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The *Ethics* of Aristotle

Course Guidebook

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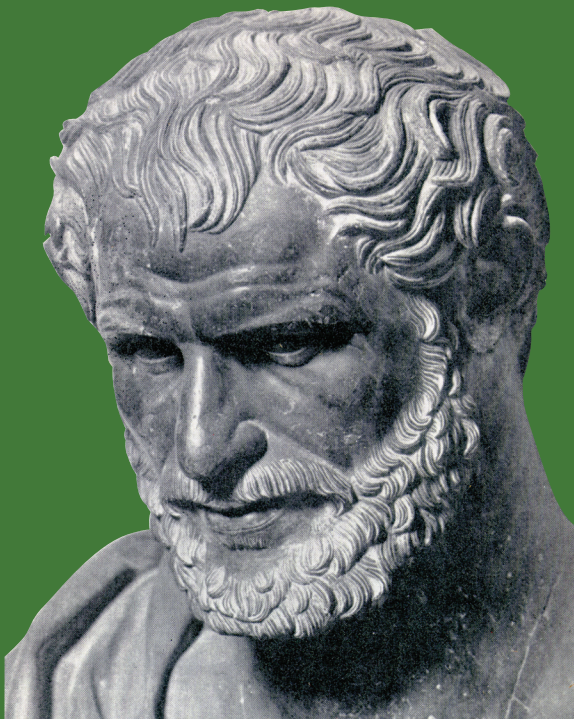

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Joseph Koterski, S.J., received the H.A.B. degree in Classics from Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1976. As a Danforth Fellow, he completed a Doctorate in Philosophy in 1982 at St. Louis University, where he wrote a dissertation on *Truth and Freedom in Karl Jasper's Philosophy of Science* under the direction of the late James Collins.

After teaching Ancient Philosophy for two years at the Center for Thomistic Studies of the University of St. Thomas in Houston, Texas, Professor Koterski joined the Maryland Province of the Society. Ordained a priest in 1992, after taking the M. Div. and S.T.L. degrees from the Weston School of Theology in Cambridge, Massachusetts, he began teaching philosophy at Fordham University, where he now directs the M.A. program in Philosophical Resources and specializes in the history of medieval philosophy and natural law ethics.

At Fordham, Professor Koterski serves as the editor-in-chief of *International Philosophical Quarterly* and as chaplain and tutor for the Queens Court Residential College for Freshmen. In 1998, he received the Dean's Award for Outstanding Undergraduate Teaching, and in 2000, he received the Graduate Teacher of the Year Award. In addition to the many articles and reviews he has written, Professor Koterski is the co-editor of *Prophecy and Diplomacy: The Social Teaching of Pope John Paul II* and the editor of the annual proceedings of the University Faculty for Life organization, *Life and Learning*.

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The *Ethics* of Aristotle

Scope:

This course focuses on the views of Aristotle (387–321 B.C.) about morality by means of a careful study of his *Nicomachean Ethics*. Often called "the philosopher of common sense," Aristotle offers an extremely balanced account of many ethical questions. The goal of this course will be to present his ideas clearly and to suggest ways in which the thought of a philosopher from so long ago still bears tremendous relevance for our own age.

After providing some important background about Aristotle's general approach to philosophy, this course will turn to the text of his main work on ethics. In the first book (and then again in the tenth), he argues that the chief goal of human life must be something desirable for itself and not merely as a means to something else. He then reviews the perennial candidates for this goal, including pleasure, wealth, and honor, before arguing that the only satisfactory answer to the question is happiness. Everything else, including pleasure, wealth, and honor, may contribute to a happy life and may even be necessary conditions for it, but only a life of genuine virtue will make one truly happy.

Given this concentration on virtue, Aristotle devotes much of the earlier part of his treatise to defining moral virtue, then illustrating it by example. In the effort to be wisely commonsensical, he stresses that virtue consists of a steady disposition to choose the golden mean between responses that would be excessive or deficient. But, he insists, this mean should be understood not as the average or the mediocre, but as the very peak of excellence, whether in regard to our actions or our feelings. His case studies of virtue feature the traditional set of four cardinal virtues: courage, temperance, justice, and prudence.

The categories within which Aristotle sets out the notion of justice have been especially significant for all the subsequent history of thinking about the subject. He distinguishes between legal justice (what is right because laid down by civil authority) from natural justice (what is right independently of whether it ever becomes embodied in civil law). From the latter notion, the entire tradition of natural law ethics arises. With regard to the many possible instances that involve the exchange of goods and services, whether by voluntary agreements, such as contracts, or by

involuntary acts of force, such as crimes, Aristotle argues that justice will be served by arranging for an exact equality in the amounts exchanged. In certain spheres, however, an exact equality in amounts would be unjust; therefore, Aristotle also articulates a notion of distributive justice, in which the goal is a proportionate equality that takes into consideration such factors as the difficulty of the labor, the danger faced, the ability to contribute, or the needs of those to be served. Finally, Aristotle even envisions a need for a judge to be able to correct an injustice that would be done by too strict an implementation of the law for a situation the legislator could not have foreseen, and this he calls "equity."

In the second half of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle takes up three issues that are crucial to the moral life. Alert to the fact that many people will see pleasure rather than happiness as the goal of human life, he tries to point out the contradictions implied in this position. He also makes an extended study of well-ordered and badly ordered pleasures, in an effort to show that an inclination to take pleasure in the right sort of things can well be an indicator that one has really achieved a solid virtue.

In Books VI and VII, we find Aristotle's account of the rational component of ethics. He offers a classification of the intellectual virtues to match his earlier list of specifically moral virtues. He also offers his own account of moral weakness in an effort to solve the problem Socrates had raised about how a person could deliberately do what he or she knows to be wrong.

Perhaps the most charming part of the entire text is Aristotle's account of friendship in Books VIII and IX. Using a threefold distinction based on the precise object of affection prominent in various relationships, Aristotle distinguishes the best sort of friendship (friendship of character) from friendships of pleasure and friendships of utility.

By the study of this classical text in ethics, we can learn an ethical wisdom that has stood the test of time and can offer valuable insight for our own day.

Lecture One
The Philosopher of Common Sense

Scope: Aristotle is often called "the philosopher of common sense." As in his works on logic, being, and nature, so too in ethics, he worked by sifting the wide range of existing opinions on a topic for insights that could serve as cornerstones of a broad, well-balanced theory. At the core of his own moral theory we find the idea of virtue, understood as human excellence. The very structure of the ten books of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (modern readers might well think of them as "chapters") emphasizes two sets of virtues: virtues of character (especially the cardinal virtues of justice, courage, temperance, and prudence) and virtues of mind (including both speculative wisdom and practical wisdom). Aristotle argues that these virtues are important in themselves, as well as constituents of a happy life.

This lecture will provide a survey of this course and an overview of Aristotle's thought, with a special emphasis on the place of his moral theory in the history of philosophy. By contrast with, say, the dialogues Plato wrote about Socrates, the form of this work is a treatise, a well-polished presentation of ideas discussed in the school Aristotle founded, the Lyceum.

Outline

I. However diverse their own concerns, generation after generation has returned to the *Nicomachean Ethics* by Aristotle (387–321 B.C.) for ethical insights about how to live well and about what the meaning of human life is.

- **A.** Aristotle was one of Plato's brightest students.
  - **1.** After long years in the Academy, Aristotle founded his own school, the Lyceum.
  - **2.** Here, he conducted teaching and research in his own highly empirical manner, which focused on comparison and contrast in order to find the common form in any group of items.
  - **3.** This commonality then gave that group (called a "species") its proper definition and placed it correctly in the larger scheme of things (that is, identified its "genus").

4. Aristotle wrote on a vast number of topics, including physics and biology, political constitutions and theatrical drama, as well as more technically philosophical topics, such as logic, metaphysics, and ethics.
5. His followers in this highly experiential approach that seeks for the "essence" of anything (that is, for the form that is common to all members of a group) are usually called "Aristotelians."
6. Among Aristotle's most famous students was Alexander the Great, who used to ship new plant and animal specimens back to his teacher from his military expeditions!
7. Aristotle spent most of his life in Athens, but just before his own death, he had to flee from Alexander's enemies after news of Alexander's death.

B. Aristotle used a "biological" model in his approach to ethics. Looking for the common elements in the lives of culturally diverse individuals and the organization of diverse governments, he attempted to characterize what led to excellence in the life of an individual and in the life of a community.

II. There are many theories of ethics.

A. The utilitarian theory of ethics (as originally propounded by John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham) restricts its consideration to weighing costs and benefits.
1. Utilitarian ethics is still practiced today, for example, in medical ethics and government funding.
2. But this theory has no respect for the intrinsic value of anything, including human life and human dignity.

B. A second type of ethics is based on the concepts of duty and right, or the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."
1. This theory is associated with the philosopher Immanuel Kant, who gave it a more technical statement in his "categorical imperative."
2. It is an approach that emphasizes the way in which we, as free human agents, need to make our choices and to make them responsibly.
3. This theory also emphasizes the importance of certain things, such as human rights.

C. A third kind of ethics attempts to go deeper by relying on insights into human character and is associated with nature and the tradition of natural law.

1. It has its basis in the works of Greek philosophers, such as Socrates, Plato, and especially, Aristotle.

2. Socrates approached it by asking people to define the virtues.

3. Plato continued Socrates's effort through his *Dialogues*.

D. Aristotle follows the same pattern of looking at human nature but with a biological or anthropological slant. In contrast to the sorts of principles that are prominent in other ethical theories (such as utilitarianism, deontology, or divine command theory), Aristotle tends to offer ethical principles rooted in human nature and the virtues that constitute excellence in human life.

III. The *Nicomachean Ethics* consists of ten books, each divided into "chapters."

A. In contrast to Plato's highly imaginative *Dialogues* between Socrates and various characters, Aristotle uses the systematic approach of a treatise.

B. This format dispenses with the interesting but sometimes meandering give-and-take of conversation to give the reader a clearer statement about specific questions and answers.

C. Aristotle's concentration on basic questions, such as identifying a suitable goal for human life and distinguishing the means from the end, keeps his argument clear.

IV. The *Nicomachean Ethics* presents a moral theory focused on happiness and virtuous character that largely transcends the cultural world in which it was composed.

A. Aristotle lays out at the very beginning of his *Ethics* what he believes is the general game plan for human life, its purpose and its goal: that all people act for what they think will make them happy. (He argues that what constitutes happiness is where people disagree.)

B. In the rest of his *Ethics* (Books II–X), Aristotle takes up other subjects, including his central notion of ethics: virtue.

1. For Aristotle, virtue implies excellence at a particular function.

2. He looks for common patterns of excellence in a diversity of individuals, regardless of their cultural or social backgrounds.
3. He uses this notion of excellence to organize the content of most of the rest of the *Ethics*.
4. The scope of Aristotle's concern with virtues in human life includes both "internal" states of emotion and desire and "external" relations to other individuals and to the community (under the topic of justice).
5. One of the most important parts of the *Nicomachean Ethics* comes toward the end, where two books are devoted to the subject of friendship.

V. The *Nicomachean Ethics* is a study based on experience that aims to find clear principles that will help us to distinguish good from bad and right from wrong.

A. In accordance with a maxim from jurisprudence ("hard cases make bad law"), he offers relatively clear cases of virtue and vice, rather than complicated, borderline cases, from which to draw principles.

B. While searching for answers to practical questions about living a good life, Aristotle often tries to offer general principles, not just solutions to particular problems.

VI. The *Nicomachean Ethics* uses several key terms.

A. Aristotle is concerned with seeking various "goods."
1. Aristotle uses the term "good" to refer to what is desirable, as opposed to what is merely good.
2. We must distinguish between a genuine good and an apparent good (e.g., healthy food and junk food).

B. He constantly returns to the theme of happiness (*eudaimonia* = having a good spirit).
1. Happiness is something that involves a life of activity.
2. It is an end in itself, not a means to an end.

C. Aristotle also likes to use the term "mean," as in golden mean.
1. This is probably the most important of the key terms in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.
2. For Aristotle, a mean is a point of excellence lying between two extremes: excess and defect.

3. The virtue of courage, for instance, is a habit of choosing to respond appropriately in dangerous situations, thus avoiding both recklessness and paralysis.

D. "Habit" is another key idea.

1. Using a biologist's model, Aristotle looks over the long range of an organism's development.
2. Habit will allow us to approach a situation with confidence.
3. For Aristotle, this is the project of ethics; it is a project that is enormously assisted by knowledge but is not solely about knowledge; it is about becoming accustomed to the idea of excellence (doing what is right) and, thereby, bringing us to the prospect of happiness.

Essential Reading:

Henry B. Veatch, *Aristotle: A Contemporary Appreciation.* Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1974.

Supplementary Reading:

William K. Frankena, *Thinking about Morality*. Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan, 1980.

W. F. R. Hardie, *Aristotle's Ethical Theory*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1980.

James G. Lennox, *Aristotle's Philosophy of Biology: Studies in the Origin of the Life Sciences*. Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001.

Questions to Consider:

1. In jurisprudence, one often hears the maxim that "hard cases make bad law." Does it likewise make sense in ethics to seek one's principles from relatively clear cases of virtue and vice, rather than from disputed, borderline cases?
2. Aristotle's theory of ethics focuses more on virtue and vice than, say, on obligation and permission or on the weighing of advantage and disadvantage. What elements are stressed in other theories of morality that you know?

Lecture Two
What Is the Purpose of Life?

Scope: In the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, one can see Aristotle's typical way of proceeding. He considers various views about what happiness is, including pleasure, honor, and wealth, but finds that each of them is at best a means to something else. Genuine happiness also requires the achievement of virtue to be complete and self-sufficient. In some contrast to Socrates, who tended to identify virtue with knowing the right thing to do, Aristotle insists that knowledge must be conjoined with good upbringing and personal commitment to produce the virtue necessary for real happiness. The argument Aristotle proposes in support of his view gives special attention to teleology, the natural orientation of the human person toward certain ends or goals. For Aristotle, ethics is part of a larger project that he calls "politics." This lecture will situate the discussion about happiness and virtue in the greater scheme of Aristotelian practical philosophy by considering his definition of the human being as "rational animal" and his argument for asserting that we are intrinsically "political" and "social" by nature.

Outline

I. The first part of this lecture considers Aristotle's characteristic methods in Book I for identifying happiness as the goal of life.

- **A.** Aristotle examines a number of popular views on the subject of what constitutes happiness (including pleasure, honor, and wealth) and the case that can be made for each proposal.
- **B.** He gives special consideration to the views of his teacher Plato on the idea of the perfect good and, thereby, urges the appropriateness of asking about "the good for human beings."

II. The second part of this lecture examines Aristotle's justification for his answer to the question about the goal of human life through philosophical reflection about what is truly good for human beings.

A. As a criterion for assessing the alternative answers, Aristotle proposes that the goal for human life ought to be something that is an end-in-itself and self-sufficient.

1. He notes that all human activities aim at some sort of good, but that some goods (such as pleasure, wealth, and honor) are subordinate to others.

2. He argues that the goal of human life ought to be final (an end-in-itself), not a means to some other end.

B. In accordance with his typical procedure throughout his works, Aristotle argues that we should look for the function that is specifically distinctive of human nature to identify genuine human fulfillment.

1. After giving examples of the way in which one finds the characteristic function specifically distinctive of certain animals and certain tools, Aristotle applies this method to the case of humanity.

2. The specific difference that is definitive of human nature is rationality**.**

3. Aristotle refers to rationality in the all-inclusive sense of knowing and choosing.

4. "Knowing" includes not only cerebral functions, such as articulation and calculation, but also practical intelligence, such as carpentry, children rearing, and arts, among others.

5. These are a natural part of human functioning, but they have to be developed.

6. So, too, the rationality involved in "choosing" refers to a whole range of things, including desires, passions, and emotions, as well as the practice of making selections among the things to which we are attracted or repelled.

C. Aristotle suggests that although human happiness ought to include such things as a long enough life of reasonable health, or material prosperity, or friends, or honor, or respect, the crucial notion is that we should use our rationality to develop our native powers into a peak of excellence.

D. Aristotle claims that only in the proper development and use of rationality will human beings find their fulfillment and happiness.

1. He makes this case in Book I, chapter 7, at Bekker number 1097a20.

2. Many thinkers in the long Aristotelian tradition have found great fruitfulness in following out this Aristotelian model of basing ethics on human nature, because it offers objectivity, universality, and intelligibility to ethical claims. For example, Thomas Aquinas uses the idea to articulate natural law ethics.

E. Part of the significance of Aristotle's work is to start us in this direction of identifying human happiness as the goal in life and to give us a good procedure for justifying this view in the face of those who argue that the goal of ethics is pleasure, or honor, or wealth. Aristotle's *Ethics* prompts us to ask:

1. Does merely having such things as wealth or a life of honor constitute, in itself, a good use of our rationality? Or are these things constituent parts, means to the end, that should be included but do not by themselves constitute the end?
2. Is the end itself a complete use of our powers over the course of a full life with some of these material means met?

III. The larger context in which Aristotle wrote this work involves his view that ethics is really part of the study of politics.

A. Aristotle's remarks on happiness should not be taken only in the context of individual morality but in light of social and political perspectives.

1. For Aristotle, the name for the chief unit of social life was the *polis*, or city.
2. Aristotle's sense of the intrinsically social nature of human life can be seen in his remark that ethics is ultimately part of the study of politics (political philosophy).

B. Like the identification of happiness as the goal of life in Book I, the theory of the virtues to be discussed in coming books has an intrinsically social orientation.

1. Aristotle's theory differs in this respect from certain current moral theories, which are thoroughly individualistic and even atomistic in their approach.
2. Aristotle notes that different political regimes focus on inculcating different virtues. For example, kings aim to cultivate the virtue of obedience; virtues typical of democracy include civic participation and the submission of an individual good to the good of the community as a whole.

3. The twentieth-century Aristotelian thinker and French philosopher Jacques Maritain wrote a number of books questioning whether an individual's own good ought to be submitted to the good of the community, or whether the good of the community ought to override the good of the individual.
4. Maritain's book *The Person and the Common Good* typifies the twentieth-century approach to Aristotelian ethics: trying to balance the demands of individual life and the intrinsic importance than any person has with the legitimate demands of a larger community.

Essential Reading:

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I.

Supplementary Reading:

Don Asselin, *Human Nature and Eudaimonia in Aristotle*. New York: Peter Lang, 1989.

Jacques Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, tr. John J. Fitzgerald. Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1947, 1966.

Yves Simon, *The Tradition of Natural Law*. Bronx, NY: Fordham Univ. Press, 1992.

Questions to Consider:

1. If you were given a wide set of powers, or a large sum of money, what would you do with it? Then ask yourself why you would make these choices. In the final analysis, do you come to the conclusion that seeking happiness is the ultimate reason why you chose what you did and, thus, that happiness is the chief good of human life for which we choose all other things as means-to-an-end?
2. Do you agree that rationality is the "proper human function?"

Lecture Three
What Is Moral Excellence?

Scope: In general, "virtue" for Aristotle refers to some human excellence. Sometimes, this excellence seems to arise naturally in a given person, but more often, it is a character trait acquired by deliberate practice over a long time. We can recognize the presence of a virtue when a person has a disposition to act or to feel in a certain way regularly, easily, and even with some pleasure. "Moral virtue" is that state of character in which a person has the habit of choosing the mean between the extremes of excess and deficiency. In this definition, "the mean" refers not to the mediocre or to the average but to the peak of excellence that is just right, given the situation and the people involved. A response that would involve more or less of the action or feeling in question might still be morally acceptable but would not manifest the excellence of real virtue.

Outline

I. In Book II, Aristotle offers a general definition of virtue in terms of habit, choice, and the mean between extremes.

- **A.** In general, virtue (for Aristotle) refers to the development of one or another of our powers to the peak of excellence; intellectual, as well as moral, virtues exist.
- **B.** Although our Latin-based term "virtue" etymologically connotes manliness (*virtus* comes from *vir*, meaning man or male), Aristotle's Greek term is *aristeia*, which means excellence in any human person.
- **C.** Aristotle develops his concept of virtue beyond that of Socrates.
  - **1.** For Socrates, virtue is a matter of knowing; a person who really knows what is right will do right.
  - **2.** For Aristotle, knowing what is right does not guarantee virtuous behavior.
  - **3.** Virtue requires habit.
- **D.** Although some habits (addictions, for instance) tend to reduce choice by making action unthinking and automatic, we can also

point to habits that help us make better choices by increasing our attentiveness and focus. Moral virtues are habits of this sort.

E. Such habits (habits of mastery) may be difficult to acquire but will eventually become second nature and may even become pleasurable.

F. In his views on virtue, Aristotle is in contrast with some other philosophers, including Kant.

1. Kant held the position that virtue is a matter of doing one's duty without ulterior motive and, thus, that something is not virtue if it is too easy or pleasant.

2. Virtue comes when we exert enormous willpower, resist an attraction, or overcome something repellent ("no pain, no gain").

3. For Aristotle, however, virtue should, ultimately, make life easier.

II. A moral virtue is a habit of choosing the mean between extremes in regard to some action, desire, or emotion according to the right reasoning of a wise person.

A. Aristotle thinks of the "right choice" as the golden mean: the peak of excellence between excess and defect, not the average or the mediocre.

B. Those who are not used to making the virtuous, or right, choice may have to look to models of virtue for inspiration until they can develop the virtue for themselves.

C. Aristotle's standard of virtue thus combines an element of knowledge and an element of control.

D. The intellectual virtue of prudence (one of the four cardinal virtues) is crucial to the acquisition of moral virtues. Aristotle discusses the virtue of prudence in more detail in Book VI of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, which we will discuss in Lecture Seven.

E. Aristotle cautions that the precise location of this golden mean may not be exactly the same for everyone.

1. For example, with respect to the golden mean of temperance, just how much food or drink one should consume in order to be healthy can be measured with some objectivity, but it will differ from one person to another.

2. The same applies to the golden mean of courage, because knowing the type of danger to be faced and one's own competencies will determine the appropriate behavior.

F. The common element in all the moral virtues is conformity with right reasoning, which includes taking all the relevant aspects of a particular situation into account to come to the correct choice, the sort of choice that an impartial but knowledgeable observer would come to.

G. By using such terminology as "the mean between the extremes" and "right reasoning," Aristotle intends to suggest a certain objectivity in regard to virtue. Aristotle's "relativist" approach here is not relativist in the sense that it is arbitrary; it is relative to certain objective factors about ourselves and the situations we face.

III. Although Aristotle disagrees with hedonistic ethics that make pleasure the chief ethical criterion, he does take account of pleasure in his notion of virtue and its acquisition.

A. How do we acquire virtue?

1. Moral virtue is not natural (in the sense of simply instilled in us by nature) nor unnatural (in the sense of contrary to nature) but acquired as a habit by repetition until it becomes "second nature" to us.
2. We become accustomed to doing the right action at the right time for the right object with the right motive and in the right way.

B. This habit of doing the right thing may even give us pleasure.

IV. The twentieth-century Aristotelian Hannah Arendt, in her book *The Human Condition*, articulates her views about the virtues that are at the heart and soul of human excellence.

A. Arendt has a strong sense of public and private virtues and the ways in which the virtues that Aristotle discusses are particularly relevant for our own times.

B. She also has a strong sense of what happens when we fail to cultivate both private and public virtues, as in her discussion of certain war criminals.

C. Sometimes, Arendt argues, a matter of thoughtlessness, a failure to do the indispensable moral deliberation, can bring about disaster.

V. In Aristotle's Book II, one finds a tremendous theory of what any particular virtue in the moral order will consist of.

A. Aristotle tries to give appropriate names to each of the virtues. In Books III, IV, and V he gives a wide panoply of instances where virtue can be developed.

B. But not every range of human activity has a mean.

1. Aristotle holds that some things are simply vices (e.g., passions, such as ill will, shamelessness, or envy, or actions, such as adultery, theft, or murder).

2. These are intrinsically evil in themselves, not just by reason of some excess or defect. No one could perform such an action properly, or at a right time, or in due circumstances, however much pleasure the action would give someone.

C. The identifying factor for a virtue is that it is a golden mean.

Essential Reading:

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II.

Supplementary Reading:

Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1958, 1998.

Richard Bosley, Roger A. Shiner, Janet D. Sisson, *Aristotle, Virtue, and the Mean*. Edmonton, Alberta, Canada: Academic Press, 1995.

Henry B. Veatch, *Rational Man: A Modern Interpretation of Aristotelian Ethics*. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1962, 1971.

Questions to Consider:

1. Which habits (virtues, skills, personal traits, lifestyle patterns, addictions) involve an increase in our power of choice and which tend to reduce choice or even render it impossible or unlikely?

2. What factors have to be considered when determining the golden mean in a certain sphere of life?

Lecture Four
Courage and Moderation

Scope: Although there is no explicit concept of "freedom" in Aristotle, he makes a strong case that human beings are responsible only for what we have voluntarily chosen to do or not do. His discussion in Book III about the conditions of responsibility in terms of both knowledge and voluntary consent is a landmark in the history of thinking about ethics. The remainder of the third book takes up two of the cardinal virtues: courage and temperance. He shows each of them to consist of the habitual choice of the mean between extremes. Courage, for instance, is a disposition to confront danger without being overly bold or simply paralyzed by fear. Throughout the range of situations that call for courage, the person must recognize what is really fearful and deal with it appropriately, just as the temperate person will deal realistically with the phenomenon of pleasure to avoid both indulgence and insensitivity to legitimate pleasures.

Outline

I. In Book III, Aristotle argues that we are responsible only for actions we have done voluntarily.

- **A.** We attach praise or blame only to an action that is done voluntarily; thus, to assign responsibility for any action, two conditions must be met:
  - **1.** The action must not have been done under compulsion.
  - **2.** The actor must have had relevant knowledge about the circumstances.
- **B.** If either of these two conditions is not met, then responsibility for a given action is eliminated or, at least, reduced.
  - **1.** There are various kinds of compulsion, including physical force, fear, habits (such as addictions), threats, and so on.
  - **2.** There are also many ways in which a person can fail to have sufficient knowledge, sometimes by one's own fault, sometimes because of factors beyond one's own control.

C. Strictly speaking, Aristotle does not speak of "freedom" in the "internal sense" (as in an individual's power to make decisions that will affect his or her life). That concept was developed only later by such figures as the Stoics, Paul, and Augustine. The treatment Aristotle gives of "the voluntary," however, is a crucial step in the eventual articulation of an adequate notion of personal freedom.

1. Aristotle, and the ancients, did not have a sense of freedom in the "internal" sense, as in "freedom of choice."

2. The ancients did, however, understand freedom in the "external" sense, as in the difference between a free man and a slave.

3. The concept of freedom as self-mastery developed later, with the Stoics, Paul, and Augustine, and culminated in the theory of freedom of Thomas Aquinas.

4. Aquinas claimed that no earthly goods are infinite; at least in principle, our will is able to master any good (or evil), and the only good that we cannot resist is the sight of God.

5. In Aquinas's view, this is part of the reason that we do not see God in this life: to keep us free during this life to make decisions.

6. Aristotle does not go this far, but he anticipates the development of this concept.

7. In other works (such as the *Politics* and the *Rhetoric*), Aristotle provides more extensive treatment of freedom in the external sense, that is, as the absence of coercion or restraint in the public sphere.

8. Here, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle prefers to speak of the voluntary nature of the actions for which we bear responsibility and the importance of understanding virtue as the habit of choosing on the basis of deliberation.

II. The second half of Book III treats at length two important virtues, courage and temperance, and their corresponding vices.

A. Courage is the virtue concerned with feelings of fear and confidence.

1. It consists of habitually choosing the golden mean that resides between cowardice and recklessness when in situations of danger that really merit some fear.

2. In the strictest sense, courage names the virtue that deals well with fear of death in battle, but Aristotle also identifies other types of courage.

B. Temperance is the virtue concerned with moderating our response to pleasures.

1. It consists of habitually choosing the golden mean between self-indulgence and insensibility.
2. Aristotle, thus, uses his standard framework of definition for this virtue, but he readily admits that (of the two corresponding vices) the habit of yielding excessively to pleasure in self-indulgence is far more common than the habit of being insufficiently sensitive to pleasure.

Essential Reading:

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book III.

Supplementary Reading:

Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 2: *Willing*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1978.

Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues: Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, Temperance*, tr. Richard and Clara Winston. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1965.

Questions to Consider:

1. Aristotle holds that ignorance and compulsion can modify, or even eliminate, responsibility. What sorts of ignorance really do excuse a failure to act rightly? What sort of ignorance constitutes no excuse?
2. How much do fear of injury to self or to others, addiction, blackmail, and the like really "compel" and, thus, make an action "involuntary" rather than "voluntary"? At what point ought one to show courage and resist such threats, even at personal cost? Does any such threat excuse a person from responsibility?

Lecture Five
The Social Virtues

Scope: Mindful of the variety of passions in addition to fear and pleasure, Aristotle describes a series of virtues pertinent to life in society. Some deal with the proper use of money (liberality, magnificence), some with honor (pride, ambition), some with anger and mood (good temper, friendliness), and some with speech (truthfulness, ready wit). One important question to ask during any study of the *Ethics* concerns its abiding relevance. Are virtues such as these still to be regarded as morally normative, or are they more a product of the cultural assumptions of Aristotle's time and place? Attention to the means by which he makes certain distinctions and argues his case will help to deepen our appreciation of the entire work.

Outline

I. We have thus far dealt with two of the four cardinal virtues (courage and temperance). Before turning to the other two cardinal virtues (justice in Book V and prudence in Book VI), Aristotle turns in Book IV to nine virtues that are important for certain social relationships.

A. In turning his attention to these virtues, Aristotle follows his bent as a biologist and looks for patterns. He identifies the same pattern of a peak of excellence in his study of these social virtues as he did with his cardinal virtues.

B. First, he discusses virtues concerned with money. For some commentators, Aristotle's concern with these virtues suggests that his ethics is aristocratic, but others argue that he is right to discuss this range of virtues, even if some people will never have enough wealth to deal with them.

1. Liberality stands between prodigality and meanness.

2. Magnificence is the golden mean between vulgarity and niggardliness.

3. For Aristotle, magnificence is a virtue that puts large sums of money to work in public service. A wealthy citizen in Aristotle's day would have had an opportunity to demonstrate

magnificence by sponsoring the theatrical productions that were major features of Athenian religious festivals.

II. Next, Aristotle turns to virtues concerned with honor. These virtues are also a bone of contention among later commentators, but much depends on how the terms are understood.

A. Pride stands between vanity and humility.

1. Some religious commentators, in particular, see humility as a virtue and think of pride as a vice, perhaps even the source of all sin.

2. It may be that there is simply an unresolvable difference of opinion here. But it may also be possible to understand pride here not as simple arrogance, but as the proper pride in oneself that is actually commanded when one talks about "loving one's neighbor as oneself."

3. In his book *The Steps of Humility*, Bernard of Clairvaux attempts to explain humility in relation to a proper sense of pride in oneself. He defines humility as "a reverent love for the truth." In this sense, Bernard argues that one should love what has gone well in one's life. Equally, one should revere the fact that one needs help for what has not gone well; this reverence exemplifies a love for the truth about oneself.

B. Industriousness is the golden mean between too much and too little ambition.

III. Good temper is the virtue concerned with the emotion of anger; this habit involves avoiding the extremes of excessive irritability and the deficiency of spirit that is sometimes today called wimpiness (the desire to be liked at all costs).

A. Anger is not a simple passion but a complex one, because of the sense of internal conflict that it can engender.

B. Passion for Aristotle is a feeling, not something that we choose, but something to which we must choose to react.

C. Aristotle believed that a disposition to show anger in the right way can become a virtue if we undertake the pattern of habituation of learning to recognize and respond appropriately to anger.

D. For Aristotle, anger can have good and proper uses, in the sense that some situations require a spirited response, such as in the face of some injustice.

E. Not to use anger appropriately, Aristotle argues, is to risk incurring the vice of timidity, or wimpiness.

F. Here, Aristotle is taking a very different approach to the passions from that of the Stoics, who saw all passions as dangerous.

1. The Stoic goal in life was deliverance from passions, the state of *apatheia.*

2. They sharply differentiated between what they believed was controllable and what they believed they could not control.

3. They strove to become indifferent to anything beyond their control, including the passions.

G. Aristotle's approach to passion focuses on cultivating the habit of recognizing the passion before it grows out of control and using it or tempering it accordingly.

IV. The charming virtues of social communication are generally not controversial; some of them seem to be matters of temperament.

A. Friendliness is the peak of excellence between flattery and surliness. A more extensive treatment of this area of life will come in Books VIII and IX.

B. Truthfulness is the golden mean between boastfulness and false modesty.

1. Here, Aristotle is speaking more about self-knowledge as it appeared in his discussion about proper pride.

2. Truthfulness implies a habitual willingness to keep an open mind and maintain critical objectivity.

C. Having a ready wit comes between buffoonery and boorishness.

D. Having a healthy sense of shame and modesty stands between bashfulness and shamelessness.

1. This area of ethics has seen a tremendous amount of growth, especially in the twentieth century.

2. Among the theories of ethics that have been proposed in phenomenology is the work of Pope John Paul. His writings on love and responsibility include theories on the appropriate role of shame and modesty that appear to develop ideas that Aristotle initiated in his *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Essential Reading:

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book IV.

Supplementary Reading:

Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Steps of Humility*, tr. George B. Burch. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1950.

George Harris, *Agent-Centered Morality: An Aristotelian Alternative to Kantian Internalism*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1999.

Karol Wojtyla (later Pope John Paul II), *Love and Responsibility*, tr. H. T. Willetts. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1981.

Questions to Consider:

1. Do you think that philanthropy is a duty or just an ideal for those who are financially well endowed?
2. What, if anything, is the moral fault in wanting to be liked at all costs? How can a person correct a tendency in this direction?
3. Are all lies morally wrong? How about "white lies"? Are there situations in which one may intentionally deceive another person by what one says?

Lecture Six
Types of Justice

Scope: Although all the virtues discussed up to this point named excellence of character in regard to feelings (and only secondarily in regard to any action that results from some feeling), Book V concentrates on virtuous action under the concept of justice. After distinguishing between corrective justice (excellence at effecting an exact equality of the amounts of goods and services in any exchange, voluntary or involuntary) and distributive justice (the virtue of arranging for a proportionate equality appropriate to relevant differences, such as risk, difficulty, ability, need, or the like), Aristotle broaches the even more important distinction between natural and legal justice. If one is ever to argue that a given law is unjust, it is crucial to assert the existence of a natural justice that an otherwise duly formulated law somehow violates. In addition to attending to the discussion of equity at the end of Book V, we will examine some specially relevant texts from the *Politics* and the *Rhetoric*.

Outline

I. At the very center of the *Ethics* stands the virtue of justice. The complexity of the subject merits the dedication of an entire book to it.

- **A.** Aristotle's procedure in Book V is first to distinguish the types of justice, then to explore the structure of the virtue according to the model of the golden mean.
- **B.** Much of the subsequent history of ethics is rooted here in the discussions about right and wrong. The focus on what is permissible, what is obligatory, and what is forbidden adds another dimension to the previous discussions about good and bad, the excellence of virtue, and the correlative types of vice.

II. The following are some crucial distinctions about various types of justice:

- **A.** There is the just in the sense of what is lawful, as opposed to what is fair and equitable.

1. Anyone who is law abiding is, in some sense, just. Yet the laws of any given society may not capture everything that justice (in the sense of fairness) requires.
2. Later thinkers in this tradition will develop some of the ideas latent here, in what Aristotle calls "natural justice," into natural law theory, the notion of a higher law by which one may judge the justice or injustice of any humanly crafted law.

B. Whether codified into law or not, justice as fairness may be subdivided:

1. Rectificatory, or corrective, justice involves the restoration of equality between parties by compensation of the party that is wronged or injured; this type of justice ignores the personal status of the individual parties and concentrates only on making the amounts in question equal again.
2. Distributive justice does take into consideration the personal status of the parties; it involves not an equality of exact amounts but an equality of two ratios (that is, the ratio of one person to the object in question and the ratio of another person to the same object).
3. The standard of comparison can vary considerably: one could calculate such factors as the proportionate need or the merit deserved.
4. Modern theories of justice have enormously expanded on Aristotle's idea here, as in, for example, progressive wage and tax structures and so on.
5. In both of the above categories, and especially in rectificatory justice, the transactions involve something involuntary for which justice requires a correction. But justice also governs voluntary exchanges, which may take place according to strict arithmetical equality between the objects exchanged or according to some proportion, such as the difficulty of the labor involved or the type of risk taken.

C. Aristotle defers most of his discussion of political forms of justice for his book *Politics*, but he does foreshadow those discussions by reviewing the types of fairness and equality found in such social relations as the city (the *polis*), the household, and the relation of masters and servants.

D. Aristotle's ideas on various schemes of justice have served as a resource for a tremendous amount of work on this subject.

1. Yves Simon, one of the great twentieth-century Aristotelian scholars, considered these schemes of political justice and how to embody them in various structures of government and authority.

2. In his book *The General Theory of Authority*, Simon takes a relatively Aristotelian starting point and elaborates the theory that a governmental authority is not merely intended to restrain criminals; it should also create a specific, appropriate scheme to effect the common good through the distribution of the common burden.

III. This discussion of various types of justice leads to a consideration of justice as a virtue.

A. Just as he did with the virtues of the emotions, discussed in the previous books, so Aristotle distinguishes between individually just acts and the character trait that is the virtue of justice.

1. Like the other virtues, justice is also a habit of choosing the mean; here, the mean is the mean of giving and taking, that is, giving the right amount of work for the pay to be earned, giving the right amount of pay for the work to be done.

2. Justice as a virtue is the habit of choosing to render or receive the right amount at the right time and to avoid the extremes of too much or too little.

3. Aristotle notes that the individuals involved in these transactions may not feel good (virtuous) about what they are giving or receiving; there may be resentment.

4. Justice, too, requires knowledge of the relevant circumstances, as well as choice of the right course of action.

5. The virtue of justice also needs to be acquired by practice.

B. A special virtue in this general category is the virtue of equity.

1. Lawmakers must consider the general situation and cannot be expected to envision all the possible exceptions that may occur.

2. Equity is the virtue of justice in the heart of a judge that corrects any injustice that would be done by the strict administration of legal justice.

Essential Reading:

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book V.

Supplementary Reading:

Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues: Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, Temperance*, tr. Richard and Clara Winston. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1965.

Yves Simon, *A General Theory of Authority*. Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1980.

Peter L. Phillips Simpson, *The Politics of Aristotle*, translation with introduction, analysis, and notes. Chapel Hill, NC: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1997.

Questions to Consider:

1. Justice requires that a punishment fit the crime. What criterion should one use to determine this?
2. Distributive justice requires proportionate equality. What is the right standard to use for a tax system: Property holdings? Income? Need? Ability to pay? Is a flat tax system fair or unfair?

Lecture Seven
The Intellectual Virtues

Scope: Objectivity in ethics requires the existence of truths about the world and the human condition that we must respect; for this reason, it is no surprise that Aristotle should turn to a discussion of truthfulness and reliable judgment. But beyond merely adverting to the realistic theory of knowledge required for the theory of the mean that is at the basis of the moral virtues, Aristotle offers a wide-ranging list of the various virtues of mind that are needed for a full and happy life. In what may come as a surprise to modern readers, he lists art and science among these virtues—treating them not so much in terms of the works of art or the body of knowledge we call science but in terms of acquired habits of mind in a person, such as the habit of seeking wisdom or the habit of prudent judgment.

Outline

I. The thrust of Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics* as a whole is to introduce the fourth cardinal virtue, prudence or practical wisdom, as the habit of right reasoning in matters of action and to set it in the context of other intellectual virtues.

A. Aristotle distinguishes two main spheres of intellectual activity in terms of their objects:

1. The object of the contemplative (speculative) intellect is truth. This type of intellectual activity is concerned with the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake.

2. The object of the practical (calculative) intellect is the correlation of right desire with truth.

B. As before, virtue names a habit of excellence in the use of one of our powers, but except for prudence, which is both a moral virtue and an intellectual virtue, the model of the golden mean between extremes does not apply here.

C. When discussing the nature of truth, Aristotle is a realist.

1. He believes the goal of truth is to conform the mind to the way things are.

2. He also believes that one must first know the way the world works to be able to improve it with practical uses of the intellect.
3. This idea implies that we must know the truth about ourselves to be able to develop appropriate skills and virtues.

II. Aristotle identifies five major (and several minor) intellectual virtues:

A. Science is the habit of demonstrative knowledge of what is necessary and eternal to show how effects are linked to their causes.

1. In Aristotle's logical works, especially the *Posterior Analytics*, we find an elaborate theory of science as a habit of knowing how to proceed from first principles, through the chains of reasoning typical of a discipline, to the conclusions appropriate for that discipline.
2. In Aristotle's many biological and physical writings, such as the *Physics*, we see elaborate examples of how the possession of this virtue permitted the author to set forth his learning in a given field.

B. Art (*techne*), for Aristotle, is the habit of knowing how to make or do things.

1. Aristotle is not referring just to the fine or performing arts. He has in mind the whole range of technological knowledge, considered not so much as a body of knowledge but more as the way the mind of the person with this knowledge is shaped.
2. Aristotle thus gives expression to one of the genuine types of human knowledge, the possessor of which may not be terribly articulate about his or her knowledge, yet whose competence is far-reaching, such as a plumber or a pianist.

C. Prudence, or practical wisdom, is the habit of knowing how to act, how to secure the ends and goals of human life.

1. The golden mean structure typical of moral virtue is evident here in the deliberative moment of prudence (namely, by neither deliberating too much nor too little, but in the right way for the right amount of time).
2. The golden mean structure is also evident in the judgment moment of prudence (namely, by judging realistically, neither in an overly optimistic manner nor in a way that is excessively pessimistic).

D. Intuition of first principles (*nous* [Greek], meaning mind, insight, or intuition) is Aristotle's name for the habit of grasping the principles from which demonstrations will be able to proceed.

1. Later philosophers will schematize the principles one needs for the speculative sciences by such names as the principle of identity, the principle of non-contradiction, and the principle of causality.

2. Aristotle often discusses the substance of these principles in his logical works and in such works as the *Metaphysics*.

3. The principle of identity refers to the ability to correctly identify something, even if it undergoes changes in appearance.

4. The principle of contradiction refers to the fact that something cannot be and not be at the same time. All speech relies on this principle.

5. Likewise, practical disciplines, such as ethics, also have a first principle that one needs to use, namely, that the good is to be pursued and the evil, avoided.

6. But much of the problem with life is figuring out what the good is and what the evil is.

7. And the definition of good and evil has led to much disagreement.

8. Later philosophers in this tradition will take this struggle to identify what is good and what is evil as the basis for their accounts of the conscience.

E. Wisdom (in Greek, *sophia*, one of the root words in "philosophy") is the habit of uniting the intuition of first principles with science (the habit of knowing how to demonstrate the link between effects and their causes).

III. By the end of Book VI, Aristotle has brought the main part of his theory to completion.

A. Although the *Nicomachean Ethics* is a science of morality, Aristotle is mindful that the fullness of human happiness requires practical wisdom, as well as philosophical wisdom.

B. The contribution of philosophical wisdom to happiness is formal: the correct identification of what happiness consists in requires an understanding of the necessary virtues.

C. But attaining happiness also requires practical wisdom to ensure that we take the proper means to the true human ends and achieve the moral virtues required for excellence in human life.

D. The actual process of acquiring virtue requires that we attend not just to one or another, but to the interrelation of the various spheres of life.

E. An intellectual component is necessary for any of the moral virtues to take place, and a moral component is necessary for prudence to occur.

F. To be courageous, temperate, or just, one has to know how much danger one ought to face, or how much pleasure one ought to seek or permit, or how much giving and taking should occur in a social interaction.

G. For all of this "right knowing" to happen, prudence must come into play.

H. For prudence to occur, however, one also has to have a grasp of the moral virtues.

IV. Aristotle concludes this book by referring to Socrates, his intellectual grandfather.

A. Aristotle greatly respects Socrates but feels the need to correct Socrates in one important area.

B. Socrates, at least as Plato presents him, seemed to think that knowledge was a matter of virtue—if one really knew the right thing, one would do it.

C. Aristotle disagrees; he argues that merely knowing what is right does not guarantee that one will do what is right.

Essential Reading:

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VI.

Supplementary Reading:

Jonathan A. Jacobs, *Being True to the World: Moral Realism and Practical Wisdom*. New York: Peter Lang, 1990.

Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues; Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, Temperance*, tr. Richard and Clara Winston. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1965.

Henry B. Veatch, *Aristotle: A Contemporary Appreciation*. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1974.

Questions to Consider:

1. We often enjoy being around optimists. Can optimism distort one's perception of reality as much as pessimism? How does one achieve the proper balance?
2. How much deliberation is enough when one needs to act? What are the minimal conditions for having deliberated long enough? How does one know that one should end one's deliberation and make a decision?

Lecture Eight
Struggling to Do Right

Scope: Mindful that someone without appropriate knowledge easily tends to do what is wrong, Socrates had regularly maintained that the person who really knew what was good and right would be virtuous and act on that knowledge. But this approach can lead to the dubious conclusion that anyone who acts wrongly must not have known. Aristotle's approach to the problem is to distinguish six possible states of character development. The opposed states of virtue and vice (the acquired dispositions of feeling and acting rightly) have already been covered. At the extremes on this spectrum are the rare cases of the godlike and the bestial—those whose natures bring them to feel and act virtuously (viciously) in almost superhuman (subhuman) manner. But in the middle, between virtue and vice, Aristotle finds the groups he calls the "continent" and the "incontinent"—those who do not yet have the settled disposition of virtue or vice but who have to struggle every time they encounter a feeling like fear or pleasure or a perception of what the right thing to do is. These cases of moral weakness constitute a fascinating effort on Aristotle's part to deal with the Socratic problem. (The section on pleasure at the end of Book VII will be discussed in Lecture Eleven.)

Outline

I. Book VII deals with one of the most critical problems of ancient ethics: the relation between knowledge and virtue.

A. In the Platonic dialogues, Socrates tended to identify virtue with knowledge, on the supposition that if someone acted wickedly, that person must not have really understood what goodness required. How, after all, could one really have known if one acted otherwise?

B. Despite the widespread conviction (which Aristotle seems to have shared) that one will be moved to act only if attracted to a good (at least an apparent good), we have, from early on, a sense that moral failure must be something more than just an intellectual mistake.

II. Aristotle's attempt at resolution of the problem involves his distinctions among six psychological states:

- **A.** The godlike or altruistic person displays a nearly preternatural affinity for the virtues.
  - **1.** The psychologist Kohlberg developed a scheme of six psychological states that bears a strong resemblance to Aristotle's six character states.
  - **2.** Kohlberg, like Aristotle, believes that most moral virtues are developed through constant effort, and he also admits the existence of an altruistic state (in which virtue is innate).
- **B.** The bestial person is as bad as the godlike person is good.
- **C.** The virtuous person has been described in earlier books to have acquired moral virtue by achieving habits of excellence through careful deliberation and repeated actions.
- **D.** The continent person manages to make the right decision but lacks the virtue (that is, the settled habit of feeling or acting rightly). Nonetheless, this person succeeds in choosing rightly after a moral struggle.
- **E.** The incontinent person is weak-willed. This person is not marred by vice (some settled habit of feeling or acting wrongly) but tends to fail in the struggle to choose rightly.
- **F.** The vicious person has settled habits but bad ones. This person tends to choose a course of action easily and with regularity, but the choice habitually tends to be toward some extreme of excess or deficiency of feeling or acting.

III. Aristotle's contribution to the debate over moral weakness concentrates on those here called the "continent" and the "incontinent."

- **A.** Aristotle is insistent that knowledge of the truth is as important as good habits.
  - **1.** Truth is a matter of conforming the mind to way things are.
  - **2.** It is, thus, different from certainty and confidence: You can be certain about something, yet be wrong; you can lack confidence, yet be right.
  - **3.** Aristotle argues that the continent and the incontinent can distinguish between virtue and vice, but they have not yet joined that knowledge to the habit of choosing to do the right thing.

4. Thus, for Aristotle, voluntary action requires knowledge, as well as choice.

B. Aristotle proposes that in order to best describe moral weakness, it is helpful to understand the kind of reasoning that is typical of such a person.

C. For this understanding, Aristotle offers his account of the practical syllogism (by analogy with the account he delivered in his logical writings, including the *Posterior Analytics* and the *Prior Analytics*, of the valid and invalid forms of syllogisms used in speculative thinking).

D. The practical syllogism involves three lines of thought: a first premise, a second premise, and a conclusion.

1. The practical syllogism combines a universal premise that expresses some moral precept (such as "one ought to keep one's promises" or "one ought not to tell lies") with a particular premise that identifies some specific action one is considering (such as "my promise requires me to do X" or "Y is a lie").
2. This combination results in a conclusion about what one ought or ought not to do (such as "I ought to do X" or "I should not say Y").

E. Aristotle holds that people of unsettled habits (moral weakness) will have not just one universal premise, but several, and that the particular line of action they are considering will shift.

F. Although the reasoning of the virtuous person habitually gets to the correct conclusion and the reasoning of the vicious person gets to the wrong one, the morally weak person exhibits reasoning that is not just the result of an intellectual mistake but also involves the influence of one's passions and desires.

G. What is especially important about Aristotle's account here is the way in which he preserves both the rational component and the irrational factors involved in moral reasoning during cases of moral struggle.

1. One's badly trained or ill-mannered emotions and desires can be identified as the factors that pull one away from the universal premise that one really ought to use in one's deliberation.

2. These factors then place the particular premise that expresses the action being considered under a more favorable universal premise.
3. For example, one will not join "X is a lie" to the premise "One ought not tell lies," but to a premise such as "An effective lie will save me from this scrape."
4. This combination thus yields the conclusion "I ought to say X."

H. Aristotle's solution to this problem has not met with universal approval.
1. One of the more popular approaches to the problem takes the view that some people are simply inclined to evil.
2. These philosophers hold that sources of evil exist in everyone that should be acknowledged.
3. Life is a constant struggle against these sources of disorder.
4. This line of argument fails to account for the responsibility that we all bear for decision making.

I. Augustine, in his *Confessions*, wrestles with this problem.
1. In his youth, Augustine was attracted to the "Manichean" position: that people are battlegrounds between good and evil, spirit and body.
2. He later rejected the Manichean philosophy in favor of a position that was closer to that of Aristotle in the sense that we really do have to own up to the decisions that we have made.
3. We cannot pat ourselves on the back for the good things that we do, then say, "the devil made me do it" for the bad things.

J. For Aristotle, the passions do not necessarily mislead us, but they need to be brought under our careful control.
1. They need to be habituated in matters of virtue so that we do not become slaves to them and to habits of vice.
2. To facilitate this control, Aristotle strongly urges that we develop the habit of deliberation.

K. Aristotle's views on the struggle to do right have long been valued as a contribution to the understanding of free choice in the will, not only in cases of virtue and vice but also in situations of weakness of will.

Essential Reading:

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VII, chapters 1–10.

Supplementary Reading:

Augustine, *Confessions*, esp. Book VII.

Lawrence Kohlberg, *The Philosophy of Moral Development: Moral Stages and the Idea of Justice*. 2 vols. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981, 1984.

Nancy Sherman, *Making a Necessity of Virtue: Aristotle and Kant on Virtue*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997.

Questions to Consider:

1. What can one do to strengthen one's willpower? What role do friends and even associations, such as twelve-step programs, have in helping a person of weak will?
2. What do you think about Aristotle's idea of the practical syllogism? Even if many of our decisions do not involve such explicit formulation of distinct steps, such as the articulation of separate premises, is there still some such process going on? Or is this more something that we only do after the fact, when we are trying to explain our decisions to someone else?

Lecture Nine
Friendship and the Right Life

Scope: Respectful of the fact that friendship for different kinds of people can attract us for quite different reasons, Aristotle distinguishes between friendships of pleasure, friendships of utility, and friendships of excellence. He explores a number of social contexts in which friendly feelings can arise and develop into friendships, from the family to the state, as well as intermediately sized associations. His account of the differing status of various persons involved in such relationships can help us discern the motivations and expectations (appropriate and inappropriate) of diverse kinds of friendship and human association.

Outline

I. Books VIII and IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics* should be read as a unit; they constitute a short treatise on friendship, in four parts (the first two of which will be covered in this lecture):

- **A.** An analysis of the various kinds of friendship.
- **B.** An identification of the specific sort of reciprocity found in each type of friendship.
- **C.** Practical advice on maintaining and dissolving friendships.
- **D.** A philosophical reflection on the nature of friendship.

II. Aristotle distinguishes three kinds of friendship, each of them marked by mutual affection, but the difference between them is based on the different types of love involved.

- **A.** A friendship of pleasure is one based on the fact that certain people simply enjoy one another's company, but what both parties really seek is their own pleasure.
  1. Since the good that is desired on both sides is pleasure and enjoyment, relationships of this sort tend to fade and break off when what had given pleasure ceases to do so.
  2. Friendships of young people often tend to be of this variety, and this sort of relationship can exist among people of vicious character as easily as among more virtuous people.

B. A friendship of utility is grounded on the mutual advantage that the parties serve with respect to one another.

1. The friendliness that marks this sort of relationship is largely based on the usefulness that is served by being nice to one another, as in the workplace.

2. Again, there is little to sustain the relationship when the mutual utility ceases.

3. People in positions of authority do well to discern whether a friendly person stands in one or another of these relations.

C. A friendship of excellence (also called friendship of character) depends on virtuous people wishing well for one another.

1. Despite the fact that such relationships will also usually be pleasant or useful, such factors are incidental, because these people wish well to their friends for their friends' own sake.

2. Such friendship arises from character; therefore, the people involved must be virtuous already or, at least, one of them must already be well developed in virtue and the other, marked by genuine potential for virtue, which the first will aim to draw out.

3. Although the number of friendships of pleasure or of utility might be considerable, the number of friendships of excellence one might have is probably small, because such individuals are rare, and such relationships require considerable time and familiarity.

III. We must take note of the relative equality or inequality between the parties.

A. In a friendship between unequals, some kind of proportion needs to be observed.

1. Friends will try to render service to friends, but what they can render will differ.

2. Different types of relationship will involve different sorts of reciprocity, such as in relationships between a parent and child, spouses, rulers and subjects.

B. Loving is more of the essence of friendship than being loved.

1. The delight that parents take in their children exhibits the truth of this maxim.

2. Virtuous people are more ready to share than vicious people.

3. One may have various genuine expectations of true friends.

C. In certain important ways, parallels exist between friendship and justice.
   1. Civic friendships are crucial for a successful political community.
   2. Using a typology of constitutional forms that is worked out in much greater detail in the *Politics*, Aristotle shows how the different kinds of friendships tend to predominate in different forms of constitutional arrangement.
   3. The more successful types of political regime tend to foster and promote the types of civic friendship needed for that form of political organization.

Essential Reading:

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VIII.

Supplementary Reading:

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books VIII and IX, translated with commentary by Michael Pakaluk. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Paul Schollmeier, *Other Selves: Aristotle on Personal and Political Friendships*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1994.

Questions to Consider:

1. What expectations are reasonable in a friendship of pleasure? In a friendship of utility? In a friendship of character? How should one handle a request that is unreasonable? Need such a request break up a friendship?

2. Do individuals need to be of the same degree of character development to be friends? When and how is it appropriate to work actively for the moral development of one's friend? When would it be inappropriate interference to do so?

Lecture Ten
What Is Friendship?

Scope: In an extremely practical mode, Aristotle offers advice on such topics as the occasions that may require one to break off a friendship and how to do so. In Book IX, he also discusses the nature of self-love and beneficence to others, and he offers a realistic appraisal of the limits to the number of friends one can have. By commenting on the relation of friendship to such virtues as justice and temperance, Aristotle also rounds out the virtue-ethics he has been developing throughout this work. This lecture will provide some comparison between the intrinsically social and political framework of Aristotelian ethics and the moral athleticism more typical of, say, Stoic virtue-ethics or the individualistic perspective of certain modern ethical theories.

Outline

I. A time may come when breaking off a friendship is necessary.

- **A.** The reasons for this necessity include some change in the motivation of the parties and conflicts that may emerge in our obligations.
- **B.** Such questions are always difficult to decide, yet fairness and past affection require that we be willing to face such hard decisions with honor and justice.
- **C.** Mindful of the need to remember special circumstances and to be long-suffering, Aristotle nonetheless urges that one be firm and direct when the time comes.

II. Friendship is based on self-love and on a willingness to look out for the good of others.

- **A.** In a manner a bit reminiscent for us of "Love your neighbor as yourself," Aristotle urges that one must have a certain self-regard to be able to share love and affection with others in the manner typical of friendship. If one's self-love were excessive or deficient, one's readiness to look out for the good of a neighbor will tend to be affected, either by insufficiency or exaggeration.

B. The good will involved in friendship is the result of a feeling of poverty and plenty, that is, a sense that one has something to share and that one stands in a position to receive something from the other.

C. Much of the pleasantness in friendship consists in holding a shared viewpoint on many topics. One can see this even in friendships of utility, as well as in the friendships of excellence that are so crucial to political association.

III. What becomes clear from reflection on experience in this matter is the need to have friends.

A. The ultimate basis of the need for friends is the nature of happiness, which is the goal of human life: this is not just a need to have others who bear us good will, but (for real human fulfillment) we need to be a friend to others.

B. How many? Although no precise number can be discerned in this area, especially with regard to friendships of utility or friendships of pleasure, the limits on our time and energy will probably mean that we can have only a few friendships of excellence, because one must spend time with these people to truly be friends of this type.

C. Examples of various types of friendship in Western literature include Don Quixote and Sancho Panza in Cervantes's famous story of the eccentric knight and his squire, and Saint Augustine, in his *Confessions*, who once enjoyed the camaraderie of a gang of juvenile delinquents, from whom he only reluctantly broke away.

IV. As we near the end of our text, it seems appropriate to begin comparing it to other ethics.

A. The social and political tenor of Aristotle's ethics, especially noticeable in this treatise on friendship, is in keeping with his general claim that human beings are by nature social and political animals. His ethics has an intrinsically communitarian focus that is extremely valuable today.

B. By comparison, say, with another virtue-ethics from antiquity, the moral athleticism of Stoicism, Aristotle's ethics strikes us as attempting to balance dependence and independence rather than to urge complete self-reliance.

1. For the Stoics, the crucial ethical insight is the distinction between what is and what is not within our control. In particular, this means that we should regard our passions and emotions as untrustworthy, and we should make ourselves indifferent to what is outside our control so that we can never be hurt by it.
2. This makes the concept of friendship problematic for a Stoic, because friendship implies placing oneself in a situation that is intrinsically outside one's control by putting one's trust in another.
3. By contrast, Aristotle does not insist on such rugged individualism but stresses the need of friends precisely to help one become and remain virtuous.

C. Aristotle's approach to friendship can also be contrasted with hedonism and utilitarian ethics.

1. There are many forms of utilitarianism, that is, theories of ethics that urge us to maximize pleasure and minimize pain.
2. These theories include that of Epicurean ethics. Because Epicureans stress the cultivation of pleasure to avoid pain, they approach friendship purely from the viewpoint of pleasure.
3. This is not to imply that Epicureanism is focused only on the basest aspects of life, but merely that Epicureans emphasize the human being as a center of pleasure and pain.
4. Although some forms of utilitarianism try to consider how the total amount of pleasure and pain for a whole community are being affected, many forms focus only on the pleasure and pains of the agent and those immediately affected. There is a tendency to stress that good and bad, right and wrong should be assessed only from the individual agent's point of view. One often hears the asserted that no one should ever impose his or her morality on others.
5. By contrast, although not impervious to the reality of pleasure and utility, Aristotle's vision of friendship also contains a strong sense of nobility, the virtue that sometimes requires us to do painful things because they are the right things to do. Justice, for instance, may require that we transcend any possible boundary of pleasure precisely to do that which is equitable, even at the cost of considerable sacrifice.

Essential Reading:

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book IX.

Supplementary Reading:

Gilbert Meilaender, *Friendship*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981.

Suzanne Stern-Gillet. *Aristotle's Philosophy of Friendship*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1995.

Questions to Consider:

1. Presuming that friends will give one another "the benefit of the doubt" and allow for all sorts of things out of friendship, when does it become necessary to break off a friendship? Is a direct confrontation better for breaking off such a relationship, or is it better to use some indirect course, such as neglect or atrophy, until the person ceases to be in contact?
2. Does the value of friendship consist more in what one receives from one's friend or in the effect on oneself that is experienced in self-giving? How can one rejuvenate long-term relationships that seem to have lost some of their earlier fascination or generosity?

Lecture Eleven
Pleasure and the Right Life

Scope: Aristotle seems to have recognized that one of the greatest practical challenges to his moral theory would come from pleasure-based ethics. From the moment of his opening gambit about the reasons for taking happiness and not pleasure to be the goal of human life, he repeatedly addresses the role of pleasure in morality. One of the identifying marks of a habit, for instance, is that a person must find doing a certain action pleasant (as well as easy and regular). Pleasure, Aristotle insists, is a condition that is necessary but not sufficient for virtue, because some pleasures are rightly felt and some are wrongly felt. In contrast to the view that all or most pleasures are bad (and in contrast to the popular view that pleasure is precisely what makes anything good), Aristotle argues that moral maturation involves growth in feeling pleasure in some pursuits and increasing sensitivity to the ugliness or inappropriateness of other pursuits.

Outline

I. In Book X, Aristotle again treats the topic of the proper place of pleasure in one's ethics.

- **A.** At the end of Book VII, he had already examined three views on the subject:
  - **1.** The view that pleasure is not a good.
  - **2.** The view that pleasure is not the chief good of human life.
  - **3.** The view that most pleasures are bad and the view that identifies bodily pleasures with pleasure in general.
  - **4.** Because of the obvious connection between this material from the end of Book VII with the material at the beginning of Book X, most scholars regard Books VIII and IX on friendship as a separate treatise by Aristotle that came to be included in the text by a later editor.
- **B.** Aristotle's own position is that happiness, not pleasure, is the basis for ethics, yet he insists that pleasure has an important role to play in human life.
  - **1.** Typically, Aristotle takes a moderate position.

2. Mindful of the various types of pleasure that are associated with various bodily and mental activities, Aristotle argues against those who are suspicious of including any pleasure at all in one's view of the goal of human life.
3. But equally mindful of the ways in which one can become a slave to one's passions, as well as of the huge differences in the kinds of pleasure, he argues (as he did in Book I) that a sound ethical analysis of the topic must take into consideration the proper function typical of humankind, namely, human rationality.
4. Aristotle's view, then, is that those pleasures that assist the development and proper use of our rationality should be regarded as right and good, while those that in some way impair or frustrate our rationality must be regarded as suspect. Recall here the wide scope of Aristotle's sense of rationality: it includes thinking and knowing (in both the abstract and the concrete) but also making choices and deciding on activities—and all this must be considered, not just from our lives as individuals, but from our lives in the community (the *polis*), as well.

C. One of the special roles that pleasure plays in Aristotle's ethics concerns virtue.
1. One of the marks of actually having any habit is that one will find pleasure (as well as ease and regularity) in doing a certain type of action.
2. Hence, having the specific habit that is a virtue (a morally good habit), a person will actually find it a pleasure to do the right thing, to strike the mean between the extremes, rather than go to excess or deficiency.

D. Taking pleasure in the right things can well be a sign of virtue. But merely taking pleasure in something does not mean that it is virtuous. One must independently establish that one is taking pleasure in the right sort of thing.

E. Put another way, many pleasures can be acceptable, even desirable, as long as they are "well-trained." An illustration of this comes from Dante, who frequently put Aristotle's words into the mouth of Virgil, who is Dante's guide through hell. To use just one example from *The Divine Comedy*, lust can and should be

transformed into the right kind of love—love with a sense of commitment—through proper "training."

F. By contrast, some modern writers have envisioned a reverse of the Aristotelian approach to pleasure. For example, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, describes a hedonistic, utilitarian universe, in which everything is set up progressively to maximize certain pleasures and reduce reasoning to a sophisticated instrument for gaining certain types of pleasures. But the ultimate result is the elimination of freedom and the possibility of self-sacrifice for a good higher than oneself. The communal ethos is reduced to increasingly complicated patterns of using reason merely to achieve open hedonism.

G. As a kind of back-handed compliment, Huxley's system of indoctrination actually follows the Aristotelian principle that it takes years of habitual reinforcement to establish the sought-after mindset.

II. Thus, in contrast to the view that all or most pleasures are bad (and in contrast to the popular view that pleasure is precisely what makes anything good), Aristotle argues that moral maturation involves growth in feeling pleasure in some pursuits and increasing sensitivity to the ugliness or inappropriateness of other pursuits.

Essential Reading:

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VII, chapters 11–14, and Book X, chapters 1–5.

Supplementary Reading:

J. C. B. Gosling, *The Greeks on Pleasure*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.

C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1991, 1960.

Questions to Consider:

1. Ordinary language allows us to speak of a wide variety of things as pleasures, including bodily sensations, physical activities, relaxation, mental activity, aesthetic experiences, memories, and so on. Are they all of equal value? How should we rank them?

2. What is your evaluation of Aristotle's thesis that pleasure should not be regarded as the chief good of human life, even though it is a necessary part of a good life?
3. Is it possible to habituate people (especially young people) to take pleasure in what they may not spontaneously appreciate but what is genuinely good for them? How about in the case of criminals? Social misfits? Addicts? Is it valid to claim that some pleasures are simply wrong or inappropriate?

Lecture Twelve
Attaining True Happiness

Scope: In the final portion of Book X, Aristotle returns to the topic with which he began his ethics, the nature of happiness. By way of review and synthesis for our study of the *Ethics* as a whole, we will examine first his claim that happiness consists in a life of virtuous activity rather than in a life dedicated to personal amusement. In this book, we also meet his new claim, that the happiness of the contemplative life is superior to the kind of happiness possible in an active life. Here, we must remember that Aristotle envisioned ethics not just in terms of individual morality (as modern thought often tends to do), but primarily within the larger sphere of politics, to which Aristotle devoted a separate treatise.

Outline

I. The view that Aristotle has been setting forth throughout the *Nicomachean Ethics* is that happiness consists in a life of virtue rather than a life dedicated to personal amusement.

A. Mature readers should reflect on this claim in light of their own life experiences; often, a certain age and experience are required to appreciate this claim, because the raw excitement and novelty of sensational pleasure blinds youth.

B. In making his claim, Aristotle presumes that certain material conditions for living are present as necessary minimal conditions: health, enough wealth to live independently and not to have to scratch out one's survival, a good reputation.

1. But he continues to insist that these minimal conditions do not constitute real happiness.

2. Rather, what is needed for happiness is excellence of character, that is, habits of virtue and achievement in the areas that are specific to humanity, including one's powers of mind and choice, as well as one's powers of associating with others both in the relations of personal friendship and in the forms of civic life that make political organization possible.

3. Otherwise, he argues, we will feel frustrated in what is most basic to us as human beings.

II. In Book X, Aristotle also advances a new claim, that the happiness of the contemplative life is superior to the kind of happiness possible in an active life.

A. This claim in no way denies that the entire *Nicomachean Ethics* is set in a political context—many of the explicitly political questions alluded to here will receive fuller treatment in his *Politics*; a complete treatment of Aristotle's position must be constantly alert to this political dimension.

B. Without in any way denying that an active public life can be a genuine form of happiness, Aristotle is now turning to what he considers a superior form of human happiness.

1. One aspect of the contemplative life is the activity typical of such a philosopher as Aristotle himself. He clearly had a tremendous appreciation for the fruits that were possible by way of a life of reflection, such as his own.

2. Calling this life "superior" may strike some as arrogant, as if it somehow denigrated those who must or who choose to work publicly.

3. But this is to misunderstand Aristotle's position: it is not arrogance, but a sense of the privilege that is involved in having leisure for study and a sense of the possibilities for using one's mind in this way, perhaps a little like those who are listening to these tapes!

4. Another crucial aspect of this question concerns not the person doing the contemplation but the object being contemplated.

5. In addition to the many aspects of this world that can be contemplated, we can also contemplate the divine. And contemplation of the divine can lead to honor and worship of the supreme being.

6. Aristotle's suggestive remarks in this direction have encouraged many of his followers to see here a hint that the most fulfilling kind of happiness possible will consist of being in union forever with the source of supreme goodness.

7. Although the practical needs of life allow even the most well-motivated to give only a portion of their time to such

endeavors, Aristotle seems here to be praising the delights of a strong dedication to this sort of activity, so far as one can in this life.

III. The legacy of Aristotle in the field of ethics has been vast, and his thought continues to be extremely influential today.

A. Each generation, and every thoughtful person, must face the question of the purpose of life and how to be fulfilled.

1. Sometimes cultural forms of thinking and acting are so strongly embedded that there seems to be little scope for personal decision in these matters.

2. Aristotle suggests that personal control of our lives is indeed possible, in so far as we can and should develop habits of choice. Actions have their consequences and we have to take responsibility for them by cultivating (good) habits of personal choice. Such cultivation will, in itself, provide the happiness that is the ultimate goal of our lives.

3. In our own, much more fluid and culturally diverse society, there are many visions about the goal of life and about successful means of its attainment.

B. Aristotle's ethics remains an extremely viable option and a wealth of insight, both for the professional philosopher and for the average person.

1. In professional philosophy, we have seen yet another revival of Aristotle in recent years, led by such figures as Alasdair MacIntyre and Martha Nussbaum, who have found in Aristotle a model for virtue-ethics as opposed to ethics centered on law and for fresh thinking on current problems.

2. Virtue-ethics is complementary to natural law theory, another form of ethical theory that is currently experiencing a tremendous revival. Natural law theory gives importance to the concept of both an internal and an external dimension of justice. Natural law theory argues that we all possess an internal sense of fairness that is independent of the human-made laws of any given community.

3. For the average person who is well enough educated to consider reading a treatise on ethics and to reflect on questions about the meaning of life and conduct, Aristotle's

commonsense approach provides an extremely valuable model for making sense of life, particularly:

4. In defining virtue as the habit of choosing the mean between extremes of excess and deficiency in matters of action and emotion. In this definition, one finds a pattern for thinking through one's options and for directing one's own moral maturation and that of others.
5. In identifying happiness as the genuine goal of life and in defining it to consist of a life of the virtuous activity that actualizes our basic human potentials. This assertion gives a solid basis for assessing many of the other partial and incomplete, if not actually distorted, claims about the goal of life that are frequently afoot today.
6. In stressing the need for genuine human friendship of various kinds. This claim appreciates the indispensably communal dimension of human life, even while distinguishing the kinds of relationships that we must enter and the kinds of expectations that friendships place on the parties involved.

Essential Reading:

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X, chapters 6–9.

Supplementary Reading:

Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins, eds., *Action and Contemplation: Studies in the Moral and Political Thought of Aristotle*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1999.

Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990.

Questions to Consider:

1. How would you rank the options Aristotle is considering as candidates for the happiest form of life, namely, the contemplative life? The active public life? A mixed form of life? A normal, private sort of life?
2. Now that you have considered the whole of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, how do you evaluate this proposal that happiness depends on a life of activity in accord with virtue?

Glossary

Note: Greek words are italicized; references in one entry to another item in the glossary are in bold-faced type.

akrasia: The Greek term for "weakness of will."

apatheia: The Greek term for "indifference."

apparent good: A perceived good; something that appears desirable, whether it truly is so or not.

aristeia: The Greek term for "virtue"; an abstract noun derived from the adjective "good" in the superlative degree (*aristos*).

art: For Aristotle, an intellectual virtue: knowing how to do or make something. Aristotle does not limit the word to the fine arts in the way that the English language might suggest.

automatism habit: A developed disposition to act virtually without thinking.

autonomy: Self-rule (one of the important goals of Kantian ethics).

Bekker number: The numbering system used in citing passages in Aristotle. These numbers are derived from a Greek edition of the text that runs consecutively throughout Aristotle's corpus; they should be cited, along with the book and chapter number, that are the internal divisions in any one of Aristotle's works.

cardinal virtue: The common name (derived from the Latin word *cardo*, meaning "hinge," as in the "hinges" on which the doors of life swing) for the four central moral virtues: prudence, courage, temperance, and justice.

categorical imperative: A philosophically precise version of the Golden Rule championed by Immanuel Kant; namely, let any maxim by which you intend to act be subject to the test of universalization: whatever you would allow yourself, you must allow to others; whatever you would forbid to others, you must forbid to yourself.

choice: The act of deciding to act (in one way or another) or not to act at all.

contemplation: Intellectual activity devoted to meditation on the highest possible objects, especially the divine.

continence: The state of a person who does not have a habit of acting virtuously but who can often manage to do the right thing after (sometimes considerable) inner struggle.

corrective justice: The achievement of what is fair and equitable by balancing the commodities or services exchanged; this form of justice concentrates on exact arithmetical equality of the amounts in question and is blind with respect to the persons involved. See **distributive justice**.

courage: In Greek, *andreia* (literally, "manliness"): the habit of choosing the mean in matters of some danger that tend to elicit fear or boldness; the mean between cowardice and recklessness.

deficiency: Too little; paired with **excess** as the extremes between which one should seek the mean.

deliberation: Reflection possible courses of action in preparation for choice.

deontology: Named from the Greek term *deon* (meaning "necessary"), any ethical theory centered on duty and obligation.

desire: The attraction felt toward a perceived or apparent good.

distributive justice: The achievement of what is fair and equitable by arranging for a proportionate equality in which the exact amounts in the transaction are not equal, but equality is achieved between the ratios of the amounts in relation to a given person. Examples include a pay scale in which individuals are compensated in proportion to the difficulty or danger of their jobs or a graduated-tax system in which individuals are expected to pay in proportion to their abilities. See **corrective justice**.

divine command theory: An ethical theory that finds the source of goodness and moral obligation in the expressed will of God.

end: That for the sake of which something is done (some means is used); any given "end" could be an intermediate end (useful for achieving some yet further end) or an end in itself.

Epicureanism: A school of ethics that takes pleasure (understood in a broad and sophisticated way, not in some merely crass manner) to be the chief goal of life.

equity: The achievement of justice by a judge who corrects the injustice that would occur by a literal application of some legislation in a context unforeseen by the legislator.

essence: What is common to all members of a given species; often named from a thing's basic form or structure.

ethics: Morality; that part of philosophy (and, more specifically, that part of **politics**) dealing with morality, especially with questions of good and bad, right and wrong.

eudaimonia: The Greek term for **happiness**.

excess: Too much; paired with **deficiency** as the extremes between which one should seek the mean.

form: The structural principle of a thing; that which makes it what it is and makes it act in the typical ways that it does.

fortitude: See **courage**.

freedom: For Aristotle, this terms tends to be political rather than psychological, used to designate one's ability to speak or act publicly. For the psychological sense of freedom, see **choice**.

friendliness: The peak of excellence between flattery and surliness.

friendship: A relationship of affection and loyalty; for Aristotle, there are three main types, **friendships of pleasure**, **friendships of utility**, and **friendships of character or excellence**.

friendship of character or excellence: One that depends on virtuous people wishing well for one another.

friendship of pleasure: One based on the fact that certain people simply enjoy one another's company, but what both parties really seek is their own pleasure.

friendship of utility: One grounded on the mutual advantage that the parties serve with respect to one another.

genuine good: What truly perfects a given thing by contributing to its authentic growth and development.

genus: A term of classification; the larger group to which a thing belongs; see **species**.

golden mean: See **mean**.

Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

good: In general, whatever is desirable; see **genuine good** and **apparent good**.

good temper: The virtue that strikes the mean between excessive irritability and a wimpish deficiency of spirit.

habit: The developed disposition to act or to feel in a certain way, such that one does so regularly, with ease, and even with pleasure.

happiness: For Aristotle, this is the goal of human life because it is an end that is self-sufficient and desirable in itself. It consists in a life of virtue, provided that certain material conditions are present as necessary minimal conditions, including health, enough wealth to live independently and not to have to scratch out one's survival, and a good reputation.

hedonism: The ethical theory that champions pleasure as the chief good of life.

humility: Not an Aristotelian term. For many later Christian Aristotelians, the name of a virtue opposed to the vice of **pride**. For a figure like Bernard of Clairvaux, humility consists in "loving reverence for the truth."

incontinence: The state of a person who does not have the habit of vice but who tends to lose the inner struggle to do the right thing.

indifference: For **Stoicism**, a state of being beyond the sway of one's passions. This term should not be confused with being dull or lackadaisical; it is envisioned as a state in which one's reason is capable of clear choices because it is freed from the pressure of one's appetites and emotions.

industriousness: The virtue that strikes the mean between too much and too little ambition.

intellectual virtue: A developed (acquired) disposition of excellence in the use of one's mind. For Aristotle, there are five especially important such

virtues: **wisdom**, **science**, understanding, **art**, and **prudence** (or **practical wisdom**).

intuition of first principles: An intellectual virtue that consists of the habit of grasping the principles from which demonstrations will be able to proceed.

involuntary: Not deliberately chosen; Aristotle notes that we are not responsible for what we do involuntarily, such as when we are forced to do something.

justice: The virtue of giving and receiving what is due or fair (neither too much nor too little); see **distributive justice** and **corrective justice**.

justice of exchange: Fairness in transactions, whether voluntary (by consent) or involuntary (made fair after the fact by an appropriate administration of **corrective justice**).

Kantianism: The school of thought associated with Immanuel Kant; in ethics, a focus on promoting the rational use of one's freedom and maximal autonomy by means of the **categorical imperative** as a way to determine what duties to impose on oneself.

legal justice: What is obligatory because promulgated in a given society by the appropriate authority. See **natural justice**.

liberality: A virtue of dealing with money that strikes the mean between prodigality and meanness.

logic: The art of thinking well; that part of philosophy concerned with the rules for valid reasoning and with the detection of fallacies.

Lyceum: The name of Aristotle's philosophical school; the school prided itself on its empirical method and its interest in collecting data on every possible subject to pursue questions about the nature of all things.

magnificence: A virtue that puts large sums of money to work in public service; the habitual choice of the mean between vulgarity and niggardliness.

mastery habit: A developed disposition that increases one's power of choice and control precisely by the skill and ability one has acquired.

mean: The peak of excellence (not just the average or the mediocre) between extremes of excess and deficiency in a given sphere. When one has a disposition regularly to choose the mean, one is said to have **virtue**.

means: That by which something else gets done; its value consists in its ability to bring about some end or goal.

metaphysics: That part of philosophy concerned with being in general and with the categories of being.

moderation: See **temperance**.

modesty: The virtue that strikes the mean between bashfulness and shamelessness.

moral virtue: A developed (acquired) disposition of excellence at choosing the mean between the extremes with regard to action or emotion.

natural justice: What is fair and equitable, regardless of whether it is codified by the explicit law of any given society. See **legal justice**.

natural law theory: An ethical theory championed by **Stoicism** and by many later Aristotelians (most notably, Thomas Aquinas) that finds the source of good and bad, right and wrong, in reason's reflection on human nature.

nature: The internal principle of a thing's typical activity and program of growth and development.

nous: A Greek term for mind or intellect. See **intuition of first principles**.

passion: A feeling or emotion, that is, an involuntary motion in one's soul that is aroused by an external stimulus or a memory.

pathos: The Greek term for **passion**.

perceived good: Something that strikes a person as desirable, whether really good for that person or not.

phronesis: The Greek term for **prudence** (or **practical wisdom**).

phronimos: The Greek term for an individual with *phronesis* (**prudence** or **practical wisdom**).

physis: The Greek term for **nature**; its verbal root is *phyein*, meaning "to grow, to develop."

pleasure: Good feeling, sometimes of a sensory nature, sometimes of a spiritual sort. Aristotle holds that taking pleasure at the right sort of things is a sign of virtue, but he warns that pleasure itself is neither the goal of life nor a criterion of morality.

polis: The Greek term for a city.

politics: That part of philosophy dealing with the organization of civic life; for Aristotle, **ethics** is part of politics.

practical reasoning: Intellectual activity aimed at doing or making; in ethics, this often involves learning to correlate spontaneous desires with what is genuinely good for us.

practical syllogism: Aristotle's description of the reasoning process by which a person places a specific action being considered under some general moral premise in order to reach a conclusion about the proper action to take.

practical wisdom: See **prudence**.

pride: For Aristotle, a virtue concerned with honor that strikes the mean between exaggerated and insufficient senses of one's own importance. For many later Christian Aristotelians, the name for the vice of exaggerated sense of one's own importance. See **humility**.

prudence: The virtue of knowing how to act, how to secure the ends and goals of human life by deliberating realistically (neither over optimistically nor over pessimistically), and of coming to appropriate decisions in a reasonable period of time (neither too hastily nor too slowly).

rational animal: One of Aristotle's preferred definitions for the human being; members of this species all share (to one degree or another) the ability of reason as a distinguishing mark within the genus "animal."

realism: A school of thought that identifies truth as the conformity of the mind to the way things are.

rectificatory justice: See **corrective justice**.

responsibility: Moral accountability for one's deliberately chosen actions.

right reason: The correct use of reason, as exemplified in persons recognized for their virtue.

science: An intellectual virtue; the habit of knowing what is necessary and eternal and of being able to make cogent cause-and-effect demonstrations in a given field by using the relevant first principles.

second nature: The development of certain traits to the point that they come with such regularity, ease, and pleasure that they seem innate rather than acquired.

sophia: The Greek term for **wisdom**.

species: The sub-group in a genus to which a given individual belongs. The test for determining whether an individual belongs to a species is whether or not it possesses a given trait or property (however well or poorly developed that property may be in the individual).

specific difference: The trait or property that is found (however well or poorly developed) in every member of a given species but totally lacking in individuals not of that species.

speculative intellect: Intellectual activity concerned with the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake.

Stoicism: A school of philosophy that cultivates peace of mind by training a person in moral virtue and in the habit of being indifferent to anything outside of one's one control.

techne: The Greek term for **art**.

teleology: Goal-directedness; for Aristotle, not only do artificial objects have some goal in their very design, but natural objects also have in-built inclinations to seek their given ends.

temperance: The moral virtue of habitually choosing the mean between the extremes of self-indulgence and insensitivity in matters of pleasure and pain.

truth: The conformity of the mind to the way things are.

truthfulness: The **golden mean** between boastfulness and false modesty.

utilitarianism: An ethical theory (associated with such figures as Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill) that champions as the "greatest happiness principle" that one should regard nothing as intrinsically right or wrong but should rather evaluate the usefulness of everything from the perspective of maximizing happiness and minimizing pain.

virtue: A developed (acquired) disposition (or habit) of excellence at something; see **moral virtue** and **intellectual virtue**.

voluntary: What is done in accord with one's nature.

weakness of will: For Aristotle, the state of a person whose reason is not in full control but who tends to be pulled by various appetites and passions.

wisdom: An intellectual virtue, whether speculative or practical in nature. Speculative wisdom is the habit of uniting the intuition of first principles with science (the habit of knowing how to demonstrate the link between effects and their causes). See also **prudence**.

wit: The mean between buffoonery and boorishness.

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