into consistent behaviour requires thought, the capacity to perceive and transmit meaning, and to correct oneself, i.e., the capacity to readdress plans and behaviour. Feeling positive emotions—like flow—while performing right actions implies a well-developed personality, which demands a firmer foundation than mere innate dispositions.

Plato and Aristotle frequently claim that the possession of external goods is useful only if man knows how to make use of them by ordering them to the good life: it is of no use to have the tools to work with wood if one does not know their *use*; it is not sufficient to have food and other goods if one does not how to *take advantage* of them. Plato and Aristotle agree that knowing is an absolute and stable good and upon this depends the *use* that is made of external goods (*Euthydemus* 280b-d). In using those goods, however, other capacities are developed in a parallel way (*Theaetetus* 197c-d).

Everything, then, is ordered to happiness understood as *the good life*. The good life is a permanent activity ruled by wisdom. Plato concludes further on that "not only good fortune but good *doing*, as it seems, is provided by *knowledge* for mankind in every *getting* and *doing*." Thus, he goes back to the affirmation that "when wisdom is present, whoever *has* it needs no more good fortune than that" (*Euthydemus* 280b).[47]

ble, London 2003 (orig. 1951), pp. 207; *Freedom to learn for the 80s*, Charles E. Merril, Ohio IL 1983, pp. 285-295.

[44]Cf. C. R. Rogers, *On becoming a person: a therapist's view of psychotherapy*, Houghton & Mifflin, Boston 1961, pp. 23-25, *Freedom to learn*, cit., pp. 285-286.

[45]Cf. A. Maslow, *Motivation and personality*, cit., pp. 153-56, 162.

[46]Cf. A. Maslow, *Motivation and personality*, cit., p. 169. The affective resonance of a better comprehension of situations, and its consequences in the implementation of decisions, continues to be a fruitful field of study, like Barbara Fredrickson's 'broaden and build' theory: cf. B. Fredrickson, *Positive emotions broaden and build*, «Advances on Experimental Social Psychology» 47 (2013), pp. 1-54.

[47]For a detailed presentation of these Platonic texts see J. A. Mercado, *Origins of the metaphysics of the living*, cit., pp. 36-41.

3.6 Awareness of our limits

In other passages, Aristotle deals with the challenge of the uncertainty of the human situation regarding happiness, pain, and hardship. The Stagirite does not elude the argument of the discontinuity of enjoyment for the virtuous man because the possession of virtue is "compatible with being asleep, or with lifelong inactivity" and because we cannot call happy the one undergoing "the greatest sufferings and misfortunes" (I, 1095b31-35).[48]

The text implies that suffering could be integrated into a happy life within certain limits, but those limits are not clear: again, the capacity to endure pain, both physical and psychological, depends on the internal conditions of the individual.

But the passage regards the very same challenges of some of the most provocative texts of the Platonic dialogues, such as the absurdity of the sufferings of the upright person in *Gorgias* (471a-483a) and the happiness of the successful selfish person (*Republic* I, 338c-352a and the later discussion on the myth of Gyges). This is the so-called 'Nietzschean' position of the *immoralists*,[49] i.e., the permanent challenge to relate the good life to happiness.[50]

What the Stagirite instead claims boldly is that personal identity is more important even than the uncertainty of happiness and the certainty of pain:

> For existence is good to the good man, and each man wishes himself what is good, while *no one chooses to possess the whole world if he has first to become someone else* (for that matter, even now God possesses the good) (IX, 1166a20-22. Italics added).[51]

Even if we have to wait for the advent of Neoplatonism and Christian thought to find a more developed philosophy of human interiority, the Aristotelian approach discloses important paths to self-awareness and responsibility that will be mentioned in the following paragraphs.

3.7 The 'discovery' of wilful behavior

In §§3.1-3.2 there are some of the main distinctions of the Aristotelian School about the deepening of the comprehension of the dynamics of reason and its per-

[48] Cf. also I, 1098b3-99b8, 1100a8-9, 1101a7.

[49] Cf. P. Foot, *Natural goodness*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2001, pp. 99-115, and *Rationality and goodness*, «Philosophy», 2004, (Suppl. 54), pp. 1-13.

[50] Cf. E. Mack, *Critical notice on P. Foot 'Natural goodness'*, «Economics and Philosophy» 19 (1), pp. 143-147.

[51] Martin Seligman came close to this conclusion about own's identity in an exchange of ideas with his daughter Nikki, who was 10 years-old. He told her that perhaps in the near future she could be cloned and become immortal, with the possibility of deleting all her bad memories. After a few seconds, she refused the 'proposal' by simply saying, "It wouldn't be me. I'm one of a kind" (M. E. P. Seligman, *Authentic happiness*, cit., p. 206).

manent feedback with appetites. Books III and VI of the *Nichomachean Ethics* explain the fundamental functions of the mind that constitute the interconnectedness among the internal powers of the soul mentioned in §3.2.

Choice or *proairesis* depends on our capacity to deliberate (*bouleuontai*),[52] this *calculation* or *ponderation* is proper to rational beings (III, 1111b4-1113a13), i.e., beings that are able to project their present actions into an uncertain future. Deliberation and choice contrast with simple willing because of its more determinate nature: desire and willing are unrestrictedly open, i.e., one can desire unattainable things, e.g., immortality or that past events had never happened (VI, 1139b6-10):

> no one chooses such things, but only the things that *he thinks could be brought about by his own efforts*. Again, *desire relates rather to the end*, *choice* to what contributes to the end; for instance, we *wish* to be healthy, but we *choose* the acts which will make us healthy, and we *wish* to be happy and say we do, but *we cannot well say we choose to be so; for, in general, choice seems to relate to the things that are in our own power* (III, 1111b24-29. Emphasis added).

And to weight the external and the subjective situation—circumstances—we do deliberate (*bouleuontai*, III, 1112a18ff.). As with choice, Aristotle associates it with the attainability of the objects we consider:

> *We deliberate about things that are in our power and can be done*; and these are in fact what is left [...] Now every class of men deliberates about the things that can be done by their own efforts (III, 1112a31-35. Emphasis added).

Later, the Stagirite includes the collaboration of friends in the realisation of projects (III, 1112b27-29).

3.8 The moral dimension of choices

Aristotle dwells on the thesis that "it is in our power" to perform or not to perform certain actions in order to develop what we might call the first treatise on personal responsibility (III, 1113b10-1114a3). He uses a juridical approach to assign accountability for different deeds

> as when penalties are doubled in the case of drunkenness; *for the moving principle is in the man himself*, since he had the power of not getting drunk and his getting becoming inebriated was the cause of his ignorance (III, 1113b33-36. Emphasis added).[53]

He goes on to explain that we shape our interiority—the quality of our desires—while choosing. The feedback among our internal powers implies their own permanent self-modelling, "for when we have *decided* as a result of

[52] See §3.2.

[53] See W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History*, v. 4, cit. pp. 478-479 on the severity of the Stagirite in comparison to Plato's conception of 'diminished responsibility', more akin to contemporary sensibility.

deliberation, we *desire* in accordance with our deliberation" (III, 1113a12-13. Emphasis added).

In Book VI he explains the role of choice not as a mere hinge between desires and reasoning, but as a deeper interconnection of these different powers: "Hence *choice is either desiderative thought or intellectual desire*, and such an origin of action is man" (VI, 1139b3-5. Emphasis added).[54]

Aristotle is very much aware of the two sides of the coin: it is important to distinguish our internal capacities, but it is even more relevant to think about them in unity with the activity of the individual because we become more connatural with the things we choose to attain.

Earlier I explained how the activities by which we achieve something are a source of gratification (§3.3). In §5.5 we will see the numerous connections between these Aristotelian theses and Baumeister's studies on the projection and execution of plans.

3.9 The disassociation of the internal powers

Another lengthy discussion in Books III and VII of the *Nicomachean Ethics* displays the contrast between *intemperance* (ἀκρασία, *akrasía*) and *incontinence* (ἀκολασία, *akolasía*). These two and their virtuous counterparts have to do with handling vehement evil desires. Aristotle starts the discussion by presenting beauty as the highest motivation for action, as contrary to ignorance and violence: the inspiring force of the perfection of actions assists the agent in his struggle to overcome the inescapable adversities of different undertakings (III, 1110a6; 1110b9ff.). Aristotle presents the ideal of military courage (ἀνδρεία, *andreía*), typical of the heroic tradition (cf. III, 1115a3-1117b20).

The caveat regarding violence as compulsory for acting is useful to approach positive and superior stimuli:

> if someone were to say that pleasant and noble objects have a compelling power, forcing us from without, all acts would be for him compulsory; for it is for these objects that all men do everything they do. And *those who act under compulsion and unwillingly act with pain, but those who perform acts for their pleasantness and nobility perform them with pleasure; it is absurd to make external circumstances responsible, and not oneself, as being easily caught by such attractions, and to make oneself responsible for noble acts but pleasant objects responsible for base acts* (III, 1110b8-16. Emphasis added).

[54]Cf. A. M. González, *Moral, razón y naturaleza. Una investigación sobre Tomás de Aquino*, EUNSA, Pamplona 2006, pp. 168-172.

So, Aristotle connects courage with the Platonic distinction between lower and higher appetites explained above.[55]

Furthermore, the Stagirite employs again the idea of the right mean with respect to objects of desire and the internal situation of the agent. Reason evaluates these elements in order to establish what is the *right thing for me to do here and now*. Courage offers relatively simple situations because there are few elements involved: the agent evaluates the congruity of his fear in a dangerous situation. It is elementary to decide whether the reasonable action is flight or fight, even if what is at stake is his own life. With these categories we can apply the term *courageous, reckless* or *coward* to the different possible behaviours (cf. III, 1116a10-15).

Through these concrete reasonings, Aristotle progresses from the Platonic 'intellectualistic' position, but always sharing with his master some fundamental notions, e.g., temperance (σωφροσύνη, *sophrosyne*) as necessary to keep presence of mind and to be able to deliberate and then act in the best possible way (III, 1117a28-b20).

That is why his seminal catalogue of the forms of temperance and intemperance is so important and goes beyond the external appearance of self-control. The agent must harmonize general convenience or inconvenience with his actual desires.

From this relationship between reasoning and desire, Aristotle develops a fourfold catalogue of situations:

1. The *continent* will have evil desires but be able to restrain them, while the *temperate* (ἐγκρατής, *enkratés, sophron*), will *not* have evil desires at all. It is implied that both will be able to reason and judge correctly in a particular situation, so they exercise self-control.

2. The *incontinent* man (ἀκρατής, *akratés*), in turn, will *not* judge that he must *always* pursue pleasure—it is implied that he will be capable of giving reasons for not pursuing a particular pleasure at a particular moment—but he will do so anyway:

> knowing that what he does is bad, [he] does it as a result of passion, while the continent man, knowing that his appetites are bad, does not follow them because of his reason (VII, 1145b12-14).

3. The temperate man is in command of his sensual and irascible tendencies, acts in conformity with reason (cf. II, 1104a34-b6), and does not yearn for pleasure nor for not having pursued it (cf. III, 1118b28-35). The intemperate, on the other hand,

> craves all pleasant things or those that are most pleasant, and is led by his appetite to

[55] See §3.1. Cf. *Rep.* 439e-441a; cf. NE III, 1116b-1117a9.

> choose these at the cost of everything else; hence he is pained both when he fails to obtain them and when he craves for them (for appetite involves pain) (III, 1119a1-5).

4. The intemperate man feels no remorse after his search for pleasure because he believes that it is right to fulfil the requirements of our spontaneous desires. Here there are more hints of "abstract thought" to complete Ekman's remarks about the role of regret quoted above (cf. VII, 1150a16-25; 11150b29-36).

In conclusion, the only full state of virtue is that of the *temperate*. *Continence* is similar externally to *temperance*, but with a crucial difference: a continent man's desires will be evil, or at the very least unwieldy (which is why they need to be restrained). That is why Aristotle does not, strictly speaking, count *continence* as a virtue.[56]

The complete description of the temperate man is illuminating as it offers important hints about the congruence of human activity. So, the temperate man does not enjoy the things that the self-indulgent man enjoys most,

> nor in general the things that he should not, nor anything of this sort to excess, nor does he experience pain or craving when they are absent, *or he does so only to a moderate degree, and not more than he should, nor when he should not, and so on; but the things that, being pleasant, make for health or for good condition, he will desire moderately and as he should, and also other pleasant things if they are not hindrances to these ends, or contrary to what is noble, or beyond his means.* For he who neglects these conditions loves such pleasures more than they are worth, but the temperate man is not that sort of person, but *the sort of person that right reason prescribes* (VII, 1119a12-21. Emphasis added).

It is clear for Aristotle that the problem of the incontinent is not a fragility of his ability to understand (cf. VII, 1146b7ff), but he associates it with the defects of comprehension: to behave against what one considers to be right can be equated with an intellectual error regarding the application of a universal principle to a concrete situation (that of the actual desires). Reason is not able to guide the appetites (cf. VII, 1146b32-1147b2).

In other texts, Aristotle integrates the role of imagination in this delicate process of lining up the different faculties in order to generate a constructive behaviour. All the powers can synergize or clash in this choral activity.[57]

As a conclusion to this long discussion we can quote some words of Alejandro Vigo. The Argentinian scholar explains that in the incontinent there is a disasso-

[56] Cf. VII, 1145b14-15 and II, 1105a17-1105b. See also M. Pakaluk, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics: An introduction*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2005, p. 234 and B. Fowers, *From continence to virtue: Recovering goodness, character unity, and character types for positive psychology*, «Theory and Psychology», 18/5 (2008), pp. 629-653.

[57] Cf. Aristotle, *Movement of animals*, 701a6-b2. On the relationship between senses, memory, and imagination, see Ekman, *Emotions revealed*, cit. pp. 33-35. More about fantasy and mental work in §5, below.

ciation between his desires and reason, so he "has not achieved a transformation of his ideal life in an *ethos*" or *lifestyle*.[58] Thus he is unable to structure his life through coherent plans that require an enduring *symphonic* activity of his powers. He summarizes this incapacity as a "fallenness in the present", i.e., a lack of energy to sustain the effort needed to deal with foreseen situations. It makes his behaviour similar to that of animals[59] that are stuck to the present.[60]

This harmonization allows him to deal with his own future in a never-ending "learning by doing"[61] and correcting his own way of doing things.[62]

3.10 Being a friend of oneself. The question of egoism

Deliberation and choice as the foundation of voluntariness help clarify some points about *egoism*, as Aristotle puts it in book IV of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The Stagirite discusses the relation between friendship and the possibility of establishing a friendly relationship with oneself. As seen in §3.2, Plato claims that the order of the faculties leads the subject to behave "as a friend of himself," assuming that this is a convenient condition. The Aristotelian argument arises in a debate on egoism or the pursuit of self-interest. The question develops in two key questions: is it possible to be a friend of oneself, and should everyone seek the best for himself?

The answer does not address the first question directly. Instead, it assesses that, in any case, we all must choose things and situations. Thus, even if the relationship "with oneself" is not comparable to the otherness required for friendship —or justice— each must decide what is convenient to grant oneself or to avoid. Choosing between the beneficial and the harmful involves the choice of both material and spiritual goods, and seeking and administering them implies continual deliberation and choice.

[58] A. Vigo, *Action, reason and truth* cit., p. 142. On p. 38 there is a full account of the reasonings that lead to this kind of decision-making. See also the Spanish version, A. Vigo, *Estudios aristotélicos*, EUNSA, Pamplona 2011, p. 353. See also pp. 287-288. See also the concluding paragraph of §3.2 above, and the whole text of §4.6 below.

[59] A. Vigo, *Action, reason and truth* cit., p. 154.

[60] See R. F. Baumeister, K. D. Vohs K D, G. Oettingen, *Pragmatic Prospection: how and why people think about the future*, «Review of General Psychology» 20 (1) 2016, pp. 3-16, p. 8. See the parallels with Mischel's works in §4.2.

[61] For a comprehensive explanation of the principle "learning by/through doing", see F. Inciarte, *First principles*, cit., pp. 317-336.

[62] See a summary of Anscombe's insightful theoretical approach to the correction of reason and thought within the Aristotelian framework in J. M. Torralba, *Acción intencional y razonamiento práctico según G. E. M. Anscombe*, EUNSA, Pamplona 2005, pp. 170-172. For a business-oriented presentation of the same thesis, see C. Llano & L. Polo, *Antropología de la acción directiva*, in L. Polo, *Obras completas*, A, v. XVIII, EUNSA, Pamplona 2019, pp. 376 and 419.

This first conclusion serves as a premise for clarifying the question of selfishness: if one must choose what to seek, it is necessary to be good, that is, to select for oneself the best things. As explained above, the most valuable things for the virtuous person are existence and self-awareness, which implies the harmonisation of desires with reason and with the best goods, i.e., intellectual goods. Thus, the honest person strives to nourish his soul with the goods of reason, informing all his activity through them.[63] Such a person

> wishes to live with himself; for he does so with pleasure, since the memories of his past acts are delightful and his hopes for the future are good, and therefore pleasant. His mind is well stored too with subjects of contemplation. And he grieves and rejoices, more than any other, with himself; for the same thing is always painful, and the same thing always pleasant, and not one thing at one time and another at another (NE IX, 1166a23-28).

It follows that if selfishness is interchangeable with this endless search for what is best for oneself, i.e., treating oneself as one's best friend (cf. 1166a1-4), it becomes a moral requirement.

In any case, these theses can only make sense as the basis of a broad view of human activity: the harmonisation of the faculties mentioned above leads to more fruitful behaviour, including social relations: this eliminates the apparent paradox of selfishness explained here. On the contrary, the incontinent choose the pleasant and harmful, or give in to laziness, fear, or neglect. Incontinent people:

> choose, instead of the things they themselves think good, things that are pleasant but hurtful [...] And those who have done many terrible deeds and are hated for their wickedness even shrink from life and destroy themselves (NE IX, 1166b9-11).

The consequences for social life will be deleterious. This focus on the well-being of the self is quite different to that illustrated in the myth of Gyges. Aristotle is claiming for the internal unity of the single and his coherent conduct, that implies collaboration and honesty. The practical response of the *immoralist* is a casually occuring race determined by the fleeting directives of a creativity that continually opens loopholes until exhaustion or boredom permeate all the strata of his life.

[63] Manuel Cruz offers an inclusive reading of the various objects of love, based on the famous discussion in the *Symposium*. For Cruz, the fact that the highest forms of love do not stagnate in the sensible does not imply that they do not assume it. That is to say, the hierarchy in which desires and loves are integrated should not be understood as a compartmentalised system. With this interpretation, the intellectualist separation, in which the attainment of spiritual goods implies the abandonment of the most elementary stages of love, is largely overcome. This idea applies to Aristotelian discourse in the terms I put forward here (M. Cruz, *Plato on eros*, «Acta Philosophica» 30 (2022), pp. 101-119).

4 PROMOTING CONNATURALITY BETWEEN REASON AND DESIRES

4.1 Gratification and pleasure

Desires and emotions are at the core of our lives.[64] They present us a wide range of information about ourselves and the external stimuli we experience. Different contemporary proposals about the nature of desire present a more integrated approach to our appetitive drives than the reductive 'fight or flight' approach. Nowadays the consideration of the cognitive elements and the mutual influence of knowledge, desire, and action bring to light a richer image of the dynamics of our behaviour. The mythical and rational explanations of our internal faculties illustrated by ancient philosophers, as explained in §3, have important psychological updates.

I would just mention some of them that seem particularly in tune with the inescapable 'inner dialogue' that shapes choices and preferences, and ultimately also character.[65]

It is worthwhile to underline some of the conclusions of the early works of the positive psychology movement regarding pleasure. I will not deal with the debate about *eudaimonic* and *hedonic* happiness because I only wish to stress the rediscovery of important nuances regarding pleasure and pleasant situations that are at the core of the re-evaluation of virtues and character as psychological matters.[66]

Seligman explains in *Authentic happiness* that sensible pleasure and pain have a minimal scope in our emotional life. Feeling good or enjoying a situation is different from the positive feelings or emotions achieved experienced with virtuous activities such as working in a good business, helping others, or educating our children. The most rewarding activities are those in harmony with noble purposes and imply the actualisation of virtues:[67] authentic gratifications rely on

[64]Cf. Ekman, *Emotions revealed*, cit. pp. 42, 50.

[65]I would like to thank an anonimous referee that reminded me of the similarity of my terminology to that of Margaret Archer. Although Archer is better known in the sociological sphere her proposal has deep anthropological roots, I think our basic theses are quite overlapping. Cf. *Structure, agency and the internal conversation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2003.

[66]Cf. C. Peterson & M. E. P. Seligman, *Character strengths and virtues: a handbook and classification.* American Psychological Association-Oxford University Press, Oxford 2004, pp. 11-18. See also K. Kristjánsson, *Flourishing as the aim of education. A Neo-Aristotelian view*, Routledge, London 2020. ch. 3. "The flourishing-happiness concordance thesis: do these two always go hand in hand?", pp. 52-72, E. Diener & R. Biswas-Diener, *Happiness. Unlocking the mysteries of psychological wealth*, Blackwell, Oxford 2008, pp. 233, 348-249, and P. Valenzuela, *Eudaimonic vs Hedonic well-being: authors and ideas in the contemporary debate*, in https://www.researchgate.net/publication/344749367_Eudaimonic_vs_Hedonic_Well-Being_authors_and_ideas_in_the_contemporary_debate [19/10/2020].

[67]Cf. M. E. P. Seligman, *Authentic happiness*, cit., p. 112.

continuous efforts,[68] even those that develop in *flow*, as described previously.[69] That is why in the more systematic text *Character strengths and virtues*, they rely more on the term *fulfillment*, because "it seems that fulfillments must reflect effort, the willful choice and pursuit over time of morally praiseworthy activities."[70] Even positive emotions,

> alienated from the exercise of character leads to emptiness, to inauthenticity, to depression, and as we age, to the gnawing realization that we are fidgeting until we die.[71]

Pleasures are just feelings, while gratifications are the product of engaging activities in which the strengths of our personality flourish. It requires thought, the ability to perceive and transmit meanings or to correct oneself.[72] Experiencing positive emotions in conjunction with good actions implies a highly developed personality for whose constitution innate provisions are not enough. Here too there is an essential correspondence with classical thought, that is, that good actions are accompanied by a certain kind of gratification (cf. NE I, 1099a).

4.2 Awareness

There is a self-evident principle regarding emotions and behaviour that Ekman stresses in the first pages of *Emotions revealed*. After acknowledging that the readiness of our emotional responses is very useful for life preservation, he develops a whole chapter on "Behaving emotionally."[73] There he quotes and glosses upon terms from different authors that underscore the importance of the ability "to stop and think" before acting under the pressure of the passions. He summarizes what others call *appraisal awareness* or *reflective consciousness* with the need to be able to consider attentively our own emotional feelings to weaken promptly an emotional trigger that may be about to go off.[74] Then he assesses

[68] Cf. M. E. P. Seligman, *Authentic happiness*, cit., pp. 116-117.

[69] Cf. §3.3.

[70] C. Peterson & M. E. P. Seligman, *Character strengths and virtues*, cit. p. 17.

[71] M. E. P. Seligman, *Authentic happiness*, cit., p. 8.

[72] Cf. M. E. P. Seligman, *Authentic happiness*, cit., pp. 103, 111ff.

[73] Cf. P. Ekman, *Emotions revealed*, cit. pp. 52-81.

[74] Cf. P. Ekman, *Emotions revealed*, cit. pp. 75-80. The concept *appraisal awareness* was coined by Magda Arnold (1903-2002). The Moravian psychologist discovered in Aquinas' notion of *estimative* a conceptual basis that allowed her to distinguish without separating the sensitive perception from its cognitive elements and its emotional impact. See R. Cornelius, *Magda Arnold's Thomistic theory of emotion, the self-ideal, and the moral dimension of appraisal*, «Cognition and Emotion» 20 (2006), pp. 976-2000, and P. Valenzuela, *Magda B. Arnold's work on the integration of philosophy and Psychology perspectives on Human Emotion*, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/35368 1387_Magda_B_Arnold's_work_on_the_integration_of_Philosophy_and_Psychology_perspecti ves_on_Human_Emotion [18/02/2022.]

that it is a process composed of two stages. The first stage regards the awareness of what it is within ourselves that is causing us to respond emotionally in a way we later regret. The second stage is to "try to broaden our understanding of the other person."[75] He explains some concrete strategies in the conclusive remarks of every chapter and refers also to the positive outcomes of meditation in order to develop such *attentiveness*, but he admits that he has not conducted research in that field.

4.3 Finding and building good reasons

Back in the 1970s, Martin Seligman and some of his colleagues incorporated the so-called *explanatory style* in their studies on helplessness in humans. The explanatory style as a *habit* of explanation is a dispositional factor for pessimism or optimism that influences the way we evaluate our development in complex circumstances.

The explanatory style is the manner in which we habitually explain to ourselves why events happen. Seligman considers that the descriptive style is a useful modulator of learned helplessness, e.g., an optimistic explanatory style allows for an interruption of this state of inability to act effectively. Instead, a pessimistic style fosters such a state.[76] The way we tell ourselves how things have gone and how we think that we can act to modify them has significant effects on one's state of mind and on the ability to overcome obstacles.[77]

Thus, the whole theory can be schematized as follows: if learned helplessness comes as a reaction of renouncement, the abandonment response derives from the belief that "everything I do is in vain;" "it is useless to oppose external forces;" "my natural endowments determine me."

Even if the explanatory style is only one aspect of the personality and is particularly influential in people prone to discouragement and depression, it is vital to underscore two evident things: the first is that the explanatory style can be shaped with or without the assistance of a specialist. The second is that it is significant not only in psychotherapy, but for people without particular problems. It is a matter of education of the person's ability to evaluate his or her own position

[75] P. Ekman, *Emotions revealed*, p. 80.

[76] M. E. P. Seligman, *Learned optimism: how to change your mind and your life*, Random House, New York 2006, pp. 15-16. Cf. L. Bastos, *L'eudaimonia nella proposta della psicologia positiva di Martin Seligman*, ESC, Rome 2019, pp. 202-218. See the remarks on helplessness in §2.2., n. 7.

[77] Seligman's popular works are outspokenly exhortative, so they seem to minimize important aspects of psychological research, especially the clinical area regarding mental illnesses. Peterson has detached descriptions on the research of the explanatory style. See C. Peterson & M. E. P. Seligman, *Character strengths and virtues*, cit. pp. 573-580, and C. Peterson & T. A. Steen, "Optimistic Explanatory Style," in *Handbook of positive psychology*, C. R. Snyder & D. J. Lopez (eds), pp. 244-256.

in complex and often permanent situations. People can put things in a different—oftentimes corrected—perspective thanks to a certain amount of detachment. It supports a wider evaluation of the different circumstances helping the work of our intelligence.[78]

At this juncture there is a deep consonance with Maslow's fundamental ideas and the profile of self-actualised individuals, as already noted.[79] Such people, according to Maslow, possess a fine objectivity in their assessment of situations, which makes them able to focus on problem-solving and be more proactive, effortlessly avoiding self-centredness. Carl Rogers deals with the issue in a similar way, underlining the relative well-being produced by a better understanding of reality, which allows for a better management of it.

4.4 Carol Dweck: managing deep attitudes

Carol Dweck (New York 1946) goes further in this way of dealing with mental dispositions. She explains the core of her work through the idea of *mindsets*. Mindsets are the ways we evaluate ourselves and our circumstances, and these perspectives can be deeply influenced by education or the cultural environment. They can

> determine whether you become the person you want to be and whether you accomplish the things you value. [...] Believing that your qualities [e.g., IQ, fearfulness] are carved in stone [...] creates an urgency to prove yourself over and over.[80]

This she calls *the fixed mindset,* and she explains its opposite as *the growth mindset*, that depends "on the belief that your qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts" and that "everyone can change and grow through application and experience". People with such a mindset

> believe that a person's true potential is unknown (and unknowable); that it's impossible to foresee what can be accomplished with years of passion, toil, and training.[81]

Surprisingly, one interesting discussion of the book is the widening of the fixed mindset to gifted people. Dweck considers the tennis player John McEnroe as an outstanding example of a fixed mindset carrier. When McEnroe made a mistake, his irritation was directed outwards—at the umpire, the ball boy, the crowd—rather than inwards towards learning and improvement. It seemed that

[78] Optimism is one of the most controversial notions in positive psychology, both internally and among its critics. It is linked to a superficial version of positive thinking, harshly criticised by Barbara Ehrenreich in *Bright-sided: how the relentless promotion of positive thinking has undermined America*, Metropolitan Books, New York 2009.

[79] Cf. §3.4.

[80] C. Dweck, *Mindset. How you can fulfil your potential*, Robinson, London 2012, p. 6.

[81] C. Dweck, *Mindset*, cit. pp. 6-7.

he was unable to consider himself responsible and accountable for his performance. Blaming circumstances or other people interferes with our awareness of our situation and the ways we try to improve our abilities or constructively modify our situation.

Dweck explains in the fifth chapter of her book the challenge with the *talent mindset*. She recalls the disastrous ending of Enron in 2001. Dweck agrees with the idea that American corporations espoused the worship of talent that promoted the appointment of highly talented fixed mindset managers. A large number of those managers constantly tried to prove they were the best ones, often claiming credit for other people's contributions and undermining others to feel powerful.

Dweck wisely contrasts this toxic behaviour with the description of managers that make firms grow steadily over the years in Jim Collins' *Good to great*.[82] Dweck claims that those managers have the growth mindset, so they believe in human development. It is observable in their readiness to listen to others' opinions and judgments, and their will to surround themselves with the most qualified people they can find; they evaluate squarely their own flaws, and they ask in an open manner what skills they and the firm will need in the future.[83]

None of these dispositions are things of another world. They can be learned, but require the courage to modify deep-rooted inclinations—the sclerosis of the fixed mindset. Normal people share different elements of the two kinds of mindset as described by Dweck. Her theory illuminates concrete elements that foster or inhibit harmonious dialogue between the internal powers of the individual and his or her responses in different contexts.

4.5 Walter Mischel: Circumspection in the face of vehement desire

Walter Mischel (Vienna 1930-New York 2018) is celebrated for his decades-long studies on delayed gratification in children and young people. It helped to clarify the importance of self-control in personal development. Mischel considers that the issue of willpower arises not only when talking about going on a diet, quitting smoking, or controlling anger or sadness. It also emerges when we read about scandals of prominent figures, whether they be celebrities, politicians, or moral authorities: if this person was good enough to get where he is, why then did he commit such a base moral error?[84] We are dealing again with the paradoxes of

[82] J. Collins, *Good to Great: why some companies make the leap and others don't*, Harper Business, New Rochelle (NY) 2001.

[83] C. Dweck, *Mindset*, cit. pp. 108-110.

[84] W. Mischel, *The marshmallow test. Understanding self-control and how to master it*, Random House, London 2014, p. 7.

the intemperate and the incontinent![85]

There seems to be even more urgency when we realize that the question is not only about the centrality of self-control—it is also about whether or not willpower is a given, or something learnable. Are some of us doomed to weakness of will while others are gifted with grit?

Mischel tells us that the driving force of his work was his personal belief that "the ability to delay immediate gratification for the sake of future consequences is an acquirable cognitive skill;"[86] an intuition that, as the book *The marshmallow test* shows us, was eventually supported by the findings of his research. Mischel clearly sets out his task in the introduction:

> I discuss what 'willpower' is and what it is not, the *conditions* that undo it, the *cognitive skills and motivations that enable it*, and the *consequences of having it and using it.* I examine the implications of these findings for rethinking who we are; what we can be; how our minds work; how we can—and can't—control our impulses, emotions, and dispositions; how we can change; and how we can raise and educate our children.[87]

Mischel and his graduate students developed the first set of procedures in the preschool on Stanford University's campus in the late 1960s. The full title of the project clarifies the study subject: "The preschool self-imposed delay of immediate gratification for the sake of delayed but more valued rewards paradigm." So, children were given a candy with the promise that if they waited for the return of the teacher, they would have another, but they could eat the first one at any time. They had as their subjects the age cohort of Mischel's daughters, although they themselves were never part of the experiments. It is this coincidence that also led to the further development of research on delayed gratification; that is, the impact of this skill on other areas of life. First, Mischel makes it clear that he and his students designed the procedure not as a 'test' to rate children's performance, but as a tool to understand what "enabled them to delay gratification if and when they wanted to." He also clarifies that the experiments are in no way meant to be predictive.[88] However, in the years that followed, casual conversations around the dinner table with his daughters made him notice possible links between the preschoolers' results on the marshmallow test and his daughters'

[85]See the Aristotelian explanation and Vigo's remarks on the capacity of detachment from actual stimuli in §3.9.

[86]W. Mischel, *The marshmallow test*, cit. p. 1.

[87]W. Mischel, *The marshmallow test*, cit., p. 5.

[88]W. Mischel, *The marshmallow test*, cit., pp. 21-22. Dee Gill offers a comprehensive summary of Daniel J. Benjamin and colleagues' research on the limits of Mischel's conclusions of his experiments (D. Gill, "New Study Disavows Marshmallow Test's Predictive Powers," 24/02/21, https://anderson-review.ucla.edu/new-study-disavows-marshmallow-tests-predictive-powers/ [26/02/2022.])

'informal judgments' about the social and academic performance of their peers. Thus the "Stanford longitudinal studies on delay of gratification" were launched in 1982; from then on, Mischel's research definitively found its direction and its niche in the field of psychology.

Even if Mischel does not devote much space to the evolution of emotions during the tests, some of his descriptions shed light on that issue. Both in preschoolers and other groups, self-congratulation usually accompanied those who were able to delay the gratification.[89]

Two episodes are worth mentioning, even if they make this paragraph a bit long. Both stories are significant in illustrating the relationship between self-control and gratification.

The first regards Inés, a Chilean girl. She kept the two Oreo biscuits given to her, i.e., the one at the beginning of the test and the one she received as a reward for not eating the first. She did not care about them; she just wanted to show them to her mother when she came to pick her up at school, proud as she was of her achievement.[90]

The second event concerns a survivor of the bombing of Nagasaki in August 1945. His name was Takashi Paul Nagai (1908-1951). His young children lived because they were outside the city, but his wife died in the first moments of the catastrophe. As a physician, he devoted himself to caring for the wounded and later to maintaining morale among his fellow citizens. His already failing health suffered and he could not get out of his small house.

His daughter Kayano was six-years-old at the time of the events (1948). The little girl took too much time to get home after school one day. Then, suddenly,

> she appeared before him carrying a cup, both hands holding it as if it contained a precious flame that must not go out. [...] Her eyes never left the cup until she put it down on a shelf. Then she exhaled noisily in relief. Intrigued, he asked her what it was. A big smile.

Kayano explained that, at school,

> everyone was given a cup of something new called pineapple juice. It tasted so nice when she sipped it that she decided it would do her sick daddy good.[91]

It is easy to identify there an emerging virtuous way of feeling while doing good, like that of Aristotle's upright man and explicitly cited by Ekman.[92]

The impact of mastery on emotivity is clearer in adults. Even before we achieve something, the very *feeling* that we can do it requires both awareness

[89] W. Mischel, *The marshmallow test*, cit., pp. 18.

[90] W. Mischel, *The marshmallow test,* cit. pp. 18-19.

[91] P. Glynn, *A song for Nagasaki. The story of Takashi Nagai: scientist, convert and survivor of the atomic bomb*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco (CA) 2009, pp. 207-208.

[92] See §§3.3 and 3.4.

of our situation and of the possibility of ruling our lives instead of being acted upon. Mastery is the belief that we can be active agents in determining our own behaviour, that we are able to change, grow, learn, and conquer new challenges.

Mischel illustrates it with the story of "Theresa," a distressed woman who was becoming upset and anxious

> feeling that she could no longer manage her life. In the third therapy session, her agitation seemed to peak, as she exclaimed tearfully that she was afraid she was losing it and begged Dr. Kelly to answer her question, 'Am I falling apart?'
>
> Kelly slowly took off his glasses, brought his face close to hers, stared straight into her eyes, and asked, 'Would you like to?'

Theresa was astonished. She appeared immensely relieved as if an enormous burden

> had dropped from her shoulders. It had not occurred to her that it might be within her power to change what she felt. 'Falling apart' was suddenly an option, not her inevitable fate. She did not have to be the passive victim of her biography, witnessing her life unravel. This was her 'Eureka!' moment.[93]

From that moment on the therapy started an exploration of alternative and more constructive ways of thinking about herself and opened paths of action she had not considered before.[94] It is not yet a work plan, but is a significant step forward. Again, a renewed awareness of the whole situation modifies intimate feelings and can deliver energy to take up demanding projects.

4.6 Roy F. Baumeister: structuring the future

Roy Baumeister and his colleagues have been studying the way we *handle* our future for several years. As indicated previously in §§3.2 and 3.9, the outcome of their works updates significant Aristotelian theses inspired by James' theses on autonomy and purposive behaviour.

Some of their experiments are useful to contrast the manifestations of different mental activities, e.g., mere mind wandering and concrete planning. It implies the above-mentioned mental tools such as deliberation and choice to arrange the order of foreseen events. These exercises are particular and require effort and concentration.

[93] W. Mischel, *The marshmallow test*, cit., p. 112.

[94] W. Mischel, *The marshmallow test*, cit., p. 112. Mischel does not develop the theme of hope. For Aristotle and Aquinas (*Summa Theologiae*, I-II), hope appears as one of the eleven fundamental passions. In this perspective, hope is related to joy, one of the five fundamental emotions according to Ekman's proposal, but it is far from being identified with it: hope is an emotion in which cognitive and evaluative elements converge, often associated with accumulated experiences.

Setting up plans is mental work that requires energy and readiness for a challenge. It is obvious that arrangements do not simply happen: the individual must be focused and working mentally at it. It is an activity that requires involvement. Planning is about what one wants and is meaningful for several key reasons. So, it is an important stage of the *administration* of our desires. As Baumeister explains,

> One of those [key reasons] is that it connects across time, which is inherently a meaningful connection and one that enriches the associative network of any thought or idea [...] [There is] a general pattern linking meaningfulness to connection across time. Thoughts that combined past, present, and future were rated as the most meaningful on average of all thoughts.[95]

Planning entails effort and work. Exercising it colours the mood in a more pleasant light and diminishes feelings such as stress, anger, and anxiety.

In another paper, Baumeister and colleagues present the *pragmatic prospection theory*, very much in line with the work quoted above. Apart from the coincidence regarding the exclusivity of humans to consider the future and to be able to *work* on it,[96] they explain *pragmatic prospection* as the capacity to "think about the future so as to guide actions to bring about *desirable* outcomes." (p. 3) This simple formulation overlaps with Aristotelian principles: humans can think about their future in a way that allows them to model it.[97] It implies that we *evaluate the feasibility* of the foreseen situation (pp. 3-4). And it presupposes the *difference between mere desiring or wishing and choosing* (pp. 5-6);[98] between *deliberating* and *performing*; between *planning* and merely *predicting*.

They explain that general or propositional ideas become *narrative* when humans translate them into *practicable plans* (pp. 7-8, 13). This narrative implies a permanent administration of emotional feedback (pp. 8-11), which means that emotions have a relevant evaluative character. But on top of this factual evidence, narrative implies that moving from a present "to a desired future outcome requires a sequence of actions and events, *meaningfully and often causally related to each other*" (p. 8),[99] and they conclude that "plans that are in line with people's

[95] *Homo Prospectus*, ch. 6. "Pragmatic prospection", pp. 168-169.

[96] R. F. Baumeister, G. Oettingen, K. D. Vohs, *Pragmatic Prospection,* cit., pp. 8, 13. To avoid inserting seven footnotes in a row, I will indicate the pages of this study in brackets throughout the body of the text.

[97] See §§3.2 and 3.9.

[98] See §3.7.

[99] See NE 1176a155 ff. in §3.3. L. Polo coined the term *non-defuturization of the future* to indicate that humans live more in the future than in the present. It means that time is a continuum and that we are always projected into the future. At the same time, "the future can be determined to the extent that freedom enters the scene the future changes," C. Llano & L. Polo, *Antropología de la acción directiva*, cit. p. 456. We always look forward, so we are always planning somehow. See L. Polo, *Persona y libertad,* in *Obras completas* A, v. 17, EUNSA, Pamplona 2017, pp. 158-170.

prized values are better at getting the desired result than other plans" (p. 10). The authors comment that connecting future to present based on meaningful narratives "can improve present decision-making and long-term outcomes" (p. 8), as the Aristotle-inspired advocates of *recta ratio* claim.[100] The formulation of personal awareness or psychological conscience explained in §3.6 would profit from these experimental works.

4.7 Learning to measure what is significant

Apart from these connections between ancient philosophy of the human person and contemporary psychology, it is worth referring briefly to some practices that can foster the internal dialogue of the faculties.

So-called first generation coaching draws mainly on the work and practice of Timothy Gallwey. Gallwey adapted some practices from Carl Rogers' proposal to help people increase their awareness in the most important aspects of their activities. He shifted from the environment of sports to a wider field of practice because he discovered that the core principles of his practice were useful in any domain.

Gallwey stresses the importance of the identification of objectives and the essential role of imagination in this task.[101] In the words of Bergamino, clarifying objectives within a project

> helps the individual to project himself into the future, making it mentally present [...] When the mind sees the goal in its concrete dimension, it adheres more easily and orients itself naturally to it. The process naturally enhances the client's goal-setting capacity.[102]

The focused agent, as underscored by Csikszentmihaly in his theory of flow,

> only picks up on those aspects of a situation that are needed to accomplish the task at hand. [...] [The agent] is not distracted by other thoughts or external events, [...] [and] is totally engrossed in whatever is relevant in the here and now.[103]

[100]The authors do not discuss the objectivity of what people consider more or less highly valuable, although it is clear from the context that it is about stable social and family relationships; plans for progress in one's work, etc.

[101]Baumeister and his colleagues integrate the role of imagination, mind wandering, and even day-dreaming in those complex processes. It would be fruitful to compare the outcomes of their research with the Aristotelian texts on fantasy. Ekman's and Gallwey's approach to imagination is more generic.

[102]F. Bergamino, "Coaching for the development of the human person: History and anthropological foundations", in *Personal flourishing in organizations*, Juan A. Mercado (ed.), Springer 2018, Cham (CH) pp. 143-170, p. 151.

[103]Cf. T. Gallwey, *The inner game of tennis*, Random House, New York 2000, p. 84.

The complex functions of deliberating and deciding have a positive emotional impact when the individual integrates them in a coherent program. A consistent follow-up of the plan produces permanent, even if non-dramatic, positive feedback, which provides energy to the whole endeavour.[104] Again, this tuning of the faculties is in harmony with a virtue ethics theory that can integrate emotional outcomes.

In management, strategies based on objectives have been very present since the 1950s. In the 1970s, the practice of "objectives and key results" (OKR), devised by Andy Grove and popularised by John Doerr, came to maturity.[105] The fundamental idea of "measuring what matters" implies setting achievable and challenging objectives aligned with the organisation's corporate purpose. The setting of goals goes hand in hand with establishing benchmarks to measure their achievement. This planning is done by working units, not by general management. The continuous exercise of comparing objectives with results sharpens forecasting and evaluating one's own resources. A supportive feedback system helps individuals and workgroups to become increasingly responsible and autonomous. Correction and reward are naturally incorporated into the processes.[106]

These findings of contemporary psychology and their practical developments could enrich the discourse on psychological awareness and responsibility through the study of the voluntary act and deliberation explained in §§3.6 and 3.7.

5 CONCLUDING SUMMARY

I present three sets of conclusions. The statements are very brief, given the abundance of cross-references throughout the text.

1. The main ideas from Plato and Aristotle regarding the harmonisation of reason and desires can be summarised as follows:

- Humans are free to choose the way they live, and, to that end, they must accept that not all desires (and goals) have the same value.
- The ability to choose implies that human beings have a reliable knowledge of themselves and external realities.
- Human beings must develop a healthy relationship among their internal powers in order to master their desires in the long run. This sound relationship or harmonisation is necessary in order to cope with a wide range

[104] Cf. J. Whitmore, *Coaching for performance*, Nicholas Brealey, Boston 2009, p. 64.

[105] J. Doerr, *Measure what matters*, Penguin Books, New York 2018.

[106] In connection with some of Leonardo Polo's ideas, a cursory explanation of the proposal can be found in my article *Tiempo, tarea y satisfacción. De la sindéresis a la medición de resultados*, «Empresa y Humanismo» 25/1 (2022), pp. 111-141, DOI: 10.15581/015.XXV.1.111-141.

of shifting desires. Some inclinations are vehement and transitory, while others are calm but require long-lasting efforts to make them fruitful.
– The awareness regarding different desires changes from one person to another and from one situation to another. The ability to refine the appraisal of the inclinations and link them to the foreseeable future is of great significance. Such an evaluation is at the core of being accountable for own's life project.

2. The fruits deriving from William James' thesis of pragmatic prospection deserve particular attention, because numerous experimental studies have confirmed and enriched his principal intuition.
– James' inspiration has, on the one hand, opened up avenues for the interpretation of animal behaviour that goes beyond the predictions of the laboratory.
– On the other hand, it has served as a guiding thread for weighing the results of complex human experiments on future planning. Those studies had clarified the differences between imagining possible scenarios and making plans to carry them out. They corroborated that the brain activity and the state of mind that accompany and follow these two sets of activities are indeed distinguishable. For example, the neurological activity required for action programmes involves a more significant expenditure of energy than mere imagining; it produces positive moods, such as serenity through lucidity of mind; simultaneously, it generates an 'energy charge' to deal with the subsequent steps in the programme.
– Perhaps the most philosophically relevant conclusion is that these activities have more powerful and lasting effects when people connect them to the higher levels of their scale of values. In other words, the whole organism is more stimulated by designing concrete plans in tune with a medium- and long-range ideal of life.

3. There are five contributions from contemporary psychology that illuminate and make concrete the unavoidable internal harmonisation presented in the paper:
– As Paul Ekman assesses, we can foster our reflective consciousness to master our emotions. The more the individual refines his or her emotional appraisal, the more he or she can attentively consider that their feelings gradually weaken emotional triggers that may be about to go off.
– The explanatory style (Peterson, Seligman, and others) is an attitude that influences the way we evaluate our development. It is how we habitually explain to ourselves why events happen. Reframing our internal story can positively impact our expression and promote more fruitful attitudes in our relational activities.

- Carol Dweck's theses on mindsets connect with the previous argument regarding internal dialogue. A mindset is the arrangement of ideas about our capabilities. In a fixed mindset, the prevailing thoughts are deterministic, and it does not foster the comprehension of our inner situation. The growth mindset relies on the belief that we can cultivate qualities through effort and that everyone can improve with enough application and experience.
- Walter Mischel's renewal of the treatment of temperance, self-control, and free will directly recalls its necessity for human flourishing. Studies on developmental psychology have translated into modern terms the breadth and the limits to increasing willpower through life stages.
