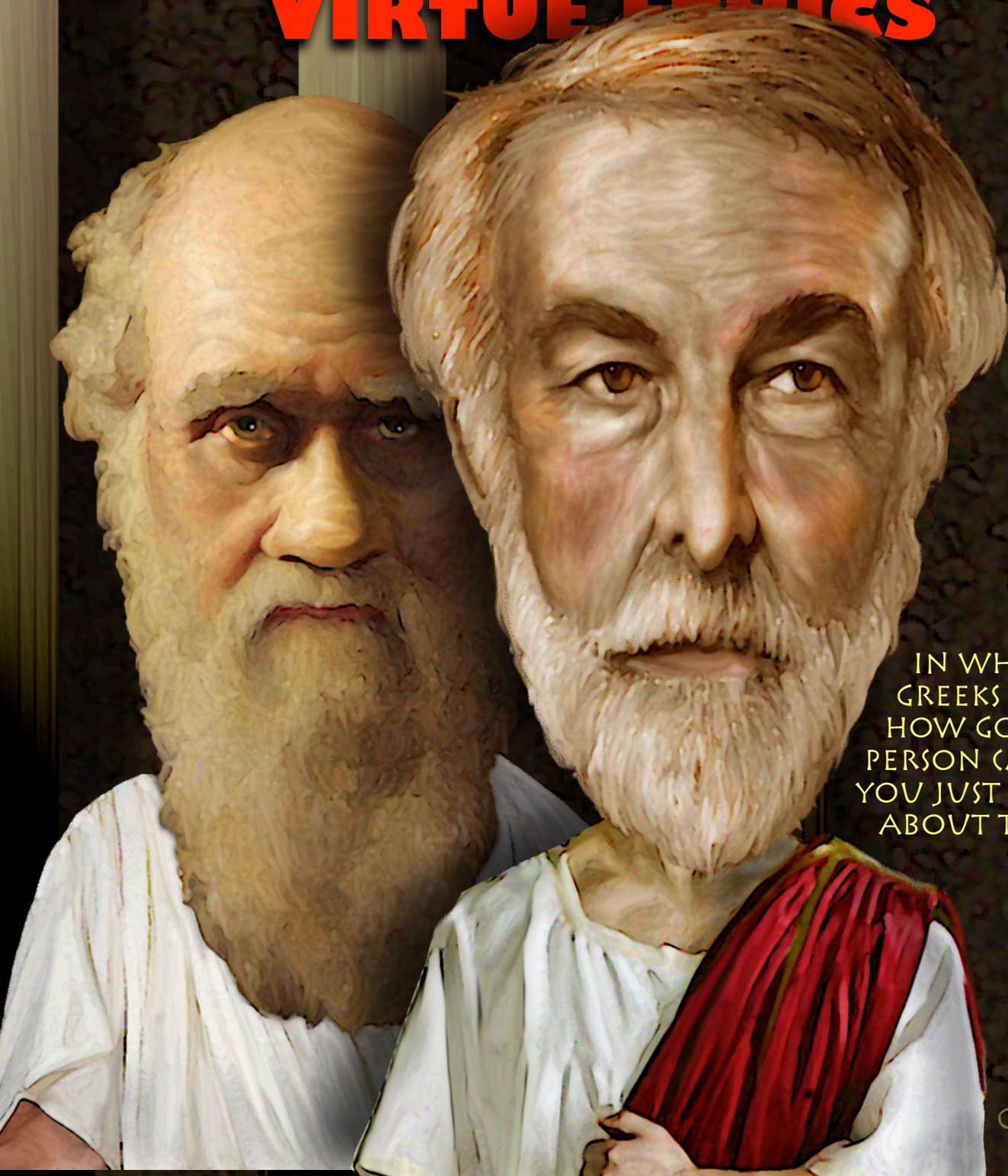


THE STORY OF **ETHICS**

How the media got moral, or not

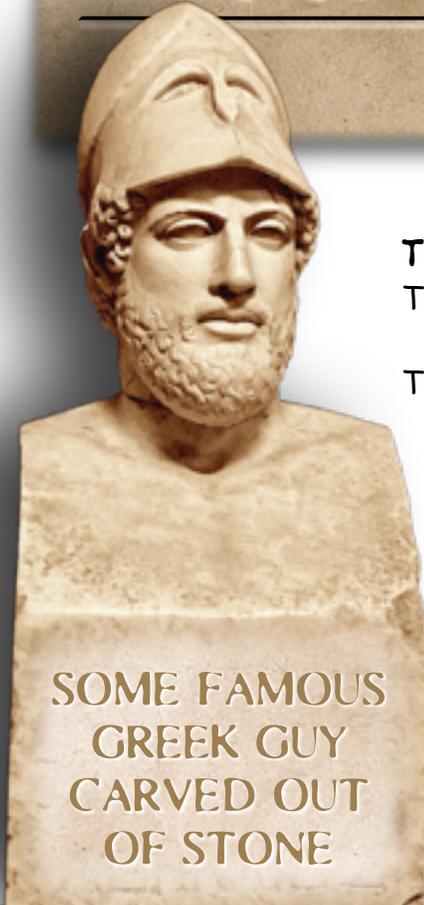
VIRTUE ETHICS



IN WHICH THE
GREEKS SHOW US
HOW GOOD A
PERSON CAN BE, IF
YOU JUST FORGET
ABOUT THE RULES.

THE ETHICS OF CHARACTER

VIRTUE & VICES



THERE ARE TWO, BASIC MORAL QUESTIONS:

The question of action—

- How should I act?

The question of character—

- What kind of person should I be?

The Greek philosophers (especially Plato & Aristotle) chose not to ask: What is the right thing to do?

Instead, they asked: What traits of character make one a good person?

These traits they called

VIRTUES

WHAT IS A VIRTUE?

- A strength of character—a disposition to act in a certain way, consistently
- Involves both feeling and action
- Seeks the mean between excess and deficiency (too much or too little of something) relative to you personally—a mean that is determined by rational principle and practical experience
- Promotes human well being

THE GREEK PHILOSOPHERS BELIEVED THAT IF YOU ACQUIRED THE RIGHT VIRTUES, YOU WOULD THEN ACT IN THE RIGHT WAY.

FOR EXAMPLE: AN HONEST PERSON WOULDN'T LIE.



WHO?
ME?



Concern for character has flourished in the West since the time of Plato, whose early dialogues explored such virtues as:



Plato



Plato's favorite vase

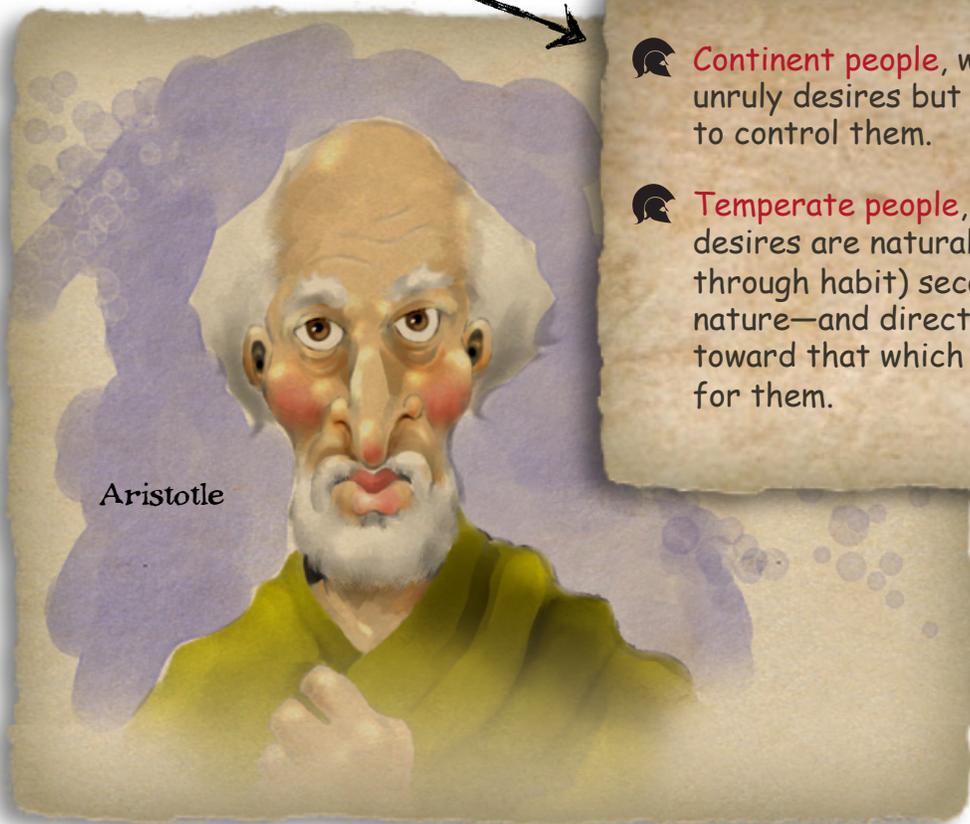


Plato's least favorite vase



Plato's broken vase

ARISTOTLE, PLATO'S STUDENT, DREW AN INTERESTING CONTRAST BETWEEN:



Aristotle

- ☛ **Continent people**, who have unruly desires but manage to control them.
- ☛ **Temperate people**, whose desires are naturally (or through habit) second-nature—and directed toward that which is good for them.

I'm totally in control.



THEREFORE, ARISTOTLE CHOSE TO FOCUS ON THE VIRTUE OF TEMPERANCE... ALTHOUGH THERE WERE OTHERS...

Aristotle divided virtues between **INTELLECTUAL** and **MORAL**.

Intellectual virtues are character traits that you need to make correct, practical decisions. Things like:

- Theoretical wisdom—the ability to understand abstract concepts and principles
- Scientific and empirical wisdom—the ability to see the world as it really is.
- Practical wisdom—the ability to use life experience to make decisions.
- Technical wisdom—the ability to learn crafts and use skills properly.

Moral virtues are character traits that you need to live a good life and consistently do the right thing. For example:

- Prudence—the ability to discipline yourself by the use of reason toward the correct action.
- Justice—the ability to act with fairness and balance when it is called for.
- Courage—the ability to discern and do the right thing in the face of either physical pain/hardship or opposing pressure, social, personal, or otherwise.
- Magnanimity—being generous, especially to those in need.
- Temperance—being moderate in all things. Aristotle considered this the key virtue from which all other moral virtues could be derived.

HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT THE IMPORTANT VIRTUES ARE?

They are the character traits that exemplify the “better nature” of human beings .

VIRTUES: A SHORT LIST

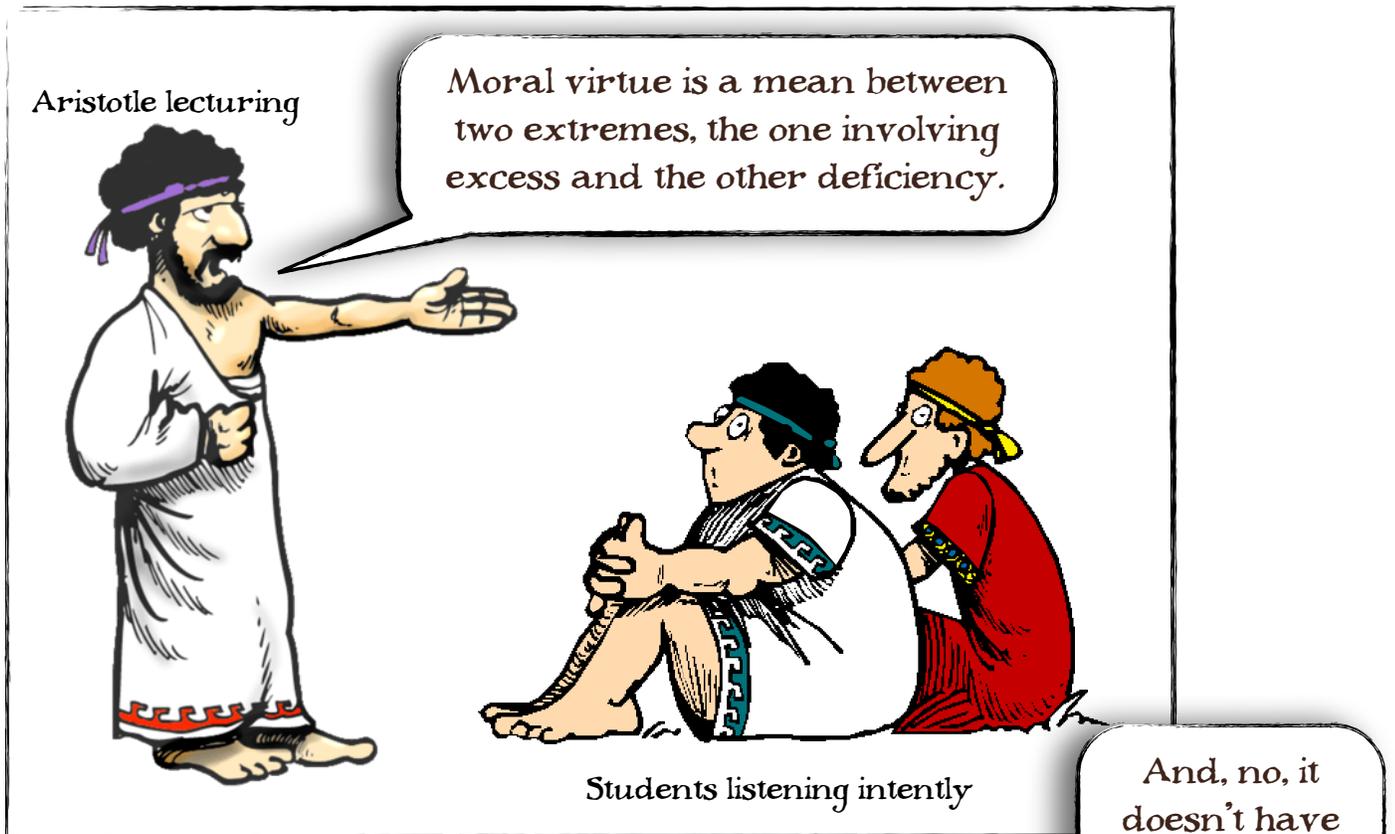
benevolence	justice
civility	loyalty
compassion	moderation
conscientiousness	reasonableness
courage	self-confidence
courteousness	self-control
dependability	self-discipline
fairness	self-reliance
friendliness	tactfulness
generosity	thoughtfulness
honesty	tolerance
industriousness	



Not to be outdone... Aristotle's collection of vases.

FOR ARISTOTLE, VIRTUE WAS SOMETHING THAT IS PRACTICED AND THEREBY LEARNED. IT WAS **HABIT**.

- 🦋 This has clear implications for moral education, for Aristotle obviously believed that you can teach people to be virtuous.
- 🦋 Moral education may initially seek to control unruly desires through rules, the formation of habits, etc.
- 🦋 Ultimately, moral education aims at teaching people to desire what is genuinely good for them.
- 🦋 And, showing them that strength of character (virtue) involves finding the proper balance between two extremes.



THIS CONCEPT WAS CALLED THE...

GOLDEN MEAN



HERE'S HOW IT WORKS...

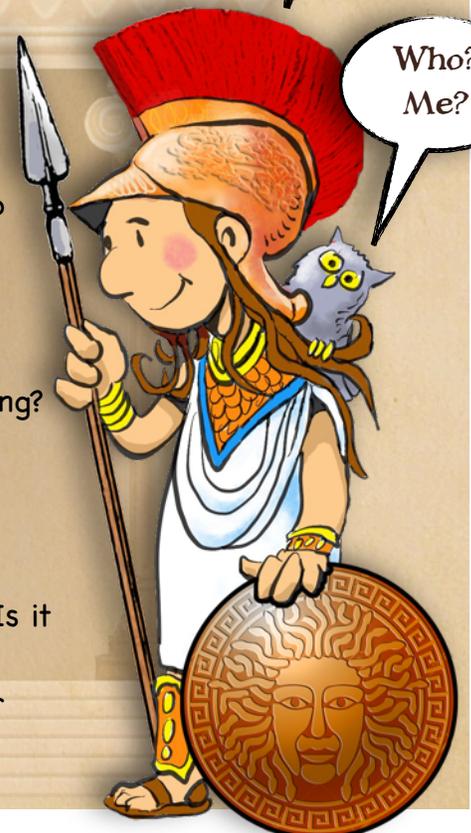


BASED ON LEVEL OF MORAL MATURITY (BOTH LEARNED AND PRACTICAL), AS MORAL AGENT YOU CAN TEST THE APPLICATION OF VARIOUS VIRTUES IN SEVERAL WAYS.

- **Estimation of the situation and the potential obstacles or dangers involved**
 - Define the situation, obstacles or dangers, and to whom they apply.
 - Are they serious? How serious?
 - Will anyone be harmed if you don't act? In what way?
- **Estimation of your ability to handle the situation**
 - Are you the right person for the job?
 - Can or should someone else handle the situation or help you handle it?
- **Evaluation of what is at risk**
 - What is the worst case scenario if you don't do something?
 - Is doing something worth the risk? Why or why not?
- **Evaluation of the worth of the goal**
 - What is the goal you wish to achieve by your actions? Is it worth it? To you? To others involved?
 - If you attain this goal, what will be the benefit to your character? Your practice? Your community?

This will also make you look wise.

Who?
Me?



TAKE COURAGE, FOR EXAMPLE...

You take courage. I'm gettin' outa here!



Courage is the strength of character necessary to continue in the face of our fears. It is the mean between too much fear and too little fear.

- ◀ **Deficiency:** Cowardice, the inability to do what is necessary to have those things in life which we need in order to flourish
 - Too much fear
 - Too little confidence
- ▶ **Excess:** Temerity
 - Too little fear
 - Too much confidence
 - Poor judgment about ends worth achieving

SO... IT MIGHT LOOK LIKE THIS:

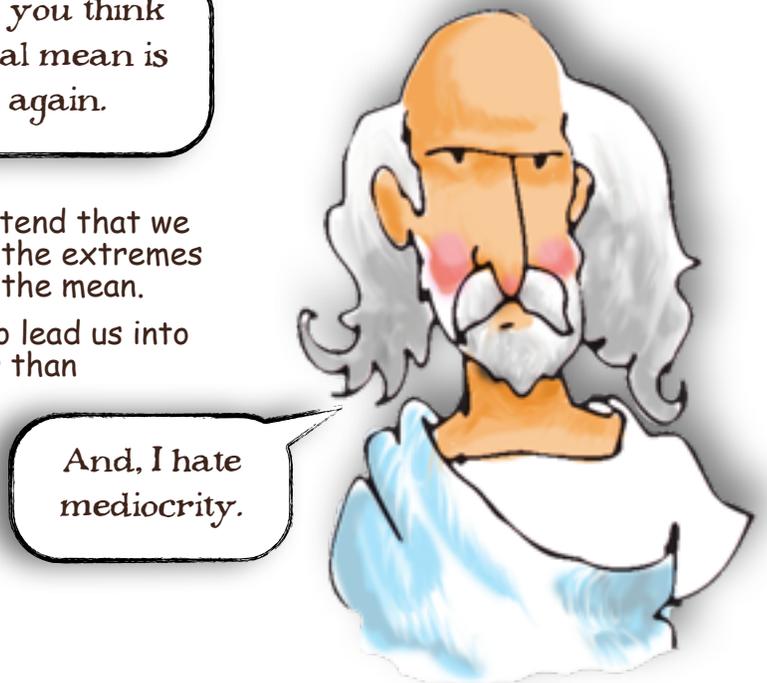
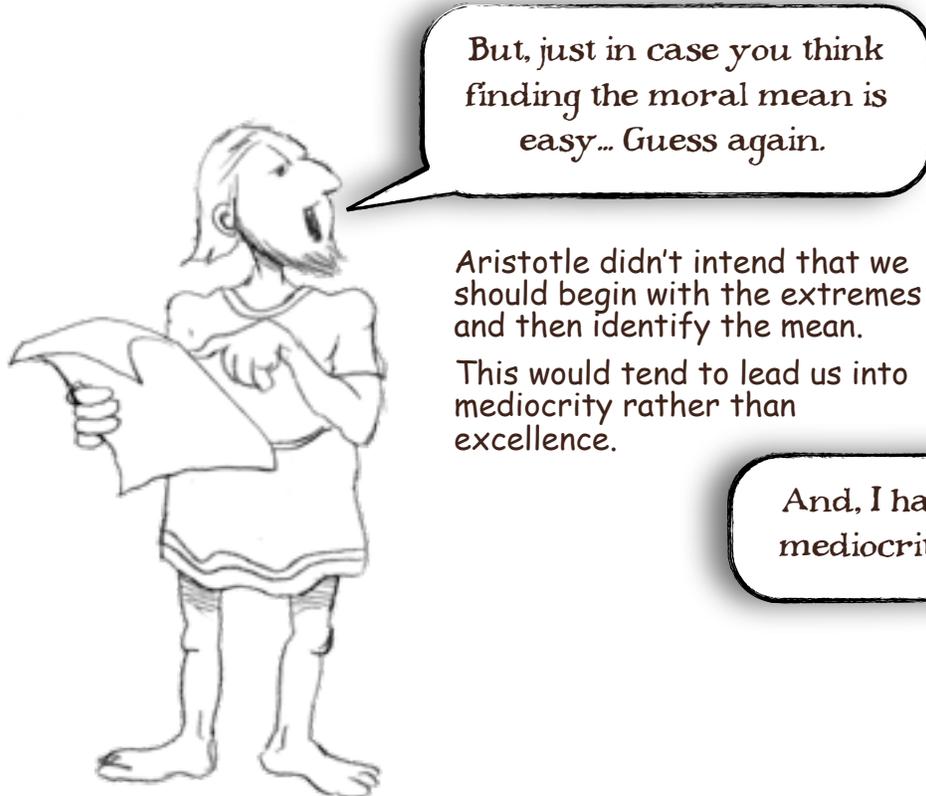
- Estimation of the actual danger involved
- Estimation of your ability to handle a situation
- Evaluation of what is at risk
- Evaluation of the worth of the goal

DEFICIENCY	MEAN	EXCESS
UNDERESTIMATES ACTUAL DANGER	CORRECTLY ESTIMATES ACTUAL DANGER	OVERESTIMATES ACTUAL DANGER
UNDERESTIMATES OWN ABILITY	CORRECTLY ESTIMATES OWN ABILITY	OVERESTIMATES OWN ABILITY
UNDERVALUES, WHAT IS BEING PLACED AT RISK	PROPERLY VALUES WHAT IS BEING PUT AT RISK	OVERVALUES WHAT IS BEING PLACED AT RISK
UNDERVALUES GOAL, WHAT THE RISK WOULD BE TAKEN FOR	PROPERLY VALUES GOAL THAT IS BEING SOUGHT	OVERVALUES GOAL, WHAT THE RISK IS BEING TAKEN FOR

THE VIRTUES HAVE TO WORK TOGETHER

To have any single strength of character in full measure, a person must have the other ones as well.

- Courage without good judgment is blind, risking without knowing what is worth the risk.
- Courage without perseverance is short-lived.
- Courage without a clear sense of your own abilities is foolhardy.



Aristotle believed that a person of moral maturity (one who had learned the habits of good character and subsequently gained the acuity of moral reasoning) would naturally seek the action that would further excellent moral character—an action that would logically lie somewhere between two extremes—one excessive, the other deficient.

I call this state, MORAL MATURITY.



He also held that the process of reasoning that would lead to the moral mean was dependent on the individual and on the circumstance.

- The moral mean would, thus, be different for each person.
- No one, absolute mean would suffice.



“Everybody who understands his business avoids alike excess and deficiency; he seeks and chooses the mean, not the absolute mean, but the mean considered relatively to ourselves.”

Ultimately, the moral mean can only be discovered by the application of both learned theory and personal perception (the practical application of our natural senses to a situation).

I'm pretty sure leaving now would be the best choice.

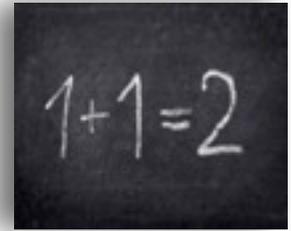


I'll see you on the next page.



ARISTOTLE'S MODEL OF THE GOLDEN MEAN IS NOT A SIMPLE, ARITHMETICAL CALCULATION OF AN AVERAGE ACTION.

- It is the result of acquired character, a moral maturity, and an ability to perceive a situation accurately as it pertains to the individual involved.
- Any person of MORAL MATURITY with an understanding of what is right and what is wrong would view the situation through the lens of his personal experience and naturally choose the moral mean.
- As every situation differs, every moral mean will likewise differ.



THIS DOESN'T MAKE IT SITUATIONAL ETHICS, HOWEVER.

It's still about character. A morally mature character will deal with every decision based on his estimation of the situation.

But, he will act based on his character. So, a courageous person will never be a coward, but will always be judicious about his actions.

ARISTOTLE CITED SOME VIRTUES HE BELIEVED WOULD BE NEEDED BY ALL PEOPLE AT ALL TIMES.



Friends jogging together

Courage: because no one is so safe that danger may not sometimes arise.

Generosity: because there is always property to be managed and always some people who are worse off than others.

Honesty: because no society can exist without communication among its members.

Loyalty: because everyone needs friends.

STRENGTHS IN VIRTUE ETHICS

- The building of a good character is a noble pursuit.
- It covers everyone, equally.
- It's pretty to tell bad from good character in people.
- It gives us a way to criticize people based on consistency of action (which is based on character)

HOW CAN WE USE VIRTUE ETHICS TODAY?

- To answer questions of character.
- To bring consistency to "situational" claims.
- To help describe "ideal" persons for certain positions or occupations by asking what virtues would best suit that job.

THIS IS PROBABLY NOT A GOOD CHARACTER.



I love horses.
Can I drive your chariot?



WHAT ARE SOME VIRTUES, BOTH INTELLECTUAL AND MORAL, THAT YOU WOULD ASSOCIATE WITH:

JOURNALISM

- Truth telling
- Fidelity (keeping promises)
- Justice (fairness)
- Diligence
- Prudence
- Courage
- Respect
- Others?

Which, if any, of these or others were ignored during the recent phone hacking scandal in the U.K.?



ADVERTISING

- Truth telling
- Diligence
- Creativity
- Propriety
- Respect
- others?

What in this ad violates any of these, or other, virtues? Why do you think that is?



PUBLIC RELATIONS

- Honesty
- Diligence
- Respect
- Fairness
- others?

In the infamous Wal-Mart "Flogging" scandal, which of these, or others, were absent?



Would these professions be better served if more **MORAL** virtues were considered part of their expected character? What about generosity, or compassion?

A MODERN INTERPRETATION

- Alasdair MacIntyre despairs that the modern world is one in which ethics has become a victim of **Emotivism** (also known as subjectivism).
 - The doctrine that all moral judgments are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling.
- Emotivists believe that contemporary moral arguments can't be determined rationally.
- The resulting problem is that society has lost its moral language and that moral debate is contentious and rarely leads to consensus.
- Society seems incapable of coming to enough basic agreement in matters of ethics to enable it to deal with the moral chaos that surrounds it.

I despair!



MACINTYRE DECRIES THE “CULT OF INDIVIDUALITY” AS PRESENTING HUMAN BEINGS AS **FREE-WILL ADDICTS** WITH NO RELATIONSHIP TO SOCIETY AS A WHOLE — HE SAYS THAT THIS IS A BIG MISTAKE.

- We are all born into a society and learn to live within its shelter, developing as part of the whole.
- In this way, we are not disconnected entities living wholly for ourselves
- In order for individual virtues to be realized, the organization in which the individual works must develop an environment conducive to the development of good character—
 - much in the way Aristotle suggested that the best form of government was one that would do the same.
- In order to actualize these virtues, the focus of right actions should be the public interest.



The Public

I'm about as virtuous as I can get.

MACINTYRE NOTES THAT ANY AREA IN WHICH PEOPLE STRIVE FOR EXCELLENCE, **SUCH AS MEDIA PROFESSIONS**, IS AN APPROPRIATE PLACE FOR THE EXERCISE OF VIRTUES— THOSE QUALITIES THAT ALLOW PRACTITIONERS TO EXCEL IN THEIR ROLES OF CONTRIBUTING TO SOCIETY.



MACINTYRE ALSO SUGGESTS THAT THREE BASIC VIRTUES ARE COMMON TO MOST ENDEAVORS.

- **Justice**, which demands that we recognize the skills, knowledge, and expertise of other practitioners, and that we learn from those who know more and have greater experience than we do;
- **Courage**, which requires that we take self-endangering risks, push ourselves to the limits of our capacities, and be prepared to challenge existing practice in the interest of extending the practice, despite institutional pressures against such critique;
- **Honesty**, which asks us to be able to accept criticism and to learn from our errors and mistakes.

AN IMPORTANT PART OF A YOUR EVOLUTION TOWARDS
INDEPENDENT PRACTICAL REASONING IS FOR YOU TO
ACQUIRE THE VIRTUES AND MOVE TOWARDS WHAT IS THE
GOOD FOR YOU.

AT THE SAME TIME YOU MUST CONSIDER, AND CARE
ABOUT, THE COMMON GOOD.

WHEN USING MACINTYRE'S VIRTUE ETHICS APPROACH,
TRY THE FOLLOWING EXERCISE:

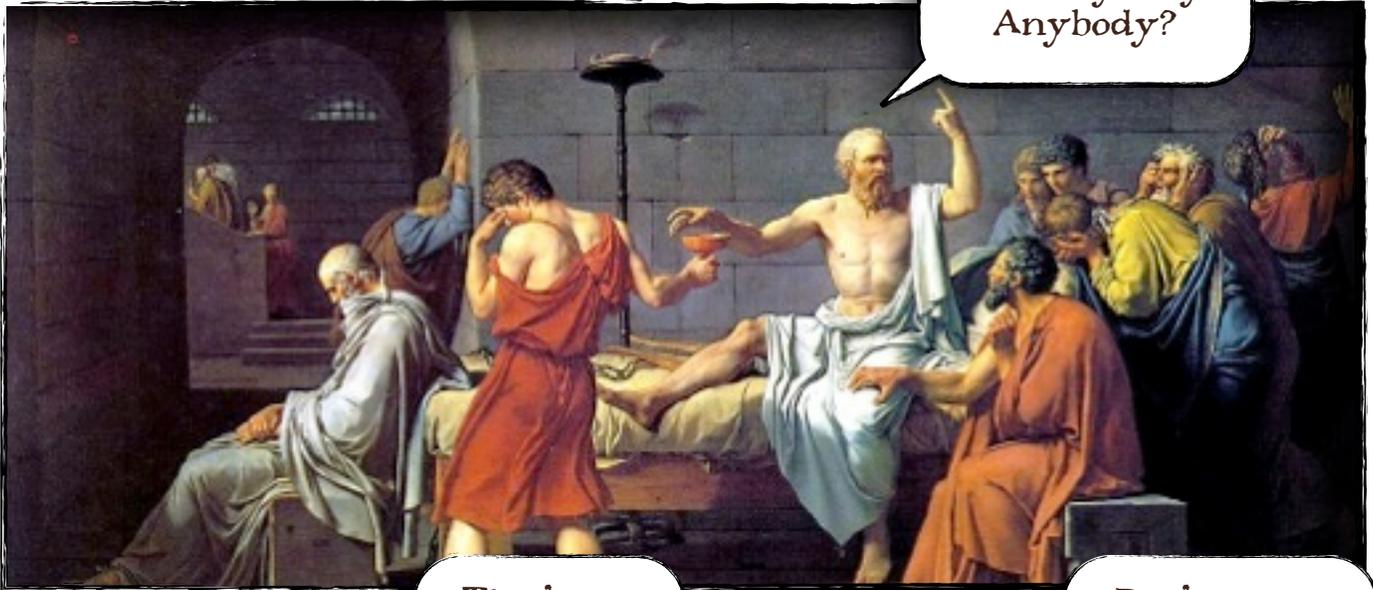
ASK YOURSELF IF YOUR DECISION FURTHERS THE EXCELLENCE OF
YOUR PROFESSION AND CONTRIBUTES TO THE OVERALL GOOD
OF THE SOCIETY IN WHICH YOUR PRACTICE IS A PART.

WHEN USING VIRTUE ETHICS, TRY THE FOLLOWING EXERCISE:

ASK YOURSELF IF YOUR DECISION WILL HARM YOUR INTEGRITY IN ANY WAY, MAKING YOUR CHARACTER SEEM INCONSISTENT OR NEGATIVE. IS THIS THE TYPE OF CHARACTER TRAIT YOU WOULD ADMIRE IN OTHERS?

AND, ALWAYS REMEMBER THE LAST WORDS OF SOCRATES...

I owe someone a chicken. Who is that? Anybody? Anybody?



That's not funny...



Don't worry about it. I've got pizza.





One must keep one's character. Earn a character first if you can, and if you can't, then assume one.

Text

Mark Twain