ARISTOTLE'S CONSEQUENTIALISM

DAN KARY

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by

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Abstract

This thesis is an investigation into Aristotle's ethical thought with the goal of showing that he is both a virtue ethicist, and a consequentialist philosopher. It carefully examines what he says, and analyzes it with a consequentialist lens and compares Aristotle to various consequentialist schools of thought to show some similarity. It also attempts to reconcile both consequentialism and virtue ethics to show that the theories need not be in opposition and that Aristotle gives a theory where they co-exist by answering two distinct questions: What should I do? and What kind of Person should I be?

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Dan Kary
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1 Introduction

It is my intention to show that Aristotle, in addition to being a virtue ethicist, is also a consequentialist. There is a major split in ethical theory between virtue ethics and consequentialism. This split resides in what values ethics ought to focus on; virtue ethics places emphasis on good moral character, which for Aristotle consists in having good habits, and consequentialism puts the emphasis on the particular consequences that come about from action. Aristotle gives importance to both, and reconciles them by using each to answer a different question about ethics: namely, What kind of person must I be? and What kinds of things must I do? Aristotelian philosopher J.L. Ackrill explains that "Aristotle thus draws a strong contrast between *what* is done—which might have been done from various motives or inadvertently—and *why* it is done." (214). By showing that Aristotle is accurately described as belonging to both consequentialist and virtue ethicist camps, I hope to show that these theories need not be in opposition. For Aristotle, these questions have shared roots, and it is in these roots that we find the reconciliation between the two theories.

One root is wisdom, which requires listening to reason. Another root is the completed practice of virtuous action that constitutes moral agents. Aristotle's consequentialism arises in his teleology which points to specific goals or consequences, and his virtue ethics aims to achieve these goals. These theories differ in perspective and expression, but do not necessarily undermine each other.

My investigation, which is analytical in nature, focuses on key terms such as benefit(s), education, good, appropriateness, wisdom, action, measure, priority, desert, fear/anxiety,

mediation, completeness, and happiness (*eudaimonia*). These terms are defined through their different contexts in virtue ethics or consequentialism. Each term is treated like a puzzle piece, and once it is identified as such, will be examined to find where it fits into the puzzle as a whole. Once all the pieces are in place, a picture of Aristotle's consequentialism will become clear, and we will see how it fits in with his virtue ethics and his entire philosophical system.

However, these pieces are frequently used to bridge the two theories, and also give us access to the wider biological context which is also necessary for fully understanding both sides of Aristotle's ethics. For this reason, I believe that both virtue ethical and consequentialist lenses are useful to understand Aristotle's ethics and his philosophy more fully. His consequentialism is grounded in the idea that goals are desired consequences which are used to make moral and ethical decisions and so he puts emphasis on goals, actions and completions. I intend to show that these terms, as formulated by Aristotle, are consequentialist in nature.

Goals, along with actions and the completion of both, are measured by what they do, whether they were completed or not, and what was produced by this, good or not. Various things which are good contribute to this consequence. One source for good is virtue, which allows agents to act in ways to complete particular goals that bring about various kinds of goods as consequences. Some goods, such as happiness, have a greater value than others and I shall look at this. The investigation attempts to show that, in addition to virtues being goods which contribute to consequences, consequences which are the responsibility of moral agents affect the kind of person that the agent is and determine whether, and to what degree, he or she is a person of virtue.

This thesis also will compare Aristotle with other philosophers who are recognised consequentialists, and observes what similarities (if any) can be drawn. On happiness, Aristotle will be compared with J.S. Mill in Section 4.4, and on justice and desert, with Fred Feldman in section 4.3. In section five, various consequentialist theories will also be explored in an attempt to place Aristotle on some kind of continuum. While Aristotle shares many important ideas with many consequentialists, I do not intend to place him firmly in one camp or another, but rather to develop an idea of his particular, and unique, form of consequentialism.

Aristotle often made use of one theory to explore many topics. His metaphysics, politics, and biology all echo the theories we will be examining in this investigation of his ethics as provided in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (EN). I will also use ideas from various contemporary Aristotelian scholars such as John M. Cooper, Sarah Broadie, D.S Hutchinson, Jonathan Jacobs, Richard Kraut, Sir David Ross, Nancy Sherman, and Rupert Woodfin in an attempt to clarify various Aristotelian terminologies so that his theory can be made more accessible. We will begin by discussion of good which is the focus of Aristotle's consequentialism. Then, we will talk about consequentialism and see how it applies to Aristotle's ethics.

2 - The Econometrics of Good

2.1 – Defining Terms

Before examining the central terms with which I am concerned, such as consequence, consequentialism, virtue, and good, it is helpful to establish how I shall be using them.

First, I shall take *consequence* to mean "something that follows from something else: an effect, a result, or an outcome" (Mautner, 107). *Consequentialism* asserts that consequences are

normative in that they determine the moral character of human actions. It is the idea that rightness and wrongness of actions are determined by the good, bad or neutral outcomes of those actions and what is right is also what is most desirable or beneficial overall. Right actions bring about actual goods which maximize the potential goodness in particular situations. Furthermore, *agent* will be taken to consist in being the originator of an action. Agents are responsible for their actions regardless of their aims and Consequentialists will argue that agents have goals in mind when they perform actions and they do things with these goals as intended consequences. Moral action is rationally determined for consequentialists, as action must be in accordance with the goal to try and bring about the benefits from this goal as a consequence. Calculation is what allows agents to decide on what a goal should be, and what action will bring about this goal. Other factors may have an effect on goals such as emotion and cultural norms. However actions that are determined by emotions and cultural norms are not calculated as to how to bring about maximum benefit in a situation and are therefore discouraged by consequentialism. Education as to what will maximize benefit and knowledge of relevant facts is helpful to making proper evaluations as to how to proceed morally in action.

It is important here to make clear the kind of consequentialism we are going to attribute to Aristotle. He is a consequentialist as well as a virtue ethicist as he sees value ethically both in consequences and in having good characteristics or habits (virtues). However he is not a mainstream consequentialist like Mill. He is a consequentialist in so far as he asserts that people have goals and attempt to achieve these as consequences of their actions because the goals are valuable once satisfied. These goals are sometimes activities rather than products or results, as activities can also be desired consequences. For example, Aristotle asserts that the contemplative

or "reflective" life is ideal for humans (EN 1177a20) which he states is activity in accordance the highest excellence in us, and is the end for human pursuit.

The ethical life for Aristotle is the pursuit and achievement of particular goals such as happiness. Whether these goals are achieved or not however is a consequence of a series of actions in accordance with virtue or excellence for humans which we will find comes through being well mediated in all aspects of life. Proper action will bring about a successful consequence and comes through knowing (and learning) what is good for you and actually doing this.

However there is the question of what many of these goals may be. As we shall see, Aristotle argues that *eudaimonia*, usually translated as "happiness", is the highest goal. John M. Cooper frequently refers to *eudaimonia* as "the ultimate end". *Eudaimonia* is action in accordance with the highest virtue, and virtues are dispositions or capacities to act in defining ways. *Virtue,* or *arête,* is excellence of character, and a disposition for making good choices. As Sarah Broadie describes it, "excellence of character (*êthikê arête*) [is] a disposition acquired through practice" (17). So Aristotle is going to claim that virtue is what we pursue given that happiness comes about through particular dispositions which are developed through the habit of continually acting virtuously (practice) in accordance with character excellences.

However there is a potential problem in these conceptions of virtue and consequentialism for the project I have undertaken. As a philosopher in the virtue ethics tradition, Aristotle's focus is dispositions or states of an individual; but in determining the rightness in actions, philosophers who adopt consequentialism focus instead on the consequences of actions to determine the rightness of actions. So how is it that Aristotle determines the rightness of actions if he is both a virtue ethicist and a consequentialist?

I am not the first to suggest that Aristotle was, in some regard, a consequentialist. For example, Aristotelian Consequentialism has been variously described by Walter Sinnott-Armstrong as *eudaemonistic consequentialism* and Aristotle as a *virtue consequentialist* "which holds that whether an act is morally right depends on whether it stems from or expresses a state of character that maximizes good consequences and, hence, is a virtue" (Sinnott-Armstrong).

One way to answer our problem is to say that there is no difference between the two characterizations. We might assume that all actions that stem from a virtuous state, excellence of character, or good habit are also going to have good consequences and that all actions that have good consequences are so because they resulted from a virtuous disposition. This is because if the action is rooted in something which is good, like a virtue, the consequences that follow must also be good. This however cannot be; sometimes we might accidentally bring about good consequences. We may also fail to bring about good consequences despite our acting from virtue and so I reject the idea that action from virtue must bring about good consequences. For this reason, I suggest a unique form of consequentialism can be derived from Aristotle's own theory and this view is preferable to placing Aristotle in one of the existing consequentialist camps specified in section 5.

I propose that our problem is resolved in appealing to different kinds of evaluation. It is a mistake to evaluate consequences and virtues on the same grounds. People are evaluated as good and praised as such because of their virtuous actions. These virtuous actions are rooted in virtuous dispositions that are developed by habit. For Aristotle, a virtue is a disposition or capacity for particular kinds of action; and repetitive actions of a particular kind help shape the agent into a particular kind of person through habit as it is the act which is an expression of the agent. D.S. Hutchinson adds that "man reveals himself by what he voluntarily does" (208).

furthermore "it is right to praise and blame us for our decisions and for our voluntary actions because they accurately reveal the sort of men we are" (Hutchinson, 210). Virtuous action completes the agent. But there is some linkage here between the two theories as this completion of the agent is itself is a consequence.

Actions themselves are right or wrong based on the actual amount of good or benefit that comes about from them, and if the consequence is an activity then the goodness being produced from this activity is a significant source for its evaluation. In the case of virtuous activity, we see that the production of goodness comes from the completion of the agent and his happiness in both doing well and being well. Actions also determine the worthiness of a person for reward or punishment as their responsibility stems from what they have done, while praise and blame stem from whether the action was rooted in virtuous activity. Hutchinson adds that there might be those who are unable to control their behavior, but we still punish them because of their actions. They are still at fault because they became that kind of person; they engaged in particular activities which caused them to act badly and certain activities we partake in shape who we are. For example, gambling produces gamblers (210).

A consideration such as the one that follows can affect the calculations of relative rightness of an action and also the relative goodness of its agent: saving a life might be considered a right action, but the action is somewhat tainted by the fact that the person doing the saving did not act from virtue and intended to actually harm the person. This may cause the rightness of the action to be diminished or even cancelled out by the aim; but when actions and aims are taken alone, they each ground different evaluations. People are praised for their virtue, and their aims, while they are responsible for the actions they take. However we often forgive wrong doers because they did not intend to do anything wrong, and we often do not forgive those

who have aimed to do wrong. We adjust our evaluations because it is sometimes right not to harshly punish people who are genuinely good because they are unlikely to repeat such actions and punishment would not help to deter them, and we think that it is more just to punish those people who are genuinely bad people because there is some kind of benefit in deterring them from acting this way again or deterring other people with similar aims with a threat of punishment.

This adjustment for evaluations is important because it takes into account both the dispositions of the agent, and his actions. Fred Feldman talks about this as an adjustment of "utility", where utility is used as a measure of the benefit or good of a situation which is typical to consequentialist Utilitarians, a significant community among the consequentialists. However most Utilitarians tend to equate utility with a hedonistic calculation of pleasures versus pains, which is something to be avoided here, given that Aristotle's calculation of good includes pleasures but also other sorts of goods. However Feldman's discussion of the adjustment of utility for justice, which is one of several virtues, is important to our discussion and is addressed in detail in 4.3.

Finally, *good* is an attribute given to something upon completion of some goal. Good is also measurable in terms of value, benefit, or utility to some thing or someone that derives from this completion. Given this, and the earlier definition of consequence, it would seem that goodness resides largely in consequences since things are good largely in terms of completion. However, good is something we will need to explore further, and will do so especially in the next section.

2.2 – The Good and Kinds of Goods

Not everything is chosen for something else, since this would entail an infinite regress and would result in desires that are "empty and vain" (EN 1094a20-21). Aristotle sees the end to the regress in an appeal to something in which all good things participate (*methexis*), which he and Plato refer to as "the Good". All good things share something with the Good, and in this they are good. Knowing the Good will allow us to aim for it and measure our actions. "Aristotle's search for *the* good is a search for the *highest* good, and he assumes that the highest good, whatever it turns out to be, has three characteristics: it is desirable for itself, it is not desirable for the sake of some other good, and all other goods are desirable for its sake" (Kraut). Aristotle claims that this good is happiness (*eudaimonia)* since it is the one thing that meets these criteria. This is discussed in detail in 2.3; but for now, let us talk about goods in general.

There are many different goods, and Aristotle claims that when goods are equal, the greater amount takes precedent: "For even if the good is the same for a single person and for a city, the good of the city is a greater and more complete thing both to achieve and to preserve; for while to do so for one person on his own is satisfactory enough, to do it for a nation or for cities is finer and more godlike" (EN 1094b7-11). Furthermore, "The larger amount of goods is always more desirable" (EN 1097b20). However, as we shall see, too much of anything good turns out to be bad because it fails to balance out the agent properly. Desire has a tendency to continue to consume what is good to excess and so it must be checked by reason. This allows the agent to pursue what is actually good for him and is therefore what is most desirable. When Aristotle says that the larger amount is more desirable he means the larger amounts of things that still benefit or complete a particular activity or the agent himself, which requires restraint. Both of these ideas

will be looked at later throughout, particularly in section 2.4. But for now, let us continue the look at completion and what constitutes something being good and its role in this completion.

While the greatest amount of goods is also what is best. This is not to say that more of anything good is also better. Take for example the ideal society which Plato describes in the *Republic*. A good society has all the things it needs to function properly. However Plato warns that too many luxuries add to the size required to run a city because somebody other than the original producers and service providers must produce these surplus luxuries. These extra people, in turn, cause the need for more basic products and services to be provided, which in turn will require more citizens to produce them, who will also require luxuries. This growth will continue until the city is massive and disorganized, unless a cap is placed on the unnecessary luxuries a city will allow. In proper amounts, citizens make a society better off, and the society makes the citizens better off. The sum of goodness a cooperative collective of citizens can produce far surpasses the sum of goodness that people could do on their own. We can see this in the fact that citizens typically have only one expert craft or skill, while together they have all the skills needed for a good life. This is a case where the combination is better than the sum of the parts. There is also a best arrangement which is determined by the proper measures, and also proper arrangement of parts at the proper times.

Measure is fundamental for Aristotle in all contexts including biology, especially in the *De Anima* and the *Physics*. For example, the matter of which humans are made is not very special, but when arranged correctly, humans have an animation or a "soul" that has various powers such as thought, and movement which are not in the matter alone. In his *Republic*, Plato looks to a proper amount of certain kinds of things and people and avoids excess or deficiency which would stop a society from working at its best. This is why he searches for minimum

criteria for what makes a good society and advocates that these specific criterion be met, but not exceeded (*Republic*, 369-374).

Aristotle does something similar in the *Posterior Analytics* with his idea of *commensurate universality*: where a property belongs to all instances of a subject, and only to instances of that subject. This is related to Plato's example of the ideal state as he describes properties of a 'city' which are universal to all cities, set the criterion to be a city, and are the only properties required. Aristotle does the same in *Posterior Analytics* Bk. 1 Ch. 4, and 5: particularly in the case of a 'triangle' but also with 'line', 'point', and others. This is a helpful concept for both Plato and Aristotle as they are looking for a particular mean which defines a thing, and makes it best. In other words they are looking for what completes without falling short or exceeding. This completion is the consequence that Aristotle seeks in all things because it is this completion that makes things good.

As for specific goods, and how we differentiate them, Aristotle says: "those that are pursued and valued for themselves are called good by reference to a single form, while those that tend to bring about or somehow preserve them or prevent their opposites are called good because of them, and in another way." (EN 1096b10-13). Things are good either in themselves or as a means to something. Goods which are pursued for themselves are greater goods than those which are pursued for some other thing. For example, what you intend to buy is more valuable than the money you use to buy it. In terms of our discussion, some things are good because of the consequences that come from them, or because their occurrence is the consequence we are looking for. But there is one good which is *always* pursued for itself as an ideal consequence; this is *happiness*.

2.3 – Happiness is the Highest Good

Honour, pleasure, intelligence and the other goods are chosen for themselves but they also lead to happiness, and it is on these grounds, among others, that Aristotle claims happiness as the highest of all goods (EN Bk. 1 Ch.4). Happiness also meets Kraut's criteria for the highest good as we saw in 2.2. Aristotle says that this is something which most people agree on; both people of quality and common folk (EN1095a18-19). Furthermore, happiness is both living and doing well (EN 1095a19-20). However what happiness is prompts debate; some say pleasure and wealth, some political life and honour, and some a life of reflection (EN 1095b15-20). The content of this debate is what is it that indicates to us that a person is living well and doing well, and in the proper context of being a human. Happiness is therefore dealing with a particular activity, or group of activities, which bring about excellence in being human. Excellence in being human Aristotle calls *eudaimonia,* and the virtues are activities in accordance this excellence.

Happiness is a good, the highest of them, and it comes about through completion of acts that meet specific criteria. What makes humans happy depends on what makes them human. The humanity is the criterion for what completes them. It is also their function and what they uniquely do. Completion of this function is a consequence, but it also arises from a virtue as a beneficial and habitual character trait. A daily regimen of eating grass does not make human beings complete, because it gives them a minimal benefit; this is a life more suited for a deer. There are some things that make some species happy and some things that make human beings happy. This depends on what kinds of things it does by nature; doing these things makes the creature complete. There might be some humans who feel complete by eating grass. However this is not a true completion of function, given that they are human. The reason for this is because it does not

maximize their benefit given that they are not using their potential abilities, such as reason. If they used their full array of abilities by action in accordance with what is excellent for them, they would truly be happy. Hutchinson comments further, saying that "man is a rational animal, and he is at his best when he uses his reason" (205). Aristotle will grant the feelings of joy had from living the life of another kind of creature as genuine, but will go on to say that there is something wrong (or incomplete) with them, and that, if they were functioning normally, then they would be happier and generally better off than they would be from a life similar to a deer.

Aristotle in the *Politics* discusses natural lives for various kinds of humans and animals (Bk. 1 Ch. 5), saying that various capacities limit certain kinds of people and that certain lifestyles are not well suited for them given their abilities. For example, he claims that slaves have the ability to recognize reason but not to use it and are best being slaves because this allows them to fully use what abilities they do possess; furthermore it is to a wider benefit of society that they use these abilities and excel in their "natural" niche (*Politics*, 1254b16-1254b32). While this distinction between "kinds" of people may be a false one, he does also draw distinctions between animals and people. He seems right to assert that humans are not well suited to animal life and that animals are not even capable of a human existence which, he says, requires reason. In the *Republic,* Plato talks in similar ways about a division of labor and how certain individuals use their particular aptitudes to serve the community as a whole (369a-370d). But for now, let us set aside the idea of what is good for humans, which is discussed further in 4.4, and continue with discussion of completion.

Completion (*teleios*) comes about from a function and its excellence, and as mentioned in 2.1, completion is a criterion for determining what is good. When somebody is happy they are also complete; he or she is not lacking in anything. If somebody is lacking something they will

desire it, and if all their desires were fulfilled they would be happy. However, this fulfillment is not of simple felt desires but the fulfillment of those things which will bring about the completion of the person, specifically in *eudaimonia*, the ideal state for humans. This requires the acquisition and development of virtues, the highest of which Aristotle argues is contemplation. In terms of this goal, learning to discern what is lacking and how to fulfill it is critically important.

In addition to completion, happiness also is affected by chance. Aristotle confirms the element of chance in happiness in EN Bk. 1 Ch. 9 with the story of King Priam who was an "excellent" person, but also ends up in sorrow because of the sack of Troy. Aristotle writes (*Physics* Bk. 2 Ch. 4) about chance as a kind of cause, which can have a bearing on happiness. Both doing well and being well are requisite to being complete and therefore happy. Priam may have done the right things to be happy, but he was not happy because of particular consequences that arose from chance.

But for now, we will put this aside and "let us go back to the good we are looking for – what might it be? For it appears to be one thing in one activity or sphere of expertise, another in another" (EN 1097a15-17). We have talked about completion as a good thing, which is determined according to certain criteria, but let us now talk about the criteria themselves and what determines them for good itself.

2.4 - Good as a Mean of Extremes

People have particular aims or goals and regard them as good in relation to the degree of the completion that is a consequence of an action. Aristotle often refers in the *Nicomachean*

Ethics to what is best as the "most complete". However, the term completion needs more exploration, to which I will turn in this section.

Too much or too little of anything is destructive and does not complete, but falls short or is excessive. For example, Aristotle says that the right measure of food/drink preserves and completes health, too much or too little destroys it (EN 1104a17-18). The same is true of virtues such as courage (En 1104a19-20); moderation is the key to maintaining courage. People gain courage by enduring fright, but those who are always afraid are cowards. From this, it follows that there is a right measure of fright to endure to be courageous. We also see that those who endure fear without distress are courageous, and with distress are cowards, and perhaps those who do not feel fear at all are reckless.

Similarly, strength entails enduring some pain, but we must not always be in pain. Aristotle claims that "it is because of pleasure that we do bad things, and because of pain that we hold back from doing fine things" (EN 1104b9-11). But those who hold back cheerfully are moderate, and with distress are self-indulgent. We can, however, know what pleasures we should have, and when to have them, because of proper ethical education. Aristotle says that it is "…through pleasures and pains that people become bad, i.e. by pursuing them and running away from them" (EN 1104b20); that is, running from the ones we should have and pursuing the ones we should not have on the basis of what is good for us and others. We also should have them in the proper measure.

We have various measures; there are extremes of exceeding and falling short in terms of completion, and there is also a mean. 'Mean' does not mean "middle", so much as it means right measure. But, in a sense, the mean is between, or in the middle of, excess and deficiency. A situation's right measure may call for equal or unequal parts; a lot of something or a little bit of

it. Exceptional situations call for exceptional action, and it is for this reason that rigid sets of rules cannot be followed if good is to be realized at its full potential in many cases. Courage, for example, is having the right measures of fear and boldness (also commonly referred to as "confidence" in the literature) in a given situation so as not to be a coward or reckless. Acting on this mean will bring about the best consequence (which is the greatest amount of benefit overall while keeping detriments to a minimum) in the face of danger.

Fear and boldness are the feelings which have an impact on the virtue of courage. Having them in a proper balance allows a person to have well mediated feelings and courageous. An imbalance of fear and boldness causes a person to act from a vice. Achilles was without fear. All he felt was boldness, so his actions originated in vice and he was not properly equipped to do what is right. He put himself and his men in unnecessary danger. However, he did achieve many of his goals, for which he deserved reward, though he was still reckless and therefore not worthy of praise. He required some amount of fear of the Trojans to mediate him and make him act with greater care. This would make his actions courageous rather than reckless.

As seen in section 2.2, correct measures (means) are important; too much fear (cowardice) is a detriment even though it may well be that fear would be a good thing in other particular circumstances. Goodness is a measure of virtue and a prescription for the right action. "...Every expert tries to avoid excess and deficiency, and looks instead for the intermediate, and chooses this" (EN 1106b6-8). The expert choice is the perfect measure, and perfection does not require more or less of anything, this would undermine perfection. As too much salt makes for a bad pretzel, too much boldness makes for recklessness, and in both cases the intermediate measure is correct and ideal. Both salt and boldness might be generally good but in all things excess is actually detrimental.

We see how goods can be detrimental and so they should not always be pursued but this is never true for good itself. In the *Sun analogy* (*Republic* 507a-509c) Plato compares the sun to the Good. The Good here is said to illuminate the world with truth and reality so the intellect can know the world as it is and form whatever knowledge is possible. Later however, in the *Cave analogy* (*Republic* 514a-521b), Plato talks about how damaging and painful it is to be exposed to the Sun (or the Good) without protective mediation and proper preparation. So even the Good is portrayed as a danger, even your completion as an agent. However Aristotle provides us with a method of achieving this. He offers us a dialectical way to achieve the moderation.

Aristotle argues for us to do what is best and sometimes this is by avoiding particular goods in favor of others; we also need to be careful about those goods we should pursue because this must be done in moderation. This moderate pursuit of goods is best realized through interactions and it is through particular relations that things become actually good or not. It is these particular relations that bring about good consequences including how we relate to each other and the world around us. This requires that we act in accordance with excellence which requires proper measures of moderation in these actions.

For example, frosting is good, but only in certain relations, such as being on cake rather than on sausage, and relation is part of measure. The proper relation can make for a better good than just the sum of the included goods. For example, the pleasure (which is a good), gained from eating frosting might be numerated as 5 and from cake it might be 10. However cake with frosting might gain a utility of 20 rather than 15. The point here is that goods are best taken in proper measures that are best for what they relate to.

However, Aristotle does not use this sort of calculation, but he does use a calculation of more and less, as well as means between extremes of excess and deficiency, which is formulated

in his "doctrine of the mean". Aristotle's calculations are also applied to particular relations that always have some unique variables. This means that no two moral evaluations can be the same and rigid rules are not helpful. Instead practice is fundamental to ensure that the best relations are met in the world; we must recognize what will make things best. For example, we cannot say that we must always have 0, 100 or 50 as a measure of boldness. Nancy Sherman provides a helpful analysis:

> *Ethical action will not, of course, be procedural. Accordingly, cues and tips will not be expressive of some more systematic, longhand rules that a teacher can pass on to others. Even so, explicit teaching must take place, as we have argued above; but what is passed on will be ways of reacting, seeing, and understanding which aim at establishing enduring patters of action (250).*

We might say that we always should have courage, but this is just to say that we should always do the right thing, as courage is just the right measures of fear and boldness. Since different situations call for different measures of boldness, a rigid rule is of little use. We must use reason to measure, dialectically, the level of boldness required of any given situation. This dialectical skill is perfected only through education and practice that is designed to end the development of practical wisdom.

We must have a desired consequence somehow in mind as a mark to guide our acts; but we must also actually act. This is further explored by Sherman:

> *Learning through repetition will be then a matter of successive trials that vary from one another as they approach this ideal way of acting. In each successive attempt, constant awareness of the goal is crucial, just as measuring how nearly one has reached it or by how much one has fallen short is for the next trial. The practice is more a refinement of actions through successive trails than a sheer mechanical repetition of any one action (248).*

There is an excellence which entails practice in ethical action just as there is for other things such as piano playing. For this reason, Broadie translates '*aretē*' as "excellence" though it is traditionally translated as "virtue". It is from the term '*aretē*' that "virtue ethics" takes its

designation. Plato discusses the idea that virtue can be taught in the *Meno* and it is clear from what we have been discussing that Aristotle believes that virtue can be taught in a sense, as one is taught other skills. However, like other skills virtue requires practice and the refinement for becoming an excellence and a part of an agent's own character through habituation.

Aristotle's ethical theory gives a lot of attention to dispositions or habits (Greek '*hexeis*'). A virtue is, in fact, a kind of habit. Virtuous action is rooted in the agent's having particular habits. Virtue requires skillful action just like piano playing. This is a skill of moderation and is rooted in the disposition to choose the mean relative to the situation. The closer to the mean the better; the mean itself is the best (perfect) action. Broadie says:

> *The excellence mildness, for example, operates in the 'continuum' of temper. It is the 'intermediate' for several reasons: first, because the responses it issues on particular occasions 'hit the intermediate between too much and too little' (20).*

However Aristotle says "the intermediate is in a way an extreme…" (EN 1107a23); it is an extreme of good (what is best). The intermediate will vary since it deals with particulars: "for actions deal with particulars, and the requirement is that we should be in accord with these" (EN 1107a31-32). This means that different situations are unique and require unique action, given that proper action requires evaluations of situations that always have unique variables.

Thus, consequences are fundamental for Aristotle, since we have particular consequences, determined by a mean, as our goals which already exist, somehow, before we act. These are themes which we will need to unpack in the next section.

2.5 Consequence as Measure, and a Goal, of Maximizing Good

If somebody voluntarily does evil then it is through ignorance or accident, but then it is the act which is voluntary and not the evil. People will only do evil willingly if it is for a perceived greater balance of goodness. So when they pursue something it is either a good or an apparent good; the ignorant may wish for a harm that they think is a benefit. Aristotle discusses this in EN Bk. 3 Ch. 1 and 4 and it ties in with the Socratic view that: "For myself I am fairly certain that no Wiseman believes anyone sins willingly or willingly perpetrates any evil or base act" (Plato, *Protagoras* 345d and e, W.K.C Guthrie translation) and "...no one willingly goes to meet evil or what he thinks to be evil" (*idem* 358d). People have particular consequences as their goals, and they always wish to maximize good with these goals as they do not have evil as their aim. Jonathan Jacobs explains this concept, saying:

> *Even the person with bad character and evil purposes does what he or she does because it seems to that person a good thing to do. The act may be unjust, dishonest, and demeaning to others. Still, the agent who performs it thinks that in some respects it is a good and worth while thing to do. (103)*

Aristotle explains one aspect of completing these goals with measures dealing in proportion and appropriateness. In EN Bk. 4 Ch. 1, he argues that somebody can spend less and yet be more open-handed. It is not the amount that counts, but the proportion and the appropriate action. We should be angry only when appropriate, and also in an appropriate way (discussion about the emotions is continued in 4.2). The same is true of our actions; what should be done is also what is appropriate to the situation, and the more appropriate to the situation the better the consequence. Appropriateness is determined by what is required to complete some purpose. For example, drinking is the appropriate action when thirsty as it will fulfill the purpose of quenching thirst. This is also good, as appropriateness prescribes a particular action to a particular situation

for the completion of some goal. This is especially true of things such as tolerance. Aristotle applies appropriateness to tolerance (especially in the last part of EN Bk. 4) saying that it is best to tolerate some things, perhaps for maintaining the harmony of a society. However there are some things that you are not good to tolerate, perhaps those things which put the harmony of a society in danger. Aristotle also says that appropriateness applies to all acts, even joke telling which he discusses in EN Bk. 4 Ch. 8.

Appropriateness applies to all things which are good. While open-handedness is considered generally a good thing, it is not always appropriate: "for the open-handed person is not praised in the context of war" (EN 119b24). There is a time and a place for certain virtues, and in war courage serves for better consequences than open-handedness. Appropriateness depends on the situation and what it requires to bring about the best consequences.

Specific situations call for specific measures. The mean provides the appropriate measure here, as the mean is required action to bring about the best and most beneficial results to complete the action. Appropriateness is that which mediates or provides a mean, as we saw above. It applies to a particular situation and only to that situation. We again see the importance of commensurate universality, this time in appropriateness, as there is a specific criterion to a situation which makes it good if completed without falling short or exceeding. Aristotle argues that "…one must choose what is intermediate, not excess, and not deficiency, and what is intermediate is 'as the correct prescription prescribes'…" (1138b19-21). This is true for all virtues. One of Plato's main themes in the *Protagoras* is virtues as a unity of knowledge and therefore as extensions of knowing what is the best thing to do, and why it is the best thing to do. We see that both good choices and good action bring about the most beneficial consequences, and both come about through wisdom and knowledge of what is best.

2.6 – Good Action as a Wise and Virtuous Decision

Virtuous activity is a mark of wisdom, especially in judgment but also in decision and action; the wise know how to act and they actually do so. A choice is correct because of its accordance with virtue, but completion comes through skill and wisdom; "for excellence makes the goal correct, while wisdom makes what leads to it correct" (EN 1144a8-9); this is why wisdom is a root for both virtue ethics and consequentialism. Judgment is an assessment while a decision is a voluntary acting "and it seems that those who make the best decisions are those who make the best judgments" (EN 112a9-10).

We should begin to note the unity here between virtue, which demands particular consequences through judgment, and the virtuous activity itself, which comes about through making a decision to listen to that very judgment. Actions in accordance with appropriate virtues are what bring about good consequences. This harmony comes about through wisdom. Aristotle argues that the description 'wise' belongs to those with skill in deliberation (EN 1140a33). This applies to the sorts of things that will lead to excellence in particular activities for the agent. For example, the doctor is wise in medicine if he knows, through deliberation, what leads to health.

Wisdom is concerned with particular situations, as wisdom has to do with action (EN 1141b16-17). For Aristotle, the use of wisdom, or *phronēsis*, is a practical activity; it can tell you what you should do to bring about good consequences and allows you to do it through practice and the acquisition of proper dispositions. This practice that allows us to gain wisdom will be to do those actions which a person of virtue would do. But let us focus first on decision and then judgment.

The consequence of deliberation is decision, which Aristotle talks about in EN Bk. 3 Ch. 3. We do not deliberate about what is beyond our grasp; we also do not deliberate about function. For example, the doctor does not deliberate about treating people (EN 112b13) but rather how to do so. Deliberation is about how to bring about certain ends or consequences, rather than about the ends themselves (EN 112b15-16). Since skill in deliberation entails that one should know what to achieve and how to achieve it, skillful deliberation is also a characteristic of the wise.

When deliberating, we are trying to find the mean which tells us how to act, and it is reason that tells what the mean is in a particular situation. This is because acting reasonably will be in accordance with the particular virtue applicable. The measure of boldness will vary to be courage; it is not always the same measure. Virtues have a goal of good action as we saw in section 2.5, so acting virtuously will produce goodness and acting perfectly with it will produce the best consequence to be had in a particular situation. This however is only ideally true. We often find that people who act from virtue fail to achieve their consequences either due to a lack of skill in the implementation of their action, or because of some chance events which are beyond the agent's control. However those who use their reason are better off than those who do not, because they have a greater likelihood of success in their actions for the most part.

Aristotle reviews various kinds of reasoning. Reasoning about what cannot be otherwise we call "scientific", and the reasoning about what can be otherwise is "calculation" (1139a12-13). Calculation is the same as deliberation (1139a14); when we decide, we calculate. We also do not deliberate about what cannot be otherwise (1139a15). We deliberate because we want to make the right choice; otherwise we would act without deliberation. Thus, it is the consequences of our actions that determine the success or otherwise of our choices, and the quality of our deliberation. Now that we have talked about decision, let us move to judgment.

Comprehension, or clarity in seeing a point (EN 1143a18-19), is necessary in making judgments. For maximizing good in our actions we must be able to see what will be good from all perspectives. This way, nothing is missed and everything can be taken into account to add assurance that the choice being made is a good ("wise") one. Aristotle says that what is good is good either without qualification, or for somebody (EN 1152b27-28). The same is true of consequences. To ensure that a choice is well made, it must stem from good dispositions or virtues. It also must be the choice with is the best, given all the perspectives. But this too is an exercise of virtue, as those without virtue will act selfishly and only within their own perspectives.

Consequentialism and virtue ethics align above since those with virtue see the importance of greater societal good as opposed to lesser personal goods. We noted this at the start of section 2.2, and EN 1094b7-11 where Aristotle mentions the importance of goods for a city and nation over the individual: "At the out set of the Ethics, he describes the good of the state as 'greater and more perfect' than that of the individual" (Ross, 187). It is true that some who lack clarity can be more effective in achievement of completion than those who have total clarity. These people however are more effective only by accident, lacking virtue yet accidentally gaining the desired consequence.

We can now see the importance of wisdom both as a guide to show which goals are good and beneficial to have, and how to go about achieving them. However let us now look at the problems with the pursuit of some goods, and specifically with the Good itself.

2.7 – Good and Fear

We have seen that the Good is a measure to assist in organizing one's life so as to live in accordance with a complete life. To quantify this, imagine that the mean of some virtue is 50 (courage), and the extremes are 0 (cowardice) and 100 (rashness). 50 is best, and the closer to 50 the better. The closer to zero the more an act is cowardly and the closer to 100 the more rash. With 50 as a mean, it is far better to have 48 than 95. Plato also argues for a kind of moderation between extremes by saying that what assures a good life is "surely knowledge, and specifically a science of measurement, since the required skill lies in the estimation of excess and deficit" (*Protagoras,* 94). Aristotle does something similar when he talks about correctness in deliberation and calculation in terms of the achievement of ends in EN Bk. 6 Ch. 9.

However there is a serious problem with this model in that the human condition often does not wish to stop at 50. Aristotle, as we have seen, is an advocate for moderation. Though it seems that people strive for excess in all things and often we find a conception that if one thing is good, then more is better. For example, the Aristotelian picture shows that while Achilles was seen as a hero as he was very bold, he actually needed more fear. As a result, Achilles acted from the vice of rashness and was no hero, but a fool who drew himself and his own men unnecessarily into danger. This example helps to show the point that moderation is critically important for Aristotle when finding the Good.

Human beings have the capacity to make beautiful art, music, and war. This power, as it is argued by both Plato and Aristotle, is both divine and dangerous. The danger lies in the fact that we are capable of divine things but we do not have a divine nature. This is why we are prone

to excess and why we find it sometimes so difficult to do the right thing. We lack the divine control over emotion and desire necessary to guarantee action in accordance with virtue.

At the end of *Republic* Bk. 4 Plato classifies the human soul into three parts: the rational, the emotional, and the lustful. The rational part of the soul is concerned with truth, and is something divine within us. The emotional part deals with our emotions such as joy and anger. The lustful part craves and wishes to consume all sorts of things which give it pleasure. Plato also uses these parts to describe three classes of citizens in his ideal state. The rational part of the soul represents the rulers; it has the ability to properly govern the agent. The emotional side represents the spirited auxiliaries or military, which support and are the ally to the rulers just as the emotions are for reason. Lastly, the lustful part of the soul represents the rest of society which produces all sorts of goods and services, but at the same time craves these things along with wealth and pleasures.

With society we see a problem with the auxiliaries ruling, as well as the citizens who are producers. They are not capable of ruling in such a way that will be best overall for the society. Those who lust are concerned with only their own pleasures and consumption, and the auxiliaries would run wild without proper command. We see a similar problem if our soul functions this way. If our emotions run wild, then we often do things without proper consideration and often do things which we regret later. When our desires are in command it bears similar results, we do things without consideration beyond the immediate which may bear bad consequences later. Reason has the ability of foresight, proper consideration and analysis to be able to decide what is best for the soul. Like a society, a soul needs all things. Emotions can enrich our lives, and the fulfillment of certain lusts brings benefits also. But these must be controlled by reason to allow us to do what is best, and Aristotle in EN Bk. 7 talks at length about the benefits of self-control,

and the dangers of not controlling ourselves. We will talk about this in 4.2 in regards to what it is that is best to do, but for now we will continue to discuss this as a source of fear.

Our capacity for the divine through the exercise of reason is potentially limitless. But the Good is the measure that reason uses to regulate our exercise of that capacity. Our desire for excess is also a compulsion to make things "better", when it is moderation which is truly best. With Achilles we see how excess can be bad in the case of emotions and desires. As for being good, there are some things in which it is bad to be good; an example is pleasure. Some pleasures can be fatal, as can some pains. Pleasures are good in themselves, but pleasures can still be bad if the costs are too high.

The Good is a great source of fear for Plato and Aristotle because of what striving for it can cause people to do. People will strive for excess instead of moderation because of their mistaken view of the Good. They can do evil things because of their mistaken perceptions of the Good. This is because human beings are capable of the divine but are not themselves divine. They are prone to evil, and this is shown in their abuse of power when they fail to wield the control necessary to act in accordance with the Good.

Human nature strives for excess, and this contradicts with our function, which requires proper moderation. This concludes our discussion of the econometrics of good. Good is the focus and goal of Aristotle's consequentialism and so this lays the groundwork for our discussion of the theory itself. Let us now talk about his consequentialist theory, beginning with actions.

3 - What Kinds of Things Should I do?

3.1 - Good as a Completion of Goal and a Consequence

Aristotle begins the Nicomachean Ethics saying that:

> *Every sort of expert knowledge and every inquiry, and similarly every action and undertaking, seems to seek some good. Because of that, people are right to affirm that the good is 'that which all things seek' (EN 1094a1-3).*

We saw in the previous chapter the importance of the Good and, indeed, all goods. For this reason, it is apparent that the goods are not only what agents want, but what is best for them also. Jacobs comments that:

> *Human activity is end-oriented. The end is the good of the activity, whatever kind of activity it is, (whether it is making, understanding or doing) (103)*

However, as we shall see, agents are often confused about what a good is, what it is not and how this affects their choices and actions. Hutchinson observes that "everybody pursues what he regards as good, although men with the wrong values are mistaken about what actually *is* good" (210)

However pursuing goods is not enough as goods come about only as particular consequences which entail both action and its accordance with excellence. Aristotle says that "just as at the Olympic Games it is not the finest and not the strongest that are crowned but those who compete (for the winners are among these), so too in life it is the doers that become achievers of good and fine things – and rightly so" (EN 1099a4-6). From this, we see the importance of actions, and of their consequences. For example, the act of playing the piano is necessary to the completion of piano playing. The same is true of the virtues; acting courageously is essential to being courageous. However, the piano player was playing the piano before she was a piano player. I am no piano player, but surely I could bang on the keys and make noise. If I did

this enough, perhaps, I will become a piano player, as opposed to an imitator of a piano player. The status of a piano player requires some level of skill as it is the action of playing the piano in accordance with excellence that completes the activity and constitutes the desired consequences. I may try to make beautiful music by banging on the keys, but I will not complete this action as I do not have the skill to make beautiful music.

The same is true of courage, a virtue. People become courageous by doing courageous acts; a coward might act in the same way as a courageous person in a particular situation, but he is still a coward because he does not have the disposition to act habitually in a courageous way. It is only through acting habitually in accordance with courage that he may he be called courageous due to the fact that this clearly is his disposition.

This disposition is a principle of action which resides within the agent, and so it is not simply a matter of doing the things which courage demands a certain number of times, but doing so with the proper change in character also. The coward's acting in accordance with courage was merely accidental, given the kind of person he is. The kind of person somebody is has a great deal to do with the evaluation of that person; and this is what we must now explore.

Aristotle says that "Everything praised appears to be praised for being of a certain quality and being disposed in a certain way towards something; for we praise the just man, the courageous man, and in general the good man, and excellence, because of his actions, i.e. what he does" (EN 1101b13-16). We find that when it comes to evaluating a person, we look to the kind of person they are. A man who is courageous is of that kind, and we praise him for it. This could only come about if he had particular dispositions which caused him to act certain ways more times than not, which is the criterion for being placed in a kind. This is why consequences play such an important role; a man is not courageous until he has been courageous and we value

him for this. If a courageous man acted courageously but failed to achieve his goal, we do not reward him for his failure but perhaps praise him for his effort.

As people are punished for the harm they cause, they are also benefited through actually achieving a benefit, even if this entails growth and insight arising from failure. Consequences are fundamental here, since attaining a benefit is a consequence of some action, even if the act was a failure. An example of this is learning a lesson from having done something wrong. This relies on action: "for we are not inquiring into what excellence is for the sake of knowing it, but for the sake of becoming good, since otherwise there would be no benefit at all" (EN 1103b26-29). We see that there is a practicality to this investigation into consequentialism.

However consequentialism focuses on particulars. Aristotle says that:

> *Things in the sphere of action and things that bring advantage have nothing stable about them, anymore than things that bring health. But if one says universally is like this, what one says about particulars is even more lacking in precision; for it does not fall either under any expertise or under any set of rules– the agents themselves have to consider the circumstances relating to the occasion, just as happens in the case of medicine, too, and navigation (EN 1104a4-10).*

How we should act is determined by the particular details of a situation, which will determine the right measures to use appropriate to the situation, and cause the best consequences. Certain measures may count for virtue one day, but the next day may see different measures to count as virtue. Virtues have consequences which come last. We are looking for particular results, which vary from case to case "and everything that is done belongs to the particular and what comes last" (EN 1143a33-34).

But the appropriate action is there before the action is done, and is discernable to one who practices the dialectic of practical reasoning. For example, the option to act courageously is there in a situation before one chooses to do a specific act. The action of courage must have been chosen as a course of action before the courageous act is done at all. The action is also not right

once it is done, although the consequence of the action may be the production of good or not. The action itself is always right because of what it will produce, has produced, or currently is producing. This shows that the consequence makes it right. The action being right has to do with its accordance with what is best, which is always present as the action is present as a goal before it is done. We desire a goal but that goal must first exist before we achieve it, as it first must be available to the agent before he can even begin to achieve it. What goals to have are not determined by their success as this comes after acquiring a goal. Goals are determined desires for success, which are what agents strive to complete. Goals and their completions are both consequences, however, since the goal determines a desired consequence and the completion is determined by the good to the extent it is produced in this consequence.

Let us discuss this idea of success further in terms of our two questions: Who should we be? and What should we do?

3.2 – Evaluation of People and Actions

In determining the right thing to do, judgment and deliberation together with wisdom, reason, and knowledge, as Aristotle distinguishes each from the other, are all extremely important. For now, let us focus on reason as Aristotle distinguishes it. Broadie says that: "for the purposes of ethics, Aristotle focuses on two aspects or 'parts' of the human soul, one of which he identifies with reason strictly speaking, the other with the capacity to 'listen to reason'" (17). An agent's reason acts on the knowledge he has, and wisdom is both having reason and listening to it by doing what reason reveals to be the best choice for the agent and those with whom he is

involved. Reason therefore also has a role to play in virtue, as virtuous decisions are also reasonable choices given that reason says what is a virtuous, and therefore beneficial, choice.

It seems we make these evaluations because we look for what marks, or measures, goodness so we can attain associated benefits which appear to us to be desirable. This allows Aristotle to offer a useful tool for consequentialists who face epistemic problems in determining how to act since they cannot know the results of their actions. While consequences are important to Aristotle, it is also important that we act from a virtue. The desired consequence that follows from a virtue will be completed so long as we act in accordance with the appropriate measures and nothing impedes its outcome.

Aristotle maintains that virtue is acquired. In this sense, virtue is a consequence of action in accordance with what is virtuous. People become virtuous by imitating those who are virtuous. To say that somebody is virtuous is to make a statement about their character, and to say that their actions are virtuous says something about the character as well as the action. When we say that a person has acted well, that just says that the action was in some way good, specifically in its consequences. However actions are also expressions of a person's own identity; so those who often act with virtue, and make this a part of their character, are themselves virtuous.

Earlier we discussed action in accordance with an appropriate measure, which is a mean of extreme positions. It is through reason that we disclose this mean as an action to be done. All virtues function in the same way but what is involved in each is different. For example, all virtues seek what is best and beneficial, but courage seeks it in excellent measures of boldness and fear. The reason we have different virtues is because different situations call for different actions. Friendliness in battle is not appropriate, and is not really a virtue at all in this situation. Courage is however a virtue in battle as it helps to gain victory. Broadie says that "In a broad

sense we act justly when practicing the other excellences of character, since in each area what counts as appropriate ('intermediate') conduct is to some extent determined by what we owe others or what they have a right to expect from us" (34). This is why virtues cannot conflict with one another, as they must be appropriate to the situation to count as a virtue. One virtue may be more appropriate to act from in a situation and this is not a case of virtues conflicting. Rather, it is the case that one takes precedence over another. They all seek the same thing and, if followed properly, will yield good consequences. However we still have to choose the appropriate virtue given the situation. It is apparent that what Broadie calls "Aristotelian decision" (42) seems to deal with making choices to achieve some goal or consequence. When we decide to act courageously it is for some desired consequence, such as victory in battle. It is true that we should be courageous for its own sake, but when we choose to do so it is because we are hoping to achieve something or gain something through the action.

One way of achieving certain goals is by having good habits. But, in addition to achieving these goals through acting in accordance with virtue we need to develop these habits and make them parts of our character. They are what deserve praise. We praise the courageous man, and in general, the wise and excellent man; however we reward the man who has acted well. Consequences have a special bearing because they are what actually bring about goodness, so this is what we reward. We reward people because they are responsible for goodness, and so it is best to do those things which are beneficial. However the disposition of the person and the kind of person they are might make the reward or punishment greater or less, or perhaps even cancel it out (see section 4.3)

Let us now talk more specifically, therefore, about what is valued and measured.

We value, or measure things and people in terms of their achievement of functions. We measure a lion's status in terms of its ability to hunt or drink, among other potential criterion. If this is completed we say it is good, and the further from completion, the worse it is. This however is only a measurement of the value of actions. What measures the value of an agent is virtue. But this is also a kind of completion. So we see here that completion is key to bridging consequentialism with virtue ethics; completion of actions makes for good consequences as the goals of the action are met, and completion of agents is precisely what makes them virtuous. By achieving their goals an agent becomes the kind of person they must be to attain their desires.

The understanding of functions also serves to clarify the connection between virtue ethics and consequentialism. Virtues function to prescribe actions that lead to good consequences including, especially, those that govern the growth of the moral agent. Courage is the right measure of fear and boldness to do what is best. So courage is measured by boldness and fear in terms of its function: the production of good consequences.

Because of the kind of creatures they are, with particular capacities and abilities, it is best for men to live the contemplative life, which includes the use of reason and listening to reason by acting reasonably. What is reasonable is also what is best; and so the measure of a person is the set of her actions and dispositions for which we award praise or blame, reward or punishment. We find here that what truly benefits the agent are those things which make him more valuable to others as somebody who produces that which is good.

We have discussed kinds of things that are best to do and why this is; a good person will do excellent things from habit, or virtuous disposition. Those who do excellent things from a virtuous disposition and those who do them out of fear or other reasons are no different in terms of their responsibility; they have done the same action. However the person who acts from a

virtuous disposition differs from the other because he deserves praise for his habitual choices. Doing excellent things more often than not (the more often, the better) will make you a good person; it will develop the habit. This seems circular, but it must first start with action and doing excellent things. Now that we have talked about good action, let us now talk about what this means in terms of the kinds of persons we should be.

4 - What Kind of Person Should I be?

4.1 – The Bearing of Virtues/Excellences on Good

As discussed in section 3, excellences of character, or virtues, come about through habit. Aristotle says that we can teach habits of intellect, and we can change bad habits and develop good ones (EN Bk. II Ch. 1). However some may argue that none of our habits can be natural. Nature does not break habits; fire rises and rocks fall (1103a19-23). It is clear, nonetheless, that people can change habits, as we have seen in our discussions of virtues and how they are developed and acquired. However our habits are not necessarily unnatural either, yet they are changeable. Aristotle argues in EN Bk. II Ch. 1 that habits are natural, in so far as we are naturally able to make them and break them. We see that gaining virtues is hands-on, since you are not courageous until you have been courageous and have developed a tendency to act courageously, as we saw in Section 3.

We have also discussed how good actions such as courage come about from a virtuous disposition, and the good person as an agent. The good person knows how to act in relation to what is fine, advantageous and pleasant and he does act accordingly. Aristotle argues, for example, that only a just person can act justly (EN Bk. 2 Ch. 4). For justice to count fully as

justice the person must have the skill in justice, and act from the skill; it cannot be accidental. An act may have caused a just result but the act itself was not just as it also requires some level of habituation. Our excellent character depends on what we do, the choices we make, and a good disposition that brings about the good of both. We have said before that this must start in action, but let us look further into this.

Aristotle says that "so too at the beginning the unjust person and the self-indulgent one had the option not to become like that, and hence they are voluntarily unjust and self-indulgent; but once they have become like that, it is no longer possible for them not to be" (EN 1114a19-23). Aristotle is saying they have to become that kind of person through habit; they may have performed acts of justice, perhaps by accident, but they are still unjust people. For Aristotle agency refers to the originator of an act, as we saw in section 2.1. Agents are tied to their actions because their value is tied into their responsibility for those consequences and also their praise-worthiness of having acted from virtue. Acting with what virtue prescribes is good but acting from virtue makes this act better; and acting from virtue is having virtuous goals.

Sometimes we imitate a role model whom we admire, and thus think there is something good about the person that we should share. The Platonic idea that good things imitate perfect forms may extend to people who will imitate instances of good in order to become good themselves. However we can only imitate the kinds of things good people do, such as acting from virtue. We cannot imitate precisely what they do since situations are unique. We can never copy another because each lives a specific life and we each live our own.

As we noted earlier, a key to being a good person is having a good sense of things, which Aristotle says "is making correct discrimination of what is reasonable" (EN 1143a21). You cannot be wise without excellence of character. Aristotle talks of 'primary excellences' which

require wisdom and also 'natural excellences' which are dispositions we are born with (EN Bk. 6 Ch. 13). Aristotle differentiates these by pointing out that the natural excellences can be had by children and animals (EN 1144b9). The primary excellences however require intelligence which is not available to animals. One example of a primary excellence is courage. Animals may act in the same way that a courageous person does, because they have a natural excellence which allows them to do so but this must be accompanied by intelligence to be used properly, otherwise they are potentially harmful (EN 1144b10). It is human intelligence that allows him to act in accordance with means, which is necessary for virtuous activity. This is especially true for what Aristotle considers the highest human excellence, contemplation, which is an activity of the intellect.

It is possible to have one natural excellence and not others, but it is not possible to have one primary excellence without the others as the wise person has all excellences in some degree. This may be true, and while it might not be obviously consequentialist there are consequentialist aspects to be noted. Being a good person is important to Aristotle's consequentialism because it is the people with the best dispositions who will do the actions which prove to be the most beneficial, both in doing the action itself and because of the benefits produced by the action. These both have a bearing on the goodness in consequences. We have talked about the importance of virtue, but now we shall look at what it actually does for action.

4.2 – Ways to Approach Action

Somebody is likely better off if they act through calculation and persuasion rather than lack of self-control because they approach things with care, using reason. This prompts Aristotle to say that a lack of self-control in temper also is less shameful than a lack of self-control of

appetite (EN Bk. 7 Ch. 6) as the temper acts with what it thinks is reason but mishears it while giving into appetite is ignoring reason, which is the opposite of wisdom. Self-indulgence is also worse than being un-self-controlled as there is a judgment instead of an impulse. Temper is not due to judgment, but happens in the moment; it is lapse in judgment rather than a conscious effort to undermine it. However, while overcoming these obstacles is admirable, it is better not to have to overcome them at all:

> *We might **admire** someone who overcomes great temptation, but we would rather be the person who is not tempted at all. It is the last state that Aristotle recommends for humans. (Woodfin, 127).*

That being said, part of being un-self-controlled is being weak rather than genuinely bad. The self indulgent have no regrets while the un-self-controlled do, and regretting a bad makes that bad less bad than if it is not regretted as this is more likely to change the improper course of action in the future. Similarly, deciding to harm is worse than not deciding to, and regretting harm is better than not regretting it. But how is it that we overcome and do away with these poor characteristics and weaknesses?

Rupert Woodfin notes that "Aristotle thought that the only realistic way to control emotions is to train them by practice and habit" (128) as "moral argument does not work" (128). Pleasure can cause us to do bad things, as we have seen, but the emotions can also. Plato divides the soul into three parts: reason, lust and emotion; reason is fundamental for finding means that lead to virtue and listening to it is fundamental for good action. However even those with perfect reason may still have trouble controlling emotions. Emotions cause us to lose control and act in regretful ways. Woodfin says that:

> *The soul consists of a rational and an irrational part. A major element of the irrational part of the soul is our emotions - such as love, fear, pity, and joy. These emotions have a powerful influence on our actions and often can lead us into trouble. Therefore, we need to be able to control our emotions (125).*

Hutchinson however comments that there are great problems with just using reason as a leash on the emotions:

> *The problem with emotions is that they are not easily controlled by reasoning; it is usually quite pointless to try to reason yourself out of a feeling of hatred or anger or lust. Emotions need to be controlled in a different way, by being trained over a long period of time (222).*

Emotions are enriching parts of being human. But like pleasures, which are also enriching, there is an appropriate time and place to partake in emotion. Part of acting in accordance with this mean is not feeling too much or too little of any given emotion in a situation. Acting with the appropriate measure leads to the best consequences, and "if we can feel the right emotions at the right time and in the right degree, then we will tend to act well and consistently and will lead to a successful life" (Woodfin, 125). Furthermore:

> *Aristotle's advice is that we should align our emotions with what is the right thing to do in particular circumstances, so that we* ***want*** *to do what is* ***right****. And "right" here means that which is rational. (Woodfin, 126).*

However this requires practice, and must become part of our character. It is not a matter of just deciding to make it so. We have discussed the emotions and pleasure as causes of a lack in self control, but for now let us return to discussion of how lack in self control affects the growth of the agent.

Both those who aim for bad consequences out of ignorance and those who are un-self-controlled because of the consequences of their actions achieve bad results. Actions are likely to be bad if those who plan action plan what is contrary to what is good (although they do not realize this), or if those without self-control act contrary to reason. These actions may cause suffering to all involved, but the one that immediately suffers is the agent himself. This constrains his growth as a human being and keeps him further from *eudemonia* (happiness), and

the self-knowledge that would allow action in accordance with the fullest capacities. However Aristotle makes a distinction between those who make such judgments and the un-self-controlled. He says that: "un-self-controlled people are not unjust, either, but they will do what the unjust do" (EN 1151a10-11). Aristotle says this because the un-self controlled do not aim to act unjustly; this something contrary to their character and is a result of accident and weakness.

Being self-controlled is the mean between stubbornness and un-self-controlledness and so you cannot be wise and un-self-controlled. So, the clever can be un-self-controlled, but the un-self-controlled are only half bad because they do not decide bad things. They may intend to do what is good, but fail to act this way. Aristotle uses the example of a city that passes good laws but does not enforce them to illustrate this point (EN Bk. 7 Ch. 10). Here we again see the importance of action and consequence in general: how good is a law if it is not practiced and enforced? Aristotle argues that "One is not wise merely by virtue of having knowledge, but also by being the sort of person to act on one's knowledge" (EN 1152a8-10). A person may know what would count as courage in their actions, but this is not wisdom. The wise truly understand what courage is because they know how to act courageously, and why it is beneficial; they feel no conflict as to how to act properly and they remain in control.

Let us leave this point for now, and end with a look at pleasure as an approach to action, and ask why it is that pleasure, and particularly one sort of pleasure, tempts people to do certain actions. Some things are pleasant by nature and some become pleasant through habit. Some take pleasure in things because they are crazy, or have some other defect or deficiency. They only take pleasure in certain things because there is something missing or wrong with them, and it can perhaps be corrected through education, habit, force, or cures. Friendship is one thing that people do take pleasure in and this is what we will examine next.

4.3 – Friendship as a Human Good

In this section we will discuss a specific good, friendship, for a specific creature, humans. Aristotle does this in EN Bk. 8 and 9. We will look at this good in the wider context we have discussed by tying it into concepts of justice, completion, and others, but more particularly into the wider context of Aristotle's own consequentialism.

Aristotle says that "...no one would choose to live without friends, even if he had all the other good things" (EN 1155a5-6). It is a necessity for a proper life and this is due to the special things which friendship provides such as advice, refuge, and special care. However some "friendships" do not provide these; Aristotle explains this by describing three levels of friendship. First is friendship of benefit. Here friends are a means to acquire things; you have friends for your sake and this kind is very short lasting. Secondly there is a friendship of pleasure. Friends here are a means to pleasure; again, you would have friends for your sake and this is also a short lasting friendship. Lastly there is a true, or genuine, friendship. Here friends are made because of genuine caring for the other person; you are friends for both your sake and their sake and these are long lasting friendships. Although the first two kinds of "friendship" are mentioned, Aristotle only really accepts the last as friendship, as it is called "true" or "genuine".

We find that this true friendship is reciprocal, as you cannot be friends with objects. So, friendship is a wish for the good of others and their good wishes for you. However there must also be awareness that this is occurring as this facilitates the reciprocation. Friendship is not a love of usefulness; since once the usefulness ends, then so would the friendship. Alliances, for example, are not friendships. Love of usefulness would be a friendship of benefits rather than of

people and so friendship requires the love of others in themselves which will yield greater benefits; a good friendship gives back as much or more than is put in.

A friendship of benefit focuses on the attainment or exchange of particular benefits with little or no care for the other people involved. True friendships, however, focus on the well-being of others, and gain benefits as a consequence of the friendship. True friends also gain benefits much larger than could be gained from a friendship of benefit because the friendship itself produces good, and so the consequential benefits to be gained from a true friendship are much larger than any other type. Thus true friendship is a superior form of friendship because it does what friendship is supposed to do with the highest yield.

This shows that those who seek only friendships of benefits are foolish as they can derive the greatest benefits only through true friendship. In the *Phaedo*, for example, Socrates demanded equal participation from his friends as friendship is a sharing of common interests as well as goals, company, and so on. So the "sour-tempered" make friends slowly as they do not easily enjoy the company of others and to be friends you must enjoy being with the other person and be their equal in terms of the friendship. A friendship of excellence is a friendship most of all. It is founded on a shared excellence which produces and seeks good consequences for both sides which cannot be achieved by a single agent, without the mediation of some sort of debts.

We saw that there are kinds of friendship, but the closer to true friendship the better it is. Reciprocating benefits does not make for true friendship as such forms only a friendship of benefits. A true friendship is one of equality. Friendships of father-son, husband-wife, and so on, are different kinds of friendship, perhaps with a superior and therefore inequality (EN Bk. 9 Ch. 7). However these cannot be evaluated in the same manner as they serve different purposes. For

example, a father gives the son certain things which the son does not give back, but the son does give different things in return.

Friendship depends on sharing (EN 1159b33). One aspect of sharing is benefits; Aristotle says in EN Bk. 8 Ch. 13 that benefits which were gained unjustly should be repaid (when possible) and should not be forced. Justice (as fairness) is very important in friendship. It seems that justice, or deserving a consequence, adds to the goodness of the consequence. This will be discussed in greater detail shortly; but for now, let us discuss justice itself and determine its relation to this issue.

Aristotle's views on friendship (EN Bk. 9 Ch. 2 and Bk. 8 Ch 7, 9, and 13) echo the scene in *Republic* Bk 1 but manage to avoid the effect of Socrates' objections, as they allow for exceptions in particular situations. Hutchinson notes that "Aristotle himself holds that virtuous citizens (not necessarily the rich) do make greater contributions to their societies and that they should expect greater rewards in honour and respect" (222). Basically, if you put more in, you deserve more in return, and getting what you deserve is just. Benefits are to be given based on appropriateness, including debt. For now, let us focus on debt as a key aspect of justice.

Debt can be seen as a kind of incompleteness, or lack (*stereisis*). But debt also has a biological analogue which is important to Aristotle. For example, a tadpole, which has no legs, is in debt in terms of being a frog since he is an incomplete frog. The frog is born in "debt", so to speak, and incomplete. Throughout its life it grows from a tadpole, toward the end of being a fully grown frog. Aristotle says that "whenever there is an end, the whole prior sequence of action is performed with this end as its purpose" (*Physics*, 119a8). The frog's growing legs and becoming a fully grown frog is an example of its becoming a "good" thing. It is also completion of his end and elimination of a lack or debt, and so, it is also "just". We have explored previously

how completion of an end or goal is fundamentally consequentialist. The frog's completion is a consequence of his growth cycle. If it did not happen then it was a failure of nature (*Physics* Bk. 2, especially Chapters 1 and 8). Aristotle's teleology, which is a *natural consequentialism*, deals fundamentally with the achievement of goals as consequences.

Sir David Ross comments that "Aristotle's ethics is definitely teleological; morality for him consists in doing certain actions not because we see them to be right in themselves but because we see them to be such as will bring us nearer to 'the good for man'" (188). In the next section we will look at this achievement of the "good for man" as a desired state which is the consequence we must seek in our actions to achieve happiness. This is also a biological phenomenon in Aristotle's view because what is good for man is biological; it has to do specifically with humans, as opposed to some other creature. Until we achieve this consequence, happiness, in our actions, we still have a lack, or debt, the fulfillment of which is our main goal (*telos*) and takes priority over all else.

Priorities are fundamental to understanding debt. For example, a lion cub which does not know how to hunt is an incomplete lion and she must learn to hunt to become fully a lion. This is something lacking in her and requires completion. She therefore has a priority to learn how to hunt, rather than play fighting with her brother all day or lazing about in the sun because "what a thing is and its purpose are the same" (*Physics* 198a25). Debt is just one aspect of justice however; let us move on to talk of justice in general as a good itself and as bearing on good in general.

Aristotle does not talk about utilities like other consequentialists whom we will look at shortly. However he does talk about goods and, in certain contexts, he advocates for the greatest amount of goods; to this extent, he is a consequentialist. Fred Feldman is a consequentialist, who

talks about justice and its contribution to the calculation of good overall. In his study *Adjusting Utility for Justice*, Feldman addresses a justice theme:

> *Roughly, the theory maintains that pleasure is generally intrinsically good; but it is better if it is fully deserved, and it is less good if it is not deserved. In extreme cases, if it is undeserved, it may be worth much less-indeed it may be worthless or even bad. Pain, on the other hand, is generally intrinsically bad. However, it is even worse when the person who suffers it does not deserve it. It is less bad-and may even be good-if the person who suffers it fully deserves it (575).*

Feldman's work offers an explanation of why it is good to punish criminals; not just because it might make them better people having learned a lesson, or because it removes a potential threat from society, but because it has an intrinsic good; it is good in itself, and not for something else. When something is just, it is also deserved. Feldman gives six principles which state how desert affects the goodness of pleasure which Aristotle says is itself a good:

> *P1: Positive desert enhances the intrinsic goodness of pleasure.*
> *P2: Negative desert mitigates the intrinsic goodness of pleasure.*
> *P3: Neutral desert neither enhances nor mitigates the intrinsic goodness of pleasure.*
> *P4: Positive desert aggravates the intrinsic badness of pain.*
> *P5: Negative desert mitigates the intrinsic badness pain.*
> *P6: Neutral desert neither enhances nor mitigates the evil of pain.*
> *(575-580)*

This view claims that pleasure is an intrinsic good; something good in itself. The overall intrinsic good of the pleasure is enhanced by justice. The more deserved, the greater the enhancement of overall intrinsic good of the pleasure. So it is not just the fact that it is deserved, but how much it is deserved that must be considered. This correlates to how much the intrinsic good of the pleasure is enhanced. An undeserved pleasure is still pleasurable and, as such, is still intrinsically good. However, its intrinsic goodness is mitigated by the fact that it is not deserved. If the pleasure is neither deserved nor not deserved, then justice has no bearing on the intrinsic goodness of the pleasure as justice deals with desert. The opposite is true of pain which is intrinsically bad; if it is deserved, then it mitigates the intrinsic badness of that that pain, if it is

not deserved the intrinsic badness is increased, and if it is neither deserved nor not deserved, then justice has no bearing on the intrinsic badness of pain.

We have noted the importance of debt as a biological phenomenon. Aristotle argues "the point is that those things are natural which undergo continuous change, starting from an intrinsic source of change and concluding at some particular end" (*Physics*, 199b14-15). What is appropriate also has a specific mean which is a measure for all virtues including justice for both nature and persons. This concludes our investigation of justice, so let us return to talk of friendship with justice in mind.

So far, our analysis of Aristotle's position has led us to see that the selfish do not love themselves because they pursue what is actually bad for them. They are concerned with goodness; however they are ignorant of the full scope of goodness. They only see a small benefit for themselves and fail to see any greater good that would flow from acting for the completion of what is best not only for others but for themselves also. Those who act only for themselves may bring about good things for themselves, but have ignored their own goodness: their lack (*stereisis*) or animating need to be a good person. If they were a good person, then they would take pleasure in doing good things and would be happy from doing so. Friendship clearly shows this as friends take pleasure in the goods of their friends which adds goods which would not be enjoyed otherwise. So having friends is good because no matter how happy you are without friends you will be happier and better off with friends. Giving benefits is itself a benefit which is best served by having friends.

This is a biological truth also: man is a political/social animal (*Politics* 1253a18). Because of this, friendship is a component in the completion of humans and is a desired consequence. However, this too has a mean. Although friendship is good you should not have

too many or too few friends. There is a right number to suit your needs. Friendship is another good which is bad in excess as we have discussed before. You must have enough but you do not want to spread yourself too thin; this would defeat the purpose as friendship requires an intensity which is special and cannot exist with too many people.

Here we have discussed one human good; let us now talk about the most important, happiness or *eudaimonia*, and how this relates to the human good in general.

4.4 – The Human Good

The whole of Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics is devoted to goodness from the human perspective, and it is related to Plato's *Philebus* in that talk of good must be related back to us:

> *Of course there the concern at first is not the idea of the good but the question of the good in human life. But in the end, any talk about the universal idea of the good always takes as its point the departure of the human question: What is the good for us? (Gadamer, 30).*

The Good is a complex and difficult idea which is a great source of fear for Aristotle and Plato as we saw in 2.7. We are unable to access it directly, but rather by finding the good in things. In this section we will talk about goodness in terms of our own excellence as both Plato and Aristotle did. As in the last section, this section focuses on a particular good for a particular creature; on human beings and their happiness. There is something special about happiness; it is always an end in itself. This section however deals with many things that relate to happiness such as pleasure and how this does and does not relate to happiness. We will begin by returning to talk of pleasure which many people associate with happiness.

We should not choose something because it is pleasurable, but rather do what is best and take pleasure in this fact. This relates to excellence of character, or virtue. Choices are correct

both because of virtue and that their completions constitute consequences. As for pleasure itself, it is a good but not the Good; the Good is complete without degree. Pleasure has degree. Therefore, the Good is not pleasure. Pleasure, like justice, makes a situation better though sometimes it is a bad thing to pursue. We need to focus on every good and not just pleasure "for every good is more desirable when combined with another one than it is in isolation" (EN 1172b28-29). This claim, however, needs some explanation.

There are many desirable and valuable things which are not pleasurable. Nobody would choose to be a child forever or choose to live a life of only ignorant pleasures as opposed to a life filled with other goods brought about from virtue. Indeed, we sometimes choose things that are pleasure-less or even painful for something greater than pleasure. However pleasure is complete; it is intrinsically good, as we argued for justice in 4.3. Some activities give us pleasure, but the most complete activity is the most pleasurable. Let us explore exactly what kinds of pleasure this must be and what gives rise to it.

There are many kinds of pleasures such as those of body and those of intellect. They differ in kind, and what completes them also differs in kind. There are also different pleasures for different things; Aristotle notes that Heraclitus says that donkeys prefer sweepings to gold (EN, 1176a7-8). Humans take pleasures in certain things insofar as they are human, unless they are corrupt. Human pleasures tie in with the type of creature that a human is and these are pleasurable because they complete him. Broadie says that "according to the present doctrine, pleasure completes (*teleioun*) the activity, as 'a sort of supervenient end' (or 'completion')" (70). Also "...Plato had argued that the purer a pleasure is, the more it is a *pleasure*" (Broadie, 74). Pleasure is clearly very important in itself but also "...the chief good for every species is something pleasant to the members of the species" (Broadie, 66). Those things which are most pleasant to a

species are also what will make that species happy as pleasure completes their activity and leaves nothing left to desire.

Since pleasure can come from intellectual or sensory activities, Aristotle makes distinctions between kinds of pleasure (EN Bk. 10 Ch. 5) as Mill does (*Utilitarianism* Chapter 2), and gives superiority to intellectual activities, such as contemplation, which Mill also does. Mill also puts great emphasis on happiness calling it the "greatest happiness principle" (Chapter 2). Mill also claims (Chapter 4), like Aristotle, that happiness is the only end in itself. However, there is one serious point where Mill and Aristotle differ. For Mill, happiness just comes from pleasures, whereas for Aristotle, it comes from completion of activities that accord with virtue.

For humans, pleasure completes contemplation which is an activity of the intellect. This will complete people because this is what is best for them to do given the kind of creature that they are; humans are born with intelligence and its exercise is fundamental to their happiness. This will be discussed again shortly, but for now let us return to talk of happiness itself more generally.

Aristotle argues that happiness is not a disposition like the virtues (EN Bk. 10 Ch. 6); if it were the same, then you could have it when suffering constantly; it is a kind of activity. Aristotle says activities are either necessary for something else or desirable in themselves, and happiness is the latter (EN Bk. 10 Ch. 6). Furthermore, we have seen that good people take pleasure in virtue as this is the content for happiness in humans.

Since the content of happiness is virtue, which is a mean of extremes, happiness or '*eudaimonia*' is itself a mastering of mediation; "but if happiness is activity in accordance with excellence, it is reasonable that it should be in accordance with the highest kind; and this will be excellence of what is best" (EN, 117a12-14). This activity is contemplation, which involves the

intellect and is a key to eudemonia. *Eudaimonia* is excellence of the highest kind for humanity; it is itself a mean, and is perhaps the mean of all means, and therefore shares a similarity with the virtues in how it is achieved. As mentioned before, the virtues basically function in the same way in their achievement of goodness; they differ only in aspect. In the *Protagoras* Plato argues that the virtues are unified as knowledge of what is advantageous. *Eudaimonia* is this unifying principle, it does not deal with aspects; rather it deals with the person as a whole being well-mediated so as to act with moderation. If a person achieves *eudaimonia* they will have the all the excellences to some degree as we saw also for wisdom in section 4.1. This is because the man with *eudaimonia* is himself an excellent man, and Aristotle does claim that having one excellence guarantees the others because of wisdom. We have seen this both in the fact that they are unified, as Plato argues, and that one virtue cannot be achieved without the others, as Aristotle argues. Talk of the virtues is just the microanalysis of the macro-scale *eudaimonia*, which includes having the proper habits which guarantee virtuous activity. *Eudaimonia* is a state (as we saw at the end of Section 2.3) and developing good habits will bring about the right state. Being in the right state will allow for appropriate action and development of habit. We saw at the end of Section 3 this circularity and how this is resolved in action that starts the cycle and eliminates the viciousness. However we need to say more about what *eudaimonia* is.

Eudaimonia requires intelligence as this is the highest thing in us; it is the activity which uses intelligence through reflection, recollection and contemplation. Contemplation does not require anything beyond intellect; this is why Jacobs refers to it as the "most self sufficient activity" (133).

For Aristotle happiness is a natural and biological thing; we instinctually seek happiness and what makes us happy. All animals seek what is good for them, since, good is that which all

things seek, as we saw at the start of section 3.1. But in their own way, given the type of creature they are humans are naturally embedded with certain abilities, and contemplation is one activity that is essential for *eudaimonia*.

While the contemplative life is the highest life for humans, Aristotle notes that the second highest life is in accordance with the rest of the excellences; such as justice, courage, and so on (EN Bk. 10 Ch. 8). These however are in need of external factors for action, while contemplation is something internal and is thus more self-sufficient and higher.

Our intellect is the highest thing in us and contemplation is the activity that uses the intellect. Jacobs notes that "intellectual activity actualizes our nature most completely" (133). A lion cannot live the contemplative life because he lacks the intellectual ability to do so. A human cannot live the life of a lion and be happy because to do so is to fall short of human capacities. The reason we become happy is because we are making the maximum use of our capacities. The contemplative life has nothing missing.

Mill comments on the superiority of intellectual pleasures that can be gained only by humans saying that: "few human creatures would consent to be changed into any of the lower animals, for even the fullest allowance of a beast's pleasures" (280) as this is not the best thing for us to be doing. Aristotle, like Mill, argues that pleasures gained from the use of the intellect will be greater for a rational human than those gained from the lower pleasures such as those coming from taste or touch saying "again, no one would choose to live the whole of life with the thoughts of a small child, enjoying to the utmost the pleasures of small children; or to delight in doing something of the most shameful sort, even without the prospect of ever having to suffer pain for it" (EN 1174a2-5).

Aristotle says "For more than anything nature seems to avoid pain and seek the pleasant" (EN, 1157b16-17). Pleasure is a part of happiness, and intellectual accomplishment brings the highest pleasure about. Intelligence is divine in humans, and so a contemplative life in accordance with intelligence is itself divine. We are a kind of creature with intelligence and happiness ties in with our type, so our highest happiness ties in with our intelligence and its activity of contemplation. Aristotle says, at the opening of the *Metaphysics*, that "by nature, all men long to know" (*Metaphysics*, 980a) and it is this longing that shows a deficiency "all men" must satisfy for happiness to be achieved.

Lastly, happiness also requires prosperity; you must be healthy, and eating, drinking and so on. We also saw in 2.3 that luck also plays a factor, but intellectual accomplishment is needed for happiness of the highest degree. Many people will do what is good because of fear, however this is not enough! Both disposition and consequences matter; good deeds must stem from good traits developed through habit. Motivation must be internal not external. Broadie argues that "the courageous person holds his own life dear, the more so the better he is, because he knows the value of what he is prepared to give up" (25). A just person will not deliberate on whether to be just, but on what the just thing to do is.

Happiness is fundamental to understanding Aristotle's consequentialism because happiness is the ultimate consequence; it is completion of creatures and it is what they aim for. It is also the best thing and it maximizes their good; being a good person good makes you good.

5 - Aristotle the Consequentialist

Now that we have shown Aristotle's own consequentialism, it will be helpful here to compare it to various forms of consequentialism and see where he fits in relative to other consequentialists. Normally we see that "the most traditional view among Consequentialists is that the only kind of result that is good in itself is '*happiness*' (Haines). We have seen this is true for Mill, who is undoubtedly consequentialist, and how he differs from Aristotle on this point. However, there are many more kinds of consequentialism. This section attempts to show that Aristotle has a place among those labeled "consequentialists". First let us look at *Plain Consequentialism*:

> *Plain Consequentialism is a theory about which actions are right. Its standard is high. It says that among all the very many things we could do at any given time, only one or a very few of them are right. The implication is that the rest of them are wrong (Haines).*

The right thing is that which hits the mean, according to Aristotle, but does this entail the view that all other actions are wrong no matter how close they come? Or are there many right answers and one that is best (hits the mean)? Consider the following:

> *Plain Scalar Consequentialism: Of any two things a person might do at any given moment, one is better than another to the extent that its overall consequences are better than the other's overall consequences (Haines).*

> *This theory implies that the actions with the best consequences are morally best, but it does not say that if you do the second-best you are doing something morally wrong. It says nothing about right and wrong (Haines).*

This seems to be more in line with Aristotle's own view. Aristotle is not committed to the idea that if something is less than perfect then it fails to be good. As long as the function of something is performed and performed well it may said to be good. For example, a chair can be good if it

performs its function well, but it may be lacking somehow and that stops it from being perfect; it might be a more comfortable chair. All that is required for right action is that it is good somehow, and as we have seen Aristotle's ethics has an economy that accommodates better and best results. While being right is in line with doing what is good, being right is *most* in line with doing what is best.

The next forms of consequentialism to look at are *Expectable* and *Reasonable Consequentialism*:

> *Expectable Consequentialism: The morally right action is the action whose reasonably expectable consequences are best (Haines).*
>
> *Reasonable Consequentialism: An action is morally right if and only if it has the best reasonably expected consequences (Haines).*
>
> *Reasonable Consequentialism says that for an action of mine to be right, I must actually come to a reasonable conclusion beforehand about the consequences. Expectable Consequentialism says that an action can be right even if I do not think reasonably about it at all, so long as it is the action I would have estimated to have the best consequences if I had done a reasonable job of making an estimate (Haines).*

Aristotle is not going to deny the value of expectable consequentialism, as it will produce actual good in the world. However reasonable consequentialism will always be better if the actions are the same. Even though the amounts of benefit being produced from the action are equal, one takes reason as a source of the action which, in Aristotle's view, will add to the overall goodness of the situation because the action will have stemmed from some virtue or good choice.

Finally, we shall look at "Dual Consequentialism".

> *Dual Consequentialism: The word "right" is ambiguous. It has a moral sense and an objective sense. (i) The objectively right action is the action with the best consequences, and (ii) the morally right action is any action with the best reasonably expected consequences (Haines).*

This is an important distinction, since often what was chosen did not actually happen. Aristotle however gives importance to the consequence. But acting in accordance with excellence is evident here. Dual consequentialism makes a distinction between the root of an action and the action itself. But the distinction it makes is not the one we are drawing out of Aristotle's own philosophy. Actions are indeed right if they produced the best possible consequences, and this can be enhanced depending on whether the root of the action was in line with these consequences. The root of action however reflects on the agent as well and prescribes a value to him as well. These evaluations echo the questions we have been looking at: What kinds of things should I do? and What kind of person should I be?

Comparing Aristotle with the various forms of consequentialism shows he is a consequentialist. Conversely, we see many of Aristotle's own ideas echoed in contemporary consequentialist philosophy. It is important to recognize Aristotle's distinctions from the other consequentialists, and that he has his own form of consequentialism, because his consequentialism plays an important role in his ethical theory intertwined with his virtue ethics.

6 – Conclusion

Beginning our exploration with talk of the Good and good in general, set the foundation for our investigation as goodness is the goal for ethical action and is therefore fundamental to an ethical theory such as Aristotle's. From there, we moved to explore how Aristotle suggests we meet our ethical goals by bringing about the fullest completion of good possible. This is done in two ways; through consequences and virtuous action. Necessary to Aristotle's theory is the scope of good in the world, but also, and especially, in us.

Many concepts have a bearing on good such as proper measure, benefit(s), justice, happiness, completion, various excellences, elimination of debt, and the satisfaction of desire. But it is through virtue that we gain tools to bring these about as consequences, and contribute to good through wisdom, education, self-control, practice, and others which play an integrating, mediating-role between virtue ethics and consequentialism.

Aristotle makes use of consequences as both an end, and an activity (which includes virtues). Our moral evaluations make use of each kind of consequence; we evaluate people based on the intrinsic nature of actions, as well as actions based on their outcomes. Goodness, for Aristotle, is connected with completion which is a measure of good; the more complete something is, the better it is. Completion involves proper mediation which Aristotle explains partly with his idea of 'commensurate universality' and his 'doctrine of the mean'. This mediation pertains specifically to what is appropriate in particular situations. Wisdom and reason are tools for determining what is appropriate for completion. Completion involves the fulfillment of function, which in humans, brings about *eudaimonia*. Completion also requires partaking in particular kinds of activities (virtues), as well as action from certain activities which bring about good consequences. Finally, completion requires the elimination of debt, and is essentially teleological in nature.

Aristotle shares enough with other consequentialists to be deemed a consequentialist; however he also does not fall into any consequentialist camps and therefore has developed a form of consequentialism which is unique. What is special about Aristotle's theory is that he has a vital role for virtue ethics within his consequentialist and teleological framework.

By unifying these theories we find a theory which has the versatility to answer two important questions of practical ethics: what should I do, and what kind of person should I be?

This could only be done in Aristotle's theory by bringing out the consequentialist side in his philosophy, which we see in many areas beyond his ethics including, his teleological biology.

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