

ETHICAL DECISION MAKING



**VIRTUE ETHICS /
ARISTOTLE**

Map of Archaic Greece (750-490BC)



Aristotle, 384-322BC



Who is Aristotle?



- An ancient Greek philosopher, who lived between 384-322 BC.
- Joined Plato's *Ἀκαδημία* (Academia) in Athens in around 366/367 BC. Studied a variety of subjects in various fields in physics, biology, zoology, metaphysics, logic, ethics, aesthetics, poetry, and politics.

Who is Aristotle?



- After Plato's death, he was invited by Philip II of Macedon to tutor Alexander the Great in 340s BC.
- He established his own school, called *Λύκειον* (Lyceum), in 334/335 BC, and wrote many of his works there. Some of his most important surviving works are *Physics*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Politics*, *Metaphysics*, and *Poetics*.

“The School of Athens” by Raphael (1509-1510)



“The School of Athens” by Raphael (1509-1510)



Socratic Tradition on Justice



- Justice should be good for its own sake and for each and every member of society regardless of their power or wealth.
- Just man is wise and good, and unjust man ignorant and bad.
- Injustice produces internal disharmony and prevents effective action.
- Just person lives a happier life than the unjust person.

(Plato, *The Republic*, 347a-354b)

Aristotle's Classification of Sciences



● Theoretical Sciences

○ *Theoria* (contemplation)

- an interest in the things that cannot exist in other forms; understanding and explaining things as they are, or as they are supposed to be
- mathematics & natural sciences □ TRUTH

● Productive Sciences

○ *Poiesis* (to make / to produce)

- an interest into the things that can be different than they look; planning, designing, and creating something new
- arts & architecture □ BEAUTY

● Practical Sciences

○ *Praxis* (to act / action)

- an interest into the things that can be different than they look; understanding how to act through calculation and deliberation
- acting for its own sake / the realm of freedom
- ethics & politics □ VIRTUE / RIGHT / JUSTICE / GOODNESS

Ethics and Politics in Aristotle's Philosophy



- Ethics and politics complete one another.
- Politics -- πολιτικον – the study (or more correctly, the science) of human affairs – concerns human happiness, the question of good life, laws, customs, and institutions of a community (*polis*).
- “...the city-state (*polis*) is a natural growth, and that **man is by nature a political animal...**” (*Politics*, 1253a)

Human as political animal



- Speech – “...man alone of the animals possesses speech” (*Politics*, 1253a).
- Voice is not speech – voice indicates pain and pleasure.
- Speech: “designed to indicate the advantageous and the harmful, and therefore also the right and the wrong...”

Human as political animal



- Political animal (*zoon politikon*) – that which has the perception of good and bad, right and wrong, and other moral qualities.
- Political animal – by nature tends to form partnerships, such as family, household, friendship, neighborhood, and most importantly, city-state (*polis*) as the political association.

Political Animal: The Centrality of Reason



- Human-beings are reasonable creatures
 - *logos*: reason & language
 - *zoon logon echon* / *zoon politikon*
 - the ability to make a distinction between just and unjust, good and evil, right and wrong
- “The man who is isolated—who is unable to share in the benefits of political association, or has no need to share because he is already self-sufficient—is no part of the polis, and must therefore be either a beast or a god” (Aristotle, *Politics*).

Human as political animal



- Political animal – that which is capable of wisdom and virtue, law and justice.
- “For as man is the best of the animals when perfected, so he is the worst of all when sundered from law and justice” (1253a).
- “...when devoid of virtue, man is the most unscrupulous and savage of animals, and the worst in regard to sexual indulgence and gluttony” (1253a).

Aristotle's Method: Teleology



- *Telos*
 - ultimate purpose/aim
 - the essential nature
- What is the ultimate purpose of a person or an activity?
 - the relationship between seed and tree, medicine and health, strategy and victory
- Justice is *teleological*. Defining rights requires us to figure out the *telos* of the social practice in question (Sandel, 2009).

What is Good?



- ”...the Good is That which all things aim”
(*Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk. I, 2).
- All arts and sciences aim at certain ends.
- The science of medicine aims at health.
- The art of shipbuilding aims at building a vessel.
- The art of domestic economy aims at generating wealth.
- The science of politics aims at attaining the knowledge of the (Supreme) Good – the final good.

Good Life?



- Types of Life:
- 1) Life of Enjoyment (pleasure)
- 2) Life of Politics (pursuit of the Good)
- 3) Life of Contemplation (thinking)

- Good life is a life in accordance/in pursuit of virtue.

Happiness as the Ultimate Purpose of Human Life



“[I]f there is one thing that is the end of all actions, this will be the practical good (...) Now we call an object pursued for its own sake more final than pursued because of something else (...) Well, happiness (*eudaimonia*) more than anything else is thought to be just such an end, because we always choose it for itself, and never for any other reason. It is different with honour, pleasure, intelligence and good qualities generally. We choose them partly for themselves; but we choose them also for the sake of happiness, in the belief that they will be instrumental in promoting it” (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1097a-b).

What is Happiness (*eudaimonia*)?



“[t]he conclusion is that the good for man is **the activity of the soul in accordance with virtue**, or if there are more kinds of virtue than one, in accordance with the best and most perfect one. There is a further qualification: in a complete lifetime. One swallow does not make a summer; neither does one day. Similarly, neither can one day, or a brief space of time make a man blessed and happy” (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1097b).

Principle Aristotelian Questions on Ethics



- How to live well/a good life?
- What kind of a person do I want to be?
- What virtues characterize the person I strive to be?

Double Nature of “the Good”: Distinction between Means and Ends



- If you act in accordance with your personal goals or your satisfaction, you do good in **external sense**. That is a kind of good action about your goals, a good deed for the sake of another thing. (i.e. pleasure, happiness, well being of the greatest number) This kind of good is just an **instrument**.
- If you act, on the other hand, in accordance with a question about what a person deserves or what is **fitting** for her, then you will do good in **intrinsic sense**. This action is **good in itself**. It is fitting/proper to the nature of the person/thing we are dealing with. (i.e. honoring and rewarding excellence/perfection, distributing what is fitting for everyone) This kind of good is an **end in itself**.

The Moral Value of Human Activities



- Who should be honored/rewarded?
 - Who deserves the best guitar?
 - Who is going to use the basketball field?
- What brings happiness or goodness to human-beings is the action, which is compatible with reason.
- These reasonable actions should not be only possibilities, but they should be performed.
- These actions should be performed all the time in one's life.

Ethics and Politics: Learning by Doing



- “Moral virtue comes about as a result of habit.” It’s the kind of thing we learn by doing.
- Since we are able to make choices and decisions, it is always possible to form good and bad habits.
- “Politics is about **learning how to live a good life**. The purpose of politics is nothing less than to enable people to develop their distinctive human capacities and virtues—to deliberate about the common good, to acquire practical judgment, to share in self-government, to care for the fate of the community as a whole” (Sandel, 2009).

Doctrine of the Mean



- The only general thing that can be said about moral virtue, Aristotle tells us, is that it consists of a mean between extremes. But he readily concedes that this generality does not get us very far, because discerning the mean in any given situation is not easy. The challenge is to do the right thing “to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right motive, and in the right way.”
- Some actions/feelings admitting no mean
 - malice, envy, shamelessness, adultery, theft, murder

Intellectual and Character Virtues



● Intellectual Virtues

- scientific knowledge
- art
- intuition
- practical wisdom
- philosophical wisdom

● Character Virtues

- generosity
- modesty
- friendship
- courage
- moderation / temperance
- justice

A Superior Virtue: Justice



- Justice encompasses all the virtues; it is the *perfect* virtue.
- Justice is about *common good*; it is concerned with the relationships between people.
 - Therefore, it is a political virtue.
 - Justice as lawfulness
 - good laws form good citizens, and good citizens make good laws
 - Justice as fairness
 - fair distribution of wealth, honors, and rewards
 - Justice as repairment
 - punishment of the unjust treatment

The Problem of Slavery



- Two conditions
 - It should be necessary
 - It must be natural.
- There are also people who found themselves as slaves: prisoners of war
 - They are fit, if they flourish as slave and consent.
 - They are not fit for being a slave, if force is needed to make him/her a slave.
- Consent legitimates all roles; and coercion is a sign of injustice.