**Aristotle, NE, Books III & VII**

PHIL 230, Fall 2014

**Some virtues and vices, for Aristotle** (Books III & IV)

**Too much Mean Too little**

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| cowardice (excess of fear)  rashness (excess of confidence) | courage | (no name for too little fear)  cowardice (deficiency of confidence) |
| self-indulgence | temperance | insensibility |
| wastefulness | generosity | ungenerosity |
| vanity | pride, magnanimity  (*megalopsuchia*) | undue humility |
| Many different kinds | mildness  (re: anger) | inirascibility |
| boastfulness | truthfulness in claims about self | self-deprecation |

Write down & turn in ([c.hendricks@ubc.ca](mailto:c.hendricks@ubc.ca))

*What other character traits might be virtues, in your opinion? List at least one. Can you describe it/them as means between extremes?*

**Virtue and vice are voluntary, and thus we can be held responsible for them**

Involuntary: (III.1, not assigned)

\* *entirely forced*: “cause is external and the agent contributes nothing”

\* *partly forced*: doing something you wouldn’t otherwise do, due to circumstances (like handing wallet to someone b/c threatened with weapon)

\* *done out of ignorance*: if you’re ignorant of some particular circumstance that would have changed your action

-- e.g., give to charity but money gets embezzled by individual

Voluntary: “what has its principle in the agent himself, knowing the particulars that constitute the action” (III.1, not assigned)

-- actions that we choose, or that are caused by our emotions, desires, etc.

Virtues and vices result from habitual actions (III. 5)

-- doing the same sorts of things repeatedly affects your desires, pleasures and pains, and focuses you more and more on a particular kind of goal as “good”

-- e.g., if you continually act ungenerously, this will start to become a settled habit that affects what brings you pleasure, what you think of as good—leading to an ungenerous character state

If the individual actions leading up to the development of a virtue or vice are voluntary, the state of character that results is voluntary as well

Objection: We can’t control what habits we gained when children, and those affect our desires, pleasures/pains, what we think of as good to do

-- *possible response:* these need not determine all our future actions; we can create new habits and new states of character

Objection: what if some persons are raised or have living conditions or physical/mental states that make it such that they *can’t* see virtuous actions or states of character as good to do/develop?

-- should we say they are responsible for their states of character?

Aristotle: If we don’t hold people responsible for their vicious states of character and the bad actions that result, can we then justify punishing people for the latter?

-- individuals and legislators “punish and take vengeance on those who do wicked acts (unless they have acted under compulsion or as a result of ignorance for which they are not themselves responsible), while they honour those who do noble acts, as though they meant to encourage the latter and deter the former. But no one is encouraged to do the things that are neither in our power nor voluntary” (III.5).

Question: if we don’t hold such people responsible for their actions, when can we decide that we *can* hold people responsible?

**Continence and Incontinence** (VII.7-9)

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| --- | --- |
| **Virtue: temperance**  Use reason to choose the mean re: bodily pleasures; appetites/desires/pleasures & pains are in line w/this | **Vice: self-indulgence**  Choose the excess re: bodily pleasures; appetites/desires/pleasures & pains are in line w/this |
| **Continence**: Use reason to choose the mean, but appetites/desires/pleasures & pains struggle against this; still, overcome these and do what reason says  -- *not bad, but not a virtue* (IV.9, not assigned) | **Incontinence**: Use reason to see what mean is and want to do the mean in one sense, but  appetites/desires/pleasures & pains struggle against this; end up going with appetites over reason  -- *like self-indulgence* in that end up doing similar things (though their reason says not to)  *-- like temperance* *and continence* in that know they should do the mean (though appetites too strong)  -- *not a good state, but not quite a vice* (VII.8) |