

# Chapter 84

## Contributions to the epistemic construction of the concept of education and environmental culture

  <https://doi.org/10.56238/devopinterscie-084>

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### **ABSTRACT**

This document will try to address an epistemic construction in the field of education and environmental culture from the philosophy of Aristotle, taking up the concepts of Phrónesis and phrónimos as constituent elements of the tensions that are generated between theory and practice, typical for understanding the actions of the human being and that materialize according to the natural world and, therefore, of reality.

**Keywords:** education, environmental culture, phronesis, Aristotle

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The legacy of Aristotle constitutes one of the most relevant philosophical contributions from antiquity to our times since his thought has had a great influence on society, particularly in the Arab world and in the Christian world.

For the staunch defenders of the epistemologies of the South, perhaps mentioning Aristotle to propose foundations in the construction of the concept of environmental education and culture may be counterproductive, due to Eurocentrism; However, in this writing, we do not seek to propose Aristotle's philosophical source as the only one in the construction of this concept, we consider that the sources must be intertwined to build from different perspectives and worldviews.

For the purpose that we propose, we consider that Aristotle gives relevant importance to practice since he conceives of action-oriented towards an approach to moral knowledge to achieve virtue, through good actions. In this way, the writing will be addressed from the document "Practical Philosophy: Aristotle" by Barragán (2015) taking into account that the main motivation of the author is focused on finding meaning in the practices; Thus, in the search to consolidate a conceptual base of practical knowledge -phronesis-, this document will take into account at first, the Phrónesis for the epistemic construction of the field "environmental education and culture" as a constitutive element of human actions based on virtue and in the phrónimos to characterize the individual empowered to coexist harmoniously with others and their environment.

Also presented are aspects related to the importance that deliberation and choice have in present human decisions that allow, through education, to train individuals who act culturally for the benefit of the environment, from the rational and practical.

## **2 THE CONCEPT OF PHRÓNESIS FOR THE EPISTEMIC CONSTRUCTION OF THE FIELD OF "ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND CULTURE"**

"Education and environmental culture" is an academically unexplored field that seeks to articulate education with environmental culture in all its dimensions. A field that augurs the opening of a new academic space for research, reflection, and educational action of the greatest possible breadth.

It is then a question of conceiving the field of "environmental education and culture" not from the variety of disciplines that intervene and converge as if it were a well-articulated interdisciplinary framework as a basis for continuing to expand and develop environmental sciences as an academic theoretical practice (more beyond ecology as protection of the environment), far from it, as ratification of theories of disciplines to achieve advances in environmental sciences. In any case, it is about creating a new way of transcending man and seeing with "new eyes" the relationships of the human being between humans and the house "Mother Earth", in such a way that the human being has reference and a preference for the "home", to the "habitat", to the "house", to the "niche", as the basis of all the relationships of the human being with his environment and his fight against the collective environmental ignorance that characterizes us.

But the epistemic construction inherent to environmental education and culture is quite a challenge since it involves addressing elements of "education" and "environmental culture" separately, which allow the creation of a transdisciplinary that is concerned with aspects inherent to how human beings should live in harmony with the natural environment, not only concerning the environment or biodiversity but in their relationship with the other, from pedagogical relationships, from their social context, with a harmonious correspondence seen from the natural relationship of survival and with an economic concept different from the one currently prevailing.

But the reflection on the type of world that the planet needs can only be given from practice, from the facts, because it is in the facts where the properly human onticity is evident; And it is precisely from this perspective that Aristotle is approached, whose reflections can contribute significantly to the field of environmental education and culture. In the first place, Aristotle establishes a marked tension between the practical and the theoretical. For the philosopher, the good is the fundamental horizon towards which human beings must move, both individually and socially. He rejects the Platonic position that everything that exists tends to a single good since each thing seeks its good, which is why he maintains: "What does not have the essence of Good is not good. Consequently, the Good and the essence of the Good are necessarily identified, as well as the Beautiful and the essence of the Beautiful, and the same must be said of everything that is not predicated on another, but as such and primarily. 1990. p.94)

From this perspective, the *phrónesis* or “prudence” appears in the western translation. Theorizing *phronesis* constitutes a basic element of the understanding between the distance and the closeness between theory and practice. Thus, *phronesis* is considered "an immutable knowledge that opposes opinion or sensation" (Barragán, 2015; p. 95), in such a way that in the field of *phronesis*, of common sense, according to Aristotle (1999, p.130) "the judicious man guides his choices." In this sense, it is inferred that man must know how to decide what is most convenient at all times, where good judgment characterizes him, evidencing himself as prudent, which implies justice and temperance.

And it is precisely from prudence, where “the choice is given or free or free will, how everything we choose we choose insofar as it is either good or it seems to us to be; how free will consists in power over two opposites”. Aristotle (2001, p.11), that is, his possibilities, which in this case are: good and bad for man, so that said voluntary choice from *phronesis* is a virtuous act.

Likewise, taking into account that according to Aristotle (1990, p157) "choice does not occur without thought" it is considered that decisions are made rationally, since they are a choice between potential consequences or contrary effects, in this way, Virtue is understood as a way of being selective of the individual governed by decisions determined by reason and by what the prudent man will decide, that is, an action based on a point of balance between excess and defect in one's practice.

Therefore, prudence is considered "a virtue of the rational, which implies temperance" (Aristotle, 1982; p.213), since according to Aristotle only the temperate acts according to reason, contrary to the dissolute who only wants its delights at all times, “so that the good and correct choice makes virtue, but what has to be done to achieve that, does not fall to virtue to treat it, but to another faculty. It is very clear, then, that it is impossible to be prudent without being good. (2001, p.183).

According to what has been exposed, prudence cannot admit forgetfulness, since it is a rational choice and not a habit, a choice from which things can happen in different ways, given free will but assumed from rationality, a rationality that it is internalized in individuals through teaching and custom. In this sense, according to Aristotle, there are two types of virtues, the *dianoetic* ones that are forged with the teacher and the *ethical* ones that are acquired in everyday life.

Thus, for Aristotle the *phronesis* will be a *dianoetic* virtue by teaching, experience, and time that grows and is perfected; It is defined as "a true and practical way of being rational, regarding what is good and bad for man." Knowledge is different from wisdom. The *phronesis* evokes a timely and effective knowledge that is available to act in the human, that is, the ability to act virtuously in certain situations, beyond a timely and effective knowledge.

Consequently, regarding the true and practical rational mode, regarding what is good and bad for man, the concept of *Phrónimus* is introduced as the one who performs prudent acts. The *phrónimus* (prudent human being) decides for what, determined by reason, is a way of being selective and establishes a middle-term relative to us, that is, virtue.

In this sense, when opting for virtue, a choice is made for the active understanding of the good, in such a way that the prudent can see what is good for themselves and others, considering that it is a quality proper to the wise. administrators and politicians, which is why, according to Aristotle in his work on politics, "the office, then, of the good legislator consists in considering the city and the manner of men and all the other community, how they can participate in the good life and happiness that they can achieve. p.234

In this way, it is considered that happiness consists in doing well, and it is achieved by obtaining the best life, as well for the city as for its components, it will be the active life. .... because the end is good work, and thus the end will be a certain work and exercise. (p.236). That is to say that happiness is the evidence of virtue, even so, since some seek to achieve happiness in one way and others in another and by different means, it is noteworthy that this results in various societies and forms of public government, from which, it is considered that the human being in society, can achieve his happiness, from the deliberation of the singular man to the community.

The previous perspective is also brought up by Iriarte (2002) who includes the concept of worldview, one that involves the human being feeling part of the Universe, understood as an organic whole, vast, alive, and endowed with consciousness, having to be prudent must be one whose actions do not affect the other or the environment. However, in today's society and the human being from its intimate nature, it is up to determine how and the purposes of education. Thus, from the field of environmental education and culture, the path will be to address continuous reflections on practices to give meaning to human actions in harmony with the environment.

Following the above, in education and environmental culture it is necessary to visualize man from the phronesis since prudent actions are required since prudent actions are executed by specific human beings who decide to act. Thus, the judgment criterion is given in the individual's performance and the procedure does not try to theorize about how to do things, know how to comply with the law, or understand intellectually what prudence is, but to act as a prudent being. From this perspective, the *phrónimus* must develop skills for this purpose, that is, they must have a certain willingness to carry out righteous actions and this implies that whoever performs virtuous actions must know what they are doing and the action must emanate not from external pressures, but from the natural way.

In the way of the above, it can be outlined that the prudent human being is a judge because he possesses the knowledge, with which he can existentially judge metacognitively and act according to phronesis. This, it could be said, constitutes an epistemological antecedent of knowledge based on action, which is ratified by the fact that to act one must understand and comprehend the context from and in which one acts, therefore, the intelligibility of prudence will be anchored in the way in which the different subjectivities experience it in their daily activities.

### 3 BETWEEN DELIBERATION AND CHOICE

However, the term deliberation is coined as the moment of action that finds its reason when used in the technical and political fields. The deliberation has to do with the means; It does not deliberate on the ends, but on the means that lead to the ends.

Hence, in Aristotle's work on the soul, desire sometimes “imposes itself on deliberation and drags it along; other times, however, the latter prevails and drags the former like a sphere to another sphere; Finally, sometimes when intemperance takes place, a desire prevails over another desire and drags it down, the dictates of nature, however, are that the higher principle be the strongest and the call to originate the movement. (p.114). That is to say, through deliberation, change is produced, a change that is a power, a possibility, which is only given from desire, but mediated by reason.

In this way, two important appreciations are concerned, such as the sense of prudent knowledge, which unlike the knowledge of the wise seeks human goods, and what he calls *kairos*, considered as the realization of good according to the moment, that is, the choice of action, according to the opportune moment. From the environmental perspective, it can be determined that the decision to live in harmony is traced to a large extent by the regulation of the particular intentions of the self as an individual who does not have the existence of the other in mind. In this sense, what was exposed by Aristotle regarding the nature of greed is taken up again:

“For the nature of covetousness has no end: and almost all men seek to satisfy their covetousness. The principle, then, of remedying these evils, consists in disposing of the nature of men in such a way as to all goodness, that the good do not want to covet to have more and the bad cannot, but not in equalizing the estates. In other words, to ensure that there is equality in all these things, or that they put some medium order or development on them”. Aristotle (M.D.LXXXIII, p.143)

This allows us to determine that not all things are deliberated on, but only what can happen or not, that is, those things whose production principle is in our hands and that are also convenient are deliberated on. In this sense, it must be considered fact that talking about what is convenient in deliberation makes one think if how it is deliberated are adequate to achieve the end.

Therefore, one then deliberates on the means that lead to the ends, to accordingly, think about things in another way or make a choice (*proairesis*); For this reason, the prudent human being seeks that his choice be the right one, “because living in happiness, of necessity, must be accompanied by virtue; A city does not have to be said to be very fortunate, taking into account only one of its parts, but all the citizens. Aristotle (M.D.LXXXIII, p.3).

In such a way that “Happiness consists in action, just as the end is a kind of action and not quality. Therefore, customs qualify men, but by actions, they are happy or unhappy. ARISTOTLE (1948, p.26), since given prudence, a man in the will of customs, has to tend by virtue to two times: "Peace and war, business and rest" (M.D.LXXXIII, p.239), therefore, intentional goals are set to live well in the community, but taking into account the responsibility that comes from those actions, in such a way that it deliberates in

the choice of the means to achieve happiness as an end, seeking satisfaction of human desires in the light of reason.

With the above, it is conceived that education must contribute to social transformation and contribute to the improvement of the quality of life since all knowledge must promote coexistence with individuals and the environment for the sake of knowledge correctly.

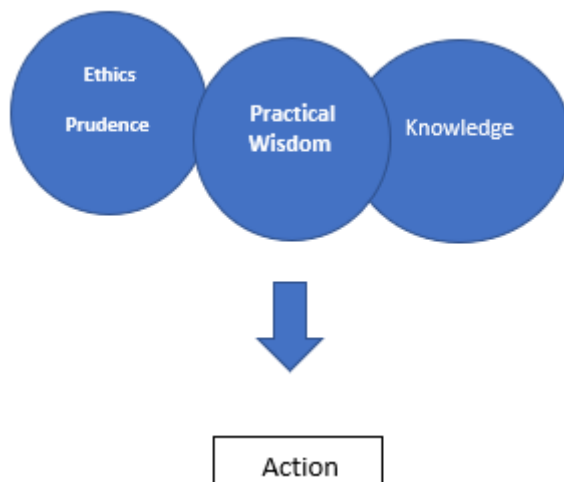
#### 4 RATIONALITY AND PRACTICAL WISDOM

Within the framework of what has been mentioned regarding the tensions between the theoretical and the practical, from the understanding of Aristotelian philosophy, it is possible to glimpse the characterization of an ethic of special value in which human beings are directed toward the good or towards the bad and not simply categorized as absolutely good or bad.

Thus, the *phrónesis* does not refer to an absolute state of a good or bad individual, but to a human being who executes concrete actions within a framework of deliberation, choice, and norms; From this perspective, according to Aristotle in his work on the soul, “no type of thought is indefinite: practical thought ends in action; As for theoretical thought, its limits are in the statements, whether they are definitions or demonstrations, the latter, in effect, begin in the antecedent and end in the conclusion. (p.35).

Likewise, “we consider art connoisseurs wiser than experts, thinking that wisdom corresponds to knowledge in all. And this is because some know the cause, and others do not, because the experts know what, but not why. Those, on the other hand, know why and the cause. (Aristotle. 1990, p.5). That is to say that, from practical philosophy, knowledge is not so relevant, if it is not put into practice or if what is known is not used, and that applicability of knowledge must be based on prudence, since this is precisely what makes true sages.

Figure 1. Action as a response to practical wisdom



Therefore, in practical rationality, prudence is a tool of human existence that is always in tension between acting and theoretical reflection, which necessarily leads to concrete actions, since human beings are free to configure their practices making responsible decisions to achieve well-being.

Therefore, according to Aristotle's practical philosophy, for a human being to be prudent and virtuous, he must act rationally. Thus, practical knowledge becomes vitally important in the consolidation of phronesis, since it involves prudent actions carried out by specific human beings who decide to act, recognizing that "opposites arise by nature around an identical thing, where... justice and injustice arises in the soul, although they are in opposite genders, since the gender of the former is a virtue, that of the latter, vice, and the good and the bad are not in gender, but they come to gender. of some things". Aristotle. (1982, p.72).

Thus, if the phronesis is updated by the phronimus, it is necessary to consider communication as a common element that serves as a bridge to communicability, so that the "collective" language is what determines the human condition of the individual, considering that The expression and choice of man must be voluntary, since it is he who decides to act in one way or another, in search of happiness and the common and individual good, mediating between desire and reason.

Finally, it only remains to reflect on how epistemological elements are built that contribute to the consolidation of the field of education and environmental culture. In this sense, it is determined from the Aristotelian perspective that practical rationality can become vitally important from the perspective of the aforementioned field since it implies that human beings are free to configure their practices by making responsible decisions to achieve well-being. In the same way, the concept of phronesis becomes vitally important, since it constitutes timely and effective knowledge that is available to act in the human sphere and requires prudence for decision-making.



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