Aristotle is undergoing a veritable renaissance in contemporary practical and political philosophy. The conceptual dichotomy of *poiesis* and *praxis*, of making and doing, with the associated distinction between *techne* and *phronesis*, technical skill and practical reason, occupies a prominent place among those peripatetic ideas which contemporary philosophical thought frequently resuscitates as especially relevant to our present situation. This long-neglected division of human activities into these two fundamental types brings into focus – so it is argued – the fundamental malaise of our social existence: the atrophy of *praxis* as action proper, the transformation of all intentional human activity into some mode of making, into technically effective modes of behaviour. The degradation of practical reason to mere instrumental control is a diagnosis which we encounter in the writings of Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas, with Hans-Georg Gadamer and Michael Oakeshott, with a number of the outstanding representatives of the so-called “humanist” Marxism, but also with Alasdair
MacIntyre, to name only a few. This diagnosis has already become a cultural commonplace which shapes our understanding of the perplexities and tasks we face.

And this is perhaps the first point where one might feel some slight unease with that fundamental Aristotelian schema of opposition which – explicitly or implicitly – underlies these characterisations.

For the striking similarity of the general formulations employed by our illustrious thinkers does veil to some extent the very substantive differences, sometimes irreconcilable oppositions, in the understanding of the “sickness of our times” which they seemingly all share. Are our problems primarily located in that unrestrained dynamism of production and technology which undermines the permanence and stability of the surrounding human world as our “home”? Or is it primarily due to the fact that the per se emancipatory powers of technical mastery have escaped the rational control of citizens due to an illegitimate invasion of the public realm by standards and forms of organisation which are necessary, but necessary only for the integration of our instrumental activities? Or perhaps is the domination of a technical expertise in contemporary life merely a powerful ideology which effectively disguises the de facto rule of power interests following their own logic quite distinct from that of a technical rationality? Or does it simply hide the sheer impotence and irrationality of those who are in the position to rule?

All these, certainly deeply divergent standpoints, can be found among the authors I have referred to. Similarly, the atrophy of praxis is seen by some of them as bound up with the dissolution of those communities which were rooted in the organic continuity of transmitted traditions and in the shared traditional manners and modes of behaviour, a process of dissolution which is expressed in the pathological demand for a universalistic justification in regard to all actions impairing the integrity of moral-political intercourse. But the same atrophy is also explained by the fact that the mediation between technical progress and social life-world is accomplished, under modern conditions too, by spontaneous, unreflectively accepted, traditional mechanisms and forms lacking rational legitimation. And the realm of true praxis which we so deplorably have lost, can be conceived as that of self-revelatory activities offering an adequate expression to irreducible individual uniqueness and human plurality, or as that of “civility” in the sense of the exercise of