

Zvonimir Komar

Conceptualising the unity of theory and practice in pedagogy based on Aristotle's ideas of *theoria* and *praxis*¹

Abstract: The purpose of this article is to conceptualise the essential synthesis of theory and practice, which can be pedagogically utilized. Otherwise, their conceptual separation enables their relation only by a posteriori means of generalisation from practice to theory, a hypothesis–empirical verification relationship, and the application of theory to practice. Aristotle's idea of *praxis* is activity that, firstly, has purpose, and secondly, has purpose within itself and not in its product. Following this, we enquire into theoretical nature of the idea of purpose, which constitutes a theoretical element of *praxis*. That *praxis* has a purpose within itself makes it pedagogically appropriate, since pedagogical practice should not aim to educate towards a pre-determined outcome (fixed theory), but so that it implicitly educates through its own activity. Pedagogical practice is not a means to an end outside itself. Implicit purpose as a theoretical element of *praxis* is then realised within pedagogical practice in a twofold way. Firstly, pedagogical practice takes place within a concrete pedagogical situation. In order for pedagogical practice to be able to (critically) recognise and analyse this situation, it must have a theoretical element which constitutes a framework for recognition/analysis. Secondly, it must have theoretical element in order to be able to produce a practical action that will lead the concrete situation towards the desired state. A further and connected question is that of pedagogical idea of theory. We will look into Aristotle's idea of *theoria*, which can be synthesised with the above idea of (pedagogical) practice. Finally, we will show this synthetical relation to have a founding conceptual significance for the pedagogical notion of pedagogical tact as a fundamental characteristic of pedagogical practice.

Keywords: theory, practice, pedagogy, Aristotle, pedagogical tact

UDC: 37.01

Scientific article



<https://doi.org/10.63384/spB61z890a>

Zvonimir Komar, PhD, Associate Professor, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb, Ivana Lučića 3, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia, zkomar@ffzg.hr ©

¹ All terminology regarding Aristotle's philosophy in this paper aligns with the universally recognised standard Oxford English Translation, originally published in twelve volumes between 1912 and 1954., revised by Jonathan Barnes.

Introduction: Formulating the problem of the theory–practice relationship in pedagogy

We can approach the problem of the theory–practice relationship in pedagogy through the initial articulation of modern pedagogy in J.F. Herbart's general pedagogy. In his 1902 book, *The Science of Education: Its General Principles Deduced from its Aim*, Herbart starts discussion on *education proper* by asking fundamental questions. Should we educate at all, and why? In what measure in relation to the educand's individual will? How can we know the aims of the future educand – a being (s)he yet isn't? If we do not know this, how can we educate at all, and what legitimises the aim of the education that we undertake? (Herbart 1902, pp. 106–107). As educators, we deal with individual human beings that are of infinite variety, that are never fully formed since we, as human beings, are eternally in our becoming and not predetermined. But also, if we aim to educate, we necessarily lead educands towards a future state that they still aren't. Education without this projective, future-based, purpose-oriented structure (Kant 2024, p. 16) is impossible. Without it, we could say either that what already *is* should *continue* to be, since nothing (that could be) is more or less true, just, free etc. (or that even these categories of truth, justice and freedom are mere illusions), or that we should not deal with what we are becoming, letting things happen of their own accord. Both are positions that abandon concepts of ethics, politics and reason altogether. Pedagogy can not assume neither of these two positions and therefore needs to solve the above contradiction of interaction between individual educand and the general purpose of education, where these two elements should be synthesised, without any of them being negated.

Herbart sees this need for synthesis of infinite variety of individuality and general moral purpose of education in dual, but united purpose of education (Herbart 1902, pp. 107–109). Individuality must be left as intact as possible (ibid., p. 114), while moral purpose of education must be general because, otherwise, there would be as many aims as individuals or groups of individuals, which would lead to arbitrariness. Schleiermacher identifies the same contradiction and tries to resolve it through synthesis of individual and communal goal of education (Schleiermacher 2022, pp. 50–56). Therefore, the purpose of pedagogy has to embody both principles.

The problem of the relationship between theory and practice in pedagogy originates in the aforementioned contradiction. Practice relates to individual and empirical and has action as its purpose. Theory relates to the notion of purpose and has truth as such as its purpose. Separateness of educand's individuality in a pedagogical situation and the general purpose of education reflects in separateness of pedagogical practice and pedagogical theory. This separateness has to be overcome. Practice without theory, in immanence of action without theory, produces a situation where: »The teacher [...] experiences only his own self, his own relation to others, the failure of his own plans.« (Herbart 2022, p. 31) Practice also has explicitly *human* essence in the sense that sub-human nature of practice (*untermenschliche Natur der Praxis*) is not possible, since practice implies doing something *willingly* (which implies – freely), while super-human nature of practice (*übermenschliche Natur der Praxis*), such as supposedly in being of god, is not possible since that being doesn't *need* anything (*weil er nicht selbst in einer Not steht*) (Benner 1980, p. 486).

Without theory, action could not move further from its existent practices otherwise than through blind experimentation. And then still, it wouldn't be able to say which practice is good and which is bad if it had no theoretical faculty. Theory that's separate from practice produces a state where: »One can only formulate entirely general statements that do not help. This is in part because there are just too many exceptions and because they have nothing to say about the most difficult [question]-namely [the] application [of such general statements].« (Schleiermacher 2022, p. 44) Separateness of theory and practice in pedagogy is not an abstract theoretical problem but one that's implicit to pedagogical being. If we want to produce existent unity of empirical pedagogical situations and pedagogical science, we have to think through a synthesis of notions of practice and theory in pedagogy and then form both our empirical and theoretical work according to these notions.

If theory is understood as finished knowledge, then it is not the *action* of knowing, and if we understand the purpose of education in horizon of such theory, we have an *a priori* established disunity of theory and practice that cannot be synthesised by any *a posteriori* means. Their »unity« by *a posteriori* means in form of *adequate application* of theory to practice means we always end up with heteronomous, unfree, technical »practice« that passively reflects »theoretical knowledge«. In such a case, we also have an ontological situation that originates from *finished being*, be it some kind of ideal being or empirical »reality«, with no possibility of autonomous becoming of pedagogical subject. Both these positions are dogmatism (Kant 1953, p. 91, p. 98). On the other hand, practice without theory is completely impossible, since practice is *determined*, voluntary, conscious action, and determination is a theoretical act (Aristotle 1995b, p. 1729; Kant 1990). Therefore, it is necessary to find ideas of both theory and practice that are *a priori* unified, in the way of their becoming, in order to produce unity of science and profession, theory and practice, general and individual.

Based on the notion of *Bildung*², Herbart already understood pedagogical tact to be a basic principle of pedagogical practice as such. Tact is action that's implicitly guided by theory, not the practical application of theory. Tact is a theoretical practice. We situate enquiry of Aristotle's notions of *praxis* and *theoria* within this framework and its further establishment. Our investigation of Aristotle ultimately aims at seeing how actions of *practical wisdom* (φρόνησις) are possible and established in human being and how they embody unity of theory and practice that's both theoretically and practically suitable for the science of pedagogy.

The possibility of a pedagogical being in Aristotle's idea of a human being

In Aristotle's philosophy, the possibility of a pedagogical being is rooted in the way he articulates human being as a being of becoming and change. If a human being's *nature* (φύσις) was static, permanent *form* (εἶδος), then humans could not be seen as pedagogical beings. However, Aristotle's investigations *On the soul* should be understood in the broader context of his investigation of *Physics* and the principles of motion, change, and becoming, because the *soul* (ψυχή) »[...] is an actuality [ἐντελέχεια] of the first kind of a natural body having life potentially in it.« (Aristotle 1995c, p. 656) Soul is a *natural body*. Simultaneously, physics as an investigation of nature deals with *natural being*, where »[...] each of them [things of nature] has within itself a principle of motion and of stationariness [...]« (Aristotle 1995d, p. 329). Soul is defined as an actuality and fundamental *purpose* (ἐντελέχεια) of the natural body having life potentially. This actuality is that which sets in motion, actualises potential life of the natural body. Soul is that which animates life from within. It does not animate the body like an *efficient cause* (κινούν) or outside source of movement, but it is a principle of self-animation. As a living thing that has a principle of motion within itself, the soul sits within the framework of physics, which deals with natural things.

That the soul exists as an inner, *final purpose* (τέλος) of a natural body with life in it potentially, can be more precisely understood by further characterising its nature:

»Thus on the second account of nature, it would be the shape or form [εἶδος] [...] of things which have in themselves a principle of motion. [...] Into what then does it grow? Not into that from which it arose, but into that to which it tends. The shape then is nature.« (ibid., p. 330)

2 In this paper, in using the notion of *education*, we follow its Latin meaning of *educere* – to lead out from (from *ex* »out« and *ducere* »to lead«). This notion is somewhat similar to the German notion of *Erziehung*, which defines *ziehen* as »pulling with force« or *herausziehen* as »pulling out«. The prefix *er-* in *Erziehen* signifies a form or state to be achieved. Therefore, it signifies pulling out (of one's unformed self) towards something. On the other hand, the German notion of *Bildung* points towards the moment of form, *Bild*, more explicitly and therefore emphasises the process of forming, giving form to that which is unformed, or trans-forming something. In this sense, *Bildung* is not mere learning, skill, or competence but the forming of a subject's self through his/her own experience and reflection.

Aristotle points out, in accordance with his four causes of natural being, that natural things entail *idea* (ιδέα), or *form* (εἶδος), which is that within them which shapes *matter* (ὕλη) as their *material cause*, making this matter something, giving it definition and being a *formal cause* of their becoming. Soul is, therefore, a formal principle that both *sets into motion* and is a *purpose* of the natural body that has life potentially in it.

When considering human being, the specific formal principle of the *human* soul is the *mind* (νοῦς) and its *thinking*, which means its action of *theory* (θεωρία). This connects to a further definition of the soul: »[...] the soul is in a way all existing things; for existing things are either sensible or thinkable, and knowledge is in a way what is knowable, and sensation is in a way what is sensible [...]« (Aristotle 1995c, p. 686). Although soul itself is *actually* (as realised purpose or ἐντελέχεια and its actualisation or ἐνέργεια) nothing, as *potentiality* (δύναμις) it is everything. When the soul *actually* thinks, then, *by* this action, it actualises itself into that which is thought (ibid., p. 685). If that which is thought is a pure idea, then the thinking soul and that which is thought is one and the same. If that which is thought is not a pure idea but formed matter (a thing), thought itself and that which is thought are partially the same (in the element of form that is thought). The act of thinking is that which is the principle of the motion of the thinking part of the soul. Therefore, thinking is that which gives both a particular form and purpose to human natural being.

Principles of motion and becoming, modalities of being, and the way they relate to human being

Without a formal principle, a *material principle* (ὕλη) is: »[...] that which in itself is neither a particular thing nor of a certain quantity nor assigned to any other of the categories by which being is determined« (Aristotle 1995a, p. 1625). Therefore, a natural human being without thought as its purpose and a formal principle still isn't fully itself, it is only its own potentiality (it still retains the vegetative and animalistic parts of its soul, which have different formal causes than the thinking that forms them into what they essentially are). Matter without form is just »[...] the primary substratum of each thing, from which it comes to be, and which persists in the result [...]« (Aristotle 1995d, p. 328). Material substrate becomes a *particular* being only through formal principle. Thinking is that which reveals ideas and forms, the nature of which is such that: »[...] we say the Forms are causes and substances in themselves [...]« (Aristotle 1995a, p. 1576). This means that forms exist by and through themselves, not by or through something outside themselves. As such, they are not only formal principles but also *purposes* in themselves. At another place in *Metaphysics*, Aristotle states: »By form I mean the essence of each thing and its primary substance.« (ibid., p. 1630) Formal principle of being is an evolution of what Plato called ideas, where Aristotle comments that by them Plato meant *common definitions* that have to be abstracted from matter (ibid., p. 1561). Aristotle does not think these forms in abstraction, but in their unity with other principles of being, so physi-

cal being is caused by the unity of *material cause*, *formal cause*, *efficient cause*, and *final cause* or purpose (ibid., p. 1555). Idea as a formal cause is therefore, in a physical being, always unified with matter, and matter moves according to its formal principle towards its inner purpose (final cause). For example, if the essence of a human being is that (s)he is able to think, then thinking is a formal principle of an only *potentially* thinking soul (a material soul as a natural being), which makes it into what it is, and when it *actually exists* as a thinking soul (when it thinks), then the purpose of this being is realized. This is how ideas exist in ideal–material unity, manifesting as a *process of being* or becoming. Regarding a final cause, Aristotle says: »The ‘for the sake of something’ is found in events that happen by nature or as the result of thought.« (ibid., p. 1682) With human being we deal with the final cause as a result of a thought which thinks forms. Final cause of merely natural soul is evident, for example, in the growth and development of plants from seed to fully developed plant and fruit. Another important characteristic of forms as purposes is that they are *substances*, which means that they *exist by themselves* (ibid., p. 1570). This means that forms are not caused by something prior to themselves but are first causes. Matter–form exists as being towards form as an inner purpose – a final cause. Therefore, in human being, form is an existent form, material form, form in physical being, while material being is not dead matter but matter formally guided by thinking and self-sufficient in itself as its own purpose.

Physical being exists as becoming from *potentiality* (δύναμις), matter, to *actuality* (ἐνἐργεια), formed matter, matter with actualized purpose. These are two *modalities of being*. Actuality is more real than potentiality because it is that which establishes the potential of potentiality as its final cause: »[...] matter exists in a potential state, just because it may attain to its form; and when it exists *actually*, then it is in its form« (ibid., p. 1658). Form is that which makes actuality possible and forms a being into matter. It is also an end – a purpose of becoming. Action is the act of forming: »For the action is the end, and the actuality is the action. Therefore even the word ‘actuality’ is derived from ‘action’, and points to the fulfillment.« (ibid., p. 1658) Action is not a means to an end but an end in itself that exists as its own action. In the preceding example, a seed does not become a plant for the sake of something outside itself. By becoming, it becomes *itself*. When this structure takes place in the thinking soul, it is the same thing that Plato expressed about knowledge being *remembrance* (Plato 1985, pp. 134–139). Human being, if his/her essence is thinking, in actualising the act of thinking, does not make up something that does not already exist as a formal cause, and does not think in order to achieve something outside thinking, but thinking itself is a purpose. Therefore, questions like *What is truth for?* or *What is being good for?* are meaningless. We will now briefly outline the characteristics of being as theory, being as action, and being as production in order to inquire about possible synthesis of theory and action in human being.

The difference between theory (θεωρία), action (πράξις), and production (ποίησις)

It is essential to understand that theory, action, and production are all different kinds of *knowing* (ἐπιστήμη), but they are all knowing of *truth* (ἀλήθεια) in its various forms: »[...] philosophy should be called knowledge of the *truth* (ἀλήθεια). For the end of theoretical knowledge is truth, while that of practical knowledge is *action* (ἔργον) [...]« (Aristotle 1995a, p. 1570). Philosophy *as such* (meaning knowledge as such) is knowledge of *truth*. But knowledge exists in three fundamental ways of *relating to* truth in forms of *theoretical knowledge* (ἐπιστήμη θεωρητική) that deals with *truth as such* (being as being), *practical knowledge* (ἐπιστήμη πρακτική) that deals with *truth as action* (ἔργον), and *productive knowledge* (ἐπιστήμη ποιητική) that deals with the *truth of a product* and good art (τέχνη). Action and production are, therefore, *knowing* action and *knowing* production, which already tells us they have theoretical element in them. All three ways of knowing relate to knowing as such and truth as such, and in this they are united as a system of being and its knowing. That is why Aristotle can say: »Therefore, if all thought is either practical or productive or theoretical [...]« (ibid., p. 1619).

Theoretical knowledge is the activity of knowing beings that cannot be otherwise than they are: »We all suppose that what we know is not capable of being otherwise; [...] Therefore the object of knowledge is of necessity.« (Aristotle 1995b, p. 1799) This knowledge exists as *demonstration* (ἀπόδειξις) and conclusions from and to necessary principles. Following this, »Knowledge [...] is a state of capacity to demonstrate [...]« (ibid., p. 1799). At the beginning of *Posterior Analytics*, Aristotle says:

»We think we understand a thing *simpliciter* [in an absolute sense, not accidentally] [...] whenever we think we are aware both that the explanation because of which the object is is its explanation, and that it is not possible for this to be otherwise. [...] Hence that of which there is understanding *simpliciter* cannot be otherwise [...] we do know through demonstration. By demonstration I mean a scientific deduction.« (Aristotle 1995f, p. 115)

Science (theoretical knowledge), examples of which are mathematics and metaphysics, is constituted through knowing principles that cannot be otherwise, knowing logical method of deduction, and knowing unity of demonstration, which includes principles, deductions, and conclusions. Theoretical knowledge deals with beings whose principles are knowable *as such*, and whose demonstration to their conclusions can be logically made *with necessity*. An important thing to bear in mind about the *action of theory* (θεωρία) is that »[...] thought is in a sense potentially whatever is thinkable, though actually it is nothing until it has thought [...]« (Aristotle 1995c, p. 683). Theoretical action is a specific kind of *being*. At the same time, being in the way of theory is *action*. Theory is not something that can be written down, let alone put into pre-formed thought. This is the reason Socrates did not write, because writing by itself is an act of falsifying theory's nature.

For things that *can* be otherwise, there is an essential difference between practical knowledge as *action* (πρᾶξις) and productive knowledge as *production* (ποίησις): »Among things that can be otherwise are included both things made and things done; making and acting are different [...]« (Aristotle 1995b, p. 1799). Production deals with things *made*, while action deals with things *done*. The difference between making and doing is: »And while in some cases the exercise is the ultimate thing (e.g. in sight the ultimate thing is seeing, and no other product besides this results from sight), but from some things a product follows (e.g. from the art of building there results a house as well as the act of building) [...]« (Aristotle 1995a, p. 1658). Product of production is not its action alone but is a produced product outside of action. Therefore, production is a matter of skill and art (τέχνη), which can be learned.

Pedagogy cannot be theoretical knowledge because it would not allow us to establish an individual empirical pedagogical dimension. On the other hand, one could look at pedagogy as either action or production, and depending on this outlook the character of our science will be very different. If pedagogy's nature is *action*, then it should deal in pedagogical practice that has meaning and purpose within itself, where this meaning *implicitly* educates by the act of its being practised. If *production* is pedagogy's nature, then it should deal with the production of competent and useful individuals – human beings that are products for heteronomous use as means to ends outside themselves. This is because the purpose of production is a product, not the *action* of production, and therefore the action of production can only be established as a function of the product. If pedagogy deals with human becoming that should be *autonomous*, then pedagogy's character must be that of action and not production, so action is what we will focus on.

Concerning practical knowledge and action, in the context of discussing potentiality and actuality in Book IX of *Metaphysics*, Aristotle (1995a) expresses its essential character through its difference from *movement*:

»[...] of the actions which have a limit none is an end but all are relative to the end...this is not an action or at least not a complete one (for it is not an end); but that in which the end is present is an action. E.g. at the same time we are seeing and have seen, are understanding and have understood, are thinking and have thought [...] At the same time we are living well and have lived well, and are happy and have been happy [...] Of these processes, then, we must call the one set movements, and the other actualities.« (ibid., p. 1656)

What we've discussed previously as a *formal principle* of being – it being a *purpose* of being, it being *thought* when it comes to the thinking soul and it existing as *actuality* when realised, is therefore *constitutive* for Aristotle's notion of action. Action has an end in itself, not outside itself. It embodies formal and final cause in its very actualisation, without which it is only movement. Action that embodies its own formal principle and its own purpose resembles, for example, the act of seeing, where, while we actively look, by action of looking itself, we see. Seeing is the actualisation (ἐνέργεια) of looking. By actualised looking, we see,

and this seeing is not a *product* separate from actualised looking but the very actualisation of looking itself. Looking on the other hand is mere potential of seeing. This is the nature of every activity that has character of action. Action that has a formal and final cause in itself, *while* it is being realised, exists as praxis.

Praxis as an action of theoretically capable freedom

Following the principle of being itself moving towards its inner purpose, which is its substance, the very first sentence of *Nicomachean Ethics* states that *every art, inquiry, action and choice aims at some good* (Aristotle 1995b, p. 1729). Therefore, at the very beginning of inquiry of practical being, Aristotle starts with determination that's a further specification of being understood through four principles of motion and two modalities of being. This further specification is that, *practically*, the formal and final principle is determined as the idea of *good*. The necessary condition of the soul for being able to exist as *action towards good* is as follows:

»There seems to be also another irrational element in the soul – one which in a sense, however, shares in a rational principle [...] the impulses of incontinent people move in contrary [from reasonable] directions. [...] Now even this seems to have a share in reason [...] at any rate in the continent man it obeys reason [...].« (ibid., pp. 1741–1742)

The irrational principle in the human soul is twofold and deals with vegetative being such as nutrition and growth on the one hand, while the other part of irrational principle *shares* in rational principle and exists as desire and appetite, as volition. Volition can be united with rational principle and become action guided by formal and final cause through theoretical action, but it can also exist as irrational volition. Therefore, it *shares* in rational principle. Aristotle adds that this practical *obeying of reason* should not be understood in the sense of being rational in mathematics (in the sense of theoretical knowledge) but in the sense by which one is *obedient to his father or friends* (ibid., p. 1742), which means in the sense of practical wisdom and good moral judgement of those practically wise. This possibility of volition obeying reason in its certain actions, establishes the difference between *intellectual excellences* (διανοητική ἀρετή), which are *philosophical wisdom* (σοφία), *understanding* (οὐνεσις) and *practical wisdom* (φρόνησις) and *moral excellences* (ἠθικὴ ἀρετή), which are *liberality* (ἐλευθεριότης) and *temperance* (σωφροσύνη) (ibid.).

Both volition and its *potentially* purposeful, eidetic character are necessary constituents of ethics as a form of action. The very *possibility* of action is established through desire, whereas the possibility of *determination* (realisation) of action is established through theoretical activity: »Intellect itself [...] moves nothing, but only the intellect which aims at an end and is practical [...] for good action is an end, and desire aims at this. Hence choice is either desiderative thought or intellectual desire, and such an origin of action is a man.« (ibid., pp.

1798–1799) Syntesis of volition and the theoretical character of its purpose in the notion and being of action is *intellectual desire*. These elements constitute *choice* as a possibility of *reasoning* (διδάσκω), *judging* (σύνεσις), *deliberation* (βουλευσις) and deciding which part of our potential selves will be realised in our action. What enables choice to be ethical is, therefore, the theoretical faculty of reasoning and deliberating, which is guided by the formal cause and in its purpose. Thus, action itself entails the theoretical faculty as its necessary constituent, but this theoretical *faculty* and theoretical *action* is not *theoretical knowledge* (science, επιστήμη θεωρητική). Volition and desire are that which move the soul as a physical being, and its theoretical faculty gives it the capacity to determine itself.

Aristotle states in the above quotation that *only the intellect that aims at an end is practical*. This is a crucial determination for establishing not only the idea of action but also the practical notion of theory. Practical intellect is not that of science, which reflects that which already is, an existent being, but that which aims towards that which does not yet exist (good that isn't yet realised). Following this: »Nothing that is past is an object of choice [...] for no one deliberates about the past, but about what is future and contingent [...]« (ibid., p. 1799). Action is rooted in the future and possibility, not in that which already is. The possibility that establishes that which is to be, according to the theoretical faculty of autonomous will, leads to the idea of freedom as a necessary ontological precondition for action. At the very beginning of *Metaphysics*, in the context of discussion of nature of knowledge, Aristotle defines freedom thus: »[...] the man is free, we say, who exists for himself and not for another« (Aristotle 1995a, p. 1555). In the context of the definition of *excellence* (ἀρετή) in *Nicomachean Ethics*, freedom is implied as *choice* (Aristotle 1995b, p. 1748). In *Politics*, Aristotle determines *liberty* as: »One principle of liberty is for all to rule and be ruled in turn [...]« (Aristotle 1995e, p. 2091). Firstly, freedom is autonomy – not living for purposes outside oneself but being in and through oneself. Secondly, freedom in an ethical sense means choosing according to reasoning and judging what is good, deliberating, and taking action determined by the activity of these theoretical faculties. Thirdly, in a political sense, which means in community, freedom is the ability to rule and be ruled in turn. We rule by actualising our faculty of theory and reason, sharing it with others publicly, whereas we are being ruled by recognizing that reason is not (our own or anyone's own, particular) subjective reason but general reason, which all people participate in and communally exercise through public dialogue. Succumbing *voluntarily* to reason as such, means autonomously accepting the rule of reason over us. These are the ways in which intellectual desire is being both established and realised. Summarily, regarding freedom and intellect as two conditions for the possibility of action, Aristotle states:

»The origin of action – its efficient, not its final cause – is choice, and that of choice is desire and reasoning with a view to an end. This is why choice cannot exist either without thought and intellect or without a moral state; for good action and its opposite cannot exist without a combination of intellect and character.« (Aristotle 1995b, p. 1798)

We should remind ourselves that: »[...] actions and productions are all concerned with the individual; for the physician does not cure a man, except in an incidental way, but Callias or Socrates [...]« (Aristotle 1995a, pp. 1552–1553). All actions (as well as production) *exist* as particulars. It is clear that if pedagogy deals with existing human beings that are being educated, it also deals with the particulars, for pedagogy doesn't relate (only) to abstract pedagogical subject, but to existent pedagogical subjects. Therefore, pedagogy is also, in this sense, a practical science, just as it is in terms of its purpose being inherent to action and not to a product. Pedagogical practice relates to *particular* (individual, existent, empirical) subjects and leads them into the area of purpose of education in such a way that both the pedagogical subject's action through education and determining what (s)he becomes is autonomous.

So, can we articulate the idea of purpose of education through theory in its above, practical sense? To answer this question, we must consider the characteristics of Aristotle's notion of good as a purpose of action.

Excellence (ἀρετή) and happiness (εὐδαιμονία) as purposes implicit to being in the way of action

Good as a purpose of action is embodied in Aristotle's notions of *excellence* (ἀρετή) and *eudaimonia*, or in English translations, '*happiness*' (εὐδαιμονία). Human being that actualises his/her life through action in accordance with excellence realises eudaimonia as a final purpose of practical being. Eudaimonia is a state of being in accordance with one's own self-guided will, determined by good as a formal cause. In a lengthy passage in *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle determines many characteristics of eudaimonia, stating:

»This [εὐδαιμονία] is what we state the end of human nature to be [...] it is not a state; for if it were it might belong to some one who was asleep throughout his life [...] If these implications are unacceptable, and we must rather class happiness as an activity [...] and if some activities are necessary and desirable for the sake of something else, while others are so in themselves, evidently happiness must be placed among those desirable in themselves [...]. Now those activities are desirable in themselves from which nothing is sought beyond the activity.« (Aristotle 1995b, p. 1859)

Firstly, eudaimonia is not a state but an action. Only by actualising excellence and in those acts themselves do we exist as eudaimonia, and this is why it has the nature of action. Therefore, it is not something that can be »had«. Secondly, eudaimonia is, just like action, free and an end in itself – the final cause of action. Eudaimonia itself is not a goal towards which a subject would move. If it were, it would be understood as a product. Therefore, it's not about doing good in order to »get to« eudaimonia. Doing good *is* eudaimonia. But what's also constitutive for it is a particular theoretical action, because living in accordance with virtue cannot be done unconsciously but only by *reasoning, deliberation,*

understanding, and *resourcefulness*, which are faculties of practical wisdom we will analyse later. All of these actions are theoretical in nature, and this kind of theory is not science but the theory of practical wisdom. Regarding this theoretical aspect of eudaimonia, Aristotle states: »Happiness extends, then, just so far as contemplation does [...]« (ibid., p. 1863), meaning that eudaimonia is possible only as a conscious good life, not as an immanence of being.

Eudaimonia is the actualisation of what Aristotle calls *excellence* or virtue (αρετή). Excellences don't produce anything in a technical sense, in the sense of a product, but »...they do produce something, not as the art of medicine produces health, however, but as health produces health; so does wisdom produce happiness« (ibid., p. 1806). They are the inner potential (δύναμις) that is being actualised (ἐνέργεια) and by the actualisation of which they form things into themselves as their purpose (ἐντελέχεια). In Aristotle's example, they »produce« in the sense of *health producing health*. That which makes a thing that which it is, is what excellences are. This tells us that they are formal and final causes in the realm of ethics. Aristotle's famous definition of excellence is that it is:

»[...] a state concerned with choice, lying in a mean relative to us, this being determined by reason and in the way in which the man of practical wisdom would determine it. Now it is a mean between two vices, that which depends on excess and that which depends on defect [...]« (ibid., p. 1748)

Free choice is a prerequisite for excellence, which is a freely *chosen state*. That it is relative to us, means that it's relational towards a concrete situation of action. That it is a mean between two vices means that it is the right measure determined by practical wisdom. In summary, Aristotle says: »[...] excellence makes the aim right, and practical wisdom the things leading to it« (ibid., p. 1807). Actions of practical wisdom are therefore that which *realises* excellences in the sense of bringing them into being, and excellence is the formal and final cause of action. Existing in accordance with excellence produces life as eudaimonia. A further question now arises: what do the actions of practical wisdom consist of since they are that which realizes both excellence and eudaimonia?

Practical wisdom (φρόνησις)³ and its faculties of deliberation (βονλησις)⁴, understanding (σύνεσις)⁵ and cleverness (δεινότης)⁶ as practical theory

We do not become good by merely *knowing* that which is good but by actualising good through our practical actions. However, practical acts as practical wisdom are not possible if they do not relate to the idea of good, that is – excellences. This is a reversal of Plato's principle. However, we do not really »produce« or »construct« the idea of good by practices of practical wisdom, but the idea of

3 In T. Ladan's croatian translation, »razboritost«.

4 In T. Ladan's croatian translation, »promišljanje«.

5 In T. Ladan's croatian translation, »rasudnost«.

6 In T. Ladan's croatian translation, »domišljatost«.

good is nothing (that is, only a possibility) if it is not actualised.

Practical activity is realised through the *practical wisdom* (φρόνησις) as a way of knowing practical being. Aristotle defines the nature of practical wisdom as:

»[...] practical wisdom cannot be knowledge nor art; not knowledge because that which can be done is capable of being otherwise, not art because action and making are different kinds of thing. It remains, then, that it is a true and reasoned state of capacity to act with regard to the things that are good or bad for man.« (ibid., p. 1800)

Action of practical wisdom relates to being in the way of action and deals with things that are of not-necessary principles. That is why there's no demonstration when it comes to it and why it cannot be science. It also cannot be art because its purpose is its action alone, not a product. Another important determination in the above quotation is that practical wisdom is the action of *deliberation* (βουλευσις). Aristotle literally says: »[...] for we say this is above all the work of the man of practical wisdom, to deliberate well [...]« (ibid., p. 1802), meaning that deliberation is a primary practice of practical wisdom and that one is practically wise by being able to deliberate well. To deliberate *well* means: »[...] excellence in deliberation will be correctness with regard to what conduces to the end of which practical wisdom is the true apprehension« (ibid., p. 1804). Deciding what is that which truly leads to a good purpose, the precondition for which is practical wisdom, is what deliberation is. Deliberation is practical wisdom's action of reasoned deciding. When decisions lead towards the realisation of practical wisdom, then one deliberates well.

Connected with practical wisdom and deliberation is *understanding* (οὐνεσις), which is also not knowledge:

»[...] understanding is [...] about things which may become subjects of questioning and deliberation. Hence it is about the same objects as practical wisdom; but understanding and practical wisdom are not the same. For practical wisdom issues commands, since its end is what ought to be done or not to be done; but understanding only judges.« (ibid., p. 1805)

Understanding is *judging* what we or someone else says or does when it comes to matters of practical wisdom. It does not issue commands (practical wisdom does), but only makes judgements in accordance with practical wisdom. Aristotle says this faculty can be compared with faculty of grasping notions⁷ in its relation to science, but understanding exists in relation to practical wisdom.

In the context of excellence having to be actualised through action, the practical activity of finding successful ways to achieve purposes is called *cleverness* (δεινότης). It is practical resourcefulness for fulfilling purposes. It can be twofold: if it embodies excellence as its immanent purpose, then it is moral, but if it does not, it is mere cleverness if the purpose is neither good nor bad, or if the purpose

7 In croatian »sposobnost poimanja«.

is bad, it is villainy (ibid., p. 1807). Thus, practical wisdom embodies exclusively cleverness that is aimed at excellence.

All these faculties (although practical wisdom itself is not a faculty, it cannot exist without these faculties, (ibid.) constitute the understanding part of excellence as *intellectual excellences* (διανοητική ἀρετή). Actions and faculties of practical wisdom are theoretical in that they require theoretical insight, act of rational sight. Deliberation requires it because it presupposes theoretical seeing and understanding of that which is being deliberated on. Understanding as judging is not possible without it. Cleverness that is not villainy but related to excellence requires it because we must be conscious of excellence. The difference from theory, in the sense of science, is that theory, in the sense of practical wisdom, is related to a kind of being that can be otherwise and therefore has to be embodied in action itself. It is a theoretical action based on the aforementioned faculties. Aristotle also points out that these practical faculties *converge* in action because they are all included when dealing with particular things in the activity of realising good (ibid., p. 1805).

In conclusion, based on the relationship between resourcefulness and practical wisdom (and between natural excellence and excellence in the strict sense), Aristotle points out that Socrates was wrong in thinking that excellences are forms of practical wisdom but was right in thinking that there is no excellence without practical wisdom (ibid., p. 1808). Excellence is a state in accordance with practical wisdom, but, Aristotle adds, not merely *in accordance*, but *through* and *by* practical wisdom as a *principle* (λόγος) of excellence (ibid.). This means that Aristotle's position is not that excellences themselves *are* principles, but that they are *through* the principle of practical wisdom. In other words, practices of practical wisdom are that which brings excellences into being, actualises it. This is why we can and must use the notion of *practical theory* when we talk about practical wisdom.

Conclusion: The unity of theory and practice in pedagogy as a practical science

In the final synthesis, we will take a look at four reflections where various sides of congruity between the fundamental qualities of pedagogy and what we've investigated as Aristotle's notions of being of theory, action and practical wisdom, their activity and their faculties can be seen.

Both action and education have autonomous purposes in themselves and therefore do not embody a means–purpose relationship but unity of theory and practice

Discussing the notion of Bildung in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer points out its origin in the idea of form and connects it with Aristotle's notion of formal cause as the inner principle of Bildung: »Education, as little as nature, knows of ends outside of itself [...] in education, on the contrary, that in which and through which someone educates him/herself becomes a self completely.«

[translation by Z.K] (Gadamer 1978, p. 37) We educate ourselves *through* interactions with experience, and these experiences themselves become our self in the same way in which Aristotle points out that human soul is all existing things, that it is nothing before it thinks and experiences, and that when it thinks and experiences, it *is* that which it thinks and experiences. This is an expression of Bildung as a formal and final cause that is an end in itself and not a product. Bildung is self-becoming, not becoming for something outside ourselves. This is why Bildung is an autonomous activity. Therefore, action as a way of being is fundamentally aligned with the principle of Bildung. Van Manen, seeking a pedagogical notion of theory and trying to transcend the orientation towards the presupposed goals of education and curriculum, says: »From the perspective of hermeneutics there are no such things as stimuli, responses, or measurable behaviors; instead, there are encounters, lifeworlds, and meanings, which invite investigation. The focus is on actions, not on behaviors.« (van Manen 1977, p. 214) As with Aristotle, this means we need to seek unity of theory and practice, practice that is theoretical, action that has purpose within itself, life that has purpose within itself and its forms.

Based on the autonomous character of Bildung, we can also align the *purpose of education* with notions of excellence and eudaimonia, as discussed, since they are that which is being *practically* realised and not merely reflected into subject understood as *tabula rasa* from a (either empirically or ideally) pre-formed idea of being. The former idea of purpose establishes pedagogical action as an end in itself, whereas the latter establishes it in terms of a means–ends relationship. The first creates unity and the second disunity of theory–practice relationship.

Action is theoretical via the notion and being of excellence and faculties of practical wisdom in such a way that, as a purpose of education, it does not negate the principle of individuality

Theoretical pedagogy and its possibility to constitute general purpose of education without contradiction to principle of individuality is possible through pedagogical practice based on the ideas of action and practical wisdom. Through praxis, theoretical activity is not conceived as a final knowledge outside of its activity but as a rationally self-guided process of self-determination. As Bollnow (1989) says, pedagogy is a theory of a practice that always builds upon previous practice and is then related back to theory. This characteristic makes it possible to synthesise the two positions that formed our problem – that of conflict between educand's individuality / empirical situation and the generality of purpose. An educand is pedagogically guided through and towards autonomous actions of praxis.

(S)he is also guided by his/her own reasoning, judgement, and understanding in timely, practical interaction related to the idea of good. Good as a purpose, although it has a principle of things that can be otherwise, is not relative just because it is not scientific knowledge. Practical wisdom is that which implicitly (because of its quality of action) educates through and for reasoning, deliberation, understanding, and autonomous rational thinking, for communal interaction of

our practical reason manifested in public space. Through the faculties of practical wisdom, we are self-guiding ourselves in a nonrelative way, both individually and communally. Pedagogy should therefore not »teach«, but open up, reflect and guide educands towards their inner freedom and their practical reason.

Excellence as such is partly theoretical because it is *rational* volition in the context of intellectual excellences. However, it is also a *realisation* through practical wisdom and its faculties, not an abstract being of science. By being in the sense of practical becoming and not existing purely theoretically, as things of science do, excellences enable both the processual nature of the purpose of education and purpose being inherent to praxis, creating practical theory.

Faculties of practical wisdom as an active synthesis of a concrete pedagogical situation and the general purpose of education

The faculties of practical wisdom are all timely activities of a concrete subject. Reasoning, judging, understanding, and resourcefulness all have their rational, theoretical, conscious element of intellectual insight that guides them from within, via the notion of excellence. They exist exclusively as *actions* and are therefore action in nature. They are internally guided by excellence and eudaimonia as their inner purpose. This means that they are actions of practical theory and are, pedagogically speaking, appropriate synthesis of concrete pedagogical situation and general purpose of education understood not as a fixed reality, idea or norm, but as practical reason. In the context of discussion on *hermeneutic actuality of Aristotle*, Gadamer says: »If good for a man is always encountered in concrete practical situation that he finds himself in, then moral knowledge has to achieve exactly that, that in the concrete situation it sees that which it (the situation) requires of him [...]« [translation by Z.K.] (Gadamer 1978, p. 346). This is what the kind of practical theory we sought through Aristotle actually manages to do. It is the same thing that the logic of pedagogical tact requires of educators. The nature of practical wisdom and its activities is suitable for grounding pedagogical practice and theory. Regarding the relationship between knowledge and being in hermeneutics and action, Gadamer says: »[...] it is about mind and knowledge which aren't separate from existent being, but that they determine themselves starting from it while being determining for it« [translation by Z.K.] (ibid., p. 346). This unity of practice and theory, being and reflection in hermeneutics, is the same as in Aristotle's notion of action, starting from a concrete situation, reflecting on it on the basis of being theoretically capable through practices of practical wisdom, and then deliberately acting based on this, producing future reality. This can be closely tied with methodologies of critical pedagogy, which insists on starting with material reality and thinking from it in the direction of ethical and ethical-political purposes:

»According to the Frankfurt School, all thought and theory are tied to a specific interest in the development of a society without injustice. Theory, in this case, becomes a transformative activity that views itself as explicitly political and commits itself to the projection of a future that is as yet unfulfilled.« (Giroux 2024, p. 58)

Hermeneutic, but also dialogic practices are all compatible with a being of action. When Schleiermacher talks about dialectics and dialogue as a method of knowledge, he points out that nobody understands language completely (Schleiermacher 2005, p. 91) and that in dialogue, we are always in the process of practical guidance of language towards homology and clarity, which can never be fully achieved (ibid., p. 92), which is also the case with writing, reading, and thinking on an individual level (ibid., p. 96). This resembles Plato's idea of thinking: »A conversation that a soul has with itself about that which it considers« [translation by Z.K.] (Plato 1979, p. 67). These are all practices of theory embodied in action. Therefore, deliberating, reasoning, judging understanding, dialogic analysis towards clarity and homology, hermeneutic understanding, and reflection are all actions that unify practice and theory in practices of their action.

Tact as a pedagogical embodiment of practical wisdom.

Friesen and Osguthorpe (2018, p. 257) point towards a place in Aristotle's *Rhetorics*, which is also a part of his practical philosophy, where he defines rhetoric as the *ability to observe available means of persuasion in any given situation* (p. 257), underlining that this definition closely resembles Herbart's notion of tact. Herbart summarises tact very clearly in one of his introductory lectures to students of pedagogy as follows:

»A link intermediate between theory and practice involuntarily inserts itself. By this I mean a certain tact, a quick judgement and decision that is not habitual and eternally uniform. But this tact is unable to boast, as a fully developed theory *should*, that while remaining deliberately consistent with the rule, it can at the same time answer the true requirements of the individual case.« (Herbart 2022, p. 32)

Tact, in the same way as rhetoric and action in general, seeks to deliberate within possibilities of a given situation, in relation to theoretical insight. The educator does not apply preconceived »theory« to the situation but has to educate through theory his/her ability to inquire, think and build on one's own dispositions, through which (s)he can practice actions that embody theory. As with practical wisdom, tact exists only through action: »Only in *action* do we learn the art; only in this way do we acquire tact [...]« (ibid., p. 33). As Palekčić says, speaking of pedagogical tact, within it we face the priority of theory and primacy of practice (Palakčić 1999, p. 116), meaning that we encounter theory through and within practice, but theory is that which leads it. Fundamentally, tactful action is also an area of ambivalence, of principle of things that can be otherwise, or, as Muth says: »Only with the opening of the dimension of unplanability does the phenomenon of pedagogical tact become clear.« (Muth 2022, p. 89) Therefore, pedagogical tact means that every pedagogical act takes place within a concrete situation, just as Aristotle's notion of action does. Both deal with the individual.

All these considerations lead us towards a notion of pedagogical theory as the *action* of theory rather than as any kind of finished knowing, be it petrified

knowledge, a hypothesis to be empirically validated, or an inductive generalisation of information. Pedagogically meaningful theory is *action* and the *faculty* of theory, which exists only while it is being practiced. On the other hand, we can also see that practice has a necessary theoretical element to it, so practice itself points towards the action of theory. Therefore, theory and practice in pedagogy can not exist separate one from another (although we can abstract them in analysis) and retain their pedagogical meaning. This leads us towards a necessity of rethinking how we approach notions of theory and practice in pedagogy, how we approach the education of teachers and pedagogical workers, but also how we think about methodologies of pedagogical research.

References

- Aristotle (1995a). *Metaphysics*. In: J. Barnes (ed.). *The complete works of Aristotle. The revised Oxford translation*. Vol. 2. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, pp. 1552–1729.
- Aristotle (1995b). *Nicomachean ethics*. In: J. Barnes (ed.). *The complete works of Aristotle. The revised Oxford translation*. Vol. 2. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, pp. 1729–1868.
- Aristotle (1995c). *On the soul*. In: J. Barnes (ed.). *The complete works of Aristotle. The revised Oxford translation*. Vol. 1. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, pp. 641–693.
- Aristotle (1995d). *Physics*. In: J. Barnes (ed.). *The complete works of Aristotle. The revised Oxford translation*. Vol. 1. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, pp. 315–447.
- Aristotle (1995e). *Politics*. In: J. Barnes (ed.). *The complete works of Aristotle. The revised Oxford translation*. Vol. 2. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, pp. 1986–2130.
- Aristotle (1995f). *Posterior analytics*. In: J. Barnes (ed.). *complete works of Aristotle. The revised Oxford translation*. Vol. 1. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, pp. 114–167.
- Benner, D. (1980). Das Theorie-Praxis-Problem in der Erziehungswissenschaft und die Frage nach Prinzipien pädagogischen Denkens und Handelns. *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik*, 26, issue 4, pp. 485–497.
- Friesen, N. and Osguthorpe, R. (2018). Tact and the pedagogical triangle: the authenticity of teachers in relation. *Teaching and teacher education*, 70, pp. 255–264.
- Gadamer, H. G. (1978). *Istina i metoda*. Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša.
- Giroux, H. (2024). Critical Theory and Educational Practice. In: Darder, A., Hernandez, K. Lam, K. and Baltodano, M. (eds.). *The Critical Pedagogy Reader*. New York: Routledge, pp. 50–75.
- Herbart, J. F. (1902). *The Science of Education: Its General Principles Deduced from Its Aim and The Aesthetic Revelation of the World*. Boston: D.C. Heath and Company.
- Herbart, J. F. (2022). Introductory lecture to students in pedagogy. In: Friesen, N. (ed.). *Tact and the pedagogical relation*. New York: Peter Lang, pp. 25–39.

- Kant, I. (1953). Prolegomena za svaku buduću metafiziku koja želi nastupiti kao znanost. In: Kant, I. (ed.). *Dvije rasprave*. Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, pp. 7–149.
- Kant, I. (1990). *Kritika praktičkog uma*. Zagreb: Naprijed.
- Kant, I. (2024). *O pedagogiji*. Zagreb: Naklada Breza.
- van Manen, M. (1977). Linking Ways of Knowing with Ways of Being Practical. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 6, issue 3, pp. 205–228.
- Muth, J. (2022). Pedagogical Tact: Study of a Contemporary Form of Educational and Enstructional Engagement. In: N. Friesen (ed.). *Tact and the pedagogical relation*. New York: Peter Lang, pp. 85–117.
- Palekčić, M. (1999). Pedagoški takt: fundamentalni pedagoški pojam. In: V. Rosić (ed.). *Nastavnik - čimbenik kvalitete u odgoju i obrazovanju: zbornik radova*. Rijeka: Filozofski fakultet, pp. 116–125.
- Platon (1979). *Fileb i Teetet*. Zagreb: Naprijed.
- Platon (1985). *Ijon, Gozba, Fedar*. Beograd: BIGZ.
- Schleiermacher, F. D. E. (2005). Predavanja o dijalektici. In: J. Zovko (ed.). *Klasici hermeneutike*. Zadar: Filozofska biblioteka Speculatio, pp. 89–106.
- Schleiermacher, F. D. E. (2022). Outlines of the Art of Education – Introductory lecture. In: Friesen, N. (ed.). *Tact and the pedagogical relation*. New York: Peter Lang, pp. 39–61.
- Theory and Practice in Education. (1989). Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333295910_Bollnow_1988_Theory_and_Practice_in_Education (accessed on 6 february 2026).

Zvonimir KOMAR (Filozofska fakulteta, Univerza v Zagrebu, Hrvatska)

KONCEPTUALIZACIJA ENOTNOSTI TEORIJE IN PRAKSE V PEDAGOGIKI NA PODLAGI ARISTOTELOVIH POJMOV *THEORIA* IN *PRAIXIS*

Povzetek: Namen tega članka je oblikovati temeljno sintezo teorije in prakse, ki je pedagoško uporabna. V nasprotnem primeru njuna konceptualna ločitev omogoča njuno povezavo le z a posteriori sredstvi generalizacije iz prakse v teorijo, empirično preverjanje hipotez in uporabo teorije v praksi. Aristotel praxis razume kot dejavnost, ki (1) ima namen in (2) ima namen sama zase in ne v svojem produktu. Nato raziskujemo teoretično naravo pojma namena, ki predstavlja teoretični vidik praxis. Dejstvo, da ima praxis namen sama zase, jo naredi pedagoško ustrezno, saj pedagoška praksa ne sme biti usmerjena v izobraževanje za vnaprej določen izid (fiksna teorija), ampak mora implicitno izobraževati skozi lastno dejavnost. Pedagoška praksa ni sredstvo za doseganje cilja zunaj nje same. Implicitni namen (kot teoretični vidik praxis) se v pedagoški praksi uresničuje na dva načina. Prvič, pedagoška praksa poteka v konkretni pedagoški situaciji. Če naj pedagoška praksa (kritično) prepozna in analizira to situacijo, mora biti opremljena s teoretičnim elementom, ki predstavlja okvir za prepoznavanje/analizo. Drugič, potrebuje teoretični vidik, da lahko ustvari praktično dejanje, ki bo konkretno situacijo pripeljalo do želenega stanja. Nadaljnje in povezano vprašanje je vprašanje pedagoškega pojmovanja teorije. Prispevek uporabi Aristotelov koncept *theoria*, ki ga lahko združimo z zgoraj navedeno idejo o (pedagoški) praksi. Nazadnje članek pokaže, da ima ta sintetična povezava pomemben konceptualni pomen za pojem pedagoškega takta kot temeljne značilnosti pedagoške prakse.

Ključne besede: teorija, praksa, pedagogika, Aristotel, pedagoški takt

Elektronski naslov: zkomar@ffzg.hr