

Can Self-Love be cultivated through *Phronesis*?

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Abstract: Nowadays, the notion of *phronesis* has acquired multiple translations, while the concept of self-love – multiple understandings. Since each translation and interpretation highlights an aspect over another, this study aims to philosophically outline the Aristotelian *phronesis* on the basis of its etymological development, seeking to determine whether self-love can be cultivated through *phronesis* on an experiential level or not. Thus, the analysis is of a qualitative nature, establishing the pre-Aristotelian and Aristotelian understandings of *phronesis* as intertwined with virtue and good life, an intertwinement which is, in essence, fundamental to philosophical practice, revealing its intimate connection with *phronesis* on both conceptual and experiential levels. Finally, it is concluded that a philosophical practice is in itself an art of *phronesis* and a virtuous activity, since it involves a conscientious self-understanding leading to *eudaimonia*, aiming to pursue what is good for oneself, the other and the humanity in general, on which basis the right stance of self-love is fostered and cultivated, for one should love what is noble, that is wisdom, and aspire to it.

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The Concept of *Phronesis*

Even though the concept of *phronesis* has been explored in a significant amount of relevant works, there is still a lack of a consistent overview of its grasped meanings, for a concept can acquire various interpretations. This is why, one of the most evident problems, still present nowadays, consists of whether the translation of *phronesis* as ‘prudence’ from the Latin word *prudencia* can be considered an appropriate translation, that is in accord with the Aristotelian meaning or not; and if not, which term can grasp the essence of this concept, for every given translation emphasizes certain elements over others (Tarantino 2017, 65-66), whether it is ‘prudence’ or ‘practical wisdom’, ‘practical reason’ (Veith 2013, 24) or ‘practical insight’ (Backman 2015, 29), ‘conscience’ (Heidegger 2003, 39), ‘moral knowledge’ (Gallagher 1992, 197) or ‘mindfulness’ (McEvilly 2002, 609). For these reasons, in order to truly understand the sense behind the Aristotelian *phronesis*, it is important that, for starters, one recognizes its significant motifs and connotations evolved throughout the Greek cultural context, that is the meaning behind the word family of *phren/phroneo* as developed by Homer, Hippocrates and Heraclitus (Tarantino 2017, 66).

Since the origin of *phronesis* lies “in the very middle of our heart, lungs, or chest, i.e., our centre – in that Homeric organ called the *phren*”, it is considered to be of an affective nature (Tarantino 2017, 61), implying one of the first and greatest themes – the motif of respiration or breathing – that would further influence the Aristotelian view (Tarantino 2017, 75-76), establishing the foundation for the entire word family of *phren/phroneo* (Tarantino 2017, 80-81).

The motif of inspiration, however, should not be merely resumed to its corporeal characteristic, for it implicitly highlights an intellectual and cognitive aspect (Tarantino 2017, 77-78) that needs to be explored to its greatest extent, being strongly related to the relationship that unfolds between the outward façade, that is what is perceived, and the inner state of being, that is what perception unfolds within oneself, exhibiting cognitive activities such as deliberating, worrying, thinking, feeling, considering – activities that include nuances of practical-volitional, emotional and ethical meanings (Tarantino 2017, 78-79).

On this basis, the Homeric motif of respiration is not only connected with one's *actions* and *emotions*, but also with one's *actions* and *language*, revealing not only the knowledge of how to remain wisely calm in the face of a tumultuous and complex experience such as a war or battle, for it requires a "measured" breath in order not "to be delivered over to an uncontrolled heart and mind" (Tarantino 2017, 81-82), but also the way *phrenes* "speaks" to oneself, that is a language closely related to conscience or impulse, for the Homeric organ "knows" or "feels" what one truly desires even before it reaches to the verbal content, tacitly orienting one towards action or away from it (Tarantino 2017, 82-83). Thus, it involves a sense of prudence oriented not simply towards what is happening outwardly, but rather towards what is happening inwardly, that is the dialogue that manifests itself within oneself.

The Hippocratic usage of *phrenes*, must be said, is closely related to the Homeric usage, since even if it is generally used with its material sense of 'diaphragm', it still implies a connection between the cognitive dimension and the corporeal one of *phrenes* (Tarantino 2017, 85-86). However, the concept of *phren*, in the ancient medicine, mislays "its Homeric-Poetic mystique," and is restated into a technical terminology, a medical one (Tarantino 2017, 87), implying one's state of cognitive healthiness (Tarantino 2017, 92). In this regard, the Hippocratic *phronein* involves the way one is using one's own cognitive faculties, thought and perception, acquiring a sense that is contrasted with either being "delirious", technically or medically, or being "out of his mind", a reminiscent connotation of a Homeric personage (Tarantino 2017, 92-93).

Despite its narrower connotation acquired, the interrelated link between the outside world and the inner world within the here-and-now experience is still preserved in Heraclitus's account "as a form of self-knowledge concerning one's place in the cosmos" (Tarantino 2017, 98), outlining *phronein* as the true wisdom of how to speak and act in accord with the truth as well as of how to perceive in tune with nature, interrelating the knowledge of self with that of world as the core of self-understanding (Tarantino 2017, 107-109).

Moreover, it would be seen that, in the Aristotelian insight, the form of self-knowledge of *phronesis* as a manifestation between one's self and the world – a world understood either "in an elemental and material way (Hippocrates), in a cosmic, universal way (Heraclitus), or in a localized,

practical way (Homer)” (Tarantino 2017, 111-112) – would persist in an intertwinement with the fundamental motif of inspiration, that is the bridge between one’s inner world (thoughts, emotions, deliberation) and the surrounding world (experience, context, environment) (Tarantino 2017, 112-113).

Thus, the Aristotelian *phronesis* is further revealed within a cultural and specific dialogue regarding the notion of good life, encompassing the way of acquiring such a life as well as the role of wisdom in “saturating one’s concrete living” in the way one speaks, acts, feels, makes decisions and thinks (Tarantino 2017, 124). Since *phronesis* supervenes on the grounds of a dialectical movement of thought concerning the representative ‘Socratic question’: “what is the good for humans and what is good to do in this particular situation?” (Tarantino 2017, 161-162), it comprises a preoccupation and an interest regarding *the good life as a whole*, namely what is considered to be good for oneself, the other and human beings in general (Tarantino 2017, 158), acknowledging virtue as the righteous perspective of what is to lead a good life (LeBar 2018, 475-476).

However, it should be noted that *eudaimonia* is not merely subjected to a state of mind, but rather to a property of life, which functional role is to define the standards rooted in one’s enterprising of living certainly well, that is acting virtuously. On this basis, what is precisely guiding one on this path is one’s practical rationality, for what represents “a standard of excellence in living” is reaching to that sort of action that is done simply for its sake. Thus, by engaging within a virtuous activity guided by *phronesis*, one develops a discipline, sculpting one’s desires and passions in a way of one’s acting out from one’s unified, and not fragmented, self, for even if others can deprive one of certain components of one’s life, the others cannot reach to what one chooses to make of oneself as an agent (LeBar 2018, 470-473).

Choosing in each moment of the day to act virtuously “for its own sake” highlights the distinctive characteristic between truly being a good person and just being a person. To ultimately choose what is good in the here-and-now situation means “to *act* in a truly human and humane way”, representing the consummation of the accomplishment of the interconnectedness of *phronesis* and the virtue of character (Tarantino 2017, 192), since one who has practical wisdom “can see what is good for

themselves and what is good for people in general” (Aristotle 2004, 107), and constantly seeks to align his personal choices with the needed matters in order to determine what is good for oneself and others (Celano 2016, 39). On this account, the Aristotelian *phronesis* involves a sense of fairness and reasonableness by *having a good eye*, that is properly judging what can be considered as reasonable – an ability acquired only through *experience* (Tarantino 2017, 165) – since only through practice one can learn to see things correctly, sizing up and sensing instantly the options one has, their behind reasons and consequences (Kraut 2012, 549).

Hence, by acquiring *phronesis*, that is the *eye of the soul*, one has *one's eyes opened*, being fully aware and present in this particular here-and-now moment (Tarantino 2017, 188), making a conscious choice manifested through one's action, since for Aristotle, as well as for Plato and Socrates, meaning well or having a good hear is not enough; “the true ethical goal is rather to *do well*” (Tarantino 2017, 188).

Thus, one's fulfilment or happiness is a result of not merely possessing knowledge or having an intellectual concern in regard to these matters, but the constant actualization of the virtues within one's character (Tarantino 2017, 172-173), since *phronesis* without the moral virtues cannot be considered *phronesis*. Moreover, the combination and application of the virtues of the mind and the virtues of character lead to acquiring that *eye of the soul* that commends the human choice of action (Tarantino 2017, 191). A truly good person must always seek to deflect excess, as well as defect, choosing the golden mean that is identified as the right principle that makes orders (Celano 2016, 40). The link between the proper rational understanding and the correct desire comprises the formation of a deliberate desire that produces one's choice deserving of a character that is virtuous (Veith 2013, 18).

Furthermore, while the role of *phronesis* is to make the means towards the end right, the role of moral virtue is to make the end right (Kraut 2012, 535). Since virtue is an outcome of habituation, what becomes central to virtue is a moral neutral ability exercised in an appropriate way; while exercised inappropriately, it transforms itself into a vice (Curzer 2018, 122-123). In this regard, Aristotle advises one to be aware of vice (as opposed to virtue), incontinence (as opposed to self-control) and brutishness (as opposed to “heroic virtue”) (Aristotle 2004, 119), since by choosing to act on their behalf, inner fragmentation results, diverging one

from living a good life and engaging into a proper soul caring, for one realizes that what actually brought him pleasure is merely pain and regret, neglecting one's disposition of acting friendly towards one's own self (Aristotle 2004, 170). On this basis, human flourishing, that is being a truly good person, implies a harmonious work and contribution of all the parts of one's soul, since even the essence of self-love in itself highlights the duty of becoming of one mind with oneself, desiring the same matters with every part of one's nature. That is why *phronesis*, desire or practical reason and moral virtue, in Aristotle's account, cannot be separated, for understanding one part requires understanding the other (Tarantino 2017, 189-190).

In this way, the deliberation occurring within oneself in regard to which are the right ends and which are the right means of an action must never cease, for this engagement cannot be reduced to some rules, but rather it is rooted into a philosophical contemplation focused on being good through one's right choice of actions. Therefore, the stability of *phronesis* is not manifested through its gathering of concrete and accurate decisions as a slate of correctness, but rather through its insightful and contemplative integration with particularity, which "*involves* right reason" and not engages "*in accord* with right reason" (Veith 2013, 23). That being said, what completes a virtue is *phronesis*, since one evolves from being merely "capable of doing the right thing in the right circumstances" towards "being a person who has a conscious understanding of who he is and what he is doing" (Lear 1988, 186).

By now, it is clear that the various existing translations as 'prudence', 'practical wisdom', 'reasonableness', 'wisdom', 'tact', 'conscience', 'circumspection', 'practical insight' or 'mindfulness' all outline certain features of *phronesis*, but none of them completely cover the complexity and essence of the meaning of the Aristotelian *phronesis*, since it ultimately means orienting one's conscientious understanding of self, whose entire practical living is manifested through one's feelings, yearnings, character, words, actions, towards human good, that is what truly makes one's life the most humane (Tarantino 2017, 192-193).

By living a good life, one pursues the acquirement and the constant exercise of virtues of character through one's training of reason, philosophically contemplating the right choice of action. By choosing conscientiously for oneself in the here-and-now moment to engage into

such an activity which is not only good, but also pleasant in itself (Aristotle 2004, 177-178), one chooses to engage into an activity which is complete and self-sufficient, increasing one's awareness in terms of self- and world-understanding as well as one's inner well-being.

As it can be seen, the tradition of viewing *phronesis* as the self-understanding wisdom, explicitly occurred with Heraclitus, is continued in Aristotelian insight. However, this tradition implicitly begun with Homer, as an awareness put into practice regarding the choice of action, and Hippocrates, as understanding of one's self in terms of his physical limitations and the choice of action to undertake in order to preserve one's healthiness (Tarantino 2017, 154-155).

In this sense, it must be reemphasized that the nature of a good action outlines the relationship *phronesis* has with the moral virtue, since virtue always seeks to outline the righteous of an aim, while *phronesis* is concerned with orienting the rational choice towards that particular right aim (Aristotle 2004, 116). Then, it must be said that being good is highly interconnected with being practically wise (Aristotle 2004, 117), hence its intertwinement with the virtue of character. However, virtue outlines not only one's state in accord with one's correct reason, it involves the practice of it as well, as long as *phronesis* is responsible for outlining the correct reason constructed in this regard (Aristotle 2004, 118). Therefore, being good implies one's every conscientious choice of moment to act virtuously through *phronesis* in the pursuit of *eudaimonia*.

The Concept of Self-Love

When discussing about self-love, Aristotle introduces the concept of friendship, *philia*, which can be defined implicitly through five marks as follows: wishing and doing good to a friend for his own sake, wishing he exists and lives, spending time with him, making the same decisions as him and finding the equally pleasant/painful things as him. Paradigmatically, these characteristics are to be found in the relation a good human being has with oneself (Annas 1989, 1), revealing oneself as the best friend one can have, for happiness seeks that kind of self-love which is characteristic to a philosophical soul – the possession of complete self-understanding, that is having “the right stance toward oneself and the capacity to secure

what is good for oneself, especially for one's soul or mind" (Pangle 2002, 169).

However, according to Aristotle (2004, 174-175), the concept of self-love is misunderstood, for most people use it in a derogatory way, revealing a self-lover as a bad person, one who likes oneself the most, one who seeks one's own interests and desires more than one's share of oneself, one who assigns oneself the best in terms of bodily pleasures, money and honours, namely matters of competition, hence generally gratifying one's appetites and feelings, one's non-rational part of soul. On this account, Aristotle reassess the common conception the notion of self-love has acquired by outlining that one who engages into reflection in order to act virtuously, one who always strives to make what is noble one's own and acts for the noble itself, one who gratifies the authoritative component within oneself and obeys it, one who enjoys the entirety of this process appears to be more of a lover of self. Even when distinguishing between a self-controlled being and an incontinent person, the appeal to reason, that is whether one's intellect is in control or not, marks the essence of this difference, for one's reasonable acts are essentially one's own, hence voluntarily. In this sense, of all human beings, it is only the good person that can be acknowledged as the true self-lover, for he lives in accord with his reason and desires what is truly noble and not what merely seems temporary advantageous.

That being said, the 'true self-love' is concerned with acting virtuously, that is pursuing the noble (Annas 1989, 9), whereas the true self-lover is engaged into a maximized activity of acquiring what is good for oneself through one's maximized activity of practicing virtues, gratifying understanding (Kim 2019, 674-676) through *phronesis*:

"And if everyone strives for what is noble and strains to do the noblest actions, everything will be as it should be for the common interest, and individually each will have the greatest goods, since such is virtue. So the good person should be a self-lover, since he will help himself as well as benefit others by doing noble acts, but the wicked person should not, because he will harm both himself and those around him by following his evil feelings. There is, then, a clash for the wicked person between what he ought to do and what he does; whereas what the good person does is the same as what he ought to do, since intellect always chooses what is best for itself, and the good person obeys his intellect" (Aristotle 2004, 176).

Aristotle highlights that a true self-lover will always choose to act good and noble, encouraging one to acquire the right kind of self-love and to express it by living a “life of actively virtuous practical reasoning”, for this is the way one profoundly feels to be oneself (Annas 1989, 12). In this regard, the main problem entailed in the common self-love is not based on one’s pursuit of too much, but rather of too little, for the greatest good lies precisely in what is noble (Pangle 2002, 171), leading oneself towards a harmonious state of being, lacking in conflicts.

To love oneself truly and deeply outlines an obedience and a gratification of one’s ‘true self’, for one does what it should be done, hence one chooses virtue for its own sake. In this way, by choosing what is good for oneself, one does not neglect the others’ good (Pangle 2002, 171-172), for the true self-lover can extend one’s love in various ways towards the others, namely by sharing views, wishing good and caring “for the sake of the friend’s virtuous character” (Annas 1989, 2-3). Moreover, the notion of self-love should not be merely resumed to friendship, rather it should be expanded to any human being, for acting for their sake entails a self-sacrifice (Annas 1989, 13), since one chooses to act righteously for the sake of what is human good.

Since one’s motivation is based on cultivating virtues of character as well as *phronesis*, it is worth mentioning that on a deeper layer – one’s self-love is reflected through one’s deeds, for any virtue or vice entailed in one’s acts represents a way of expressing itself. A virtuous being will express it through *phronesis*, a love directed towards the practice of reason itself and not towards one’s destination (Annas 1989, 13-14).

It might be said, then, that the true self-lover is a ‘rational planner’, for one has rationally chosen one’s perception regarding what a good life entails, what can be considered as valuable in one’s life and the way in which the things should be organized, as well as prioritized, in order to pursue the final end of flourishing. One’s self-love then is unfolding through one’s authentic enjoyment of living a whole life, knowing that one’s value is the same as others’ value. Thus, the true self-lover would not be attached to certain plans or goals, for one’s self-love will prevail even if one fails to acquire a specific aim. Moreover, he would not engage into an excess of self-concern, for he enjoys planning in itself, makes his own choices, and performs actions as an expression of himself (Homiak 1981, 638-640).

If virtues are a reflection of one's feelings and behaviours that are manifested righteously in various contexts (Homiak 1981, 640), 'to hit the mean' involves to feel and behave in accordance with one's rational activity, performing the virtuous activity willingly. In this way, the joy one feels when one rationally plans one's life would lead to acting virtuously precisely because of the presence of one's self-love which is expressed through one's love of reasoning. In this sense, it might be claimed that virtues form a unity, however, neither because they should be identical, nor because they should unfold all together, but rather because one has cultivated self-love (Homiak 1981, 649-650). Therefore, the Aristotelian virtuous activity unfolds as "the fullest expression of human nature", whereas one's self-love pursues to rationally harmonize one's 'best states', that is one's authoritative component, reason and one's affective element, passion (Dziob 1993, 786).

To summarize, the true self-lover is essentially the good person whose best friend is namely one's own self (Dziob 1993, 792), for he takes responsibility for his actions and commits himself towards acting well. Moreover, a true self-lover loves what one is without inward conflicts or illusions, or expectations of rewards (Pangle 2002, 181), for he pursues the right amount and the right kind of self-love. Finally, the true self-lover seeks to strengthen the developed inner harmony between one's reason and passion, enhancing a proper cooperation, whereas reason is dominant (Dziob 1993, 801), for he knows that what can be truly shared is thoughts, whilst money, honours, power and bodily pleasures are subjected to division (Pangle 2002, 182), hence his final end pursued – *eudaimonia*.

Through *Phronesis* towards Self-Love

Since self-love is mainly concerned with one's inner nature, one must learn to explore oneself through a practically wise self-observation in pursuit of self-knowledge, for one cannot run from oneself, wherever one will go, one will be oneself. Observing oneself can be the greatest act of self-love, since it represents the beginning of an inner transformation, an understanding of oneself, a way of returning to and reconnecting with oneself, in essence, being honest with oneself. Moreover, the very process of being attentive to the very present moment, hence increasing one's awareness through *phronesis*, may dissipate the images one has created

and through which one has imprisoned oneself, for loving oneself simply redirects one towards being human, expressing oneself as one is, a truly self-liberation.

On this basis, by engaging into such a practice, one engages into a philosophical practice (Lahav 2013, 84), careful examining the roots of the issues regarding life, questioning one's doubts and assumptions already taken for granted, pursuing precisely "to avoid the dogmatic and one-sided thinking" (Lahav 2013, 86), hence destroying the barriers of one's fixed system of beliefs.

Confining one's emotions, thoughts and behaviours towards an inflexible and narrow repertoire excludes the very possibility of living in one's full potential and richness of virtues, treasures which are hidden deep within oneself. On the basis of merely following automatic and rigid patterns, one cannot "give voice" to the deepest resources stored inside, namely sources of inspiration, sensitivity and wisdom. This limited repertoire, *perimeter*, highlights one's "habitual patterns, as well as the worldview (or "philosophy of life") which these patterns express", one which is very similar to 'Plato's cave' (Lahav, 2013, 88-89), hence an unawareness of being imprisoned into one's own constructed limiting views.

Through understanding one's perimeter, one essentially understands the attitude one has towards oneself, the other and the world, particularly the ways through which one seizes the life and perceives the conceived, sometimes, issues. Hence, the practice of self-love in itself reveals one's willingness to step out of this perimeter, that is, in Heidegger's terms, to pause and reflect, to be aware of what is happening here and now, to engage into a 'meditative thinking' in favour of the 'calculative thinking', precisely, a shift of perspective, seeing everything from a different angle, for to reflect or not to reflect is, ultimately, a choice.

For these reasons, philosophical practice, in its essence, is an act of consulting or, in a wider sense, an art of living philosophically. Since it can be applied in multiple ways and since there are various perspectives regarding what it entails, it is worth resuming on the competences a philosophical practitioner cultivates, namely the abilities of performing one's work well that relate to one's beliefs, relational properties, circumstances revealed in the right context (Harteloh 2010, 36-37).

Philosophical practice is based on the competences developed through the philosophical study, which are applied within the dialogue the philosophical counsellor engages in, “to real life persons”, where “the time frame is the now, the actual moment the dialogue takes place”. Since it “requires a sense of purpose and a quality of mind”, philosophical practice does not merely become “a technique (*techne*)”, but rather a practical wisdom (*phronesis*) (Harteloh 2010, 38-39).

Accordingly, the main three competences engaged in a philosophical practice are ‘the art of questioning’, ‘the art of interpreting’, ‘the art of understanding’, on which basis various styles of practice develop either by accentuating more or less one of these abilities, which reflective application connects the philosophical practice with the philosophical study (Harteloh 2010, 41).

Since these three competences represent the reflective nature of the philosophical study, its unity might be viewed in a circular motion, whereas questioning leads to answers, which are further interpreted, followed by an understanding of the interpretations grasped, enhancing questioning again the understanding. By applying this circle constantly, one reaches towards a *philosophical* ‘level of consciousness’, that implies not a logical or an associative connection between the thoughts, but rather an intimate one, which in time develops as critical thinking. Hence, its conscious practical application is an act, precisely a philosophical practice in itself (Harteloh 2010, 43), whereas its significance is not merely reflected in the philosophical counselling, but in one’s everyday life, as well (Harteloh 2010, 44).

Philosophical practice as *phronesis* provides space for understanding philosophy in terms of actions and experiences through group or individual discussions, exercises, ways of life (Tukiainen 2012), depicting a therapeutic process in itself, where the guest’s “powers of virtues are examined and encouraged”, fostering one’s virtues and enhancing one’s well-being (Tukiainen 2010, 47), hence living a good life.

Since philosophy and philosophical practice aim at circumventing, solving or accustoming one to the insolvability and dissolvment of various life issues and paradoxes, which often enough coexist with negative mental states, philosophical practice aims at wisdom, for “wisdom is precisely the understanding one needs in order to live well”. In this sense, if the notion of wisdom is comprised of virtues as character traits or dispositions, as

opposed to foolishness, hence vices, in order to lead a good life, one needs to engage into a virtuous activity (Tukiainen 2012, 114-115).

Philosophical counselling invites one to live philosophically, and any attempt of separating it from cultivating virtues would merely impoverish and make it unnatural, for a virtuous activity is intertwined with practical reasoning, enhancing its capacity of reducing sufferings and guiding one's life towards one's 'life-orienting ideals'. On this basis, a philosophical practice may not be focused on discussing virtues, but it necessarily seeks "to modify the thoughts, feelings or behaviour through the power of virtues" (Tukiainen 2010, 50-51) by questioning, interpreting and understanding. Moreover, a virtuous activity in itself enables one to healthily cope with any problems of life and this is what precisely differentiates the philosophical counselling from any psychological theory (Tukiainen 2010, 52-53).

In this regard, it is worth introducing briefly one of the virtues necessary in a philosophical practice, which is the virtue of 'release' as 'non-willing'.

In the historical account, the philosophy of release was depicted in various spiritual traditions and by many philosophers, whether as Buddhist non-attachment, Jain equanimity, Taoist *wuwei*, Stoic indifference, Christian release from willing or Eckhart's detachment as non-willing, Schopenhauer's "cessation of willing as a kind of liberation", Heidegger's *Gelassenheit* as 'releasement' and Krishnamurti's "undiscriminating awareness" (Tukiainen 2013, 1216).

According to Tukiainen (2013, 1215-1218), the notion of release is depicted as a timeless experience in which one experiences impersonally the world by letting it be as it is, leaving aside any positive or negative evaluative attitudes, living effortlessly in the present moment without attempting to force things or fearing any failure or loss. It involves "a state of unfocused receptivity or openness in which our minds are widely aware of everything that we are capable of experiencing", a disengagement of willing as 'will-directed concentration' in favour of an unfocused awareness and simplicity, creating space for openness, independence and disinterestedness. In this way, tranquillity and relaxation are attained, often enough, accompanied by an inner existential joy. Since "the roots of vice are in the will itself, however weak and simple it may be", willing

various things may encompass a notion of excess, addiction, stubbornness and negligence, hence its opposite engagement.

In order to suspend any evaluative judgment or attitude, one needs to exercise the way one perceives and thinks. Through 'perceptual indiscrimination' (unfocused awareness of internal and external events) one ceases to affirm perceptual preference relationships. By practicing it constantly not only it becomes integrated to one's life enabling one to alternate faster between the focused mode and unfocused mode of consciousness, but it also weakens the link between one's will and its manifestation in action, creating space for deliberation, thus enabling one to endure non-action. By exercising 'non-judgmental awareness' from the moment one suspects any mental or emotional source as a further aversion or attraction would help one avoid to further denature it through any evaluation. Moreover, by acknowledging that any evaluation comprises merely known facts, one realizes that one may not necessarily know one's reason of will; and even if one knows every possible fact, known and unknown, one may be still unable to assess the value of will's object in itself and as related to other goals in life. By considering these, one can further strive to balance any positive features with their possible adverse sides in order to prevent any further elation or distress caused by things one cannot control, hence enabling one to mentally detach from any predictable conceived results (Tukiainen 2013, 1218-1221).

Since release as virtue promotes a dissolvent process of any evaluative attitudes and thoughts that may cause problems in life, problems which are, in essence, manifestations of one's will, by learning to be open to release, one creates space for spontaneity and unexpected potentialities of being and thinking, an inner transformation which might reflect more authenticity and truthfulness, however, which requires a sense of patience and trust (Tukiainen 2013, 1221-1222).

When self-love is not of the right kind and not in the right amount, one abandons oneself in the favour of positive or negative fixed beliefs about oneself, running from oneself by pursuing various activities towards a deceitful happiness, encountering one in Buber's terms of 'It' and not 'Thou', which finally results into a resistance towards oneself and towards life, for living continuously within any kind of judgmental evaluation or even self-identification might encounter life, at a certain point, as meaningless.

According to Yalom (1980, 431-441), there are various sources of meaning as 'altruism', 'dedication to a cause', 'creativity', 'self-actualization', 'self-transcendence' and 'the life cycle', beliefs which are powerful in itself, for their pursuit is one of making the world better for oneself and for others, enhancing an experiential attitude towards simply experience the world as it is.

On this basis, the engagement within a virtuous activity through *phronesis*, which finally leads to living a good life as an endless end, hence a meaning in itself, involves the notion of release in the sense of broadening one's perimeter, for the perimeter itself represents the lens through which one experiences the world.

Moreover, the virtue of non-willing not only helps one increase awareness, one which is unfocused and open to new insights and discoveries, it also teaches one to let go of attempting to control things, for control in itself is a manifestation of willing, as well. By acknowledging that what one can truly control is one's mind, hence the choices one makes, the necessary space for spontaneity, deliberation and relaxation is created, whereas within one's state of relaxation, physical and mental, one's way of perceiving and thinking may take a different nuance.

Therefore, philosophical practice as *phronesis* is about a daily constant virtuous activity, one which is both healing and preventive, whereas various 'forward-looking virtues' (courage, good judgment, autonomous thinking) help circumventing different possible sources of irritation and anger, confusion and resentment, even depression; 'backward-looking virtues' (mercifulness regarding imperfections) enable recovering from traumatic experiences. Moreover, certain virtues as detachment, flexibility, relativity, mental independence influence one's attitude, orienting one towards the here-and-now moment by enhancing resilience and endurance in any stressful-perceived situations. On this account, philosophy provides various philosophical exercises ('writing to oneself', 'looking at oneself from above', 'detached awareness of everything that happens', '*praemeditatio malorum*', 'examining one's conscience', 'meditating on death', 'opening one's self to the senses') which can further be cultivated as a way of life. Furthermore, through philosophical counselling, critical thinking and impartiality are trained in the sense of examining one's situation through questioning, interpreting and understanding, whereas it further serves as a potentiality for challenging

oneself to discover inner hidden virtues as the source of inner transformation. Thus, it will not only further enhance one's self-knowledge, but also foster one's virtuous activity, one which is beneficial and according to one's needs, one which represents a new beginning for a philosophical way of living (Tukiainen 2012, 126-128).

Conclusion

This study started from the idea of the necessity of clarifying the meanings a philosophical concept entails, namely *phronesis* and self-love, by focusing on outlining its Aristotelian grasped meaning based on the pre-Aristotelian etymological development of *phren/phronein* word family as well as its conceptual and experiential intertwinement with the virtuous activity guided by *phronesis* as one's conscientious self-understanding necessary for living a good life as one's final end in terms of a continuous self-improvement through philosophical practice. In this sense, it has been concluded that practicing philosophy in itself involves practicing wisdom, engaging in a virtuous activity in the pursuit of increasing one's well-being, a cultivation of self-love through *phronesis*.

In conclusion, philosophical practice in its essence fosters the intertwinement between virtue, *phronesis* and good life, cultivating inherently the right stance of self-love by enhancing one's critical thinking through one's ability of questioning, interpreting and understanding; revealing the hidden potential of a virtuous activity as fundamental for living a good life, meaningful in itself; pursuing a release from a limited judgemental thinking. By spending time with oneself, philosophically contemplating and deliberating, one broadens one's perimeter in terms of self- and world- understanding, cultivating a right attitude towards oneself and life, caring for oneself, thus loving oneself righteously, for one understands that what can be controlled is one's mind.

On this basis, by engaging into a virtuous activity guided by *phronesis*, a conscientious self-understanding through a conscientious philosophical practice, one makes space for personal exploration in terms of choosing what is right in the here-and-now moment, changing from within by dissolving one's inward conflicts, hence restoring inner peace, ultimately, living one's life consciously.

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