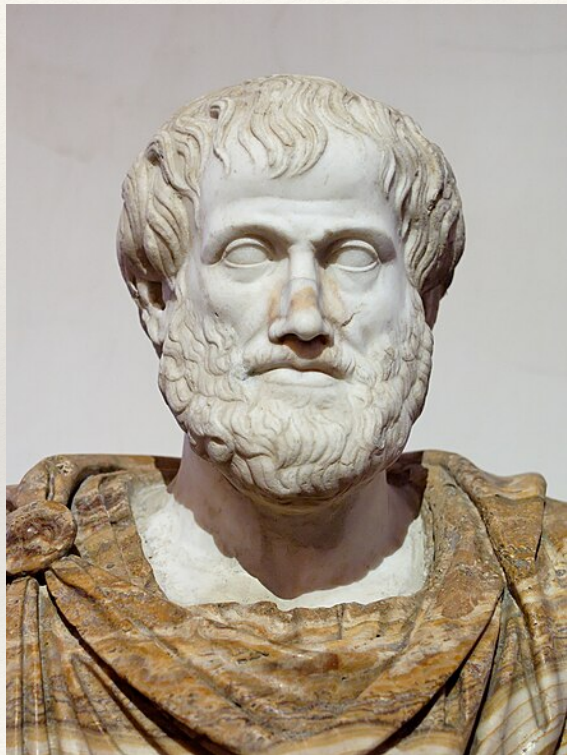

Virtue ethics according to Aristotle

Aristotle



384-322 BC

Philosopher and Polymath

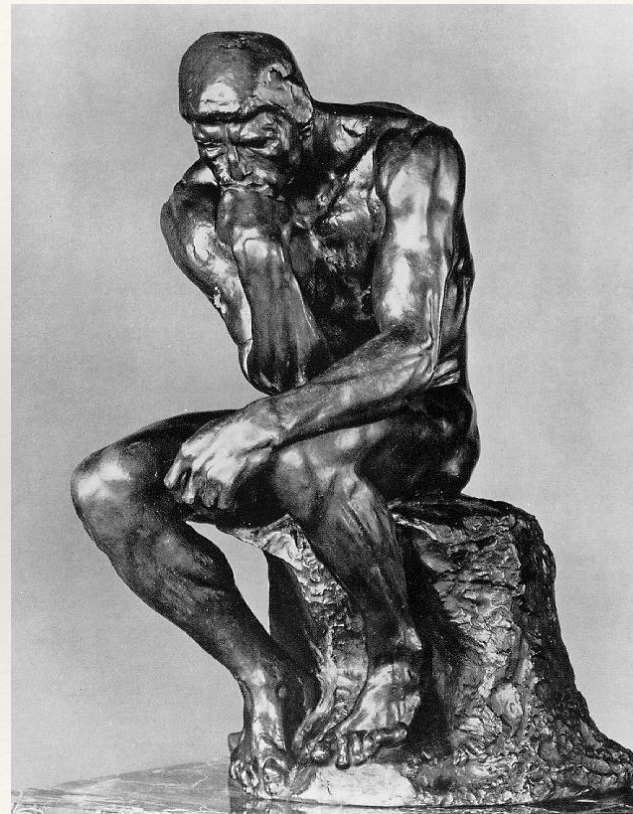
Science (Aristotle)

Science is a body of true beliefs, and knowledge, in order to be actual knowledge, must be part of some science

True beliefs: statements that can be demonstrated to be necessary and universal truths based on observation and reasoning

Science

- For a long time, people thought that it would be enough to reason about the existing knowledge to explore everything there is to know.
- One single person could possess all knowledge in her cultural context. (encyclopedia of Diderot and D'Alembert)
- Reasoning, and mostly passive observation were the main techniques in scientific research



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Human knowledge is divided into three kinds of science:

- ❖ **Productive**

- ❖ *Making something (farming, writing poetry,...)*

- ❖ **Theoretical**

- ❖ *Concerned with truth (mathematics, natural science, theology)*

- ❖ **Practical**

- ❖ *How we are to behave among ourselves (political sciences, ethics)*

Ethics is the science of Eudaimonia

“Arete”: virtue, excellence

❖ Human virtue == Human excellence

“Eudaimonia”: happiness, human flourishing

The Goal of Human Conduct

- ❖ All distinctively human actions (rational, conscious, and voluntary) aim at some goods
- ❖ Some goods are ends, and others are means to an end
- ❖ The highest good is that which we desire for its own sake, and never for the sake of another

Highest good == Eudaimonia

Soul: distinctly human

“The function of man is an activity of soul which follows or implies a rational principle”

*“Reason plays two different roles in our lives, one **practical** and the other **theoretical**. **Practical reason guides our appetites and emotions with correct principles of action,** while **theoretical reason works on its own, seeking truth.** “*

“Human virtue is to attain excellence in both the practical and the theoretical areas of reason’s influence.”

The successful life is the virtuous life

Virtue	Excellence in:	Acquired:	Aiming at:	Requiring:	Examples
Moral (character)	practical sphere	habit	intelligent conduct	<i>phronesis</i>	liberality, temperance
Intellectual	theoretical sphere	learning	discovering truth	experience and time	<i>sophia,</i> <i>phronesis</i>

*Wisdom,
Prudence*



How do we reach virtue?

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**, whence also its name (*ethike*) is one that is formed by a slight variation from the word *ethos* (habit). From this it is also plain that none of the moral virtues arises in us by nature; for nothing that exists by nature can form a habit contrary to its nature.

How do we reach virtue?

Aristotle notes that a person of virtue must also **perform the action in the right way**: she must *know* that it is the virtuous thing to do (it can't be only coincidentally virtuous), she must choose the action for its own sake (and not as a means to some other end, such as glory, honor, pleasure, or wealth), and she must choose and act “from a firm and unchangeable character” (i.e., her virtuous actions must become habitual)

The moral virtue is a mean

A virtue theory of courage

Concerned with	Mean	Excess	Deficiency
fear (<i>phobos</i>)	Courage (<i>andreia</i>): mean in fear and confidence	First Type: Foolhardy or excessive fearlessness; overindulges in fearful activities	Cowardly (<i>deilos</i>): excessive fear; deficient in confidence
confidence (<i>thrasos</i>)		Second Type: Rash (<i>thrasus</i>): excessive confidence	



The moral virtue is a mean

A virtue theory of ambitiousness

Concerned with	Mean	Excess	Deficiency
lesser honor (<i>timē</i>) and dishonor	laudable/proper ambition, industriousness	(Over-)ambitiousness (<i>philotimos</i>)	lack of ambition (<i>aphilotimos</i>)

A virtue theory of generosity

Concerned with	Mean	Excess	Deficiency
giving and getting (smaller amounts of) money	liberality, ^[50] generosity, ^[51] charity (<i>eleutheriotēs</i>)	prodigality, ^[50] wastefulness, ^[51] (<i>asōtia</i>)	meanness, ^[50] stinginess, ^[51] (<i>aneleutheria</i>)

A virtue theory of friendliness

Concerned with	Mean	Excess	Deficiency
general pleasantness in society	friendliness, amiability (something like <i>philia</i>)	First type: obsequious (<i>areskos</i>), if for no purpose	quarrelsome (<i>duseris</i>) and surly (<i>duskolos</i>), churlish, peevish
		Second type: flattering, fawning (<i>kolax</i>), if for own advantage	

WHAT I LACK IN AMBITION
I MAKE UP FOR IN
ABSOLUTELY NOTHING.

/



The 3 moral frameworks

Feature	Aristotle (Virtue Ethics)	John Stuart Mill (Utilitarianism)	Immanuel Kant (Deontology)
What makes an action moral?	It stems from a virtuous character and hits the right "mean" between extremes.	Its consequences maximize overall happiness and minimize pain.	It is done out of pure duty in obedience to universal moral laws.
Direction of the relationship	Virtue → Happiness (Being a good person produces true happiness/flourishing).	Happiness → Virtue (An action is only called "virtuous" if it successfully produces happiness).	Duty → Happiness (Morality and happiness are completely separate; duty must come first).
What is "Happiness"?	Eudaimonia : Lifelong human flourishing, excellence, and living in accordance with reason.	The Pleasure Principle : Pleasure and the structural absence of physical or mental pain.	Inclination/Satisfaction : A unstable mix of desires and worldly well-being, which has no moral worth.
The Role of Intentions	Crucial . You must know what you are doing, choose it for its own sake, and act from a firm character.	Irrelevant to the act's morality . A bad person doing something with malicious intent is still a moral act if it accidentally saves lives.	Absolute . The only unconditionally good thing is a "Good Will." You must act purely <i>for the sake of duty</i> .

The Golden Rule

The Golden Rule is the ethical principle of

treating others the way you want to be treated

Thinker	Fundamental Question	View of Golden Rule
Aristotle	What kind of person should I become?	Useful expression of virtues like justice and friendship, but not the basis of ethics.
Kant	What principles can be rationally universalized?	Helpful guideline, but inadequate because it depends on personal preferences rather than universal reason.
Mill	What actions maximize well-being?	Strongly approves of it as expressing the spirit of impartial concern, but consequences remain the ultimate test.