

# **Nussbaum: “Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach” (1988)**

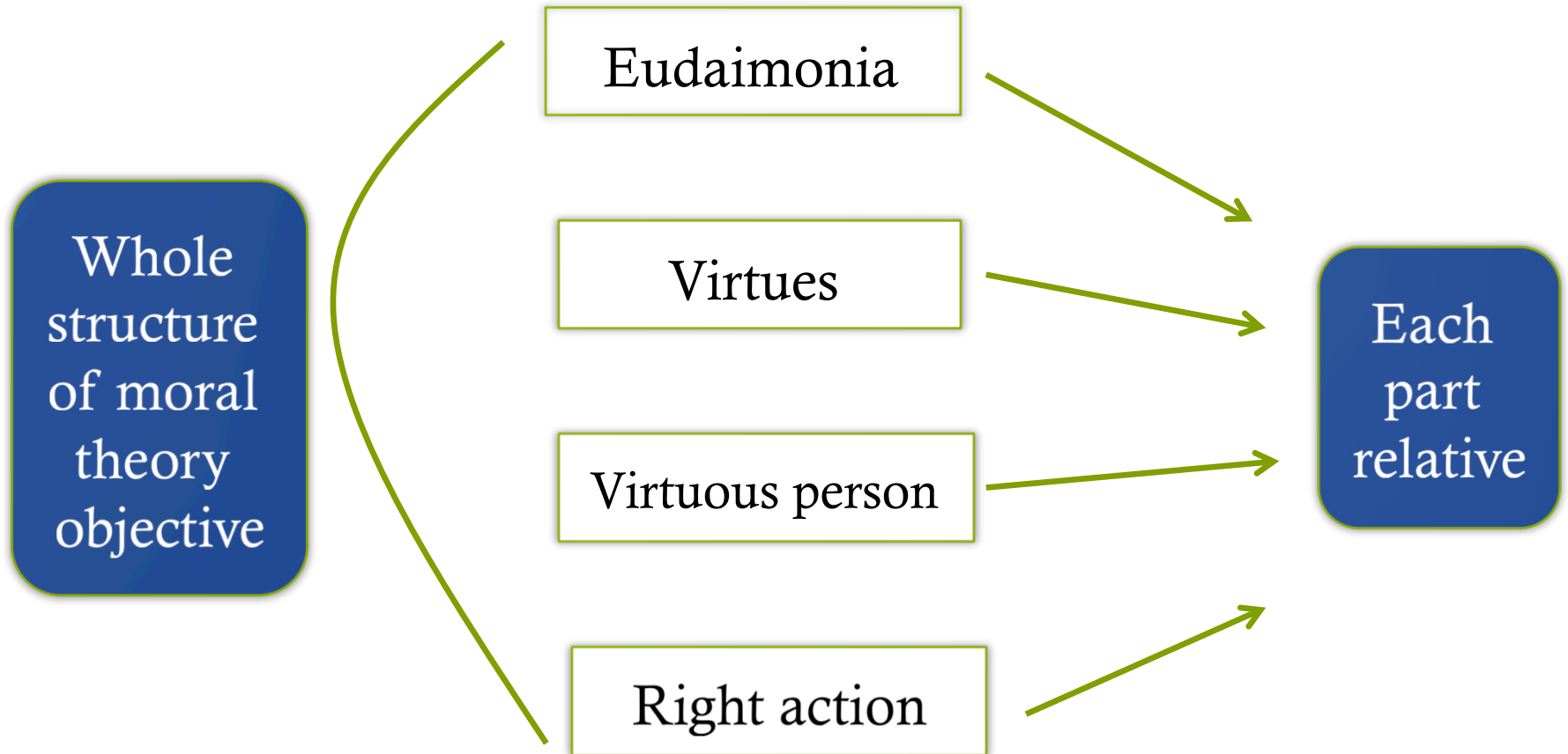
PHIL 230, Fall 2014  
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# Objectivism/Relativism in VE

VE could incorporate both objectivist & relativist aspects

- **Objectivist:** VE could say that what is morally right, objectively, is to act as the virtuous person would
- **Relativist:** But there may not be any universally valid list of virtues
  - b/c no universally valid norms of “flourishing” in a universally valid set of spheres of human life (260-261)

# Possible objectivism/relativism in VE (not Nussbaum's view)



# Aristotle's VE relativist?

**Nussbaum: No** (even though some of his virtues seem restricted to ancient Greek ideals)

- AR talks about the final end of *all* human action (not culture-bound) (I.2, I.7)
- AR talks about the “human function”/the human characteristic activity (I.7)
- AR's virtues focus on “sphere[s] of universal experience” (Nussbaum 262)



# Nussbaum's objectivist VE

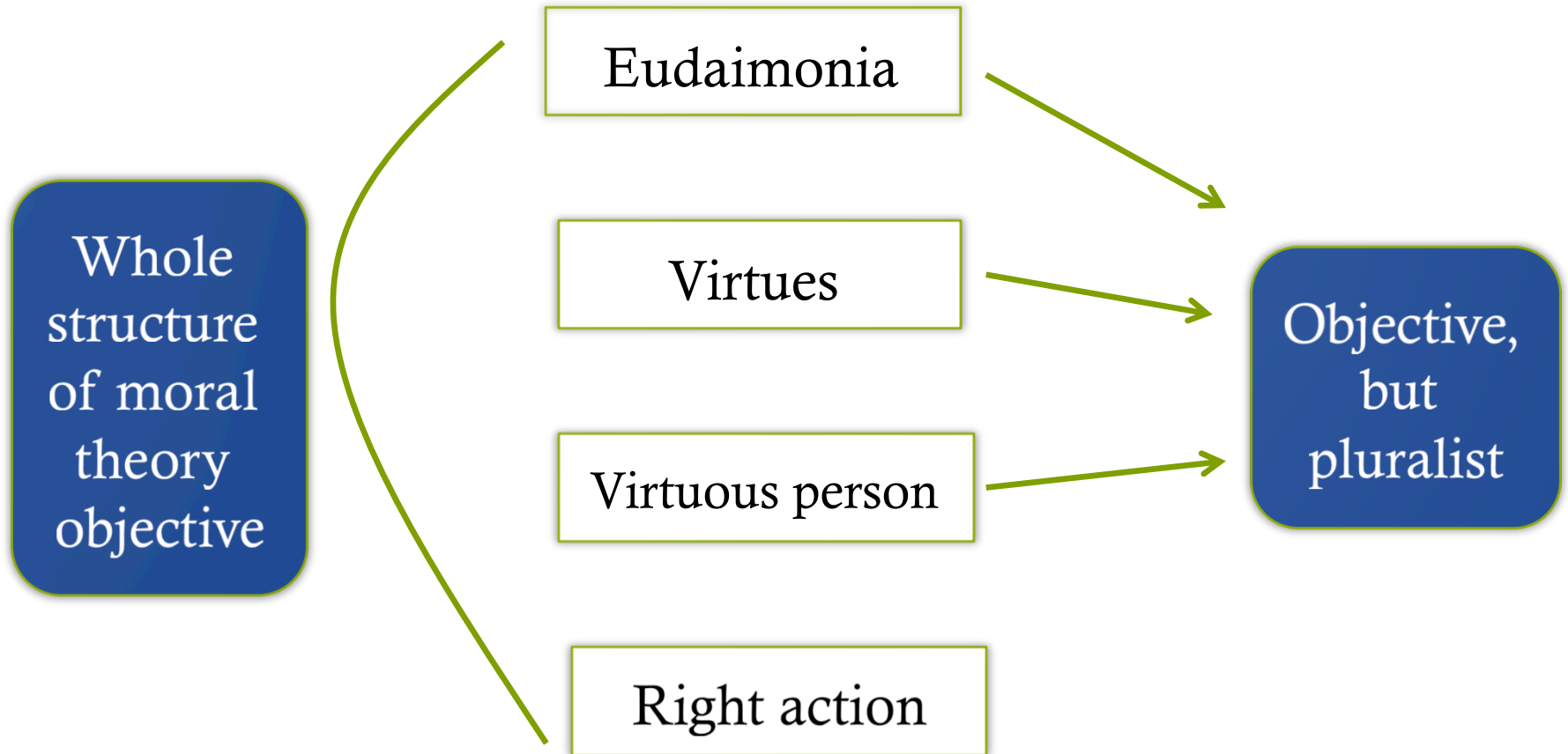
1. Come up with a list of universal spheres of human experience, “in which human choice is both non-optional and somewhat problematic” (263)
2. Give “thin” conception of virtues as acting well in each sphere (262-263)
3. Specify “thick” conception of virtues as what “acting well” means in each sphere, based in part on what leads to flourishing

# List of possible spheres of human experience generally (272-273)

- Mortality
- The body
- Pleasure & pain
- Cognitive Capability
- Practical reason
- Infant development
- Affiliation
- Humour

**What should be added/subtracted from this list, in your view?**

# Nussbaum's view



# Possible objections

First objection: “Thick” conceptions of virtue may be culturally dependent

- Maybe all we can show is “a single discourse or debate about virtue,” not that “this debate will have...a single answer” (265)

Nussbaum’s reply: (269)

- Can be plurality of acceptable definitions of each virtue (still based on objectivist criteria)
- Each definition can be applied differently in diff societies/circumstances, but still objective

# Possible objections

Second objection: Even if we could list universal spheres of human experience, the experiences in each sphere are culturally constructed (266-267)

N's reply: Agreed, but can still:

- Criticize some views of the virtues after reflection & debate on various experiences in these spheres (270-271)
- Could do so on basis of “the totality of our wishes for flourishing life,” different as they may be (271).

# Possible objections

## Questions from the third objection:

- Are all the spheres of human life given by Aristotle (or any other virtue theorist) required for a human life?
- Which are “sufficiently central that their removal would make us into different beings?” (274)
- Anything requiring private property may not be central

# Discuss on wiki one of these...

1. Do you think her list of human areas of experience (see earlier slide) is a good one, or would you add/subtract some things?
2. Can we come up with an objective set of areas of human experience at all?
3. Thinking of the virtue(s) or vice(s) that you came up with for class on Tuesday (or any posted on the wiki for Tuesday's class), can you link them to one of her areas of human experience?