

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Aristotle: Nichomachean Ethics

Aristotle wrote the Ethics for his seventeen year old son, Nichomacheas, thus, the title.

I truth the Greeks called *aletheia*,, literally, "not-covered up, not hidden and not-buried".

The Greeks, in general, but specifically Heraclitus determined human beings to be different from other beings because of **logos**, literally, *speech*; therefore, humans differed from other animals because of the power of *speech*. (This is fifth century B.C., so we can see how far advanced these pagans were from the civilized and so-called Christian 19th and 20th century Anglo-Saxons who simple-mindedly defined humans as “tool making animals” - apes and even “scrub jays” look out!) The Greeks thereby sought to perfect speech through instruction which would arrange statements in a coherent and compelling way - thus, the power and popularity of the so-called **sophists** who taught aspiring lawyers how to win arguments regardless of which side of the case any of them pled, whether for the plaintiff or the defendant in Socrates’ Athens.

This kind of speech was so powerful and pleasant that the person appeared knowledgeable, was called *wise* (**sophia**) and their teachers were reputed to be *wise men* (**sophoi**). The sophists taught these language skills by giving “explanations”, by forming “arguments” and by providing “rational accounts” on any topic so their students also appeared knowledgeable and wise. Possessors of these speech skills were identified as telling the truth; so learning and possessing these speech skills became synonymous with being intellectually virtuous and possessing the truth.

"...men seem to pursue (honor) to ass of their own worth".

This type of instruction became so popular and its effect was so powerful that some sophists claimed that teaching speech was synonymous with teaching virtue. They contended that their speech instruction not only perfected intellectual virtues, but that possessing this knowledge also perfected human nature. (See Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, among other places, *Book 10, Chapter 9, 1181a - 1181b*.) Arguing successfully, therefore, was becoming courageous, just, wise and so forth. To have such knowledge, therefore, not only made someone truthful, but also made them virtuous. The formal training we call “education”, therefore, was synonymous with virtue, so many considered formal education to be productive of virtue. Thus, some of these

sophists also claimed that the very instruction which perfected **logos**, or *speech*, not only perfected *reason*, but made it possessor to be **ethos**, or *ethical*. A person merely had to know in order to possess truth and virtue, so knowledge became synonymous both with intellectual and moral virtue.

Plato discusses this view of instruction within his dialogue,

Meno and discounts it in favor of a person remembering what had been forgotten. This discussion applies the meaning of the Greek word **aletheia**, which we translate as truth, but which literally means, not to forget, not to hide, not to bury and not to cover up. Aristotle, on the other hand, disagrees with the sophists and his teacher, Plato, both as to the differences between intellectual and moral virtues and the manner of acquiring virtues. This disagreement is stated within *Book I, Chapter 6 (1096a 15)* wherein Aristotle says that any human, especially a *philosopher* (**philo**, *lover*, **sophia**, *wisdom*) must give up theories, as dear as they are to us, in favor of the truth.

The 13th Century theologian, thomas Aquinas comments that this is the thought of Plato “...who disapproved an opinion of Socrates, his teacher, saying, that it is better to care for the truth than for some one’s opinion”. Aquinas sums this discussion up with the often misquoted Latin phrase: ***Amicus quidem Socrates, sed magis amica veritas*** - *I am Socrates’ friend, but I am more the truth’s friend*. (In *Decem Libros Ethicorum Aristotelis Ad Nicomachum Expositio*. Marietti, Taurine, Romas, 1949, paragraph 78, p. 21.)

The *Apology* lists the three *goods* which Socrates spoke about to his fellow Athenians when he urged them to prefer the internal goods of the soul to the external goods of the body. He observes that “...the common run of people identify it (*good*) with pleasure...a life of enjoyment” (**hedone**); “cultivated and active men, on the other hand, say wealth and honor are goods” - Aristotle calls these two *useful goods*, adding that honor is a good which “...men seem to pursue...to assure themselves of their own worth” (1095b 25). This observation shows how perceptive the third century B.C. Aristotle was of the human condition. The third *good* is that of the contemplative life of mind within the soul. These three *goods* are developed later and applied to the love of friendship within *Book 8, Chapter 3*.

An Overview of Aristotle’s Nichomachean Ethics

Book I, Chapter 13 identifies the object (perhaps better described as the “subject matter”) of his *Ethics* to be *human virtue* (**arete**). This requires analysis of the human soul, says Aristotle, both its *rational* (**logos**) and *ir-rational* parts - but this analysis excludes the *vegetative part* which has no share in reason -

what we today call the autonomic system, including eating, digestion, breathing, metabolic and so forth. Yet he analyzes that part which is the seat of the appetites and of desire and partakes of reason in so far as it complies with reason and accepts its leadership: this is the appetitive part. (1102B 30) The third century B.C. biologist Aristotle recognized the auto-nomic vegetative and nervous system.

Book 2, Chapter 2 specifies the purpose of Aristotle's *Ethics*' study: the purpose is

ness is an activity of the life-giving with perfect virtue.

not theoretical knowledge, or what ethics is, but practical knowledge, or how to perform ethical actions (1103b 25). Ethical actions, after all, inculcate virtuous habits and, thus, establish a human being's character (*ethos*). Actions, however, are ethical only if we, as human beings, act according to our rational nature, or right reason, also called practical reason (*sophrosyne*) and choose to be virtuous. (Book 6 Chapter 13, 1144b).

Book 1, Chapters 4-12 observe that all actions seek the good and that the human good is happiness (*eudaimonion*, literally, being-well-powered). Aristotle calls this activity of happiness divine. Human happiness, Aristotle comments, is an activity of the life-giving soul in conformity with perfect virtue (1102a 5) and perfect virtue will have two characteristics: first, it will perfect that which is peculiar to a human being, as practical knowledge (*prudence*) rather than intellectual knowledge (*wisdom*); secondly, it will achieve this perfection through a human's right actions rather than through a teacher's or parent's right instruction. So, human virtue occurs when the human being finds the mean, or mid-point through reason and chooses that mean through volition (actively willing it).

If, for instance, an opportunity or need to act courageously arises, the person reasons about the proposed action, seeking to find the mid-point between the extremes of too much action (*foolhardy*) and too little action (*cowardly*) and then chooses to act courageously. So, for Aristotle, humans could be vicious in two ways, either by over-acting or under-acting, but could be virtuous only one way, acting correctly. Therefore, the human character (*ethos*) is achieved through "...right reason concerning actions to be accomplished" and requires continuous application to each new situation, thus, Aristotle called it *sophrosyne*, or as translated into English, frontal wisdom (1107a 5 and 1138b 20).

Books 3 and 4 discuss the various meanings of words involved within human decisions and provide definitions of these words, such as choice, voluntary and involuntary. Then, Aristotle arrives at a description of a responsible human

being within *Book 3, Chapter 5*. The remainders of these two books discuss the various virtues and vices possible to human beings.

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irtuous or vicious actions?

Book 5 discusses **the** basic human virtue, that is, justice (*dike* in Greek). (If one compares this book's discussion with Plato's discussion of the

biological approach to ethics contrasts with Plato's
' approach

same virtue within the first three books of Plato's *Republic*, one can see both how much Aristotle, the student learned from Plato, his teacher and how much more Aristotle contributed to the study of the human being beyond Plato's contribution.) *Justice*, we find, is basically the mean for each human being, thus, the person who is just literally is balanced, both in thinking and acting - compare Heraclitus' celebrated statement: "temperance is the greatest virtue, speaking and acting the truth, giving heed to the nature of things". Aristotle substitutes prudence where Heraclitus says temperance, however, the very foundation of his prudence is justice.

Book 6 returns to the human being as the agent of virtue or vice and discusses the two types of virtue possible to the person, namely, intellectual and moral. This discussion requires that Aristotle reopen the discussion of the kinds and meanings of knowledge possible to human beings. This discussion again addresses that age-old question, what is the relationship between knowledge and action, whether virtuous or vicious? What part does human knowledge play in humans acting virtuously or viciously? Of course, the question hidden within this relationship is: what, if any part does education play in bringing or not bringing people to act virtuously (or viciously)?

We have discussed the relationship of knowledge both to virtuous and vicious actions in the *Apology* of Plato - Socrates states unequivocally that self-knowledge equates with human wisdom, but to seek wealth, honor and reputation is to live a vicious life-style. Indeed, Tolstoy's basic theme within *The Death of Ivan Ilych* is that base one's life-style on the knowledge of what others say, indeed, even what one's peer do is to live a vicious and painful life. Orientally speaking, Confucius sought to teach his peers right action, so formal education became his priority. However, his contemporary, Lao-tzu condemned formal education and taught that right action consists in using few words and trusting in one's "gut" feelings, as provided through living according to nature (who uses few words).

Book 7 discusses moral weakness and strength and, thus, returns to the initial comments of Aristotle about the beginnings of virtue or vice. Here the third

century B.C., pagan Aristotle confronts the contemporary and celebrated debate whether or not the goodness or badness of human beings are the result of so-called *nature* or *nurture*. Aristotle made initial statements about this matter within *Book 1, Chapters 4 (1095b 5-15), 9, (1199b 10) and 13*, as well as *Book 2, Chapter 1 (1103a 15)*. If we read e e cummings' poem *Effie*, and apply it to the *morally weak*, poetry will illuminate philosophy, specifically, Aristotle's *Ethics*:

here is little Effie's head
 whose brains are made of gingerbread
 when the judgment day comes
 God will find six crumbs
 stooping by the coffinlid
 waiting for something to rise
 as the other somethings did -
 you imagine His surprise
 bellowing through the general noise
 where is Effie who was dead?
 - to God in a tiny voice
 I am may the first crumb said
 wereupon its fellow five
 crumbs chuckled as if they were alive
 and number two took up the song,
 might I'm called and did no wrong
 cried the third crumb, I am should
 and this is my little sister could
 with our big brother who is would
 don't punish us for we were good;
 and the last crumb with some shame
 whispered unto God, my name
 is must and with the others I've
 been Effie who isn't alive

just imagine it I say
 God amid a monstrous din
 watch your step and follow me
 stooping by Effie's little, in
 (want a match or can you see?)
 which the six subjective crumbs
 twitch like mutilated thumbs:
 picture His peering biggest whey
 colored face on which a frown
 puzzles, but I know the way -
 (nervously Whose eyes approve
 the blessed while His ears are crammed
 with the strenuous music of the
 innumerable capering damned)
 staring wildly up and down
 and here we are now judgment day
 cross the threshold have no dread
 lift the sheet back in this way.
 Here is little Effie's head
 whose brains are made of gingerbread.

This e e cummings' poem expresses the various ways humans can be vicious by avoiding action, too little, as exemplified by "would" actions, so cummings names the poem "if", as in Effie - if only I had acted! Essentially this is a poem expressing cowardice, but it offers a contrast of a human being who is fearful of commitment to Aristotle's human who acts out of the love of friendship. Aristotle's *Books 8 and 9* merely develop the "guts" of his view of *Ethics*, namely, love as friendship and its variables, as it was announced, among other places, right at the beginning of his work, *Book 1, Chapter 8*:

The life of men active in this sense is also pleasant in itself. For the sensation of pleasure belongs to the soul and each man derives pleasure from what he is said to love: a lover of horses from horses, a lover of the theater from plays, and in the same way, a lover of justice from just acts and a lover of virtue in general

from virtuous acts. In most men, pleasant acts conflict with one another because they are not pleasant by nature but men who love what is noble derive pleasure from what is naturally pleasant. The life of such men has no further need of pleasure as an added attraction, but it contains pleasure within itself. (1099A 7-25)

Book 10 merely recapitulates Aristotle's decision concerning the issues he raised

nowledge makes our actions virtuous
w does it do so?

within the first two books by applying his discussion of the human virtue, that is, friendship, first, of self, then of others to pleasure, human virtues and happiness itself.

...A wise man requires the necessities of life...but the wise man is able to study (*schola*, literally, *leisure*) even by himself, and the wiser he is the more is he able to do it. Perhaps, he could do it better if he had colleagues to work with him, but he still is the most self-sufficient of all. Again, *study* (that is, *leisure*) seems to be the only activity which is loved for its own sake. (1177A 25-35)

The Context of Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*

Independent from scholarly disputes concerning Plato's two worlds, that is, the world of images (and, thus, *opinion*, or *doxa*) and the world of forms (thus, of *knowledge*, or *episteme*), Plato discusses the problem of ethics from the question: what is the good for the human being? Then, Plato considers what men think the good is, beginning with the question of *pleasure* (*hedone*) and the good for humans. We might call Plato's approach a practical one, yet, it is more psychological since it relates to what they think to be the human good than what the human good is. So, in this sense, Plato looks at the problem of ethics from the subjective starting point of what humans *feel*, or *opine* (*doxa*) what is good for them, in contrast to what *they know is good for them*. Plato's discussion about human good, therefore, centers around *pleasure* as a *humans becoming good* rather than as a *being good*.

Aristotle, on the other hand, places the problem of ethical action within a biological context. This means that to be rational to Aristotle means *to be alive, physically, mentally and spiritually*, as a unified organism, a *rational animal*. So, Aristotle's question is essentially: do we choose life for the sake of pleasure or pleasure for the sake of life itself?

The good humans seek, he observes, is *happiness* (*eudymonion*), literally, *eu*, *well* *dymonion*, *acted*, or *pleasant action*, in other words, the natural fulfillment of being human through the kind of action peculiar to a human being. The difficulty, of course, is that being human means to be both rational and animal

(or ir-rational), so the perfection and happiness of being human will be a mixed pleasure, both a material and a spiritual one. Within Aristotle's approach, therefore, pleasure is the necessary effect of a well-acted, or well-lived life, that is, pleasurable happiness "... (and) is intimately connected with the activity when it is complete". (*Nic. Eth.* 1175A 30)

virtue and vice result from nature or n
, formal education?

Aristotle's biological approach places a thorny set of questions before students:

Whether the human being is to guide his/her actions by a principle which transcends his/her embodied condition (that is, the good, according to Plato), and/or a good immanent within his/her embodied condition (that is, the mixed-good, according to Aristotle, call it an "incarnate good")?

Aristotle's problem in ethics, therefore, is a variant of his problem in his knowledge theory, that is: what is the relation of the universal to the particular, the tree as conceived and predicated of a particular pine tree as perceived through the senses? In the same way, what is the relation of the universal, abstract good of leisure to the particular concrete good human seek through particular acts as indicated through this sensible pleasure?

This question raises another serious question about the "place" of intellect and knowledge in ethical acts for the ethical human being, namely, what relationship does a human intention to do good have to do with this particular inclination toward this pleasant and perceived good? The answer to this question raises a more serious question about the relation of human ignorance as to what is good to so-called evil and/or vicious actions perceived as pleasant, such as injecting heroin or smoking crack? The answers to these questions find a diversity of opinion, at least two contrary opinions: first, "formal education is the way to do away with moral evil and the way to inculcate moral good" - a view held by John Dewey and many others, such as Bertrand Russell, the "scientific knowledge" people who say the way to effect moral and physical good and eradicate evil is "scientific knowledge" classes as those now taught in public schools within so-called "sex education" classes. The second opinion is that virtue consists in the "natural state of ignorance" as was espoused by Rousseau and, perhaps by Lao-tzu, as indicated by tone poem # 19:

Banish wisdom, discard knowledge
And the people shall profit a hundred fold;
Banish "humanity", discard 'justice',
And the people shall recover love of their kin;

Banish cunning, discard “utility”,
 And the thieves and brigands shall disappear.
 As these three touch the externals and are inadequate,
 the people have need of what they can depend upon:
 Reveal your simple self,
 Embrace your original nature,
 Check your selfishness,
 Curtail your desires.

of Aristotle's *Ethics* is not good knowledge

Today, we argue the same issues, basically, whether or not nurture or nature determines virtue and/or vice? Of course, these questions and problems are complicated a hundred-fold by the *New Testament* Christian reality and message, as Luke describes within 7:18: “Go and report to John what you have heard and seen: the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise, the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not scandalized in me”. But, if we couple this with the command that we love our neighbor as ourselves, as the Good Samaritan did, then the relation of *New Testament* Christian faith to Aristotle's human love called friendship must be re-thought. What is the relation between these two and what, therefore, is the place of *New Testament* Christian faith and love in relation to human love and knowledge, Aristotle calls ethics?

Aristotle's Ethics

Aristotle sets down his primary ethical premise: every human *art* (*techne*) aims at some good as its end, that is, a *good work* (*ergon*), a *good shoe*, one that fulfills the human purpose of that *art*. In this case, the good is the object produced, that is, the object-good-shoe. So too, every human action and choice aim at some good as the end, that is an *action* (*energeia*) as a *good-made*, literally, *an-act-well-done* (*eupraxis*), a *being-good-agent-action*, that is, an action which fulfills a human's individual abilities and human purpose. In this case, the good is the agent-acting-the-action, that is, the *subject acting is the good*, as actualized, or *bad*, as deprived of due-actualization. So, Aristotle's *Ethics* does not seek good knowledge, or a good virtuous intellect, but rather good actions, or a good, virtuous human being through a good action. The purpose of Aristotle's *Ethics* is not good theory but good practice. Since, however, politics targets the good of men as a social-acting-unit as its purpose, ethics becomes a part of politics, according to Aristotle. Yet, the basic knowledge necessary to be an ethical human is self-knowledge, so the basic

knowledge necessary to be a politician is knowledge of what a human being is. The prerequisite knowledge, therefore, for an politician is self-knowledge.

All humans seek happiness as the highest good attainable by either an individual person, or by a politician for men within a given society. But, good is as variable as is, so, there will be as many goods as there are ways things seek and associate happiness with p:

to exist, or ways to is. Aristotle distinguishes three kinds of to be good: to be useful, to be pleasant and to be a friend. A practical example might be either of the following: goods of a woman: useful as a good typist; pleasant as good to look at; or just is good, as a good person; goods of a man: useful as physically strong; pleasant to look at; just is good, as a good person.

But, the good which humans seek must be attainable by them, that is, self-bestowed and possessed. In addition, common sense induction leads us to characterize the good to be: first, final, as an end in and of itself; secondly, self-sufficient, that is, makes life desirable and deficient in nothing and so independent of whim, chance, fortune, opinion of others, and so forth, even death, as within the context of Socrates. Thirdly, the good of the human being, and thus happiness must reside in his or her proper function being actualized and, therefore, in his or her being virtuous. These requirements force Aristotle to discuss who and how the human being exists or is.

He discusses the human being as a two-part being, that is, as having a rational part which makes and possesses rules (reasons) and a part which is obedient to the reasoning part, yet, as being an animal organism. Aristotle concludes that

life is the foundation for and the soul is the source of happiness and a virtuous life.

the good of the human being is: an activity of the soul in conformity with excellence or virtue, and if there are several virtues, in conformity with the

best and most complete - the number of virtues will depend upon the parts of the human and the capacities of these parts. So, the good of the human being, therefore, will choose happiness as an end in itself and other things, including any virtues for the sake of that happiness (*1102a*). Aristotle, therefore, writes:

Actions which conform to virtue are naturally pleasant and, as a result, such actions are not only pleasant for those who love the noble but also pleasant in themselves. The life of such humans has no further need of pleasure as an added attraction, but it contains pleasure within itself. We may even go so far as to state that the human who does not enjoy performing noble actions is not a good human being at all. (*1099A 12-18*)

An interesting comparison occurs when we apply this description to any student. The student enjoys learning when discovering relationship between and among things offered for study in relation to the student's self and, therefore, loves learning. Lives of such students need no other pleasure, such a peer acclaim, teacher's grades, parental, even Divine approval.

Thus, any educational institution (or

human action or passion admits of a mean, so not all

classroom situation) based upon any other criterion than the student's love of learning is doomed to failure - the problem is that any such system conditions students to such pain that they come to associate formal learning with pain and either endure "learning" or reject it outright. However, the student can overcome any such system and enjoy learning in spite of the institution or classroom - that is, the student's learning is not distracted by his studies, assignments, grading games, or anything else, just as the virtuous person's being virtuous will not be distracted by wealth, reputation, approval, whether peer or Divine.

Aristotle concludes:

For no function of man possesses as much stability as do activities in conformity with virtue: these seem to be even more durable than scientific knowledge (the *episteme* of Plato, his teacher!) and the higher the virtuous activities, the more durable they are because men who are supremely happy spend their lives in these activities most intensely and most continuously. This seems to be the reason why such activities cannot be forgotten. Thus, since happiness is a certain activity in conformity with perfect virtue and this virtue is human virtue, one must determine what human virtue is. So, a study of the soul, or that which animates the human being, that which is the source of human life movements is necessary. (1102a)

Aristotle distinguishes two parts of the human being, an "*ir*"rational part, both vegetative (common to all plant life) and appetitive (common to all other local self-moving animal life). The vegetative part is devoid of reason, however, unlike the view of his teacher, Plato, Aristotle states that the appetitive part partakes in reason in so far as it complies with reason as its leader. So then, the human being has second part or rational part which participates in reason (*logos*) and the seat of the rational part, properly speaking, is the mind (*nous*). Virtue, or human excellence, therefore, will be distinguished into: moral virtues, similar to being generous and having self-control and are seated in the "*ir*"rational part, as well as intellectual virtues, similar to theoretical wisdom (*sophia*) and understanding (*dianoia*) and what Aristotle calls practical wisdom

(*phronesis*) which acts as a “bridge” between the two parts, the rational and the “irrational, a unifying virtue which balances two-part human being into a unified person. (Read Chapter 6 of Aristotle’s *Ethics*.)

ous actions makes us virtuous; doing vicious ac

Aristotle began his *Ethics* with an observational assumption, namely, that all humans seek pleasure and associate happiness with pleasure:

To judge from the lives that human being lead, most men, and men of the most vulgar type, seem (not without some ground) to identify the good, or happiness, with pleasure; and this is the reason why they love the life of enjoyment. (1095b)

Toward the end of the first book, Aristotle makes a shrewd induction, one which Jung might wish he had made:

Now, for most humans their pleasures are in conflict with one another because these are not by nature pleasant, but he lovers of what is virtuous find pleasant the things that are by nature pleasant; and virtuous actions are such, so that these are pleasant for such men as well as in their own nature. Their lives, therefore, have no further need of pleasure as a sort of adventitious charm, but have pleasure in themselves. For, besides what we have said, the human who does not rejoice in virtuous actions is not even good; since no one would call a man just who did not enjoy acting justly, nor any man liberal who did not enjoy liberal actions; and similarly in all other cases. If this is so, virtuous actions must be in themselves pleasant. But they are also good and noble and have each of these attributes...Happiness then is the best, noblest and most pleasant thing in the world...(Chapter 8, 1099a 1-25)

Aristotle raises a question here, one which is the topic of heated debate today, within the context of newspaper stories from the San Francisco Bay area, describing the rape of a nine year old girl by two eleven year old boys - July 21, 1992. This is the same date various articles amassed statements and statistics to show that the non-teen age children now are equal to the teen age children in the crime of rape and that violent crime by non-teen age children has jumped thirty percent (30%) last calendar year, 1991 in California.

For this reason also the question is asked, whether happiness is to be acquired by learning or by habituation or some other sort of training, or comes in virtue of some divine providence or again by chance? (Chapter 9, 1099b 8-10)

Aristotle concludes that “happiness is an activity of soul in accordance with perfect virtue...” so he then turns to the study of the “nature of virtue”. But, Aristotle further defines and narrows this virtue:

But, clearly the virtue we must study is human virtue; for the good we were seeking was human good and the happiness human happiness. By human virtue we mean not that of the body but that of the soul; the happiness also we call an activity of soul. But if this is so, clearly the student of politics must know somehow the facts about the soul...The student of politics, then, must study the soul and must study it with these objects in view...(Chapter 13, 1102a 5-20)

Book 2 begins with a sage observation, one which the Catholic theologian Aquinas emphasized in his discussion of the celebrated three virtue of Faith, Hope and Charity, particularly in his commentaries on Paul’s Epistles:

It is well said, then, that it is by doing just acts that the just man is produced and by doing temperate acts the temperate man; without doing these, no one would have even a prospect of becoming good.

But, most people do not do these, but take refuge in theory and think that are being philosophers and will become good in this way, behaving somewhat like patients who listen attentively to their doctors, but do none of the things they are ordered to do. As the latter will not be made well in body by such a course of treatment, the former will not be made well in soul by such a course of philosophy. (Chapter 4, 1105b 5-15)

Aristotle comments that all human beings have passions and faculties by nature,

acquire happiness through knowledge, nature, by chance or by God?

so these can not be the source of being virtuous or vicious because some intelligent people are virtuous, others

vicious and some passionate people are virtuous whereas others are vicious.

Virtue and vice, therefore, result rather from choice so both virtue and vice are states of character (*ethos*) and result from individual human decisions. (Chapter 5) So, even this pagan, Aristotle, concludes that the health of virtue or the illness of vice each is subject to individual choice. We humans are the source of the quality of our living, of how and whether we live and how and when we die. So, **human virtue** “...is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in the mean, that is, the mean relative to each one of us, as determined by rational principle and by a principle by which the person of practical wisdom would determine it”. (Chapter 6, 1107a 1-5)

Again, his observation of human beings, particularly, himself asserts itself:

But not every action nor every passion admits of a mean; for some have names

g "safe-sex" is not teaching ethical action and "safe-sex" are not acting virtuously.

that already imply badness, for example, spite, shamelessness, envy and in the case of actions, adultery, theft, murder; for all of these and such like things imply by their names that these actions are themselves bad and not the excesses or deficiencies of them. It is not possible, then, ever to be right with regard to them; one must always be wrong. Nor does goodness or badness with regard to such things depend on committing adultery with the right woman, at the right time and in the right way, but simply to do any of these actions is to go wrong. It would be equally absurd, then, to expect that in unjust, cowardly and voluptuous actions there should be a mean, an excess and a deficiency; for at that rate, there would be a **mean** of excess and of deficiency, an excess of excess and a deficiency of deficiency. But, as there is not excess and deficiency of temperance and courage because what is intermediate is in a sense an extreme, so too of the actions we have mentioned there is not **mean** nor any excess and deficiency, but, however they are done they are wrong. (1107A 10-20)

Notwithstanding our current so-called "Christian", or A.D. Era and in spite of our so-called advanced enlightenment as "America", it seems strange that a pagan, such as Aristotle, so clearly states what we seem to avoid, namely, some actions are wrong and can not be right - adultery, theft and murder are wrong and adultery is wrong even if you argue that you did it with "...the right woman, at the right time and in the right way..." Such honest candor is refreshing in a time when one looks in vain for such editorial courage and common sense! Indeed, both Plato and Aristotle stated that suicide violated natural law because they stated that life is a gift, not a choice. Furthermore, if we up-date this fifth century B.C. agreement about life being a gift and to take it away is to violate natural law, try reading the Catholic Christian Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, paragraph 73. Pope John Paul states unequivocally that both abortion and euthanasia are crimes against nature which no human law can render legitimate.

Book 3 begins with a discussion of voluntary and involuntary human actions, since "...virtue is concerned with passions and actions, and on voluntary passions and actions praise and blame are bestowed (and) on those that are involuntary pardon, and sometimes also pity..." (*Chapter 1, 1109b 30*) Aristotle's discussion of voluntary comes farthest of any of the so-called B.C. thinkers to the notion of "free choice", literally, a self-moving human

being, one responsible for one's own actions, independently of nature, nurture, chance or God.

Now the man acts voluntarily; for the principle that moves the instrumental parts of the body in such actions is in him and the things of which the moving principle is in a man himself are in his power to do or not to do. Such actions, therefore, are voluntary, but in the abstract perhaps involuntary, for no one would choose any such act in itself. (1110A 15-20)

So, Aristotle distinguishes human actions from natural actions. Natural actions include feeling pleasure and pain, being angry and frightened, eating, sleeping, being tired and being awake, even knowing and willing. All these are involuntary actions. But, choosing to eat, choosing to eat one thing rather than another, choosing to eat one amount rather than another and choosing to eat now, rather than later are all voluntary actions. All actions which deal with a choice between two or more items, even the choice not to choose are voluntary actions and all voluntary actions are human actions, subject to ethical decision. Yet, Aristotle is more realistic than to pose an either/or, voluntary or involuntary set of opposites:

But, a problem arises in regard to actions that are done through fear of a greater evil or for some noble purpose..A similar problem also arises when a cargo is jettisoned in a storm. Considering the action itself, nobody would voluntarily throw away property; but, when it is a matter of saving one's own life and that of his fellow passengers, any sensible man would do so. Actions of this kind are, then, of a mixed nature, although they come closer to being voluntary than to being involuntary actions. For they are desirable at the moment of the action; and the end for which an action is performed depends on the time at which it is done. Thus, the term voluntary and involuntary are to be used with reference to the moment of action. (1110A 10-15)

Aristotle concludes:

It appears, thus, that an act done under constraint is one in which the initiative source of the motion comes from without and to which the person compelled contributes nothing. (1110B 16)

Yet, Aristotle raises another issue, namely, whether or not a human being acting out of ignorance acts voluntarily or involuntarily? He answers "no" to both and posits a third way of acting, namely, non-voluntarily because "...a man who has acted has acted due to ignorance and feels no compunction whatsoever for what he was doing, nor yet was he involuntary". He further distinguishes an ignorant person's actions into those acts committed due to ignorance and those

committed in ignorance. He adduces the example of an angry, drunken man as one whose actions are not due to ignorance, but rather due to anger and intoxication; so, although the persona acts in ignorance, he is responsible for the ignorance, since he should have chosen not to get drunk, the he could have chosen whether or not and how to be angry. Thus, Aristotle argues that “...every wicked man is in ignorance as to what he ought to do and what he should refrain from doing...” (1110b 30) So, Aristotle denies what his teacher, Plato seemed to affirm, namely, actions resulting from passion and appetite are involuntary and thus, the person is not responsible for such actions:

For it is perhaps wrong to call involuntary those acts which are due to passion and appetite. For on that assumption we would, in the first place, deny that animals or even children are capable of acting voluntarily...irrational emotions are considered no less a part of human beings than reasoning is and, hence, the actions of a man which spring from passion and appetite (are equally a part of him), It would be absurd, then, to count such actions as involuntary. (1110A 25-1111b)

However, Aristotle does not identify the voluntary with choice because “...we can describe an act done on the spur of the moment as a voluntary act, but not the result of choice”. (1111B 10) So, animals and children perform voluntary actions, but whether or not their voluntary actions are the result of choice is another question. Yet, he further distinguishes choosing an action from deliberating about an action:

But, we deliberate more about the arts than about the sciences since we have more differences of opinion about (arts than sciences). Deliberation, then, operates in matters that hold good as a general rule, but whose outcome is unpredictable and in cases in which an indeterminate element is involved. When great issues are at stake, we distrust our own abilities as insufficient to decide the matter and call in others to join us in our deliberation. (1112B 5-10)

act <u>out of</u> ignorance whereas other people a
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But, since deliberation is “...not about ends but about the means to attain ends...(and) the object of choice is something within our power which we desire as a result of deliberation, we may define choice as a deliberate desire for things that are within our power...[means whereby we can achieve our end(s)]”. (*Book III, Chapter 3, 1113a 5-10*) Aristotle concludes that “...virtue or excellence (arete) depends on ourselves and so does vice. For where it is in our power to act, it is also in our power not to act and where we can say ‘no’, we can also say ‘yes’”. (*Chapter 5, 1113b 5-10*) Aristotle then concludes that “even ignorance is in itself no protection against punishment if a person is thought to be responsible for his ignorance”. (*1113B 30*) He emphasizes that “...whether the end that appears (to be good) to a particular person, whatever it may be, is not simply given to him by nature but to **of others is a projection of friendship of** only the beginning of our characteristics... yet, since the power to behave or not to behave in a given way was ours in the first place, our characteristics are voluntary”. (*1115A 5*) Thus, this pagan, Aristotle concludes that no human person can use the excuse of DNA or nurture in order to avoid responsibility, rather one’s “characteristics”, that is, one’s ethical makeup are and is “voluntary”, so we are responsible for who and how we are!

The question, however, is what is the origin of human actions, the basis of human virtue? The answer, even for this pagan is love, not any love, but love of oneself:

The friendly relations which we have with our neighbors and which serve to define the various kinds of friendship seem to be derived from our relations to ourselves. We count as a friend (1) a person who wishes for and does what is good or what appears to him to be good for his friend’s sake; or (2) a person who wishes for the existence and life of his friend for the friend’s sake. This is also the feeling which mothers have for their children and which friends who have had a quarrel, (but are still friends), have for one another. We regard as a friend also (3) a person who spends his time in our company and (4) whose desires are the same as ours, or (5) a person who shares sorrow and joy with his friend. This quality, too, is more frequently found in mothers. By one or another of these sentiments people also define friendship.

A good man has all these feelings in relation to himself. All others have them to the extent to which they regard themselves as good...(Book IV, Chapter 4, 1166a 1-10)

This statement of a pagan stands as a challenge for any so-called Christian, but the reader is urged to read all of *Chapter 8*, since Aristotle devotes this complete chapter of *Book IV* to “love of self”, the love of friendship, *philos* in

Greek. This chapter reemphasizes this point as Aristotle says “...all friendly feelings toward others are an extension of the friendly feeling a person has for himself”. (1168B 5-10) Such views, as well as his reflections upon them in response to such questions as “How many friends should we have?” offer a serious challenge to any so-called Christian. “To give us pleasure a few friends are sufficient”, he observes, “just as it takes little to give food the right amount of sweetness”. (Chapter 10, 1170b 25-30)

Two specific conclusions about Aristotle’s view of friendship are critically important to any so-called Christian: first, that only a virtuous person (like to like) qualifies as a friend to a virtuous, good human being; secondly, that one friend is a minimum, but only a few are maximum. Aristotle reaches the farthest any pagan can and did reach, but even the B.C. Aristotle was limited. That love and friendship has a central place in human virtue and happiness is a B.C. conclusion, however, such is not at all sufficient for a Catholic-Christian answer, as the *New Testament* clearly illustrates. No pagan, not even Aristotle, can think of loving a vicious person, much less an enemy.

If Catholic Christianity, or A.D.’s *New Testament* makes any difference, then that difference would have to exceed this Greek’s and any other pagan’s view. Why? The answer simply stated is that anything less is unbecoming a virtuous person, but much more is required of a Catholic Christian. So, what minimum difference must a Catholic Christian show and/or be? The “Our Father” prayer Matthew attributes to Jesus Christ provides the most succinct answer. (Matt. 5:43-48; 6:7-15) The corporal works of mercy which John attributes to Jesus Christ highlight that difference. (John 6:39-47)

The A.D.’s *New Testament* difference rests in a universal love of all humans, even, by those who by their own designation are our enemies, as children, brothers and sisters of the same *Abba*, *Daddy* and our prayer that we receive the

eristic (<i>ethos</i>) of a follower of Jesus Christ is t ur enemies, do good to those who hate you”.
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same mercy and forgiveness from this *Abba* as we provide to these, our enemies

who seek to harm us.

The *Tao* of Lao-tzu proposes that all are subject to the same forces of nature, so as a follower of *Tao*, each merely acts according to nature and leave to *Tao* the concern and “control” of even the bad and the enemy. However, the very idea of *jen*, or *love* still remains reserved to self, *Tao* and ethnic family. Never does the *Tao* suggest love of non-family and certainly not of non-Chinese enemy. Aristotle’s love of friendship is also reserved to the virtuous, so the love of

friendship may exist between virtuous people, but never between a virtuous and a vicious person, even a fellow Greek.

The interesting thing is that Socrates comes close to such forgiveness within his speech, after the 501 Athenian peer judges find him guilty of treason, however, he extends his forgiveness only to his fellow Greeks, those who voted for his death. If to be a Catholic Christian consists merely in an intellectual gift of faith,

er (ethos) of a *New Testament* Christian is love
 god to those who seek to hurt you.

belief in Jesus Christ, then it is merely sectarian, not better or worse than being a Greek citizen or than being a member of any primitive tribe, or sectarian denominational religion. After all, even Southern Baptists traditionally accepted African Americans “equally”, as long as they worshiped in different Baptist churches! Yet, even here Aristotle embarrasses the Anglo European because Aristotle included slaves, that is, non-Greeks in his will, so, when he died, they became citizens of Greece and, therefore, Greek landholders!

If such is the case, then any reasonable person would seem to face a choice between the likes of Socrates’ example and Aristotle’s friendship as ethical choices, or a denominational way of living, call it religion or a political party, even if it would be Ivan Ilych’s professional passion as his or her moral choice. The fact, however, is that the *New Testament* characteristic means that the Catholic Christian is “...as perfect as the Heavenly Father” and means that he or she would replicate the Father’s decision to send His Only Begotten Son to die for the humanity which rejected *Yhwh* who created and conserves that very humanity! So, by necessity that Catholic Christian would so love the enemy that that Catholic Christian would die for that enemy! After all, the Heavenly Father not only treats the good equally to the bad, letting rain fall and sun shine both on the good and bad, but the Heavenly Father, of the *New Testament* type sends His only Son to die and thereby redeem that very group who cries out for that Son’s life!

To have ethical love after the example of Socrates is difficult enough for a “natural” human being, but to have *New Testament* love after the example of Christ is another matter all together! Whether or not *New Testament* Christians can imitate Socrates is the issue they must grapple with, even if they are to be ethical. Whether or not *New Testament* Christians can accomplish the *New Testament* message is another matter all together because it would seem to be conditional on whether or not each of them can be or is ethical.