

ABSTRACT

Phronesis: The Missing Virtue

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This thesis examines the intellectual virtue of *phronesis*, as understood through Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and Joseph Dunne's addition to Aristotle in *Back to the Rough Ground*. The thesis highlights the importance of the virtue by contrasting it to the other intellectual virtue of *techne*, and using three novels to provide practical examples of the virtue. The three novels, *The Good Apprentice*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, and *That Hideous Strength*, provide specific insight into the nature of the interaction between *techne* and *phronesis*, which highlight the impact of overemphasizing *techne* at the expense of *phronesis*.

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PHRONESIS: THE MISSING VIRTUE

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CHAPTER 1

Phronesis: The Missing Virtue

Moral decisions play a daily role in our lives. There are few days that pass in which we are not faced with questions like ‘Is it really so bad if I just copy a part of this essay?’ or ‘Does it matter if I lie if I’m doing it to keep her from worrying?’ The problem we encounter in these situations is that we are never fully prepared for them. There are countless unpredictable factors that arise in each situation that prevent one’s expecting them. That un-foreseeability is what makes solutions hard to find because comparisons cannot easily or always be made with previous experience. Even when we have generalizable maxims like ‘It is never acceptable to lie’, there is difficulty responding to situations where, perhaps, all that is required is that one not tell the whole truth. So we are faced with the question ‘Where do we find answers to these situational dilemmas?’ More likely than not, we come away from these dilemmas bewildered and unsure whether we did the right thing. And if we were to ask others if we acted correctly, there would be no shortage of both positive and negative responses.

Many in contemporary Western philosophy have conceived of this disagreement as an inevitable result of the weakness of moral claims. In this thesis I will present an alternative understanding of moral disagreement and fragmentation in our culture by evaluating Aristotle’s concept of practical reasoning both on its own and through three important classics; namely, *The Brothers Karamazov*, *The Good Apprentice*, and *That Hideous Strength* from C.S. Lewis’ Space Trilogy. In this chapter, I will first make the problem in our culture clear to the reader, and then argue for the need for what Aristotle

calls *phronesis*, also translated prudence or practical reasoning. The specific insights he offers about *phronesis* will be recapitulated not only to present the relevance and necessity of his model of reasoning, but also to provide a foundation for the next three chapters.

The growth and investment in fields of science, and the subsequent expansion of scientific discoveries into all fields of human life, is based firmly in the concept of truth as method. The hope for scientific answers to every human question, which can be seen in theories like the singularity and evolutionary morality, has an undertone of a desire for a formula or method to determine how we ought to act. As exemplified in Kant's categorical imperative or Mill's utilitarianism, among others, much of the west has endeavored to find such a method for truth and to limit truth to method as well. Alasdair MacIntyre has argued that these approaches have ultimately led to the establishment of Emotivism, a philosophy that reduces the force of moral claims to mere expression of emotions. In his book *After Virtue* he reveals the extent to which our moral environment already contains signs of this failure and flawed explanation of reason and truth. He illustrates the fragmentation of moral debate in America through issues such as justification of war, abortion, and health care and education. The character of these debates needs little description, but MacIntyre points out three important qualities found in these and other moral debates. He says these trivial views are each incommensurable, attempt to be impersonal, and contain a variety of historical origins.

MacIntyre calls these views incommensurable, because the arguments proceed upon logically parallel lines. Argumentation in American politics today depends upon

arguments that proceed from differing normative values and therefore cannot be weighed against each other. For instance, MacIntyre shows how an argument for one action may make its case upon the need for equality, while the opposing argument's premises rest on the value of liberty. Obviously neither side of the argument would claim that these are not both desirable goods. They are impersonal in that the standards appealed to are not an appeal to individual reasons, but believed to be universally applicable, and therefore rational. The argument used does not employ merely personally significant factors in reaching a conclusion, but it employs premises based on duties or other factors that are supposedly the result of universally shared aspects, qualities, etc. And finally, they are historically various because the underlying cultural and philosophical genealogy is not unified, it is multitudinous. Each system of thought draws from a different tradition. Moreover, as a result of this variety, the current definitions and understandings of our moral vocabulary, subjects, etc. are separated from one another, making communication awkward and unguided if not impossible.

This is the state of moral discourse in America today and the consequence of the western tradition's vision of truth as method. The evidence of this condition lies in political debates, theories about scientific advance, university discourse, and much more. These debates are only the most prevalent and common examples of the fragmentation of moral life in America. Our culture is being torn by an increasing distance between the sides of these moral debates, and there does not seem to be any resolution in the future. Our politics are only a symbol of our personal lives and the extent of the disagreement and incommensurability that occurs on the numerous moral challenges faced daily. The

result is a loss of faith in the force of moral claims and the belief that they do not truly do much. Instead, they are considered either bigoted remarks made out of an inability to empathize, labeled intolerance, or that they belong only to the person who stated them. This is, ironically, Emotivism. The result is then, that we “treat moral argument as an exercise of our rational powers and as mere expressive assertion.”¹

Emotivism, as with other philosophies, is shown through a culture’s ‘characters’, as MacIntyre calls them. Characters are the faces of a culture’s underlying philosophical concerns and beliefs. As opposed to a drama, which creates characters to represent ideas of its subject, cultural characters emerge and become dominant attitudes because of their connection to cultural undertones. MacIntyre lists three prevalent characters, or faces of Emotivist culture, that he says represent “the fact that emotivism entails the obliteration of any genuine distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations”², but I would like to focus on just two, the Manager or bureaucrat, and the Therapist.

MacIntyre explains, “Bureaucratic rationality is the rationality of matching means to ends economically and efficiently.”³ In practice, this shows in the Manager’s concern with what is internal to the company’s operations. Rather than debating values and ends, which are seen as subjective and irrational, Managers “restrict themselves to the realms in which rational agreement is possible – that is, of course from their point of view, to the

¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd Edition (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 11.

² *Ibid.*, 23.

³ *Ibid.*, 25.

realm of fact, the realm of means, the realm of measurable effectiveness.”⁴The Manager operates and functions within the confines of his system of predefined ends, in other words, the mission statement. This means that the only subject of deliberation is how best to achieve that end, whether by rearranging, cutting back, specializing, etc.. So, the realm he has restricted himself to is one in which rationality has nothing to do with determining ends but simply with connecting means in an efficient way. This belief has taken over much of the business world in which we see so many instances of businesses driven to horrendous acts in order to accomplish their goals, with no consideration for the results produced along the way. These managers have restricted the “universal” vocabulary of efficiency to exclude the “subjective” moral and evaluative language. So, MacIntyre concludes that the Manager is a symbol of the “bifurcation” of the personal realm and the organizational realm; the “personal” meaning the Manager’s way of indicating the moral.

The second character that MacIntyre describes is the Therapist. In many ways, the Therapist is like the Manager. As MacIntyre says “the Manager represents in his character the obliteration of the distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations; the Therapist represents the same obliteration in the sphere of personal life.”⁵ The Therapist is also devoted to effectiveness and technique and other ‘virtues’ promoted by the Manager. The greatest sphere in which we see the effects of this character is in our vocabulary concerning grief. Sayings like “Time heals everything” and “It’s just a phase that he’ll grow out of” reflect the idea that people can simply be fixed or

⁴ Ibid., 30.

⁵ Ibid.

reoriented correctly. Rather, all of the phases we go through must be undergone with our character in mind. There is no stage that can suspend a person from the effects of their actions on their moral character. The Therapist's mentality that people can be fixed like machines underlines much of Western culture's moral imagination, but has a counter in a different kind of rationality; that is, *phronesis*.

These "characters", and the Emotivist philosophy they embody, are the sign of the two essential foci of this thesis: first, that we have developed a system of moral thought that is overly reliant on technical reasoning, and second, that this causes dryness in our moral life. Emotivism does not allow for the resolutions to moral dilemmas that we require or want. The irony of the situation is that in striving for the impersonal principals supposedly provided by technical reasoning, Western moral beliefs have succumbed to the purely personal principals of Emotivism by restricting the moral to the subjective dimension. This deficit in moral debate and character is neither desired by nor beneficial for many involved, but a consequence of an incorrect system of moral reasoning.

That type of moral reasoning is explained in Joseph Dunne's *Back to the Rough Ground*. The assumption of our modern thought is that rationality is technical and that reasoning, moral or non-moral, must proceed by the methods laid out by technical processes. Anything that cannot be expressed as justified technique then, is irrational and subjective. This means that reason is reductive, methodical, syllogistic, and essentially scientific, or else, science has been molded to this concept of reason. Dunne's book evaluates this condition in the context of its effect on teaching methods. He states "There is no scientific knowledge, already mapped-out, to mediate between one's particular

apprehensions and the doing of the good in the way that a general knowledge of dietetics mediates between the identification of a particular food and the cultivation of health.”⁶

Dunne’s evaluation establishes the importance of Aristotle’s work in identifying America’s problem. He identifies the kind of rationality currently dominating views of reason as Aristotle’s notion of ‘*techne*’ and contrasts this with another of Aristotle’s intellectual virtues: ‘*phronesis*’.

The core of the difference between these two types of reason lies in the kinds of action that they guide. *Techne* is reason about making, while *phronesis* is reason about doing. What this means is that *techne* is the reason employed in the act of producing something external to us, and underlies everything involved in that production. The process of envisioning something and then following the steps necessary to create it, understanding each part at the smallest level at which one can affect it, and knowing how to combine those parts to create the imagined end object, these are all actions under the influence of one’s “technical” ability. The vocabulary of ‘means’ and ‘ends’ is well suited to technical reasoning then because the end product of making is the result of previous actions. The trouble with this mentality is that the value of moral actions, which are described as means, is prescribed based on the end product, which makes it impossible for those actions to have value in and of themselves.

Here I would like to draw some similarities between Dunne’s idea of *techne*, and the characters described above, because they are the embodiment of just this kind of reasoning. The first resemblance is the lack of deliberation about the *telos* or the end goal.

⁶ Joseph Dunne, *Back to the Rough Ground: “Phronesis” and “Techne” in Modern Philosophy and in Aristotle* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 303.

There is a preemptive decision (or more often, an assumption) about what the goods involved in any situation are (efficiency, profit, etc.), but there is little or no consideration of what good is to be found in each particular decision. MacIntyre takes these arguments to indicate incommensurable views of the good desired, but, although these are not logically incompatible views, I believe that what characterizes them is a lack of concern for the component end of each action. As will be discussed more later on, our actions are the means by which we discover and shape who we are. For example, I would not call myself courageous simply because I thought about my actions and decided to act courageously if any frightening situation came up in the future; it is only by acting courageously that someone can actually become courageous. So, every action we perform is not only involved in a system of means to a particular end, but also the system of cultivating the virtues in oneself. Dunne calls this the “assimilation of action to being.”⁷ On the other hand, technical knowledge is, like the Manager and Therapist who separate their beliefs and values from their work, only concerned with reaching the end it predetermines and envisages. The common grounds lie in the concept of prioritization of external goods to the good in any particular situation.

Another similarity, this quality is apparent just as much in the Manager and the kind of moral debate described by MacIntyre as it is in the Therapist, is that each conclusion is assumed to be the necessary result of the starting point. There is no alternative for the one involved because there is a direct connection from the initial premise to final premise. As Dunne says about technical reasoning “an account...is

⁷ Ibid., 268.

rational insofar as it can trace the product back to the ‘causes (*aitiai*) to which it owes its being.’”⁸ The quality present in both technical concepts of rationality and moral debate or bureaucracy, and as I argue much of American moral attitude, is the procession from universal to particular by means of impersonal, teachable, and syllogistic terms. The example of this mindset lies in the belief that good ends require some bad means, as if one could ever cultivate courage by being cowardly or temperance by being gluttonous. There is an underlying assumption that one’s actions can be separated from one’s character, and that so long as the end goal is properly understood, the means should also be understood, as if a temperate man would not envision different means than an intemperate one, or a courageous man envisage different means than a cowardly one. The rationale is that there is an objective and universal goal that must be achieved, and its achievement requires a certain line of behavior, and therefore, in any given situation you must act according to the end’s prescription as one already sees it. This is reminiscent of the claims made by Kant and others at the beginning of this chapter. The assumption is that there can be no opposing ideas about the goods in any situation. Instead of considering the role of history and tradition, which can be various, in influencing the limit of moral decisions possible at any moment, the belief is that decisions should only be made based on the predetermined end. This is not to say there is no objective good in all moral decisions. The good of practicing virtues is always present. Courage is still courage and so on, but the progression of events and lives that factor into particular situations provide the basis for what decision is exemplary of those virtues.

⁸ Ibid., 250.

What is dangerous about these characters, however, is that they represent reason as a whole to American culture. Anything that does not bear these characteristics is alleged to be outside of rationality and therefore subjective -- not up for debate. So, when we come to those instances in life when we must make a decision, this is the view of rationality that is brought to the decision. It is apparent then that moral dilemmas will be approached with as much technicality as can be mustered, but the actual demands of our particular situations are quite different from what technical reasoning can address. Dunne discusses two concepts present in all action that demand the use of practical reasoning over technical: historicity and language. In every scenario and every action we take we must not only deal with the observable factors, but also those that arise from the history which confines and influences the decisions that we can make. We are constantly affected by our past in that it shapes the context in which 'appropriate' or 'prudent' is determined. Denying the historical backgrounds in a situation is refusing to recognize the realities which provide the structure for our present factors. Language is itself deeply tied to history. Dunne says "it has become what it is through a wayward development over time."⁹ Because language is a historical thing, given its own life by the process of accumulating experiences and fitting those into words, we then have restrictions based on our language's limits. Our thinking cannot occur outside of language and thus our own thoughts are given the limitations of language.

What is needed is a reasoning that addresses the particular situation, or a practical reasoning. This is the notion of *phronesis* found in the sixth book of Aristotle's

⁹ Ibid., 360.

Nicomachean Ethics. Aristotle describes *phronesis* or practical reasoning as appropriate for resolving the problems that *techne* has in dealing with particular situations. *Phronesis* provides a different concept of reason which allows for deviation from the answers that technical reasoning would give. Two essential differences in practical reasoning allow it to make up for the dilemmas brought up above: one, it arises from experience and returns to it, and two, it is concerned with the ultimate particular.

In regards to the first, Dunne says “With [practical reasoning] the will...is not in reserve...In relation to one’s *phronesis*, one has no discretionary powers to be exercised by some superordinate self.”¹⁰ This means that practical reasoning involves active investment of one’s self. Unlike technical reasoning, which we conceive of as something to be “withheld” and “applied,” practical reasoning is involved with and connected to who we are; it cannot be “withheld” because who we are is always being shaped by and shaping our actions. The two significant effects of this are that first, one’s will is entirely invested in one’s reasoning, making the possibility of removing values impossible, and second, one cannot choose to apply practical reasoning in some cases and not in others. It is a knowledge gained by experience that shapes us by fitting itself into our character. According to Aristotle, intelligence and character are connected, and furthermore, character is dependent upon one’s actions. One cannot be courageous and never act courageously. Therefore, practical knowledge arises from experience and returns to it. Dunne even describes practical reasoning as a kind of well invested experience. As an investor in stock can invest his money well or poorly and have it multiplied or diminished

¹⁰ Ibid., 266.

accordingly, so one's character is affected by the good investment of experience. What he means by 'investing it well' is simply that one's experiences are truthfully experienced. In other words, by applying a good understanding of the people involved, good insight about the underlying factors, and so on, experience then contributes to the ability to reason practically. The experience of a virtuous person contributes to the ability to know what is virtuous in particular decisions.

Of the latter difference, Dunne says that the role of practical reasoning may be summed up as supplying "ultimate minor premises"¹¹, applying them in the context of a major premise that connects the good in question with the good life, and supplying that major premise. This essentially means that practical reasoning is what gives us knowledge of things too particular for the scope of technical reasoning. *Techné*, as we discussed, can only go as far as it can reduce a subject to its component parts, but it takes an act of perception to see the ultimate particularities of a situation. For example, if given the rule that we should 'comfort' people who encounter difficult life decisions or to 'provide them with emotional support', technical reasoning can tell us that a person is encountering difficult life decisions when they are crying, and confused, and scared, etc., but it is only by perceiving that "this person is encountering difficult life decisions" that one can know just when to do that. Without this capacity, knowledge is removed from action. Just because one knows about justice does not make one just. Knowledge that is not based in the ultimate particular cannot make one more virtuous. In other words, practical reasoning provides us with the knowledge of what is ultimately particular and

¹¹ Ibid., 296.

relevant to the situation we are in, so that we are moved to action by it and therefore our knowledge is put into action and character. This is the reason *phronesis* is so essential to moral reasoning, because otherwise knowledge and reason can be held separate from action and character and values.

So, this is all to say that we are not bound to consider rationality only as defined by *techne*. *Phronesis* is a practical reasoning which does not require that all our actions be subordinated to some end outside of themselves. This helps us to understand the difference between the kind of reasonableness that allows us to answer questions like “How can I teach a classroom of students about the moral principals in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*?” and questions like “How can I help this student understand the importance of acting courageously right now?” *Phronesis* is a reasoned state about acting well, while *techne* is a reasoned state about making.

Is there any benefit to this explanation of *phronesis* though? It was established earlier that practical reasoning does not produce the kind of knowledge that can be taught in manuals or relayed in the classroom. So the benefits of a thesis attempting to explain and describe *phronesis* seem scarce. However, practical reasoning *is* taught by examples. Character is influenced by the people that surround us. Aristotle says that if we are to be virtuous people we must surround ourselves with others who are virtuous themselves. Although this essay cannot stand in for the benefit of virtuous friends, it does attempt to teach through examples. The exemplars of the virtue of *phronesis* in this thesis however, come from careful reading of three important novels. Novels are distinct from textbooks in that they present a world that the reader can travel into and observe as it unfolds. Good

novels have characters that come alive and a world that is as unpredictable and complex as the one we inhabit. The texts I have selected are just this kind of text, and I believe it is because they do not present knowledge of their characters in a manner appropriate to technical reasoning, but to practical reasoning. By experiencing the world as the characters in these novels do, and critically examining their actions and thoughts, the same kind of knowledge can be derived as from one's own experiences. The metaphorical "stepping into another world" which occurs when reading good books is an experience of actually being connected to the events and actions that take place, as if one were truly involved in them. This is not to say that reading novels can replace real experiences, but they can enrich them, and the three novels which will be examined in this thesis certainly do just that. In the next chapter, *The Good Apprentice* by Iris Murdoch shows the need for attention in cultivating *phronesis*. Then, *The Brothers Karamozov* will emphasize the difference between hope and pessimism, and the relation that this has to *phronesis*. Finally, the last chapter will discuss *That Hideous Strength* by C.S. Lewis, which contrasts the progression that the soul of an individual undergoes when ruled by *techne* or possessed of *phronesis*.

CHAPTER 2

Stuart Cuno in *The Good Apprentice*

Iris Murdoch (1919 – 1999) was an important philosopher and author of twentieth century Great Britain. In her novel *The Good Apprentice*, she writes the story of Stuart Cuno, a young man possessed by the desire to live a virtuous life in accordance with the Good. Murdoch’s vivid depiction of Stuart’s internal life provides an example of the real human experience that this thesis explores. The interplay of the struggles Stuart encounters, his setting, his own thoughts, and his loved ones allow for an examination of certain aspects of *phronesis*, or practical reasoning. In this chapter, I will examine Stuart, and the characters that Murdoch contrasts with him, by focusing on the aspect of practical reasoning, and intellectual virtue in its own right, that Murdoch calls attention. I will show the necessity of attention for practical reasoning and discuss the struggle between theoretical and practical methods of reasoning in moral situations.

Murdoch’s moral philosophy is essential to understanding both her application to this thesis and the person of Stuart as it is connected to her philosophical writings. In her essay titled “Against Dryness”, she claims that “We have never solved the problems about human personality posed by the Enlightenment”¹², meaning questions about what the individual is made of and from where the individual can derive his or her moral system. Similar to MacIntyre, Murdoch perceives some of the detrimental remnants of the Enlightenment in our culture, but she sees them in the lingering concept of human personality and our approach to literature. Of this harmful aftermath she states, “We have

¹² Iris Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics* (Penguin Group, 1999), 290.

suffered a general loss of concepts, the loss of a moral and political vocabulary. We no longer use a spread-out substantial picture of the manifold virtues of man and society. We no longer see man against a background of values, of realities, which transcend him.”

The misconception at the center of the Enlightenment period for Murdoch was the reduction of the world outside the person to the empirical, and of everything inside to the will. The last chapter focused on the *techne*-obsessed direction of Enlightenment thought. Similarly, Murdoch claims that the results of the Enlightenment’s emphasis on technical reasoning are even present in the way we as a Western culture conceive of literature and personality. She is concerned specifically with the Enlightenment methodology of reducing complexity, thereby over-simplifying man and his environment. Her work seeks to present the complexity that the ‘good life’ truly requires from the individual.

In *The Good Apprentice* Murdoch attempts to explore this truth. The novel begins with an immense moral error. Edward Cuno, Stuart’s step-brother, brings about the death of his friend by tricking him into taking drugs and then leaving him alone. This situation does not fit in to the category of complex moral dilemmas. It is straightforwardly wrong. But the plot is carried forward by the difficulties that follow. As Edward and Stuart both undergo processes to align their lives with the good life, they encounter numerous situations that are nuanced and complex. They are forced to deal with a complex system of interconnected events and people, and more often than not each situation they encounter contains a number of unseen influencing factors, such as Edward’s experience with a medium who gives him a message from his father. In this, Murdoch is illustrating

the difficulty of trying to be good despite the demands of moral situations and their hidden histories.

The title of the novel reveals the heart of its struggle; is the “good apprentice” merely a skillful apprentice (and if so toward what end) or is the apprentice in question one who has apprenticed himself to ‘the Good’? Stuart and his brother Edward stand, in many ways, as representatives of these two interpretations. Stuart, on one hand, seems to apprentice himself to the Good by searching for powerful and clear concepts of the Good in practical life (though he often fails to bring about the consequences he desires). Contrarily, Edward turns out to be a good apprentice as he goes through a series of trials and comes out the better for it. These intertwined stories reveal much about the role of the intellectual virtues in determining the good life and about the nature of *techne* and *phronesis* in the practical moral world.

One preemptive point on understanding Murdoch’s characters needs to be made. For her, the difficulty inherent in a good life is not contingent upon one’s trying hard enough. Both Edward and Stuart do not particularly succeed because of their abundant effort. On the contrary, Stuart is full of energy and life and will power, yet he is constantly struggling to succeed. For both characters, though more readily for Stuart, it is a battle of perception and ability to see the good in each situation rather than a battle of will power. This is the purpose of Murdoch’s essay “Against Dryness”, in which she discusses the moral product of the Enlightenment and calls for the “return from the self-centered concept of sincerity to the other-centered concept of truth.”¹³ She traces the

¹³ Ibid., 290.

origins of this virtue of sincerity to Kant, Mill and Hobbes, then at its latest stage, to Jean-Paul Sartre.

Through Kant, Mill, and Hobbes the individual came to be understood merely as the isolated will, Murdoch explains. She writes “We derive from Kant... a picture of the individual as a free rational will. With the removal of Kant’s metaphysical background this individual is seen as alone.”¹⁴ With this context in place, she introduces Sartre’s famous line “existence precedes essence,” completing the image of the individual that Murdoch believes is so modern, that is, one in which man is pure will and has no guiding principles besides that will. With no external end as the object of moral action, ‘meaning well’ can be the only judgement of one’s moral character. Therefore the virtue most at need for the Enlightenment man is sincerity, because, under the Enlightenment’s view of the self, his main concern is with understanding and allowing his will to lead its self. The good apprentice, on the other hand, is most in need of awareness, because he is trying to see the external world and the background of values that it contains. This is just the struggle that Stuart Cuno faces in *The Good Apprentice*.

In one of the most revealing passages about Stuart’s inner turmoil and the nature of prudence he states, “The ‘spiritual life’ and all that is too abstract. It’s not a matter of ‘explaining’. All sorts of important things have no explanations... Innocence is a strong idea, purity, holiness – Ideas are signals, or pointers, or refuges, or resting places – it’s hard to describe.”¹⁵ The context in which he is speaking is a discussion with Thomas

¹⁴ Ibid., 288.

¹⁵ Iris Murdoch, *The Good Apprentice* (Penguin Group, 1985), 143.

McCaskerville who has just commented on Stuart's attempts to change his "temperament". Stuart is trying (not in the Enlightenment sense of exerting the force of his will, but in the sense of paying close attention) to experience the Good directly. He is searching for signals as a way to come into contact with it, not in a sensory or literal way, but in the way that one searches for a lost item against a visually complex background, by focusing one's eyes and paying attention. He wants to find the Good in the real world or, as Aristotle would most likely perceive it, to make theoretical knowledge into practical knowledge. This is the challenge that Stuart takes on in Murdoch's novel. His success or failure, to be examined as this essay progresses, has immense implications about the necessity and nature of practical reasoning. Therefore, we must look to Murdoch's description of Stuart's journey, and pay attention to what challenges he faces and how he attempts to resolve those challenges.

Two contrasting characters that shed light on the context of Stuart's narrative are Ursula Brightwater and Thomas McCaskerville, both family friends of Stuart's. Ursula, the competent general practitioner, is Murdoch's representation of empiricism at its most basic and popular level. Ursula's problem solving rarely goes beyond the prescription of drugs, and each dilemma is addressed in terms of a person's 'health' or some other medical term. Ursula, then, is contrasted with Stuart in her desire for what is most present and readily visible. She merely wants the quickest and most easily given answer while Stuart is almost ascetic in his longing to fight through the fog of material distractions. In other words, Ursula's vision does not go beyond what her eyes can see; her one mode of thought is scientific and empirical.

On the other hand, there is Thomas, who is contrasted to Stuart in a different way. Thomas, the scheming psychoanalyst, only interprets Stuart's actions in terms of the eruption of some hidden, repressed, or ignored desire. Stuart's attempts to explain his lifestyle to Thomas seem always to get absorbed into Thomas' theories and unwillingly packed in, so we hear Stuart tell Thomas more than once that "you keep getting it wrong"¹⁶. Thomas's understanding of Stuart is limited to the theories and methods that he has already adopted, rather than his experiences of Stuart, and Stuart's explanations of his internal ordeals defining Thomas's theories. This theoretical view of the world is in many ways similar to Alasdair MacIntyre's description of the 'therapist'. The therapist is one of three characters he believes represents the expression of modern moral philosophy. He, the therapist, is like the manager in that he restricts himself to the realms in which moral agreement can be found; that is, the realm free from personal backgrounds and individual experiences, but predetermined by theories. The only history allowed to enter is history conceived as a progression through developments, in the same way that Thomas constantly evaluates Stuart and Edward in terms of the possible outcomes of their states or affairs. He asks himself whether Stuart will end up childish or dull because these are the outcomes outlined by his theories.

Therefore, it is just another aspect of Thomas's theories that he understands the self as a force that pushes outward, attempting to make its way into action. That force can be subdued by the counter force of societal strains or life events, and therefore they must be removed to manifest one's volition. In some ways Thomas seems to be correct. Stuart

¹⁶ Ibid., 144.

is faced with many challenges that come from his father's sexuality and his mother's absence, but Murdoch makes apparent that the true force in Stuart's actions is his search for the Good. Despite the assaults on his character and attempt at a relationship from Midge, Stuart stays true to his goal. This struggle reveals the difference between the therapeutic perspective of the individual, which claims "the self is now... criterionless, because the kind of telos in terms of which it once judged and acted is no longer thought to be credible"¹⁷, whereas Stuart's ability to maintain a concept of the Good in his life is what held him to his morals despite Midge's approach.

In what way do these two characters' perspectives contribute to an understanding of *phronesis* and *techne*? First, Ursula is the pinnacle of the technical rationality Joseph Dunne describes. Her rationalization of Stuart's actions revolves around whether or not he has mixed in his values and emotions with 'pure reason.' In other words, for Ursula, knowledge must be kept separate from one's personal or subjective qualities. This rationale fits perfectly into Dunne's description of *techne* as a knowledge that can be possessed and applied when needed, rather than something that is connected to and simultaneous with one's actions and values. She portrays the problem with this vision of rationality and knowledge in which they are removed from action and background or setting. Her prescriptions and attempts to understand Stuart have no foundation in his past actions, character, or in a concept of the Good distinct from her own field. Rather, she thinks that rationality is a matter of separating these things from one's thinking so as to

¹⁷ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 33.

be left with the simplest system of achieving some normalized good in the most efficient way.

What Ursula embodies is a kind of cleverness as opposed to Stuart's theoretical reasoning. As Aristotle describes it, cleverness is an ability to "do the actions which tend to promote whatever goal is assumed and to attain them."¹⁸ Ursula's inability to venture beyond her field's line of thought is a symptom of her already assumed good. Cleverness has no way of perceiving the individual needs and the good present in particular situations; it only has the means of achieving what is assumed, or of fitting together the means in a way that reaches a predetermined end. Therefore, Ursula fails to comprehend or contribute to the unique situation that either Stuart or his brother are in because their dilemmas stem from situations that fall outside the regular patterns of her field. Stuart especially has set himself against popularized methods of achieving the good life, so, Ursula cannot step outside her own field to understand Stuart. This contrast highlights one major quality found in Stuart, namely, his apprenticeship to the Good is not based on any presumption about his possession of the Good like Ursula, who believes her technical puzzle piece idea of the good life is exemplified in her career. Rather, Stuart wants to find the Good in his world. Moreover, he does not see his mission as finding the most effective way to achieve good results, but he sees his thoughts as actions and wants to purify his internal nature in order to affect the external. By meditating on good things like holiness and purity, he wants to change his entire character to meet his theoretical discoveries. The contrast between the two forms of rationality then should not be thought

¹⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Terrence Irwin, Second (Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1999), 97.

of as one, *techne*, possessing a concept of an objective good for the human life, and the other, *phronesis*, lacking that concept. Instead, Stuart also has a concept of a universal good for the rational animal, but he does not assume that this good is always so readily apparent in each situation. While the good life calls for virtue, particular situations call for specific virtues, which can only be determined when encountered.

Thomas, on the other hand, perceives people in terms of Murdoch's "solitary will". The solitary will found also in Stuart at times, is one of the things that the prudent man must fight against. It is only by understanding that he is not a solitary will, but a will with experiences that give context and meaning to future experiences, that he can reason practically. Similar to Ursula's notion of knowledge free from any personal influences, the idea of the solitary will conceives of the moral life as dependent upon universalizable maxims and imperatives, which are distinct from subjective concepts like one's unique experiences. Thomas's judgment throughout the novel is revealing of his philosophy. First, he is responsible for sending Edward off to Seegard for mental healing, and second, he is oblivious to his wife's affair despite her extreme behavior.

When considering his decision to send Edward to Seegard, Thomas questions whether or not he is indeed "sending his beloved child off to the underworld?"¹⁹ Edward of course returns and does find what he needed to escape his depression, but the imprudence of Thomas's action is not excused simply because of this. In fact, we see that it was not because of Seegard entirely that Edward was able to escape his torment, but in large part because of Brownie's intervention (Brownie is the sister of Edward's deceased

¹⁹ Murdoch, *The Good Apprentice*, 83.

friend, and her befriending of Edward gives him a sense of release from his guilt). The imprudence of this decision becomes apparent as he considers the two brothers as if they were ‘animals that he was watching play’²⁰. Animal play is something we think of as natural, expected, and predictable. This description then, is indicative of Thomas’s conception of people as observable, predictable and able to be put into theories or formulas.

As for Thomas’s obliviousness, Meredith points out that his father “knows everything except for one thing. It’s right under his nose but he can’t see it.”²¹ The irony is that Thomas is a psychiatrist; he is supposed to understand people and to have an interpretation for people’s actions, yet he is unable to see his own wife’s adultery. What’s more, even his son knows, and acts strangely because of it, but he does not himself find out until he reads it in Ms. Baltram’s memoirs. This emphasis on Thomas’s obliviousness signals, as his own revelation that ‘psychoanalysis is capable of mistakes’ confirms, the error in purely theoretical reasoning and the need for reasoning based in experience and with attention to one’s surroundings. Thomas does not take into account his experience as something to be explored for truth, but as something to be fit into his theories. This is the great error that his actions and his lack of attention underscore.

In other words, the solitary will seeks to be free and unchained by history or experience; this is how Thomas understands people. The prudent man however, knows that virtue is shaped by his experience and action and relies on both for his decision-

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Murdoch, *The Good Apprentice*, .

making. The solitary will view of man claims that man need only pay attention to his own volition. The prudent man is keenly aware of the reality outside of him. The consequences of Thomas' obliviousness portray the need for attention to experience, context, and actions as sources of truth rather than pure theory.

The final and most important contrast to Stuart is his own brother, Edward. Edward, whom Murdoch quickly reveals as Stuart's missing piece when Thomas asks "Do you envy Edward's extreme situation?", has apprenticed himself to the Good not by proceeding from conceptualizing the Good to applying that to his experiences, but by using meaningful experiences as mediation to the Good. Contrarily, the experiential origins of Stuart's interest in the Good are never described. Many times the suddenness and unexpectedness of Stuart's change is brought up, yet no event in his life is given to show the cause of Stuart's change. This is because Stuart's apprenticeship is conceptual. He meditates on the Good and wants to contact the Good itself, and then to apply that to his actions and his experience. Edward on the other hand, goes through a series of events and an intense journey to reach a place of longing for the Good. He learns by experience the moral obligations and dilemmas he faces as well as their nuances. Stuart meditates and thinks while Edward acts and experiences.

Some of these differences appear in other characters as well, the role of theory versus experience in Thomas' character for instance, but what this contrast highlights is the point that Murdoch considers most essential to her project, and it is apparent in almost every interaction in some way. It also happens to be the most distinguishable mark of practical reasoning above and against technical or theoretical reasoning: namely,

attention. Stuart's attention, his gaze, or his focus, are upon the things that we normally speak of as ideals. He sees holiness, beauty, and truth, in the things around him, as pointed out by his conversation with Thomas. Edward, on the other hand, seems to see the world of Seegard in a mystical sense. In Edward's description of his interactions, Murdoch typically depicts the world as magical and mystical, or charged with some unrecognized force. This is in part because he has no experience of the Good, like Stuart, which he understands to be just that, but it is also a result of his ability to see something that Stuart does not see; namely, what he does not understand. Stuart's attention is directed toward what he knows and is familiar with; Edward sees much of the world as something he does not understand. Practical reasoning too does not just see what it knows. In fact, because it has no predetermined end for each situation (as opposed to *techne* and represented in Ursula's character) each experience is unrecognizable because it cannot be categorized in the way technical knowledge can be. This does not mean that every experience is entered without any knowledge of the Good, but rather that the end result desired in any situation comes second to the potential for virtues to be practiced which arises in the situation. Stuart's lack of this capacity is what leads Jesse to call him "dead," because he does not see the uniqueness and ultimate particularity of each situation. His attention is on the qualities he wants to embody, not on the particulars he encounters. Edward's example of attention to the right details is comparable to Dunne's description of prudence as well invested experience. Well invested experience means experience that is experienced rightly, in other words, experience combined with right attention.

Finally, this leads to a description of Murdoch's concept of attention. Is attention its own virtue or an aspect of *phronesis*? What is the connection between the two? Is attention necessary or sufficient for the prudent man? Murdoch, in discussing attention, considers the relationship between man and his world important to the idea of attention. She says that it "exhilarates" us to find ourselves lost in the world and forgetting ourselves, because of the normal "distance between our ordinary dulled consciousness and an apprehension of the real,"²² the real for Murdoch being the same as the true. This means that it is actually difficult to see the world for what it is, and therefore that the difficulty of virtue and being good is most often not a matter of willing to do good but of seeing it. In fact, Murdoch argues that the strength of moral claims comes from the connection between reality and our concepts of value. They are not created by nor do they originate from the will. This idea, so counter to a culture that believes values are one's personal and subjective preferences, has the essential consequence of making attention the key to a virtue like *phronesis*, which is essentially the ability to connect truth to action. Therefore, this does not take away from the value of action and habit because Murdoch claims "virtue is good habit and dutiful action. But the background condition of such habit and such action, in human beings, is a just mode of vision and a good quality of consciousness. It is a task to come to see the world as it is."²³ This is just Dunne's point about *phronesis* when he writes, "The cleverness required here is, in Aristotle's words, 'an eye of the soul' which is fixed on the good; and what makes it so fixed –

²² Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (Routledge, n.d.).

²³ Ibid.

thereby transforming it into *phronesis* – is ethical goodness.”²⁴ This is to say that Murdoch’s description of attention depicts the same kind of action that makes practical knowledge different from technical knowledge. In paying attention to the world, there is an investment of self that goes beyond the withdrawn nature of technical knowledge.

Perhaps the best explanation of Murdoch’s ideas is in Stuart’s perception. He is one of the only characters in the book not completely absorbed with himself, but he is not entirely selfless. One of his major struggles is whether to choose a life of service or of isolation. Stuart still struggles to overcome his selfishness. The success he has had in conquering his selfishness is what permits him to see the holiness and purity that permeates the world around him, but his failure to do so is what keeps him from extending that vision to others. Perhaps it is pride that Stuart struggles with that keeps his vision on his self rather than truly seeing the people around him. The difference that Murdoch defines then is between right action and action that incorporates an understanding of its propriety, or action that is caused and rooted in seeing why that action is good and virtuous. While on one hand Stuart is able to act appropriately at times, because he holds true to what he can see of the Good, at other times, when it comes to the need of those around him, he fails completely for lack of seeing those needs. Therefore, Murdoch’s concept of attention connects one’s ability to see beyond oneself to one’s cultivation of *phronesis* because it is simultaneously a quality of virtue and of knowledge to be able to see others selflessly.

²⁴ Dunne, *Back to the Rough Ground: “Phronesis” and “Techne” in Modern Philosophy and in Aristotle*, 277.

To understand better Stuart's lack of attention, I will outline some of Dunne's comments on the connection between theory and *phronesis* and then look to examples in the novel. He states that "through theory we do not acquire a knowledge-content which can then be exploited in the practical business of life..."²⁵ His claim is not, however, that theoretical knowledge has no practical value. There are many ways in which theory influences and affects our actions. Stuart recognizes this as well when he tells Thomas that thinking is a kind of action. Instead, Dunne points out that the kind of knowledge which theory obtains guides practice only indirectly, and even then it is as if its guidance is "flatfooted" because it only emerges in times of clarity. A moral theory does not a moral man make. Practical reasoning supplies the kind of knowledge that governs theory in the particular situations such as those at which Thomas was shown to fail at. Unlike Thomas' use of his theories to govern his particular evaluations, practical reasoning issues orders for theory by means of well-invested experiences, meaning experience of attention to the manifold factors in particular situations.

This difference between the two ways of knowing is due to the directional nature of each. While theoretical knowledge is knowledge of first principles and the ability to trace other knowledge back to them, practical knowledge begins with experiential knowledge and its conclusions then return into experience by the practicing the very virtues that maintain their suppositions provided through one's experiences. Dunne describes it as follows: "the phronetic approach takes as its point of departure the *problematicity* of minor premises; the hardest thing about being virtuous, perhaps, is just

²⁵ Ibid., 238.

being able to *see* what is really significant in different situations. Whereas in the deductivist approach, the challenge in ethical life is mainly a matter of the will”²⁶ This very reason is the source of one of Stuart’s greatest obstacles: his constantly being misunderstood by other characters. An overdependence on theoretical knowledge can lead to a kind of striving in the dark, and not only for the one striving, but also for those who try to understand him. Without the reliance on reasoning that arises from and can return to experience, there is no way to translate one’s moral beliefs into action, and all that can be communicated about one’s beliefs is abstract ideas of the Good itself, which is at best understood as elitist armchair philosophy and at worst not even understood. Therefore, while theory can remain separated from experience, practical reasoning cannot, and thereby becomes part of action and character.

The characters in *The Good Apprentice* all seem to have different interpretations of Stuart’s life choices. Thomas sees him as “electing [himself] out of the human condition”, Harry believes he is “just like me, full of sex!”, and Ursula thinks he is simply mentally unstable and needs some medication. This repetition of misinterpretations is worth mentioning because, if Stuart is accurately said to represent an attempt to make the theoretical life practical, then there is a connection to what Aristotle has to say about *nous* and *phronesis*. In comparing the two, he states that “deliberating well is the function of the prudent person”²⁷ and that “no one deliberates about things that

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 308.

²⁷ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 91.

cannot be otherwise,”²⁸ in this case, about first principles. The reason for the theme of misunderstanding Stuart arises because of the difficulty of others seeing the intent in someone’s actions because there are always any number of ways to act according to one value, there is no single end point for any syllogism that begins with a principle and ends in action. This is just the problem that Dunne points out when discussing the impossibility of any syllogism that begins with a universal rule and attempts to end with a particular decision. Theory is kept separate from the practical by this separation of knowledge, and this is the struggle that Stuart’s character embodies. There is a need for a practical knowledge which can, instead of trying to reach into action by means of theoretical knowledge, deliberate well about how to achieve the desired end by paying attention to the relevant factors of each situation. This error is represented very conveniently when Stuart talks with Meredith and tells him that “Other things matter absolutely. You’ll find that out. In fact, you know it already”²⁹ And so we see in Stuart’s difficulty communicating himself to others, and the other’s difficulty understanding him, the separation between theoretical and practical.

What we find in these interactions and the characters that Murdoch has created are windows into practical moral life. Each character has formed or habituated a way of responding and experiencing his or her moral dilemmas marked by some predominant intellectual virtue, and each situation he or she encounters is marked by a number of unpredictable factors that highlight their method of experience. As Dunne and Aristotle

²⁸ Ibid., 92.

²⁹ Murdoch, *The Good Apprentice*, 252.

alike recognize, the complexity of moral situations arises out of these factors, and this is where practical reasoning becomes necessary. Stuart's character provides insight into one specific and essential part of practical reasoning, attention, which is necessary in living the 'good life'. His successes and failures are a portrayal of a human mind's struggle to cultivate the virtue of *phronesis*, and specifically the aspect of attention.

CHAPTER 3

Alyosha in *The Brothers Karamazov*

The Brothers Karamazov is one of the most insightful explorations of the human interior produced in the 19th century. Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881) includes topics in his novel ranging from psychology and free will, to the struggle between optimism and pessimism, and the concept of intention. In his attempt to depict the interplay of these themes in a nation plagued by the onset of a *techne* and science centered worldview, he contributes to an understanding of the way that *phronesis* is guided by love and experience, and in control of the application of theory. In order to draw out these observations I will examine one of the central character's, Alyosha Karamazov, interactions with all of the members of his town, focusing on his involvement with the child Ilyusha and his family, Ivan and Katerina's love life, and his struggle with Ivan's intellectuality. In addition, comparisons to his two brothers Ivan and Dimitry will contribute to an understanding of Alyosha and *phronesis*. From this evaluation, three main themes will be drawn, first, I will compare the relation of optimism, pessimism, and hope to *phronesis*, second, I will show that experiential knowledge, like technical knowledge, is not restricted to the settings in which it is gained, and third, differences between knowledge for knowledge's sake and *phronesis* will arise throughout.

Alyosha's character is first described in comparison to his brothers. Dostoevsky intentionally compares all of the Karamazov family to each other in his first few chapters in order to indicate the similarity in each brother, despite their many differences. Their similarities are then highlighted throughout the novel as characters begin to identify and

accuse Alyosha of the qualities he shares with the rest of his family. Namely, an enemy of Alyosha, Rakitin, states “You’re a Karamazov, as much a Karamazov as the rest...You’re a sensualist like your father...”³⁰ Alyosha responds to this idea with fear, but later comes to accept it and admit it to his brother Dimitry. The significance of this comparison lies in the contrast between the sensualist, exemplified by his father and brother, and the temperate person. As Aristotle concludes, temperance “preserves the right sort of supposition”³¹ for cultivating practical reasoning. It is a rule by which experience is well invested and becomes the foundation for one’s prudential judgment. So, while the sensualist is driven by present desires and habits, the temperate man knows restraint and is guided by that restraint even as he acts it out. This does not mean, however, that the sensualist cannot be temperate, only that the sensualist is inclined toward the vice of gluttony rather than abstinence. The obvious question is then, is Alyosha temperate? Or is he like his sensually motivated family and therefore imprudent? The answer to this question comes when he first encounters Grushenka, the town’s seductress. In this scene, Rakitin and Grushenka fail to carry out a scheme apparently hatched earlier in the book’s history. Grushenka, who wanted to seduce Alyosha originally, changes her mind and decides to ask him for advice. Although it seems like Alyosha would have fallen prey to Grushenka had she not changed her mind, the truth is that Alyosha shows no sign of attraction to her. All of his actions are marked with apathy rather than lust. Again, even when he is given the opportunity by Rakitin to indulge his

³⁰ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Bantam Classic Edition (New York: Bantam Books, 2003), 102.

³¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Terrence Irwin, Second (Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1999), 90.

sensuality in drink, and he is weakened to a point of being unable to refuse, we see that he has no real draw toward a life of gluttony, and only accepts because of his dejected state. His actions reveal then, that he is temperate, and only gives into sensuality because he faces an experience that is too much for him to handle.

Because of his temperance then, Alyosha acts and thinks in a very unique way compared to the many characters of this novel, and his character emerges as one who is extraordinarily prudent, unbelievably loving, and kind in every situation. Alyosha's role in the novel as an errand runner sends him on dozens of escapades across town to deliver letters, speak with others, and keep watch over his family. This allows for the depth of his understanding of people to be seen. In each of these surprisingly tense and climactic situations, the manner in which Alyosha understands his setting and decides how to respond reveals many qualities of the *phronimos*, or the prudent man. Each of his interactions contains a world of human depth and context that Alyosha at times sifts through effortlessly, and at other times seems to flounder in. One most shocking aspect of Alyosha's *phronesis*, both to the characters in the novel and to the reader, is its origination in the monastery. Alyosha's interactions outside of the monastery portray the nature of *phronesis* to presuppose the existence of the other virtues, temperance of course, playing an essential role in Alyosha's development of *phronesis*.

For much of the post-enlightenment world, the monastery is a place of isolation from real or substantial experiences. In Jean Leclercq's book *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, he discusses the realism of monastic theology. In this discussion he says of the monastic world, "Hence there arose a type of Christian culture with marked

characteristics: a disinterested culture with a ‘contemplative’ bent.”³² Leclercq’s point is that there is a separation of monastic theology from “realistic” theology in the modern mind, which stems from the unique monastic schooling methods. Similarly, the world outside the monastery assumes Alyosha’s experiences have restricted him because he has not been exposed to the ‘real’ world. This sentiment emerges in dialogues throughout the novel that show the effects of scientism and the dominance of *techne* on Russian culture.

Contrary to the enlightenment, *techne*-driven view, from the minute he exits the monastery he is constantly a source of guidance and decision for those he encounters. This is an exemplary model of the struggle between *techne* and *phronesis* in Dostoevsky’s time and in the town he creates. On one hand, *techne* requires knowledge of the underlying principles of its subject matter. Those principles are gathered by discerning the fundamental similarities in its subjects and making connections through those similarities. This knowledge can then be applied because it has been created with a presupposed end in mind, which can be applied to all of its subjects. As Dunne states it, the *technites* “has an understanding of the purpose (*telos*) of the things he makes...He does not determine this end...but finds it already established.”³³ Therefore, *techne* always seeks to understand in just such terms. *Techne* allowed to reign freely tends to subordinate experiences. In other words, it assumes its own ends are sufficient in each situation because its ends are universal. But as Dunne keenly points out, “any distinction

³² Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, First Edition (New York: Fordham University Press, n.d.), 3.

³³ Joseph Dunne, *Back to the Rough Ground: “Phronesis” and “Techne” in Modern Philosophy and in Aristotle* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 250.

between the universal and the particular which would simply include the latter under the former is unsustainable.”³⁴ Although it may seem like a truth, by definition, that the particular is part of the universal, the two are actually separated by the immense particularity and uniqueness of any situation one might actually find oneself in. Particular situations are never so simple as to be able to directly apply the knowledge of moral universals.

Phronesis, on the other hand, is cultivated in particular situations that are unique and unrepeatable. It corresponds with ‘doing’ as opposed to making, so it considers each action utterly unique. Because it does not presuppose the sufficiency of the same end in every situation then, it must be rooted in one’s habitual responses. It can only presuppose a unity and necessity of all the virtues which guide action. This is why Aristotle states that *phronesis*, in regards to *Sophia* or theoretical knowledge, “does not use it but provides for its coming into being; it issues orders, then, for its sake, but not to it.”³⁵ Because it presupposes a unity, *phronesis* does not issue orders in place of *sophia*, but issues orders for its own sake, as a good in itself. From the perspective of the *technites* then, or technical person, direct experience with the object in question and specific skills appropriate to each situation are required to make rational judgements. For the *phronimos* however, rational judgement is a product of excellence or past experience which has been well invested into forming right habits. This is why Alyosha’s temperance is so important, because it is the presupposed element in *phronesis*, and because it shows how Alyosha

³⁴ Ibid., 272.

³⁵ *Nicomachean Ethics*.

responds so well without proper technical experience of his circumstances. Without the aid of the monastery in cultivating the virtue of temperance, his ability to respond so as to find the good in each situation would be based on the technical knowledge which he does not have because of his separation from the outside world.

To further this point, there is a difference in the sources that each character draws from in their conversations which reflects the model of rationality that they have. In Dimitry's conversations, what he claims is always a product of his inner state. In other words, his knowledge comes from his heart. This is reminiscent of the virtue of sincerity discussed by Murdoch in the last chapter, and so shows the self-centered nature of Dimitry's actions. In Ivan's conversations however, he draws from newspapers and books and stories he has heard, just as many other townspeople draw on stories that have been passed around. What we find is an assumption in these characters that knowledge can simply be passed on or given to another, with no regard for the effects of experience on knowledge. Even though Ivan admits that some of what he claims may not be true, he assumes he has stacked up enough examples that if one of them is true and will be enough to prove his point; nonetheless, there is a sharp distinction between the knowledge that Ivan throws in Alyosha's face, and the knowledge that Alyosha himself has, which makes Ivan's information mute.

Alyosha's source is Father Zossima. His decisions are commonly tied back to his patriarch's sermons or actions and he is guided by the character of Father Zossima rather than any knowledge that he has acquired through mere fact gathering. This difference is significant in revealing how his experience, and thereby his knowledge gained from it, in

the monastery may be more 'real' than that of his fellow townspeople. Because he draws directly from Zossima's life his knowledge is not limited to predictably and fundamentally similar situations; instead, it is, as Joseph Dunne says, "inseparable from one as such."³⁶ Alyosha does not rely on the skills he has developed in the monastery, but on the habits which he has cultivated. The difference is that technical skills are only applicable insofar as underlying principles can be connected between situations (this is why *techne* is knowledge of underlying principles) which are hidden in human action by the nature of the particular. Well-formed habits, on the other hand, are formed in particular circumstances and can be reapplied to them. Therefore, the unrestricted nature of knowledge gained through *phronesis* is revealed in Alyosha's character. While many accuse Alyosha of being taken out of the real world, in truth his knowledge and rationality is not extrapolated from experience or character and thereby becomes all the more relevant in his decision making. Alyosha's prudence is more real and applicable than Ivan's theories because it is embedded in the moral virtues of his character.

This struggle comes to its climax in the conversation that takes place between Alyosha and Ivan in *Rebellion* and *The Grand Inquisitor*. In these chapters Ivan tells Alyosha the doubts he has regarding Christianity, and lays out the problems that a theodicy would attempt to answer. Ivan's use of newspaper clippings and articles on humanity's moral horrors in his examples are proof of a key difference between Ivan and Alyosha: they symbolize Ivan's overly technical rationality and lack of *phronesis*. The evidence that Ivan presents leads him to a theory he expressed earlier in the novel about

³⁶ Dunne, *Back to the Rough Ground: "Phronesis" and "Techne" in Modern Philosophy and in Aristotle*, 358.

the nature of men being selfish. His theories in turn are the cause of Ivan's relentless pessimism. Eventually, his *techne*-driven rationality drives him to despair and Ivan winds up losing all rationality when he contracts brain fever; an ironic twist that points out the severity of over technical knowledge. The source of this error is pointed out in Dostoevsky's comparison of Ivan to his brother. Ivan's pessimism is rooted in his evidence. Optimism is the same way. These two states are responses to one's evidential premises. One does not feel optimistic or pessimistic about a situation with no explicable rationale for that choice. So Ivan has been led to his pessimism by evidence. What this does not leave room for is hope, a uniquely Christian virtue that is based not in evidence but instead connected to the virtue of faith. Hope in turn effects change in people's lives, as shown by Alyosha's impact on those he encounters. And so we see that reliance only on *techne* can actually conceal the real effects of hope by focusing too much on evidential concerns related to optimism and pessimism. This quality of *techne* can be contrasted to *phronesis* which is connected to hope, and makes hope compatible with reason. Thus Josef Pieper states that "The infused prudence of the Christian presupposes, moreover, the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity."³⁷ The connection between *phronesis* and hope can be brought out by looking to Alyosha's response to the same issues Ivan outlines.

In Alyosha's interactions with tangible suffering in his own town; namely, the boy Ilyusha and his family, one can see how his prudence depends on his hope and how

³⁷ Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 1st ed. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 11.

the use of what Alyosha does not know is a product of this relationship. His interactions with the group of school boys also illuminates the way in which Alyosha's *phronesis* enables him to respond appropriately to his settings, and effectively draw out the good in an instance of extreme suffering. In his initial encounter with the group of boys Alyosha is drawn to them by his love for children and his practical reasoning is immediately shown as Dostoevsky writes "Alyosha had started with a matter of fact remark quite spontaneously; he had not planned it as a strategic opening move with which to approach the children, although without an approach of that sort an adult can never gain the confidence of a child, let alone a group of children."³⁸ His character is almost always shown as understanding how to earn the trust of others. Soon, however, he witnesses a fight break out between the large group he approached and one lone boy. He is unexpectedly involved when the lone boy, named Ilyusha, picks a fight with him, and then refuses to explain his pointed aggression. Although Alyosha asks "What have I done to you?"³⁹ and only gets a mauled finger in response, his normal temperament is relatively unchanged and he does not lash out at the boy, but follows him back to his home in order to find out more about his behavior. This instance, in which Alyosha's response bears immensely on Ilyusha's state, portrays the significance of what is not known in moral situations and in one's cultivation of the virtue of *phronesis*, as well as hope, which stands in stark contrast to Ivan's search for knowledge simply for knowledge's sake.

³⁸ Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 234.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 237.

Alyosha knows nothing of Ilyusha when he first meets him, except what the other boys have told him, which is that Ilyusha has continually injured their friends and has no reason to do so. Nonetheless, his actions toward Ilyusha are entirely different from the other boys' actions. Dostoevsky only gives one reason for this difference, that Alyosha is immensely curious about the cause of Ilyusha's actions and wants an explanation from him. Alyosha could have punished Ilyusha, or handed him over to his parents to punish. He could have reacted out of some theoretical motivation like "children should be punished when they misbehave", and disciplined Ilyusha accordingly. This would have been a normal and seemingly good reaction; however, Alyosha lets his lack of knowledge rule his decision even after he is given an opportunity to discipline Ilyusha upon first meeting Ilyusha's father. Alasdair MacIntyre's description of the narrative unity of a human life illuminates the importance of letting lack of knowledge rule at times.

MacIntyre explains "the story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity. I am born with a past, and to try to cut myself off from that past, in the individualist mode, is to deform my present relationships... Without those moral particularities to begin from there would never be anywhere to begin; but it is in moving forward from such particularity that the search for the good, for the universal, consists."⁴⁰ This is to say that there can be no moral 'progress' or moral revelation without acknowledgement of one's tradition which is a product of historical setting. In other words, the good is not something that can be translated into action as a permanent and always applicable rule, but rather, that particular responses are

⁴⁰ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 221.

demanded by particular circumstances in relation to a moral background or history.

Moral decisions must be translated through the filter of one's past.

This can be connected back to the understanding of *phronesis* given in the first chapter. *Phronesis* is not simply knowledge to be applied whenever desired, but knowledge that is drawn from situations and emerges as a result of one's experiences. So, in Alyosha's actions we see his recognition of the historical narrative that has shaped Ilyusha's strange response, and he recognizes his inability to know exactly what his own relation to that moral narrative is. Technical reasoning in this situation could only direct his action if it had an easily recognizable premise to act on. Because it deals with universals, it cannot direct action except in a manner disconnected from the will, which relies on syllogistic means to reach from universal to specific. Practical reasoning, however, is experience that has been invested, and therefore already tied to one's will and well-oriented desires. It can thereby direct one's actions, even without knowledge of an explicit premise, because it is founded on one's habits and one's past instead of only one's end goals. Therefore particular situations reveal how *phronesis* can go beyond the limitations of one's experience by shaping action from habit and history, not knowledge and presupposed ends. And because the narrative of a person's life resists the presumptions of syllogisms or universals, this approach is actually more appropriate than one based in technical motivations. In technical reasoning, one cannot find the necessary elements to form an action without prior acquisition of the appropriate skills. In practical reasoning, that lack of knowledge is a catalyst for correct action. This is why Alyosha

states “I must have done something somehow to make you feel this way – otherwise you wouldn’t have hurt me like this for no reason. So tell me, what have I done to you?”⁴¹

Here we find how Alyosha’s practical reason ties it to hope. The way Alyosha acts and determines his actions is not centered on any experience able to be formulated in a syllogism. His actions result from the habits he has developed in the company of the virtuous Father Zossima which allow them to be characterized by one Pieper describes as “the daring and humble hope that the paths to man’s genuine goals cannot be closed to him.”⁴² His reasoning is a product of his well invested experience with the particular, as well as his knowledge and hope for man’s end goals. This way, the whole of his experiences become invested in his character, with all the particular factors present in any experience. So, his hope is able to manifest itself in his actions and influence on others because he has the practical reasoning to see the good of acting hopefully rather than focusing on how it contributes to some predetermined end, which may not always be visible.

Additionally, in the last scene of the novel we witness the change of heart that Alyosha has brought about in the other boys through Ilyusha’s death as they shout “And let’s always go like this, hand in hand, throughout our lives, and three cheers for Karamazov!”⁴³ The change that has come over the boys from when he first met them is largely a result of his doing, and certainly would not have happened without him. The significance of this change though is its relation to the other character’s stories, and here,

⁴¹ Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 238.

⁴² Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 18.

⁴³ Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 1045.

specifically with Ivan's. In considering the difference between these two characters as a difference in the possession of intellectual virtue, we must consider what the end result is. At the end of the novel Ivan is left in a state of mental instability, (i.e. irrationality) while Alyosha is last seen doing just the thing that Ivan thought impossible: bringing good out of human suffering. Even in the case of Ivan's own instability Alyosha is quickly able to realize his need for self-forgiveness, once again showing Alyosha's greater cultivation of the intellectual virtues. Reflecting on the two brothers' differences then, Alyosha retains his ability to help and heal those around him because of his responsiveness to what he does not know, in the form of hope. Ivan however, like many in the novel, only despairs because of his pessimism. Hope, which seems irrational because of its distance from evidence, is able to defy this technical prejudice by shaping Alyosha's practical judgment. He is thereby able to achieve the ends he desires.

In an encounter between Ivan and Katerina and Alyosha in Mrs. Khokhlakov's home, Dostoevsky highlights the most essential factor in Alyosha's cultivation of prudence. In this situation, Alyosha declares the truth of Katerina and Ivan's affections for each other, but he receives a negative response from both Ivan and Katerina. Ivan assumes Alyosha has acted childishly for his outburst, and Katerina is furious. Just before entering this scene Dostoevsky makes an important clarifier about Alyosha. He writes, "Alyosha could not bear the unknown because his love was an active one. He was unable to love passively: as soon as he came to love someone, he had to help that person. And in order to help, he had to set himself a goal. He had to be sure what was good for each person, what it was he needed, and then when he was sure of what was best for everyone,

he got to work.”⁴⁴ This quote clarifies one essential difference between Alyosha and other characters; namely, Alyosha’s knowledge is oriented around acting rightly. This sets him apart from the other characters who mostly pursue knowledge for the sake of money, power, or simply for knowledge’s own sake as Ivan does.

This quotation, in light of the qualities of *phronesis* described thus far, provides an explanation for the constant reliance other characters have on Alyosha to make decisions for them and to act when they cannot. First in Katerina’s claim that “Whatever [Alyosha] decides – I will abide by”⁴⁵ and again in Mrs. Khokhlakov’s statement that she feels “as if [she’s] confessing to the father Zossima”⁴⁶ and even in the children’s willingness to obey him, Dostoevsky shows how easily his characters rely on Alyosha to act for them. Contrast this to Ivan, who is never asked for advice despite his college degree and obvious intelligence. Ivan collects knowledge merely with the intent of having it. His vast memories of newspaper clippings are evidence enough of this. Despite his use of them in arguments, it is all knowledge which has not been incorporated into his character. For instance he rejects the Christian way of living because of his arguments, without due attention given to the way that Alyosha’s actions, based in his faith, have responded to Ivan’s arguments. The only way that Ivan’s knowledge affects his character is to make him grow progressively wearier with the world and lose hope in having an impactful existence. The value of acting on his knowledge actually loses its value to Ivan,

⁴⁴ Ibid., 248.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 252.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 767.

as seen in his decision to leave the town while he knew his father's murder was a possibility.

Alyosha however, gains knowledge with the intention of acting. Since *phronesis* is formed in acting and experiencing then, his action then further allows him to cultivate virtue, and thus we see his progression from the monastery into the external world without losing his virtuous character along the way. Alyosha is able to save himself from the torments the rest of his family experiences because he has this orientation toward action which cultivates virtue.

In summary, Alyosha's character shows the importance of what is not known in acting prudently. He also portrays the need for hope in cultivating *phronesis* as well as the ability of the prudent person to act wisely without previous knowledge of his circumstances. All of this shows why Alyosha is constantly a figure for others who need to make difficult decisions. Reasoning which becomes too focused on universals or categorizes the particular under the universal, leaves one trapped and unable to decide, but Alyosha's orientation toward action shows how *phronesis* prevents this demise.

CHAPTER 4

Techne and Phronesis: Diverging Paths in That Hideous Strength

In an early part of C.S. Lewis' *That Hideous Strength* Lewis writes, "An observer placed at the right altitude above Edgestow that day might have seen far to the south a moving spot on a main road and later, to the east, much nearer the silver thread of the Wynd, and much more slowly moving, the smoke of a train. The spot would have been the car which was carrying Mark Studdock...The smoke which our imaginary observer might have seen to the East of Edgestow would have indicated the train in which Jane Studdock was progressing slowly."⁴⁷ Lewis is taking a step back here from the plotline to provide a vantage point on the events of the novel. His main characters are set on entirely different life paths, at this point both literally and figuratively, heading far away from each other. Neither is aware of the importance of their decisions, but the reader can see how their circumstances, philosophies, personalities, etc., have sent them in one direction or the other. The imagery represents the work of this chapter as well, which is two-fold. Throughout the chapter I will examine the relation of *techne* and *phronesis* to the wildly different paths that Lewis's two characters undergo by examining the plot development in Lewis' novel. This chapter will be different from previous chapters in that it will not simply highlight certain aspects of the intellectual virtues of *techne* and *phronesis*, but will contrast the kind of lives connected to the two using the novel's plotline.

⁴⁷ C.S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, The Space Trilogy (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947), 45–47.

Additionally, I will rely on Lewis's essay *The Abolition of Man* to clarify many points made in *That Hideous Strength*, in order to progress this thesis' overall description of the two intellectual virtues. These clarifications will highlight Lewis's ideas of, what I have redefined as, *techne* and *phronesis*. Because *The Abolition of Man* was written in the years between the publishing of the second and third book in the space trilogy, it provides precise insight into Lewis's understanding of the philosophies presented in *That Hideous Strength*. I will capitalize on this in order to draw out more information relevant to my description of *phronesis* and *techne*.

The distinction that must be made at the start is that the path Mark Studdock takes throughout the novel is one on which the influence from reason driven by *techne* is consistently present, while the path Jane Studdock takes is one in which the intellectual and moral virtues are allowed to interplay freely, a necessary characteristic of the prudent person. This difference will become apparent throughout this chapter, but some points made in Lewis's *The Abolition of Man* will clarify his philosophy. Lewis writes in *The Abolition of Man* a philosophical account of the struggle between *techne* and *phronesis*. He describes two different philosophies, one he calls the *tao* and the other described as belonging to Gaius and Titius in their *The Green Book*. The difference in the two philosophies is related to the difference in the N.I.C.E. and at St. Anne's, through their treatment of 'sentiment'. The *tao* recognizes that there is a connection between sentiment and the world which is based in truth. In this philosophy a sentiment can be true or untrue depending on its fair treatment of the thing it is directed toward. Things in the world can be said to be deserving or worthy of our sentiments. Conversely, our sentiments can be

said to be well-adjusted to the true nature of the thing they are directed toward. In other words, cultivating the virtues is impossible without simultaneously cultivating the sentiments, which in turn requires recognizing their significance and connection to the external world.

Gaius and Titius however, implicitly reduce one's sentiments to detached statements merely about one's internal world. They are contrasted to statements about the actual world, and thereby taken out of the field of truth and falsity altogether. Because they have no relation to the way things really are, they cannot be true or false, and therefore require no correction or cultivation. The importance of sentiments in discerning the presence of *phronesis* and *techne* is their connection to one's internal state, and virtues of character, as opposed to intellectual virtues. Lewis describes the end result of the philosophy found in *The Green Book* as the creation of "men without chests," who "clamour for those very qualities [they] are rendering impossible."⁴⁸ True statements about the world then should include statements about sentiment, but if these are excluded, then one's intellectual virtues are devoid of any contribution from one's virtues of character. This renders knowledge impersonal and incapable of relating to virtue because "[*phronesis*] is acquired and deployed not in the making of any product separate from oneself but rather in one's actions with one's fellows,"⁴⁹ and so there can be no place for practical reasoning in the philosophy propounded by both *The Green Book*, and any *techne*-mastered culture.

⁴⁸ C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics (Harper One, 2002), 475.

⁴⁹ Dunne, *Back to the Rough Ground: "Phronesis" and "Techne" in Modern Philosophy and in Aristotle*, 244.

In Mark's interactions with members of the N.I.C.E., certain implicit, and sometimes explicit, beliefs emerge that reveal the nature of the organization and its imaginary relation to *The Green Book* and to what we here call *techne*. During his first project with the N.I.C.E., in his conversation with Cosser, he encounters the N.I.C.E.'s strategic division of subjects which unsettles him. When his fellow employee responds to Mark's statements about the town's aesthetic appeal and familiar warmth with "Oh, architecture and all that... Well, that's hardly my line, you know. That's more for someone like Wither,"⁵⁰ Mark immediately realizes "what a terrible bore this little man was."⁵¹ Although Mark does not quite follow the implications of his own train of thought, Lewis is communicating the problem with the N.I.C.E.'s division of subjects, and this problem is intimately connected to the relation between *techne* and *phronesis*. Mark realizes just moments before in his interactions with Cosser that he has begun to use words like "populations" and "classes" to replace words like "man" or "woman". This subtle realization of his disconnectedness from reality shows him that his field is wholly isolated by its methodological technique. This has led him to allow for the destruction of such a beautiful and historical little town, without much consideration given to the loss. Previous chapters in this thesis have pointed out the tendency inherent in *techne* to subordinate all questions to its own technique, while *phronesis* attempts to incorporate these questions within its work. So, Mark is pushed to interpret continuously the actions and events occurring in his life in terms of his limited, subject-confined perspective or

⁵⁰ Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 94.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

technique. This is a shared aspect of both the N.I.C.E.'s practices and the characteristics of *techne*.

Another indication of the N.I.C.E.'s overly technical rationality can be found in Mark's conversations with Miss Hardcastle and the Deputy Director who continually push the notion of 'fact' on Mark's reasoning. Miss Hardcastle states "You don't know enough facts yet for your point of view to be worth sixpence,"⁵² and the important activity in Mark's work is always the collection of facts; Lewis writes "the whole selection of facts really remained in O'Hara's hands and Mark found himself merely as a writer,"⁵³ with emphasis on the word "merely." This prioritization of facts is a function of the N.I.C.E.'s desire for "objectivity". Mark is told repeatedly to maintain his objectivity in understanding the N.I.C.E. Objectivity, from the N.I.C.E.'s perspective, is about separating and minimizing the factors which play into one's decisions. Frost, one of the N.I.C.E. executives, embodies Lewis's interpretation of *The Green Book* when Lewis writes "He reminded himself that fear was only a chemical phenomenon. For the moment, clearly, he must step out of the struggle, come to himself, and make a new start later in the evening."⁵⁴ We see this again in Filostrato's attempts to reduce all nature to something sanitary, and in Cosser's attempts to do the same with Cure Hardy.

What this shows is an exclusion of any individual opinion, or more importantly, individual sentiment, from the realm of truth. The employees of N.I.C.E. believe that rationality must be free from the self so as to control *tuche* or fate, as Dunne would call it.

⁵² Ibid., 105.

⁵³ Ibid., 138.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 396.

Because the individual cannot be forced into a technique, it cannot be rational in any sense. Its unpredictability is what separates it from reason according to the N.I.C.E. The control of the external world is at the core of the N.I.C.E.'s work. Therefore, anything that is not perfectly able to be subjected to the ends constructed by and for their personal goals is considered not objective enough and written off. So, the N.I.C.E.'s claim to have rid themselves of any subjective influences is only superficial because their view of objective rationality is based either upon a particularly human desire to be in control or, even more pathetically, on their hate for Christianity. Through this concept of objectivity then, and their primary tool 'the fact', the N.I.C.E.'s obsession with *techne* is apparent.

In contrast, the people at St. Anne's are consistently described in personal terms quite unsuitable for the N.I.C.E.'s idea of objectivity. In fact, they each receive very subjective descriptions from Jane's impression of them. Jane described the Dennistons in terms of her comfortability around them and the way that they drew her in. Jane's understanding of St. Anne's is based heavily on her simple and reactionary experiences of the people and place. In fact, in her first encounter with the Director she admits "She would have called it silly if, instead of seeing it, she had been told of it by another."⁵⁵ Again, in speaking with the Dennistons, Arthur states, "You can't know what it's like until you take the plunge."⁵⁶ This group prioritizes one's personal experiences and understands the importance of this response in knowledge and moral decisions. Thus we see Mark thinking "[Jane's] mere presence would have made all the laughter of the Inner

⁵⁵ Ibid., 159.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 128.

Ring sound metallic, unreal.”⁵⁷ Because he has been indoctrinated into the ends defined by the N.I.C.E., he himself is not appalled by it, but it is apparent even on the surface level that the N.I.C.E. is a devious organization.

At a deeper level though, this allowance for the use of first impressions in making rational choices is an allowance for the injection of the self. By accepting one’s initial responses, there is an implied claim that the self is tied up in knowledge and that reasoning is not an action that must be done outside of the influence of one’s unique internal state. In other words, knowledge is formed in relation to one’s virtues, vices, history, etc. This is an essential characteristic of *phronesis*. The virtue would not be possible without this understanding, and this is always close at hand once this characteristic is recognized. It is for this reason that Aristotle writes “In fact knowledge of what is [good] for oneself is one species [of prudence].”⁵⁸

First impressions and personal experiences are more important to Lewis’s writing than as mere personal fancies. For Lewis, these impressions and reactions signal something certain and true about the world. In his *The Abolition of Man* he writes, “Even if it were granted that such qualities as sublimity were simply and solely projected into things from our own emotions, yet the emotions which prompt the projection are the correlatives, and therefore almost the opposites, of the qualities projected...If *This is sublime* is to be reduced at all to a statement about the speaker’s feelings...it would lead

⁵⁷ Ibid., 194.

⁵⁸ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 92.

to obvious absurdities.”⁵⁹ So when those at St. Anne’s acknowledge the importance of one’s subjective reactions, it is due to the objective nature of these reactions, and it indicates that they have some recognition of their particular situation. There is insight into the particular that comes from the reactions one has to it. Subjective reactions are not always more than personal fancies or matters of taste, but Lewis considers the proper recognition of those that are as essential to the cultivation of virtue.

And this is also the starting point for the examination of the effects of *techne* and *phronesis* on one’s life path and how one or the other is cultivated. Ultimately, the difference in paths of the two camps is revealed in their final moments, and this is most significantly highlighted by the difference between Frost, the assistant to the Deputy Director and N.I.C.E.’s professor of psychology, and Jane Studdock. Whereas Frost ends in a suicidal frenzy, Jane ends her journey with a reconciled marriage. The path from a virtuous use of *techne* to a vicious use of it, however, is a long and slow process that requires certain circumstances to come together, just as the cultivation of *phronesis* is tedious for Jane. Lewis portrays the process of *techne*’s intrusion through Mark and Edgestow, and for them it begins with the idea of progress.

At the start of the novel Lewis introduces the Progressive Element, which is Mark’s current ‘inner circle’. For Mark, the idea of an inner circle is what gets him caught up in the *techne*-obsessed culture in which he finds himself. Mark simply wants to feel important and wanted, and so he does just about anything necessary to achieve this goal. His downfall then is his lack of integrity. He holds no standards for himself to

⁵⁹ C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics (Harper One, 2002), 469.

which he can compare the world. But the root of the problem is present from the beginning in his marriage. Mark is oblivious to the meaning of his and others' actions. While Jane, at the beginning of the novel, is thinking about the meaning of their matrimonial vows, Lewis begins by describing Mark as "not notic[ing] at all the morning beauty of the little street."⁶⁰ Mark, the token everyman, is susceptible to the N.I.C.E.'s instrumental rationality because he is so oblivious to the fact that his thoughts and actions actually are significant regardless of their importance to the most prominent members of the "inner circle."

The Progressive Element, on the other hand, operates on one assumption: any change that occurs must work for progress or improvement. When describing this group Mark claims that it would not even exist if it weren't for the conservative group at the college. The group simply wants change, with no end goal in sight or purpose to their change; they simply believe that change is improvement. The error is similar, if not the same, as that committed by Mark. Without a concept of an end goal for their change, the Progressive Element simply wants to adopt whatever change seems most popularly important.

This disoriented need for change is quickly replaced by something else however, when the N.I.C.E. steps in. Concurrent with the fact that it is only able to enter because of the Progressive Element's undirected desire for change, the abandonment of an end goal or guiding principles ushers in the N.I.C.E.'s dehumanizing rationality. Its entrance into Edgestow is simultaneous with a heavy fog, which is an evocative metaphor for the lack

⁶⁰ Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 5.

of clarity that the N.I.C.E. requires in order to do its work. This metaphor is confirmed by the lack of fog found at St. Anne's.

The presence of the fog has the same effect on sight as N.I.C.E. and its members have on others. For instance, the reader can see in the Deputy Director's speech that he says a lot without really saying anything. Each time Mark speaks with him he leaves feeling as though something took place, but never having an answer to his questions or resolving his conflicts. The Deputy Director effectively obscures the dilemma that Mark hopes to address. Similarly, when Mark is finally given work, it is with the intention of hiding the reality of the N.I.C.E.'s goals. They want him to disguise their decision to destroy a town, or their hand in the town riots, or the justification of a murderer's conviction with his articles. Obscurity is essential in their mission because they lack an approach to knowledge that encompasses both the moral and intellectual virtues, which is to say that their end goal is constructed and vicious. Without the incorporation of all the virtues, and, as a result, without an end goal to pursue or a concept of what is good and worthy of pursuit, there is nothing that would draw people in to their mission. So they must disguise their work as oriented toward some good, or they must obscure their actions and the end they aim toward from everyone's understanding. In other words, to make up for the lack of connection to a *telos* which is not prematurely determined by themselves, they must hide their hand in constructing their own vicious ends, so that it looks like they are pursuing a universal and true good.

The contrary path which Jane takes counteracts this problem in the character of MacPhee, who embodies the skeptic mentality. He never accepts the events that occur

without undeniable evidence, to the point where he, at times, seems not even to be on the side of those at St. Anne's. He even states, in a very "N.I.C.E." way, "I have no opinions – on any subject in the world. I state the facts and exhibit the implications."⁶¹

Nonetheless, he is an important part of what Lewis takes to be the Christian path, which is obviously one of prudence. The difference between MacPhee and the N.I.C.E. is his diligence in searching for something concrete and his integrity despite lack of understanding. Despite his emphasis on facts and his outward focus then, which resemble those of the N.I.C.E., MacPhee has a quality of character that those in the N.I.C.E. do not. MacPhee's character seems to reflect one of Lewis's statements in *The Abolition of Man* which has an echo of Aristotle's claim that "[temperance] preserves the right sort of supposition"⁶². Lewis writes, "I had sooner play cards against a man who was quite skeptical about ethics, but bred to believe that a gentleman does not cheat, than against an irreproachable moral philosopher."⁶³ The assumption in the N.I.C.E. is that facts and objectivity are rational things, and rationality determines what is right. MacPhee on the other hand, falls in at St. Anne's because he is inclined to by the virtues of his character regardless of his intellectual conviction. Although it may not be said that MacPhee is the most prudent of the group, he avoids the advances of the N.I.C.E. because he allows his rational convictions to be affected by his moral convictions. For the prudent person, there is a union of the moral and the rational which means that the convictions of one are shared in the other. MacPhee is an embodiment of this union because his rational

⁶¹ Ibid., 189.

⁶² *Nicomachean Ethics*, 90.

⁶³ Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 475.

capacity is in accordance with the convictions of the moral despite his supposed lack of sufficient evidence for rational belief.

If the N.I.C.E.'s beliefs about the nature of rationality are probed a little further there arises something quite contrary to what they profess to believe. While they seem to profess complete mastery over mankind, and an ability to control and ensure the advancement of the greater good through *techne*, there is actually a complete abandonment of the human person, or as Lewis would prefer, an abolition of man. In a quotation that effectively sums up the entire progress into a *techne*-mastered culture, Lewis states about Wither, the Deputy Director, that

“What had been in his far-off youth a merely aesthetic repugnance to realities that were crude or vulgar, had deepened and darkened, year after year, in to a fixed refusal of everything that was in any degree other than himself. He had passed from Hegel into Hume, thence through Pragmatism, and thence through Logical Positivism, and out at last into the complete void...He had willed with his whole heart that there should be no reality and no truth, and now even the immanence of his own ruin could not wake him.”⁶⁴

Wither's true motivation is depicted here, and it turns out that his worldview and his motivations for joining the N.I.C.E. are self-centered. However, it is not a regard for his history, his setting, for his circumstances, or for anything real. Rather, he has

⁶⁴ Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 420.

consideration only for his own desires; namely, his desire to rid the world of any absolute truth other than himself. This Emotivist mindset is at the heart of the N.I.C.E.'s technical knowledge. Because both perspectives rely on the individual (one knowingly, the other unknowingly), they ultimately lose touch with reality around them. Without an anchor to foundational principles, there is no way to subordinate one's *techne* to the other virtues. Hence those in the N.I.C.E., like the Deputy Director, become men cut off from reality, and by nature of the connection *phronesis* has to the reality of the particular, they become men cut off from virtue. With nothing to anchor them to the value ridden and virtue shaping reality and history around them, this aspect of the world is filled in by their own minds. It becomes a mere creation of their desires, and Emotivism is the product. In other words, subordinating the work of *phronesis* to the work of *techne* results in a loss of incorporation of the moral into the rational. This in turn leads to denial of a moral reality, which concludes that the moral aspect of the world is only a manifestation of subjective desires.

Drawing this back to *phronesis* then, those at St. Anne's can be summarized by something MacPhee states, which is repeated by many others. He says, "The long and short of it is...that this house is dominated either by the creatures I'm talking about or by a sheer delusion...The answer is always the same, we're waiting for orders."⁶⁵ This is the ultimate point of divergence in the two organizations. In any system of reason there comes a time when, as MacIntyre says, "a process of justificatory reasoning must always terminate with the assertion of some rule or principle for which no further reason can be

⁶⁵ Ibid., 220–221.

given.”⁶⁶At this point, those at St. Anne’s choose to depart from their justificatory reasoning and believe that their orders come from somewhere. This might be labeled as the Christian virtue of faith, but regardless it is connected to the excellences and habits present in the St. Anne’s community. Lewis shows how each character at St. Anne’s has his or her own inclinations towards Ransom and the power at St. Anne’s. They are not all drawn because they have the same philosophy about the place, but because their preferences for the atmosphere at St. Anne’s draw them. This inclination is again the preservation of *phronesis* through the other virtues, or what Lewis believes is our sentiments’ true connection to the real world. At N.I.C.E. however, most of its members do not even know that they require a further reason or principle, and those that do know choose not to believe that there is any principle on the grounds, which Wither displays, that they want there to be no truth. If we are truly to accept Aristotle’s claim that “The unqualifiedly good deliberator is the one whose aim accords with rational calculation in pursuit of the best good for a human being...”⁶⁷ then the N.I.C.E.’s lack of concern or clarity regarding objective truth is a challenge to the cultivation of *phronesis* at the least.

At this point it seems like it has come down to something arbitrary; each group is simply choosing their different rational systems. The justification exists though, and it hinges on an idea of *phronesis*, but Lewis explains it through Mark’s mind as an idea of the “normal.” The “normal” is that to which Mark compares the true N.I.C.E.. When he sees the absurd, nonsensical pictures that the N.I.C.E. hangs in their inner chambers, and

⁶⁶ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 20.

⁶⁷ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 92.

when he experiences the destructive initiation practices of the Deputy Director, he realizes his aversion to the whole organization by contrasting it to what he calls the “normal,” which is essentially his own conscience, which includes the underlying universality of the virtues by which his own history has shaped him. This may seem like Mark has fallen back on a universal or a principal truth then, rather than *phronesis* for his protection from the N.I.C.E., but in truth it is the work of *phronesis* that saves him. *Phronesis* is the virtue which combines both moral and intellectual virtues. It is the virtue of the practical and particular, and it is this which he relies on when he is asked by Professor Frost to trample on a crucifix in order to rid himself of the effects of Christianity’s oppression. He calls it the normal because it is that which he experiences at the particular, when he personally encounters something. The revulsion he feels in response to the N.I.C.E.’s paintings ignites his conscience because Mark has lost touch with any concrete and abstract truth and could only still be reached through something as present as the particular. A connection to the principles is then made through the conscience’s appeal to *phronesis* because it the rationality which apprehends both the universal and the particular.

So, Lewis’ explanation of the two paths which began the novel ends with this idea: if a society seeks to abolish the means by which *phronesis* works, the force of one’s conscience, then its end is in destruction. A predetermined idea of the good for all situations cannot replace the role of the conscience. Though both go through similar phases, there is obviously one better choice. While the N.I.C.E. is superficially a beneficent organization, their final moments reveal the darkness upon which they are

founded. That darkness rises from the gaps which their technical obsession left open to be filled by evil. As shown by the destruction of Edgestow University's Progressive Element (along with the rest of the university), the path of the *techne*-obsessed leads to replacement with that hideous strength which is the N.I.C.E.. On the other hand, St. Anne's remains the light of Edgestow. At St. Anne's there is a willing obedience of body and mind, which leads to natural order. The animals that fill the yard at St. Anne's in the end of the novel are experiencing the same thing as Jane when she learns the blessing of obedience in virtue. The path that led Jane to and through St. Anne's involved a process which never deluded itself with ideas of the grandeur of technical reasoning and its ability to master fate. Instead, it was a process of recognizing the necessity of concrete principals, recognizing one's inability to reach them without faith in their existence, and then choosing to obey them because of a recognition of the universality they hold in life and in nature.

The tension between *phronesis* and *techne* then, is vividly present in the events that take place in *That Hideous Strength*. The contrasting story lines of the two main characters allow insight into the nature of *techne*'s possible effects on the individual and a culture if allowed to dominate one's other virtues. If *techne* is allowed to become one's dominate mode of rationality, and *phronesis* is ignored or left uncultivated, then there is an inherent risk of facing the destruction that the N.I.C.E. faced. There is an inherent connection between the nature of *techne* and the organization's downfall, which Lewis showed lies in the nature to destroy one's means of practicing *phronesis* and replace them with the end determined prematurely by one's *techne*.

Conclusion

This thesis began with a statement about the condition of the intellectual virtues in contemporary thought and culture. The first chapter began an evaluation and comparison of the two intellectual virtues described in the sixth chapter of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, *techne* and *phronesis*. Alasdair MacIntyre and Joseph Dunne's books were both used to point out the dominance of *techne* in the way that much of the American public conceptualizes the idea of rationality. It was also shown that this dominance relates to the popularization of Emotivist concepts of morality in our culture. Finally, the specific aspects of *techne* that relate to Emotivism were identified; they were its bifurcation of the personal and organizational realms, and the predetermination of end goals, without consideration for component goods. *Phronesis* was then contrasted as an intellectual virtue which relied on the incorporation and investment of one's whole character and self, not just one's ability to attach means to an end. This chapter concluded with the need to further explore the virtue of *phronesis* by studying great texts with characters who gave insight into the nature of *phronesis*.

The next chapter studied Stuart Cuno from *The Good Apprentice* as a character that embodies the process of cultivating the virtues, though falls short in many ways, specifically regarding *phronesis*. Iris Murdoch's concept of 'attention' was applied to the character evaluations in order to highlight the importance of this quality in acting prudently. In contrasting Stuart with Edward, Ursula, and Thomas (three characters who interact with Stuart), the virtue of *phronesis* was portrayed as a state that denied any confusion of objective reality with a reality free from values and virtues. Instead,

phronesis operates with an understanding of the background of values that each person inhabits. Additionally, *phronesis* was shown to be different from cleverness in that it does not merely accomplish desired ends efficiently, but instead acts in accord with the virtues of character always, so that each action is a good in itself.

The third chapter discussed the role that hope, unknown factors, and the cultivation of the virtues of character (specifically temperance) all play in Alyosha's practice of *phronesis*. His interactions with many townspeople in *The Brothers Karamazov* showed that knowledge oriented toward action was the central difference between him and other characters. This is what made it possible through his time in the monastery to cultivate the virtues of character, which in turn guided his actions outside of the monastery. Lastly, the condition that Alyosha found Ilyusha in highlighted the ability of *phronesis* to guide right action without knowledge of every fact about a person. It showed the importance of acting regardless of possession of knowledge.

Finally, the fourth chapter used C.S. Lewis' *That Hideous Strength* to discuss the two different paths that lives of complete virtue cultivation, or *techne*-obsession can lead to. The former was shown, through the inhabitants at St. Anne's, to be a life aware of and responsive to one's internal state in relation to the objective world. The latter was shown, through members of the N.I.C.E., to be one that ended in chaos and destruction. It eventually created men who could not practice virtue because of their rejection of the self, or any internal/personal factors, in determining truth.

These four chapters, and the three novels on which they focus, are meant to act as objects for meditation. They provide examples and descriptions of the virtue of *phronesis*

that can hopefully aid in the cultivation of the reader's own virtues. In addition, this thesis hinges on the recognition that the virtue of *phronesis* and its benefits has been lost on a culture in which *techne* has become the dominant concept of rationality, and that we now suffer from this change. It is my hope that thoughtful rumination on the ideas and characters presented in this thesis will allow its readers to begin the cultivation of *phronesis* within their own lives and within the any culture which has been harmed by the dominance of *techne*-obsessed views of rationality.

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