1. It must be admitted that Aristotle has not succeeded in making clear to his modern readers precisely what he under-
stands to be the role of intellect in ethical decision. Who would
dare declare unnecessary the endless arguments of the commen-
tators on this question? One naturally, however, assumes,
anyway at first, that there does exist a firm and coherent
Aristotelian theory of practical intellect: a doctrine “knowable
in itself” even if unfortunately not presented in a way that puts
doubts about its nature easily to rest. But a point may be
reached in one’s study of Aristotle’s Ethics at which that
assumption wavers, as increasingly closer readings fail to un-
cover sufficient stable support for any single conceptually clear
interpretation. Such failure may eventually waken—even in
those devoted enough to have experienced it time and again—
the suspicion that Aristotle does not command a coherent view
of the ethical function of practical intellect. The present paper
is an attempt to elaborate this suggestion. I maintain that
Aristotle’s thinking in this area is not just obscurely presented,
but intrinsically under-developed and not a little confused.
This is a remarkable fact, considering the importance of the
topic for an ethical theory such as Aristotle’s, and it promises
to be a revealing one too if, as I shall seek to do in what
follows, we can trace its source elsewhere in his philosophy.

2. The problem, to summarize it, stems from Aristotle’s use of
an inadequate model of practical reasoning in his account of the
process of reaching an ethical decision. By an ‘ethical decision’
I mean one that reflects the agent’s fundamental values and
concerns as a human being, by contrast (it is Aristotle's favorite contrast as well as his favorite analogy) with the special or professional concerns of one who engages in the exercise of a particular kind of practical skill, like the art of medicine. Aristotle holds that in every type of practical (i.e. non-theoretical) reasoning the end is premissed or assumed (ὑπόθεσις), and a chain of means then sought by which the end may be realized. The process concludes with the agent's grasping of what it is that he can immediately do that would realize the intermediate steps, and, finally, the end. But in ethical reasoning, Aristotle says, the end is eudaimonia (happiness) or eupraxia (doing well, which = happiness for an essentially practical being) or, as he also says, the good of the agent qua human being (and hence qua being that lives a life structured by many diverse concerns and involvements). Now the difficulty is one which Kant was later to exploit in an argument to show that the notion of happiness cannot generate a categorical imperative that might rival the categorical imperative of the moral law. It is that eudaimonia or eupraxia or the good of a man qua man is itself too indeterminate to play the part that Aristotle assigns to the end when he says that from the end, it being assumed, we work out the means. The sheer concept of eupraxia (which for Aristotle is nothing other than the concept of the summum bonum for man) suggests no one practical direction to prefer above others. For (as we would say) what one must do to achieve eupraxia depends on what, specifically, eupraxia is taken to be or to consist in. It follows that in ethical reasoning the end assumed as starting point from which to derive the means is not eupraxia as such, but, rather, some more specific objective or set of objectives, S, in which the agent holds eupraxia to consist. This is not to say that the notion of eupraxia plays no part in an explanation of the agent's pursuit of

1 E.g. 1151a17, 1144a24, 1112b15.
2 For eupraxia, see 1139a34, b3, 1140b7; for the good of man as such, see 1140b5-9, 21.