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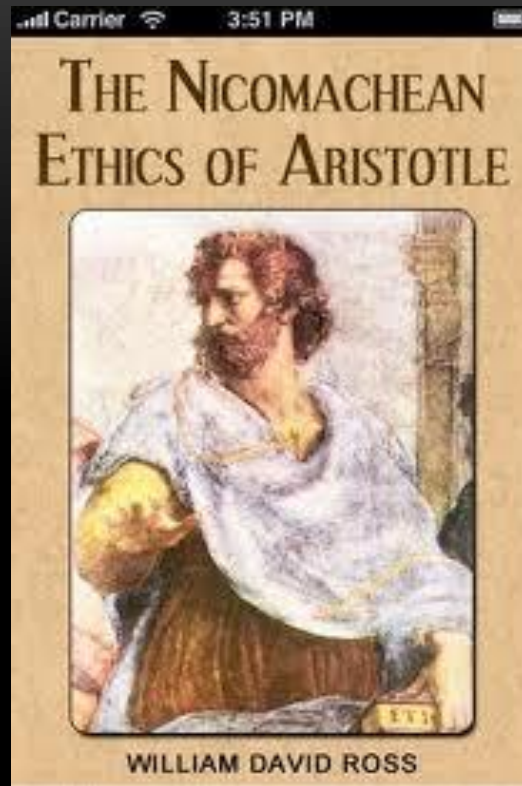
VIRTUE ETHICS-ARISTOTLE

INTRODUCTION

- Ethics as a subject begins with the works of Aristotle, and his treatment of a philosophical question which had been raised by his predecessors Socrates and Plato. In its original form, this subject is concerned with the human aim of having virtue (Greek *aretē*) of character (*ēthos*), or in other words having excellent and well-chosen habits. The acquisition of an excellent character is in turn aimed at living well and *eudaimonia* a Greek word often translated as well-being, happiness or "human flourishing". In other words, ethics is a systematic study of how individuals should best live. This study was originally coupled with the closely related study of politics, including law-making. Politics has an effect on how people are brought up, which therefore addresses the same question of how people should live, but from the standpoint of the community. The original Aristotelian and Socratic answer to the question of how best to live was to live the life of philosophy and contemplation.

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ARISTOTLE



- **Aristotle** (384 BC – 322 BC) was a Greek philosopher and polymath, a student of Plato and teacher of Alexander the Great. His writings cover many subjects, including physics, metaphysics, poetry, theater, music, logic, rhetoric, linguistics, politics, government, ethics, biology, and zoology. Together with Plato and Socrates (Plato's teacher), Aristotle is one of the most important founding figures in Western philosophy. Aristotle's writings were the first to create a comprehensive system of Western philosophy, encompassing morality, aesthetics, logic, science, politics, and metaphysics.

THREE ETHICAL TREATISES

- Christian hamartiology describes sin as an act of offence against God by despising his Person and his commandments, and by injuring others. It is an evil human act, which violates the rational nature of man as well as God's nature and his eternal law. According to the classical definition of St. Augustine of Hippo sin is *a word, deed, or desire in opposition to the eternal law of God*. The doctrine of sin is central to Christianity, since its basic message. Three Aristotelian ethical works survive today which are considered to be either by Aristotle, or from relatively soon after:
- Nicomachean Ethics, the most popular
- Eudemian Ethics
- Magna Moralia
- All three may have been compiled by students of Aristotle, especially the *Magna Moralia*, but they are all considered to be quite similar in the material covered and the method of covering it. Traditionally it was believed that the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Eudemian Ethics* were either edited by or dedicated to Aristotle's son and pupil Nicomachus and his disciple Eudemus, respectively, although the works themselves do not explain the source of their names. Although Aristotle's father was also called Nicomachus, Aristotle's son was the next leader of Aristotle's school, the Lyceum, and in ancient times he was already associated with this work.
- A fourth treatise, Aristotle's *Politics*, is often regarded as the sequel to the Ethics; Aristotle's Ethics states that the good of the individual is subordinate to the good of the city-state, or *polis* is about redemption in Jesus Christ.

ARISTOTLE'S STARTING POINT

- As mentioned above, the Aristotelian Ethics all explicitly aim to begin with approximate but uncontroversial starting points. Aristotle's starting point is that everything humans do is aimed at some good, with some good higher than others. The highest human good that people aim at, he said, is generally referred to as happiness (Gk. *eudaimonia* - sometimes translated as "living well").
- Aristotle asserted that popular accounts about what life would be happy divide into three most common types: a life dedicated to vulgar pleasure; a life dedicated to fame and honor; or a life dedicated to contemplation. To judge these, Aristotle uses his method of trying to define the natural function of a human in action. A human's function must include the ability to use reason or *logos*, because this is an essential attribute of being human. A person that does this is the happiest because he is fulfilling his purpose or nature as found in the rational soul.
- The question of how to be happy therefore becomes a question of which activities of the human soul represent the highest excellence in using reason.
- Aristotle proposed that we could accept it when people say that the soul can be divided into three parts: the Nutritive Soul (plants, animals and humans), the Perceptive Soul (animals and humans) and the Rational Soul (humans only).

MORAL VIRTUE

- Moral virtue, or excellence of character, concerns what we do voluntarily, and not what we do because we are forced to do so. The traditional word for the opposite of virtue is vice.
- Aristotle believed that every ethical virtue or positive character trait can be described as a pleasant intermediate activity, between a painful excess and a painful deficiency. But seeing what is most pleasant and most painful in truth is not something everyone can easily do, especially if they were poorly raised and inexperienced. Another way Aristotle describes each of the moral virtues is as a correct aiming at what is beautiful (*kalos*).
- Aristotle's described how people become virtuous by performing virtuous actions, which they might not have chosen themselves when young. They must develop proper habits during childhood and this usually requires help from teachers, parents, and law-makers. A good community is normally required for the development of good people.
- Virtue in the highest sense, in an adult who has been brought up well, will not just involve good personal habits such as courage and temperance, but also friendship and justice and intellectual virtue.

WHAT IS VIRTUE?

- Virtues are states of character conducive to happiness, i.e. to flourishing ("the state of character which makes a man good and which makes him do his own work well" - §II.6)
- There are two main categories of virtues: **intellectual virtues** concern only what Aristotle calls the rational part of the soul, while **moral virtues** involve both the rational and the appetitive (or desiring) part of the soul: moral virtue involves having the passions under rational control.
- In particular, the virtues involve **having the right amount** of a particular passion, or engaging in a particular kind of action to the right extent. So they have just as much to do with feeling as with doing: feel sympathy and pity where appropriate, e.g.; feel anger when appropriate and not otherwise; and so on
- If virtue involves acting or feeling in a certain way to the right extent, what is the right extent? Aristotle says that it is a **mean between extremes**, but not a mechanically determinable mean: "to feel them at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way" (§II.6, 427)
- The virtues are **acquired through habituation**, not through instruction (end of §II.4: listening attentively won't make you good): through practice, roughly.

JUSTICE

- Aristotle also wrote about his thoughts on the concept of justice in the Nicomachean Ethics. In these chapters, Aristotle defined justice in two parts, general justice and particular justice. General justice is Aristotle's form of universal justice that can only exist in a perfect society. Particular justice is where punishment is given out for a particular crime or act of injustice. This is where Aristotle says an educated judge is needed to apply just decisions regarding any particular case. This is where we get the concept of the scales of justice, the blindfolded judge symbolizing blind justice, balancing the scales, weighing all the evidence and deliberating each particular case individually. Homonymy is an important theme in Aristotle's justice because one form of justice can apply to one, while another would be best suited for a different person/case. Aristotle says that developing good habits can make a good human being and that practicing the use of The Golden Mean when applicable to virtues will allow a human being to live a healthy, happy life.

THE HIGHEST GOOD

- In his ethical works, Aristotle describes several apparently different kinds of virtuous person as necessarily having all the moral virtues, excellences of character.
- Being of "great soul" (magnanimity), the virtue where someone would be truly deserving of the highest praise and have a correct attitude towards the honor this may involve. This is the first such case mentioned in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.
- Being just in the true sense. This is the type of justice or fairness of a good ruler in a good community.
- *Phronesis* or practical wisdom, as shown by good leaders.
- The virtue of being a truly good friend.
- Having the nobility *kalokagathia* of a gentleman.
- Aristotle also says, for example in NE Book VI, that such a complete virtue requires intellectual virtue, not only practical virtue, but also theoretical wisdom. Such a virtuous person, if they can come into being, will choose the most pleasant and happy life of all, which is the philosophical life of contemplation and speculation. In other words, the thinker is not only the 'best' person, but is also most like God.

INFLUENCE ON LATER THINKERS

- Aristotle's work however continued to be taught as a part of secular education. Recent and contemporary moral philosophers influenced by Aristotle include Bernard Williams, Philippa Foot, Martha Nussbaum, John McDowell and Rosalind Hursthouse, and those who fully continue the tradition of Aristotelianism include Alasdair MacIntyre. Bent Flyvbjerg has developed phronetic social science based on Aristotle's ethics.

CONCLUSION

Here we study the ethical principles of Aristotle called as virtue ethics. It is very important conception among western ethical theories. And it influenced many thinkers till modern time.

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