

Aristotle's Ethics

(An Over-Simplification to the Point of Scandal)



OLLI @ GMU
Spring, 2010

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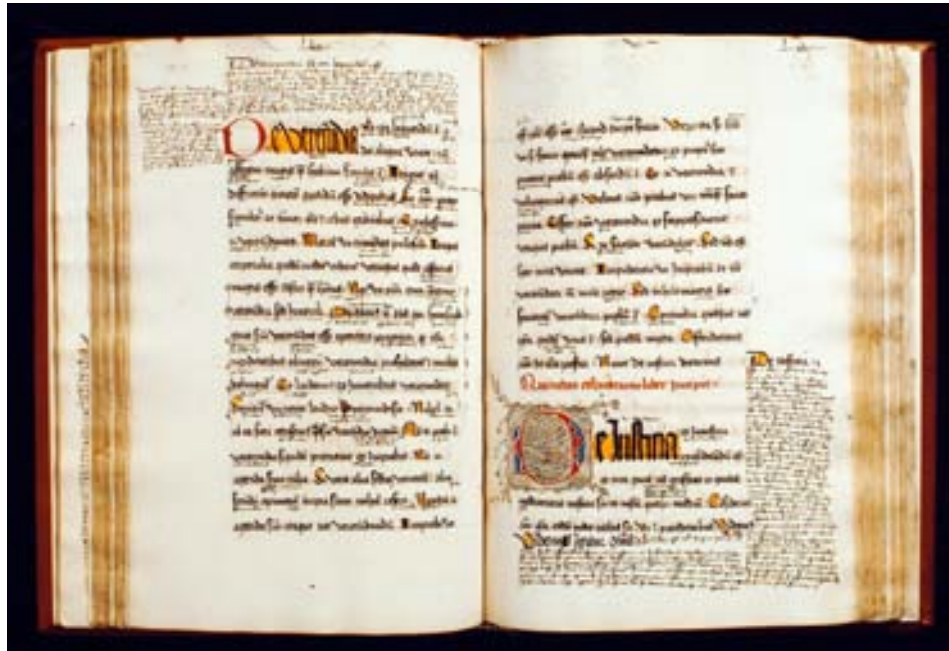


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If not beyond!



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It is the mark of an educated man to look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of the subject admits. (1094b24)

The end of a morally virtuous person's actions is
Kalon.

What is noble.

NOT his or her own good.

Four Causes

- Material – What something is made of, the stuff;
- Efficient – How it is made, what/who makes it;
- Formal – Why it is what it is;
- Final – What is it for, what is its goal, its *telos*.

Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim. (1094a1)

If there is some end of the things we do, which we desire for its own sake, clearly this must be the good. Will not knowledge of it, then, have a great influence on life? Shall we not, like archers who have a mark to aim at, be more likely to hit upon what we should? If so, we must try, in outline at least, to determine what it is. (1094a18)

The *Highest Good* must have three characteristics:

- Desirable for its own sake;
- Not desirable for the sake of some other good;
and
- All other goods are desirable for its sake.

- Highest Good is *eudaimonia*, (happiness, well-being, or flourishing).

What is the highest good in all matters of action? As to the name, there is almost complete agreement; for uneducated and educated alike call it happiness, and make happiness identical with the good life and successful living. They disagree, however, about the meaning of happiness.

(1095a16-22)

- It is not pleasure,

Now the mass of mankind are evidently quite slavish in their tastes, preferring a life suitable to beasts, ...

(1095b19)

...it would be absurd if the end were amusement and if trouble and hardship throughout life would all be for the sake of amusing oneself.

(1176b28)

- Or fame and honor,

...it seems to be more superficial than what we are looking for, since it rests in the man who gives the honor rather than in him who receives it. (1095b24)

■ Rather happiness may be found,

...by ascertaining the specific function of man. In the case of flute players, sculptors, and all craftsmen - indeed all who have some function and activity – “good” and “excellent” reside in their function. Now the same will be true of man, if he has a peculiar function to himself.

(1097b22)

Arete – Excellence

- What is the excellence of a thing – the good of a thing that it aims at – Its defining characteristic.

Psyche

- “life, spirit, consciousness”, derived from the Greek verb “to cool, to blow”.
- Refers to the vital breath, the animating principle in all living things – Aliveness
- Opposed to *soma* meaning “body”.

- A living thing's soul is its activity – the soul of an eye, if it were an independent life form itself, would be sight. How well it sees would be its virtue (excellence, *arete*).
- If a knife had a soul, the act of cutting would be that soul, because “cutting” is the essence of what it is to be a knife.
- A knife's activity would be cutting. A sharp knife would be virtuous knife.

- The soul is not a separate, ghostly occupant of a living thing (just as we cannot separate the activity of cutting from the knife).

Souls

- The soul is the *first actuality* of a living thing, its capacity simply for life itself, and cannot be immortal (when a knife is destroyed, the cutting stops).
- The faculties of the soul, such as nutrition, reproduction, sensation, motion etc., when exercised constitute its *second actuality*, its “fulfillment.”

The ax has an edge for cutting as humans have bodies for human activity.

So:

- Plants are alive – They have a –
Nutritive/Reproductive Soul;
- Animals are alive and can move, see, hear, etc. –
They also have a –
Locomotive/Perceptual soul;
- Humans are alive (?), can think and reason (??)–
They also have a –
Rational Soul.

- Living things want to be the best examples of what they are.

Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim. (1094a1)

- The rational activity of the soul along with other two other parts—its vegetative and animal parts, constitute the essence of a human soul.
- So what is the goal, the *telos*, of a human?

- What is the goal of an acorn?

To be the best oak tree it can.

- What is the excellence/virtue of a knife?

What makes an excellent knife?

Sharpness.

- What is the excellence of a bird?
- A fish?
- So what is the *telos* of a human being?

To be the best human it can be.

- What is that?

- What is the defining characteristic of a human?

Rationality.

- So the *telos* of a human, the excellence of a human then must reside in its defining characteristic, its function –

For just as for a flute-player, a sculptor, or an artist, and, in general, for all things that have a function or activity, the good and the well is thought to reside in the function, so would it seem to be for man, if he has a function. (1097b22)

If ... we state the function of man to be a certain kind of life, and this to be an activity or actions of the soul implying a rational principle, and the function of a good man to be the good and noble performance of these, and if any action is well performed when it is performed in accordance with the appropriate excellence ... human good turns out to be activity of the soul in accordance with virtue, and if there are more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most complete. (1098a13)

Activity of the soul in accord with virtue.

- To use our rational ability in the best possible way.
- How do we know what that is?
- How do we do that?
- What are the virtues/excellences of a human being?

- There are two kinds of human excellence.

Moral and Intellectual Virtues (Excellences)

Virtue, then, being of two kinds, intellectual and moral, intellectual virtue in the main owes both its birth and its growth to teaching (for which reason it requires experience and time), while moral virtue comes about as a result of habit. (1103a14)

- Moral virtues are characteristics of a human and are “defined” as a:

*... A mean between the extremes of excess and deficiency.
(1106a31)*

- Is that all?

- No.

- How do we know what the mean is?

- Easy,

...a mean between the extremes of excess and deficiency as defined by a person having practical wisdom. (1106b35)

- They are also *relative to us*,

...a mean, relative to us, between the extremes of excess and deficiency as defined by a person having practical wisdom. (1106b35)

- How do we know when we are in the mean?
- Well that is hard, but it may be easier if we try to avoid the extremes.
- The mean gives us something to aim at by avoiding the extremes.
- It is often easier to know what NOT to do and avoid this.

- All human beings are born with the potential to become ethically virtuous and practically wise. To achieve these goals, they must go through two stages:
 1. Develop proper habits during childhood.
 2. Combine ethical virtue with practical wisdom once reason is fully developed.

- So what is Practical Wisdom?

- Hold on a bit.

The moral virtues, then, are produced in us neither by nature nor against nature. Nature, indeed, prepares in us the ground for their reception, but their complete formation is the product of habit. (1103a18)

It is well said, then, that it is by doing just acts that the just man is produced, and by doing temperate acts the temperate man; without doing these no one would have even a prospect of becoming good. But most people do not do these, but take refuge in theory and think they are being philosophers and will become good in this way, behaving somewhat like patients who listen attentively to their doctors, but do none of the things they are ordered to do. (1105b9)

Again, it is possible to fail in many ways (for evil belongs to the class of the unlimited ... and good to that of the limited), while to succeed is possible only in one way (for which reason also one is easy and the other difficult—to miss the mark easy, to hit it difficult); for these reasons also, then, excess and defect are characteristic of vice, and the mean of virtue; For men are good in but one way, but bad in many.

(1106b28)

The vices respectively fall short of or exceed what is right in both passions and actions, while virtue both finds and chooses that which is intermediate. (1107a4)

Any one can get angry — that is easy — or give or spend money; but to do this to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right motive, and in the right way, that is not for every one, nor is it easy. (1109a27)

- Not everything admits of a mean.
- Some things are just bad e.g.; murder, theft, adultery;

In cases of this sort, let us say adultery, rightness and wrongness do not depend on committing it with the right woman at the right time and in the right manner, but the mere fact of committing such action at all is to do wrong.

(1107a15)

Moral Virtues

- There are 11 moral virtues.
- Exactly 11.
- No more and no less.

	Concerned With	Virtues	Vices	How We Deal With
(Lower/natural)	Us – Desires	Courage	Cowardice Recklessness	External threats
		Temperance	Insensitivity* Licentiousness	Internal threats
	Money	Generosity	Stinginess Profligacy	Things we are attracted to
		Magnificence	Shabbiness Vulgarity	
	Honor	Pride	Smallness of soul* Vanity	
		Ambition	Lack of Too much	
	Anger	Good Temper	Unirascibility* Iracibility	Desires denied
	Social – Us	Friendliness	Obsequiousness Surliness	Other people
		Truthfulness	Bragging Irony	
Wittiness		Buffoonery Boorishness		
(Higher/non-natural)	Social – Polis	Justice	Injustice Injustice	The Polis/govern ourselves

Justice

- Justice is a bit different.

Justice	Lawful –	Universal Justice		
	Fair and Equal –	Political Justice	Distributive Justice	
	Rectificatory Justice			
	Economic Justice (?)			
	Conventional Justice			
	Natural Justice			
	Legal Justice			
				Equity – corrective of legal justice

■ Justice is:

1. A distinct state of character;
2. Involving deliberate purpose or choice;
3. Dealing with distributable “goods”;
4. Concerned with two(?) sorts of distribution;
5. Which distributions, when just, are marked by equality.

- Performing a virtuous act justly requires three things:
 1. Must be intentional and voluntary (that this is the virtuous thing to do)
 2. Choosing the just act because it is the right thing to do (not for some ulterior motive), and
 3. The act must proceed from a firm and unchangeable character.

Acquisition of moral virtues:

- We acquire a character-related (moral) virtues by performing actions similar to those of people who have that virtue – 1103a31-b6
- We acquire a character-related (moral) virtues not by performing certain kinds of actions, but by performing them in a certain way (well) – 1103b6-21

- Acting well in a domain involves, initially at least, the avoidance of contrary extremes – 1104a11-27
- There is a kind of momentum in actions; to the extent that someone acts well or poorly in a domain, to that extent he becomes more disposed to act in that way – 1104a27-b3

- When someone regularly performs actions similar to those of people who have a virtue, and, if he actually likes acting in that way, we can be assured that he indeed has that virtue – 1104b3-9.

Our Rational Soul

- Has parts
- A part has reason.
 - Scientific – virtue is Intellectual Wisdom
 - Calculative – virtue is Practical Wisdom
- Another does not have reason but can respond to reason.
 - Desire – virtues are the Moral Virtues
- Another simply does not have reason
 - Nutritive – no virtue, controlled by moral virtues.

Plato	Aristotle	
Parts of the Human Soul	Parts of Human Soul	Parts of Human Virtue
Rational Soul	Part that has reason	Intellectual virtues
Spirited Soul	Part that does not have reason but which can respond to reason	Moral Virtues
Appetitive soul	Part that does not have reason and which cannot listen to or respond to reason	

- The part of the soul with reason is divided into two parts:

1. Scientific:

Whereby we contemplate or observe the things which have invariable causes. **Being**

2. Calculative:

Whereby we contemplate the variable things. It is this part with which we deliberate concerning actions. **Becoming**

Intellectual Virtues

- Five types:
 1. Wisdom (*Sophia*).
 2. Knowledge (*Episteme*).
 3. Art/Craft (*Techne*).
 4. Practical Wisdom/Reason/Judgment (*Phronesis*).
 5. Intellect (*Nous*).

- Those concerned with **Being** – *matters of basic principles which cannot be otherwise.*
- Wisdom (*Sophia*). Insight (*nous*) and knowledge (*episteme*) as regards those sorts of things that are best by nature. (“*knowledge with its head on*”).
- Knowledge (*Episteme*). A state of the thinking part of the soul that makes one actively and reliably disposed to attain truth through devising demonstrative proofs.

- Those concerned with **Becoming** – things that can change – pass into and out of existence.
- *Art (Techne)*. A state of the thinking part of the soul that makes one actively and reliably disposed to producing goods of a certain sort through true reasoning. It concerns variable things, specifically intermediate aims. A house is built not for its own sake, but in order to have a place to live, and so on.

- Practical Wisdom/Reason/Judgment (*Phronesis*).
A state of the thinking part of the soul that makes one actively and reliably disposed to attain truth in action as regards things ultimately good and bad for human beings, through reasoning (deliberation and choice).

- That which helps the others
- Intellect (*Nous*). An active disposition reliable to grasp the first principles of some branch of knowledge

Nous is the capacity we develop with experience, to grasp the sources of knowledge and truth, our important and fundamental assumptions. It is a sort of perception of the universals which can be derived from particular cases, including the aims of practical actions. *Nous* therefore supplies *phronēsis* with its aims, without which *phronēsis* would just be the “natural virtue” (*aretē phusikē*) called cleverness (*deinotēs*).

Another look

1. Theoretical

- *Sophia* - wisdom of the eternal and unchangeable, philosophical wisdom.
- *Episteme* - scientific knowledge, empirical knowledge.
- *Nous* - intuitive understanding.

2. Practical

- *Phronesis* - practical wisdom/prudence.

3. Productive

- *Techne* - craft knowledge, art, skill.

- Pseudo intellectual virtues:
- *Euboulia* - deliberating well, deliberative excellence; thinking properly about the right end.
- *Sunesis* - understanding, sagacity, astuteness, consciousness of why something is as it is. For example, the understanding you have of why a situation is as it is, prior to having *phronesis*.
- *Gnomé* - judgement and consideration; allowing us to make equitable or fair decisions.
- *Deinotes* - cleverness; the ability to carry out actions so as to achieve a goal.

Again, the work of man is achieved only in accordance with practical wisdom as well as with moral virtue; for virtue makes us aim at the right target, and practical wisdom makes us take the right means. (Of the fourth part of the soul-the nutritive-there is no such virtue; for there is nothing which it is in its power to do or not to do.) (1144a7-8)

Unity of Virtues

It is clear, then, from what has been said, that it is not possible to be good in the strict sense without practical wisdom, nor practically wise without moral virtue. But in this way we may also refute the dialectical argument whereby it might be contended that the virtues exist in separation from each other; the same man, it might be said, is not best equipped by nature for all the virtues, so that he will have already acquired one when he has not yet acquired another.

(1144b31-36)

This is possible in respect of the natural virtues, but not in respect of those in respect of which a man is called without qualification good; for with the presence of the one quality, practical wisdom, will be given all the virtues. And it is plain that, even if it were of no practical value, we should have needed it because it is the virtue of the part of us in question; plain too that the choice will not be right without practical wisdom any more than without virtue; for the one determines the end and the other makes us do the things that lead to the end. (1144b36-1145a7)

- Aristotle agrees a person might be good at a particular “natural” virtues, e.g., math, without being good at another, e.g., art.
- But moral virtues are not natural:

The moral virtues, then, are produced in us neither by nature nor against nature. Nature, indeed, prepares in us the ground for their reception, but their complete formation is the product of habit. (1103a18)

- For Aristotle the moral and intellectual virtues go hand in hand.

Wrap Up

- So we know that everything has a *telos*:
- We know that all things aim at some good:

Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good; (1094a1)

- We know that:

If there is some end of the things we do, which we desire for its own sake, clearly this must be the good. Will not knowledge of it, then, have a great influence on life? ... we must try, in outline at least, to determine what it is.

(I.1094a18)

- The *Highest Good* must have three characteristics:

Desirable for its own sake;

Not desirable for the sake of some other good; and

All other 'goods' desirable for its sake

- Highest Good is *eudaimonia*, (happiness, well-being, or flourishing).

What is the highest good in all matters of action? As to the name, there is almost complete agreement; for uneducated and educated alike call it happiness, and make happiness identical with the good life and successful living. They disagree, however, about the meaning of happiness.
(1095a16-22)

■ Happiness may be found:

...by ascertaining the specific function of man. In the case of flute players, sculptors, and all craftsmen - indeed all who have some function and activity – “good” and “excellent” reside in their function. Now the same will be true of man, if he has a peculiar function to himself.

(1097b22)

- So what is the function of a human:

If ... we state the function of man to be a certain kind of life, and this to be an activity or actions of the soul implying a rational principle, and the function of a good man to be the good and noble performance of these, and if any action is well performed when it is performed in accordance with the appropriate excellence ... human good turns out to be activity of the soul in accordance with virtue, and if there are more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most complete. (1098a13)

Activity of the soul in accord with virtue.

- To use our rational ability in the best possible way to achieve human excellence.

- There are two kinds of human excellence:
 1. Moral virtues; and
 2. Intellectual virtues

Virtue, then, being of two kinds, intellectual and moral, intellectual virtue in the main owes both its birth and its growth to teaching (for which reason it requires experience and time), while moral virtue comes about as a result of habit,
(1103a14)

■ Moral virtues (excellences) are:

1. Courage;
2. Temperance;
3. Generosity;
4. Magnificence;
5. Pride;
6. Ambition;
7. Good Temper;
8. Friendliness;
9. Truthfulness;
10. Wittiness; and
11. Justice

- The Moral Virtues are found in a:

A mean, relative to us, between the extremes of excess and deficiency as defined by a person having practical wisdom.
(1106b35)

The vices respectively fall short of or exceed what is right in both passions and actions, while virtue both finds and chooses that which is intermediate. (1107a4)

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(II.1107a15)

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 2. Combine ethical virtue with practical wisdom once reason is fully developed.

The moral virtues, then, are produced in us neither by nature nor against nature. Nature, indeed, prepares in us the ground for their reception, but their complete formation is the product of habit. (1103a18)

- Intellectual virtues (excellences) are:

Those concerned with Being --

1. Wisdom (*Sophia*).
2. Knowledge (*Episteme*).

Those concerned with Becoming--

3. Art (*Techne*).
4. Practical Wisdom/Judgment (*Phronesis*).

That which helps the others--

5. Intellect (*Nous*).

- Practical Wisdom/Reason/Judgment (*Phronesis*)
is:

A state of the thinking part of the soul that makes one actively and reliably disposed to attain truth in action as regards things ultimately good and bad from human beings, precisely through reasoning (deliberation and choice).

- Its full development takes time and is required to achieve moral excellence:

...a mean, relative to us, between the extremes of excess and deficiency as defined by a person having practical wisdom. (1106b35)

Unity of Virtues

It is clear, then, from what has been said, that it is not possible to be good in the strict sense without practical wisdom, nor practically wise without moral virtue. ...for with the presence of the one quality, practical wisdom, will be given all the virtues. ...because it is the virtue of the part of us in question; plain too that the choice will not be right without practical wisdom any more than without virtue; for the one determines the end and the other makes us do the things that lead to the end. (1144b31-36)

OK

- That was easy.

So Now How About









You just can't have too many cat pictures!





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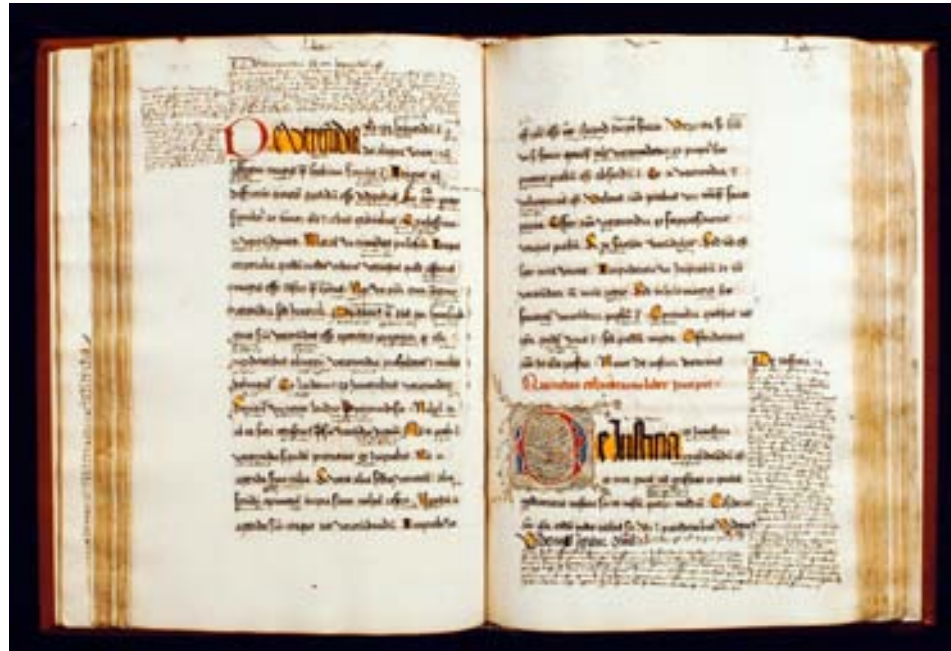
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