

CHAPTER TWELVE

ESSENCE & EXISTENCE

WHAT IS A HUMAN BEING?

So what of the State of Nature?

We've got that complex thought experiment jangling around in our heads, and we're able to see how it can lead both to the thesis that we're naturally good, and all evil is caused by organized society—and to the thesis that we're naturally evil, and only made good by organized society. We can see how it can tell us we're naturally selfish or naturally law-abiding. It seems it must be one or the other, though.

And we see even how the whole notion of society organized by some unspoken social contract is itself troubling in ways.

Either we're good (or at least law abiding), or we're evil (or at least selfish). Either organized society is good, or it's evil. Either the social contract is good, or it's evil. End of story. Right?

Right?

Well, no. The second part of our question about human nature looks at what we *are* at our very core. What is it to be a **human being**? We didn't really look at that, but just leaped into questions about whether we're actually a good whatever we are. If we can determine what sort of *thingie* we are, we might be able then to see better what our relationship with others—including organized society—actually is.

We'll find it's more complex than we thought (isn't everything?).

*X is a **human being** iff x is...*

What?

Aristotle argues that we have an essential nature, or essence (and Plato, Hobbes, Rousseau, Locke, and Master Hsün would certainly agree).

Whatever it is to be a *good* or *evil* human being is measured by this essence that we all share. But we need to know what *human being* is to get to the problem of what *good* human being or *evil* human being might be.

We need to define a term we've left glaringly unanalyzed.

This question returns us to metaphysics, but its answer takes the form of ethics, political theory, and—when we jump into the anti-essence argument by Jean-Paul Sartre—*Existentialism*. Yep. You got that right—we'll be looking also into an argument that claims there is *no such a thing as a human essence*.

And in our first dip into the deep end of existentialist thought, we'll finally enter the other side of doing philosophy—where we begin to look at the **experience** of being human.

We'll quickly find that with whatever answer we prefer,

READING QUESTIONS

As you study the following chapter, keep these questions in mind for critical thinking and analysis. They might turn up as paper topics!

- What is a soul, according to Aristotle?
- How does an understanding of the four causes enable one to understand the essence of something?
- How does Aristotle approach the problem of human nature? What is his understanding of the interrelationship between humans and organized society?
- What is a *natural slave*? How is it different from the more contemporary understanding of 'slave'? What term would you use in order to remove the emotional baggage of this word when referencing the concept? (To use the rules of discourse)
- Why does Sartre *deliberately* choose such emotionally-charged language?
- What is the difference between *negative* and *positive* philosophy?

continued...

we're forced to acknowledge our individual **responsibility** as human

beings—whatever that 'human being' thing turns out to be.

FOUNDATIONS

We'll be maintaining our use of the logical principles we learned already, especially this key concept:

*X is the **essence** of something y iff x is the most basic, necessary, and unalterable part of y that defines y as y and not something else.*

We'll also learn the following :

- According to Aristotle, a proper (full) account of a substance requires careful explanation of all four causes (formal, material, efficient, and final).
- The Greek idea of the *soul* is nothing like our idea. Rather, the *soul* is the animating principle of anything that has life.

- The purpose of something is determined by its function.
- Existentialism holds that we humans are **radically free** and are thus completely responsible for our own individual actions, our future, and our choices.
- If God does not exist, then God could not have determined the purpose of humanity. It follows that if there is to be a human purpose, the human being must determine it.

TASKS AND CQs

There (at least) **two critical questions** and **one task** in this chapter. There is also **one team project**. Finally, there are **extra credit** opportunities, each worth one task grade.

THE ESSENCE OF A HUMAN

or,

What in the World is Carmen Sandiego?

If I were to ask you to supply a conceptual analysis of a *human*, what would it be? Such was a problem posed to the philosophers of the Academy in Athens.*

It's not as easy as it might seem, defining human beings. What is unique to us, among the world of beings? Well, we have language. Yeah, but then we



READING QUESTIONS, *continued.*

- How does Sartre respond to the problem of human nature, or so-called human 'essence'? Explain his reasoning.
- Explain the meaning of each of the following terms: *anguish*, *abandonment*, *despair*, and the *human condition*. How do they explain the relationship between the individual and organized society? Explain Sartre's reasoning for the truth of each as a descriptor for all human beings.
- How does the story of the madman explain the consequences of scientific advances on human belief systems?
- Explain the concept of *bad faith*, according to Sartre. In what four ways can one act in bad faith?
- Why does Sartre argue that *existence precedes essence*? Explain why he thinks this situation is a necessary and logical conclusion.
- Can you come up with a valid or probable Existentialist argument that shares enough family resemblance to Sartre's to remain Existentialist, but preserves the existence of God?

continued...

* The Academy, you remember, was founded by Plato. But by the time this question rolled around, as some accounts have it, he had died, and the school was being led by Plato's nephew (and a good philosopher in his own right), Speusippus.

have to figure out what in the world *language* is. We don't want our definition to require intricate definitions! Too difficult. Try again.

We care for each other. Sometimes. Well, some of us do. But some other animals care for each other. Blah. Whiskey break.*

One apocryphal story has it that the Academicians came up with what they thought was a sure-fire definition:

*X is a **human being** iff x is a featherless biped.*

And it was all wine and roses until a snarky and very eccentric philosopher named Diogenes walked by the Academy and casually tossed a plucked chicken over the wall into their courtyard.

Back to the drawing board.

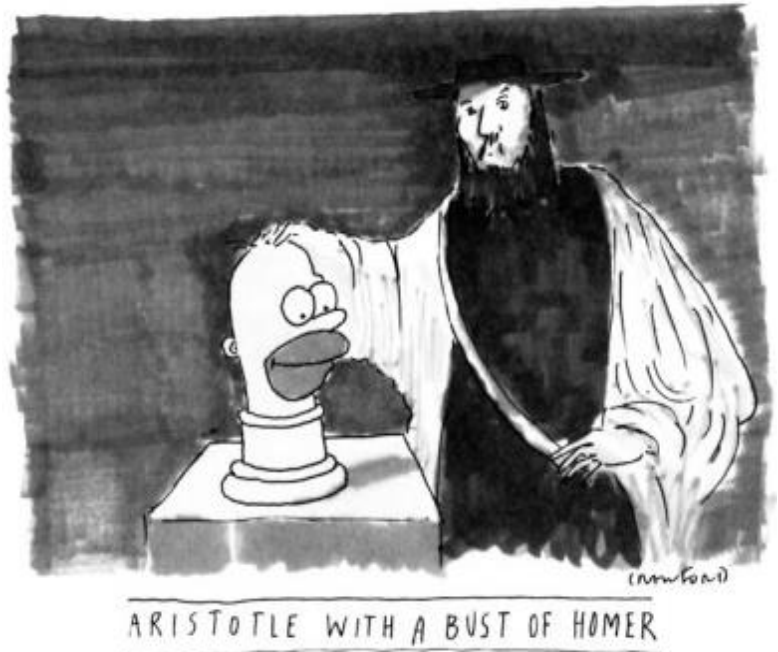
Aristotle had studied under Plato at the Academy, but by this time, he was the head of his own school—the walkabouts. Seriously. They were called the *Peripatetics*, which literally means *the walk-arounds* because they had this habit of getting into deep philosophical discussions while—wait for it—walking around. Aristotle was famous for pacing.[†] The school itself was located at a place called the Lyceum,[‡] the home of a particular statue and shrine to the god Apollo.

Anyway, Aristotle was dissatisfied with most of the philosophical accounts of different kinds of being that were stacking up on the shelves of all the credible philosophical schools. So he set out to analyze, with his students, each of the respected accounts in order to sift out the useful from the unhelpful. He figured that instead of trying to come up with something wholly unique, his best bet would be to see what his predecessors had said and to cobble together



READING QUESTIONS, *continued.*

- Take a position on the problem of human nature. Do you think one of the 'state of nature' accounts (from chapter 11) is correct? If so, which one? If not, why do you favor Sartre or Aristotle? How does your position measure up more accurately against the evidence? If your favored position has worrisome consequences or poor supporting arguments, what can you offer to overcome them? Argue validly and carefully in support of your position.



* Or maybe an Ouzo break, since this is Greece.

[†] Which must put Australian philosopher, David Chalmers at ease. That man is paces so much and so quickly while doing philosophy, it's like watching a one-man academic tennis match. One almost needs a post-workout shower after attending one of his colloquia.

[‡] Actually, the Greek was Λύκειον (*Lykeion*), but we've gotten used to using the Latin translation of its name.

something that was more helpful from those things that remained after his sifting.

In this, Aristotle was the first great synthesizer of thought. Though not the first,* he was certainly also demonstrating his power as a premier scientist. Find what research is out there. Check what works. Find overlaps. Synthesize. Work collaboratively. And that's what he did to attempt to answer not just what a *human* being is, but what *any* being is.

In a book now called *Metaphysics* (which is where we get the word), Aristotle catalogs, analyzes, and synthesizes all the previous accounts of things with οὐσία or *ousia* (being).† A certain group of things Aristotle called the *protai ousiai*, or “primary beings”—from which we get the idea of *substances* (which we talked about when discussing Descartes in chapter 10).

To understand the selections from Aristotle about *human* beings, it will be quite useful to first get a background on his understanding of any *beings*.



Aristotle Instructs Young Alexander in Philosophy

The Four Causes

The ancient Greeks (like all of us, really) were very interested in the driving forces that enable life. In their metaphysical analyses, they were more broadly interested in what the foundation of all reality might be. Thales, generally considered to be the very first Greek philosopher (and probably the very first western philosopher) reasoned that the most basic part of all reality was water. Anaxagoras, a thinker who lived hundreds of years after Thales and who strongly influenced Socrates in his youth, argued that reality was an inter-penetrating and vibrant coexistence of things like Hot and Cold and Wet and Dry and so on, all advancing and receding under the direction of a governing force called *Nous* or ‘mind.’ Heraclitus held that the essence of all reality was fire, ever changing—to try to hold it in place for a moment would be to lose the essence of reality. An unmoving fire isn’t a fire, and, as he said, you can’t step into the same river twice. Plato argued that the most basic reality was found in the ideal, immaterial Forms.

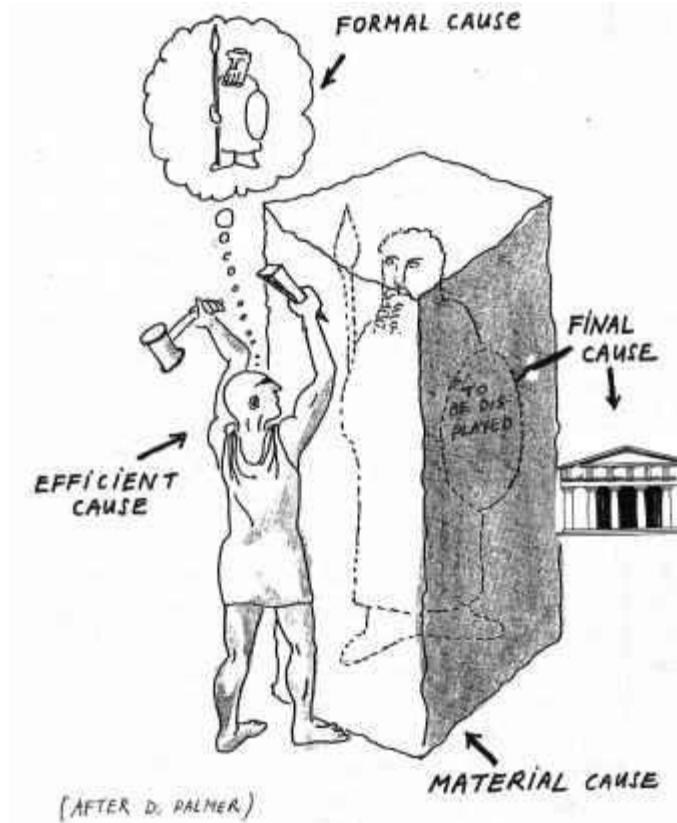
Aristotle thought that everyone was right, but incompletely. He determined that everyone had a *partial* grasp on the essence of reality. In his book, *Metaphysics*, Aristotle notes that to understand reality, we need to see that there are *four* causes:

Evidently we have to acquire knowledge of the original causes (for we say we know each thing only when we think we recognize its first cause), and causes are spoken of in four senses.

continued...

* It is likely that the first philosopher Thales of Miletus (c. 624–546 BCE) was also the first scientist as well as the first mathematician (and possibly the first person to create and use either futures or options in business).

† Speaking loosely, when a Greek thinker talks about a thing with being, he uses the word *on* or *ontos* (which roughly means ‘this’). Thus, the metaphysical study of beings or things is called *ontology*. Thisology. Nice. And for our purposes, we can understand ‘being’ partly to mean ‘essence.’ So to ask what sort of being a thing is is much like asking what sort of essence that thing has.



ON THE SOUL

Another text of Aristotle's, called *De Anima* (or *On the Soul*), discusses the essence of *living* things.

What is it that is different between natural things that are alive and those that are not alive? The answer is obvious. They're *alive*. This principle of life is essential to them, so it's their *formal cause*. Consider the difference between a living and a dead cat. It's certainly made of the same stuff. But the dead cat isn't really a *cat* anymore. It's a *corpse*. Cats do things that corpses don't (we hope). The *form* of cat is different than the form of cat corpse. And that's because cats are *alive* and cat corpses aren't.



The Four Causes, *continued.*

In one of these we mean the substance, i.e. the essence (for the 'why' is reducible finally to the definition, and the ultimate 'why' is a cause and principle); in another the matter or substratum, in a third the source of the change, and in a fourth the cause opposed to this, the purpose and the good (for this is the end of all generation and change).

The four Causes are these:

- the **formal cause**,
- the **material cause**,
- the **efficient cause**, and
- the **final cause**.

Let's break them down. Suppose you're an alien from a distant galaxy, and you come to Earth trying to figure out what some particular thing is. You run across my not-as-fierce-as-she-pretends-to-be cat, Scout.



Now you want to know what this thing is. To determine that, Aristotle says, you need to answer these four questions:

1. What is the form of the thing?
2. What sort of stuff is the thing made of?
3. How did the thing come into being?
4. What's the thing for?

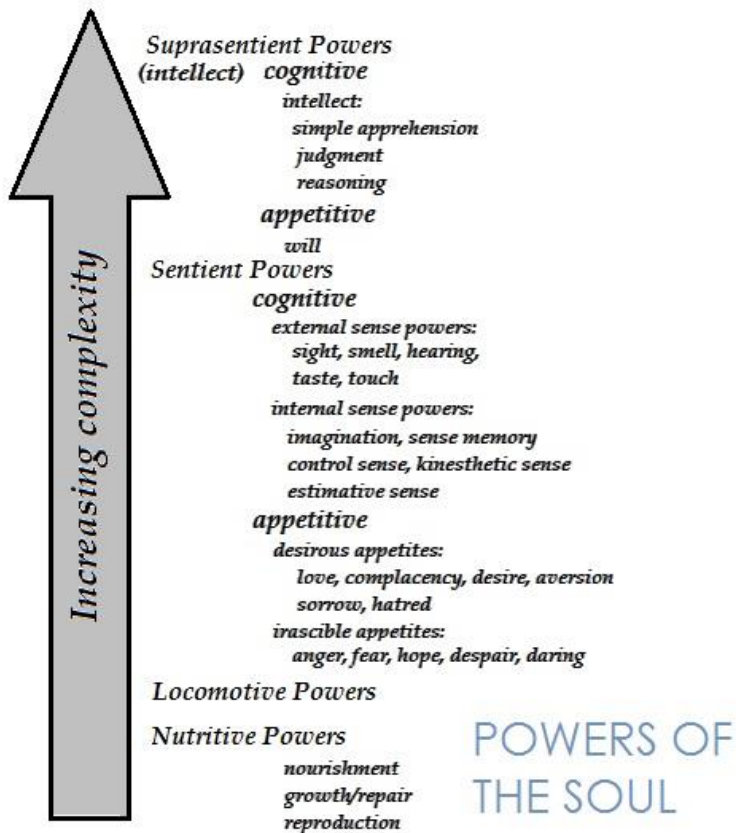
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The difference is that they have different forms. The cat has life, and this living-ness enables the cat to do all its catty things. And this living-ness is the soul. The form of a living thing, the essence of a living thing, the principle of life in that living thing is its soul.

All living things have souls. This is just to say that all living things are living things. Kinda redundant, sure, but you get the idea of what Aristotle means when he talks soul. What is it for something to be alive? At the very basic level, it requires few functions: all living things regenerate, reproduce, and nourish themselves. If a living thing is damaged and cannot regenerate the damaged parts (can't heal), then it dies. If it cannot reproduce, then life ends. Same goes for nourishing. Without this, life cannot persist. So all souls involve these basic functions (or capacities).

De Anima is pretty fascinating in its careful exploration of the nuanced layers of complexity in living things. Bit by bit, more complex life forms have more capacities, hence more soul functions.

Just to get a taste of it, take a gander at the chart below.



The Four Causes, *continued.*

The answer to each of these questions will be one of the four causes. What is the form of Scout? Cat. That's her formal cause. What sort of stuff is she made of? Fuzz and bone and blood and claws and whiskers and other goop. That's her material cause. These two together are the core reality of a **substance**.

Aristotle held that the ultimate reality was shaped stuff. In fact, his metaphysics was called shaped-stuff-ism, but it sounds better in Greek: **hylomorphism**.*

But truly understanding something requires more than the shape and stuff, it requires an account of how it got here, and what it's for. Interestingly, these two uses of the term 'cause' are still current today. We ask *what caused something to exist*? And by this, we mean to ask (in Aristotelian parlance) what something's *efficient* cause is. What caused Scout? Mama and Papa kitty doing the bow chicka bow wow.

And when somebody asks you why something is the way it is, you might find yourself answering 'because....' followed by some reason or purpose. The purpose of something is the *final* cause.

The Greek term for 'final cause' is **telos**, a term I'll use from now on. The *telos* of some artifact can be determined by considering the reason the artificer, the designer or creator or artist or tradesman, had for making the artifact. What's a table for? What's a carburetor for? These are easy to answer.

But what's a *cat* for?

continued...

* *Hylō* (pr. HOO-loh) literally means "wood," and *morphē* we still use to mean 'change.' So changeable wood. Or shaped wood. But in ancient Greek, 'wood' was a catch-all term for material stuff, much like 'apple' and 'deer' were catch-all terms in middle English for 'fruit' and 'animal.' (And that, Virginia, is how we came to believe that Eve ate an apple specifically. Take that to your next game of Trivial Pursuit.)

But to keep it simple (and to risk misrepresenting Aristotle), we'll focus on three snapshots of soul: what we'll call the **nutritive**, the **volitional**, and the **rational** soul.

But—*be clear about this!*—do not take this to mean that Aristotle thinks there are *only* three levels or even that there are three *kinds* of soul. For Aristotle, the soul is the principle of life in a living thing. In one way, you can say that there are as many kinds of soul as there are living things; but in another, you should say that really, there's only *one* kind of thing that animates life.

Soul is soul.

Okay, so back to the complexities of soul. You can say that amoebas, blades of grass, and oak trees all have nutritive souls.

But so do dogs and cats. But dogs and cats can do a lot of things that oak trees and grass cannot. For example, the cat can move herself to first the water bowl and then the food dish. And the cat is conscious of the world around her. Of course, worms and cicadas aren't as complex as cats and dolphins, but on this level, they can all move themselves to their food. And certainly they are (on various levels of complexity) aware of the world around them. To be able to move oneself is called *volition*, and we might say it's *voluntary* movement. 'Volition' and 'voluntary' both come from the Latin *volens* which roughly means 'will.' That is, something has will power of some sort. Think about a sunflower. To get its nourishment, it turns its face to the sun. But that's speaking sloppily. Actually, the sun's rays move the plant. It's moved from *outside of itself*. The plant doesn't move itself. It's not like it can suddenly *not* move to face the sun. In contrast, a worm can move either left or right to find that tasty morsel of manure, and the cat can move first for water and then for food, can move to either this food bowl or that other food bowl. Their movement is *from within*, from their own will. Thus we can say that animals of all kinds have the *volitional* soul.

But note this: these capacities come *in addition to* all the capacities of the simpler soul. Animals don't have two souls, but more capacity rich souls. All the nourishment and 'lower' faculties are informed by the 'higher' faculties. Things that have volitional souls will do all the nutritive things volitionally. Their will affects how and when they do anything they *can* do by will.

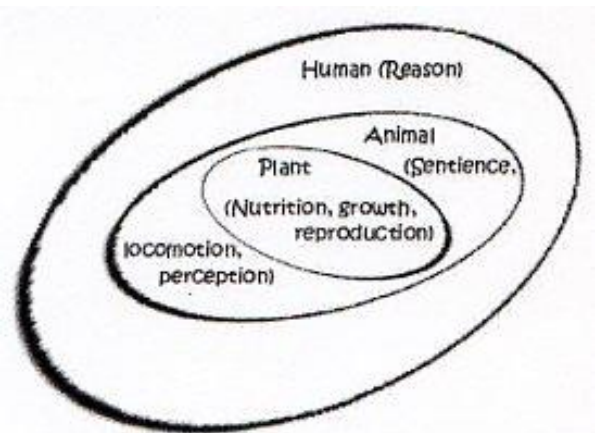
The Four Causes, *continued.*

That seems a pretty odd question. In fact, it seems a crazy question to ask about anything that isn't artificial. But Aristotle didn't think so. And if slow down, we might begin to see what he was thinking. Consider the difference between a thing of some sort and a *good* thing of that kind. To determine whether something is a *good* thing of its kind is to have some sort of idea about what the *telos* of that thing is. So what makes a tree a *good* tree? What makes corn *good* corn? What makes a person a *good* person or a cat a *good* cat? *Teloi*.*

So we've got this notion, but can we make it into something more clear: a *concept*?† To determine the *telos* of a natural thing, Aristotle says we have to look again at its form. The form is more than just the physical shape of a thing. It tells you what that thing *does* (if anything). Form meets function, in a way. So back to Scout. Her form is *cat*. So what do cats *do*? To answer this—and to see the difference between living and non-living things, we need to discuss the soul.

* The plural for *telos* is *teloi*, so don't be bewildered if you hear somebody use this term when talking about a bunch of them.

† In philosophical talk, a *notion* is a thought or image we have that is undefined, vague, perhaps even impossible to define. A *concept* is a thought that can be clearly defined and understood. This distinction is perhaps most clearly made by George Berkeley.



In the same way, we can see how the *rational* soul works. There are things that we can do that cats and dogs and even chimpanzees and orangutans cannot do. We can do the whole *woulda coulda shoulda* thing. That is, we can think in *counterfactuals*. We can imagine how life would have been were some other state of affairs to have obtained. We can learn from mistakes we never made by considering consequences of them in hypothetical thinking. We can plan for our descendants' potential future. This ability to abstract concepts, to develop morality and consider it in counterfactual scenarios we'll call *reason* or **rationality**.^{*} And when rational things undertake volitional or nutritive activities, they are always going to be infused with reasoning whenever reasoning can be involved. So when we eat, we choose *what* to eat or *how* to eat. We choose to boycott food companies or products we've reasoned to be immoral, and we practice socially acceptable behaviors of mating or employment.

So the *soul* determines what a thing does. More complex life forms have souls with more capacities. Now we can get back to the question of determining a thing's *telos*. To determine whether something is a *good* thing of its kind is to determine whether it does what that kind of thing does, and does it *well*. A good thing is something that functions well.

So what makes for a good cat? A cat that—well—*cats* excellently. What do cats do? Take a look at the volitional soul as it pertains specifically to felines. They eat. They meow. They reproduce and shed. They heal when scratched, and they digest. They purr and play and climb and sleep. They hiccup and poop and pounce and hunt and hide. And so on. A cat that does these things excellently is a good cat.

And that answers our fourth question about the causes. Let's say all these things are *catting*. The *telos* of a cat is to be a good cat. To *cat* excellently, if you will.

^{*} Remember that to say something is *rational* is here only roughly discussed. It is true that some animals like dolphins and orangutans have language. Heck, birds have very complex songs and squirrels chatter distinct messages. But it is doubtful they have the counterfactual abstraction that is here indicated as the criterion for rationality. Also note that there is no reason to think that only humans are rational (if there are angels, for example, they'd have to be rational, as would God). And remember finally that these three general snapshots of soul are not capturing the nuanced complexities Aristotle discusses. Certainly we'd say, for example, that oak trees are more complex than amoebas, that earthworms are less complex than geckos, which are less complex than gorillas. And certainly gorillas have more reason-like capacities than do octopi or seagulls, though both of the latter have been demonstrated (on camera) to use tools.

Human Nature

So what makes a good human? What makes a good life for a human? Whatever it is, it's going to hang on the nature of the human soul. Aristotle begins his argument by noting that when we say something of some kind or other is a *good* thing of that kind, we look at its actions and results—that we look at what its *nature* is and whether its actions are excellent.

The word we're going to use here for excellence is **arête**, which is often translated as either *excellence* or as *virtue*. We determine whether something is an excellent runner by considering *running* and the thing doing the running is doing so excellently according to the kind of thing it is. For example, an excellent runner that's a cheetah is going to go about running differently than an excellent runner that's a human being.

Read the following selections from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*, and see if you can figure out the following: what is his argument for the human excellence? What are we naturally? And how are we related to organized society (the *polis*)?

Prepare a Critical Question on the readings, double-checking to ensure that you are writing it according to all the stated criteria.

NICOMACHEAN ETHICS

*Aristotle**

Book I, Chapter 12: Happiness as Pleasure vs. Happiness as Virtue

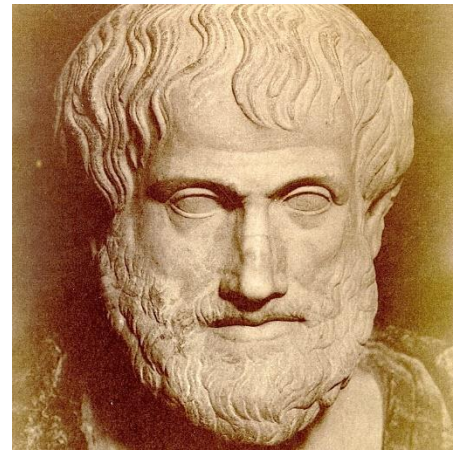
Now it is plain that everything which is a subject of praise is praised for being of a certain kind and bearing a certain relation to something else: for instance, the just, and the valiant, and generally the good man, and virtue itself, we praise because of the actions and the results: and the strong man, and the quick runner, and so forth, we praise for being of a certain nature and bearing a certain relation to something good and excellent (and this is illustrated by attempts to praise the gods; for they are presented in a ludicrous aspect by being referred to our standard, and this results from the fact, that all praise does, as we have said, imply reference to a standard). Now if it is to such objects that praise belongs, it is evident that what is applicable to the best objects is not praise, but something higher and better: which is plain matter of fact, for not only do we call the gods blessed and happy, but of men also we pronounce those blessed who most nearly resemble the gods. And in like manner in respect of goods; no man thinks of praising Happiness as he does the principle of justice, but calls it blessed, as being somewhat more godlike and more excellent.

Eudoxus too is thought to have advanced a sound argument in support of the claim of pleasure to the highest prize: for the fact that, though it is one of the good things, it is not praised, he took for an indication of its superiority to those which are subjects of praise: a superiority he attributed also to a god and the Chief Good, on the ground that they form the standard to which everything besides is referred. For praise applies to virtue, because it makes men apt to do what is noble; but encomia to definite works of body or mind.

However, it is perhaps more suitable to a regular treatise on encomia to pursue this topic with exactness: it is enough for our purpose that from what has been said it is evident that Happiness belongs to the class of things precious and final. And it seems to be so also because of its being a starting-point; which it is, in that with a view to it we all do everything else that is done; now the starting-point and cause of good things we assume to be something precious and divine.

Chapter 13: The Aspects of the Soul

Moreover, since Happiness is a kind of working of the soul in the way of perfect Excellence, we must inquire concerning Excellence: for so probably shall we have a clearer view concerning Happiness; and again,



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* Translation in the public domain. Available at gutenberg.org

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he who is really a statesman is generally thought to have spent most pains on this, for he wishes to make the citizens good and obedient to the laws. (For examples of this class we have the lawgivers of the Cretans and Lacedaemonians and whatever other such there have been.) But if this investigation belongs properly to [Greek: *politikae*], then clearly the inquiry will be in accordance with our original design.

Well, we are to inquire concerning Excellence, *i.e.* Human Excellence of course, because it was the Chief Good of Man and the Happiness of Man that we were inquiring of just now. By Human Excellence we mean not that of man's body but that of his soul; for we call Happiness a working of the Soul.

And if this is so, it is plain that some knowledge of the nature of the Soul is necessary for the statesman, just as for the Oculist a knowledge of the whole body, and the more so in proportion as [Greek: *politikae*] is more precious and higher than the healing art: and in fact physicians of the higher class do busy themselves much with the knowledge of the body.

So then the statesman is to consider the nature of the Soul: but he must do so with these objects in view, and so far only as may suffice for the objects of his special inquiry: for to carry his speculations to a greater exactness is perhaps a task more laborious than falls within his province.

In fact, the few statements made on the subject in my popular treatises are quite enough, and accordingly we will adopt them here: as, that the Soul consists of two parts, the Irrational and the Rational (as to whether these are actually divided, as are the parts of the body, and everything that is capable of division; or are only metaphysically speaking two, being by nature inseparable, as are convex and concave circumferences, matters not in respect of our present purpose). And of the Irrational, the one part seems common to other objects, and in fact vegetative; I mean the cause of nourishment and growth (for such a faculty of the Soul one would assume to exist in all things that receive nourishment, even in embryos, and this the same as in the perfect creatures; for this is more likely than that it should be a different one).

Now the Excellence of this manifestly is not peculiar to the human species but common to others: for this part and this faculty is thought to work most in time of sleep, and the good and bad man are least distinguishable while asleep; whence it is a common saying that during one half of life there is no difference between the happy and the wretched; and this accords with our anticipations, for sleep is an inactivity of the soul, in so far as it is denominated good or bad, except that in some wise some of its movements find their way through the veil and so the good come to have

better dreams than ordinary men. But enough of this: we must forego any further mention of the nutritive part, since it is not naturally capable of the Excellence which is peculiarly human.

And there seems to be another Irrational Nature of the Soul, which yet in a way partakes of Reason. For in the man who controls his appetites, and in him who resolves to do so and fails, we praise the Reason or Rational part of the Soul, because it exhorts aright and to the best course: but clearly there is in them, beside the Reason, some other natural principle which fights with and strains against the Reason. (For in plain terms, just as paralysed limbs of the body when their owners would move them to the right are borne aside in a contrary direction to the left, so is it in the case of the Soul, for the impulses of men who cannot control their appetites are to contrary points: the difference is that in the case of the body we do see what is borne aside but in the case of the soul we do not. But, it may be, not the less on that account are we to suppose that there is in the Soul also somewhat besides the Reason, which is opposed to this and goes against it; as to *how* it is different, that is irrelevant.)

But of Reason this too does evidently partake, as we have said: for instance, in the man of self-control it obeys Reason: and perhaps in the man of perfected self-mastery, or the brave man, it is yet more obedient; in them it agrees entirely with the Reason.

So then the Irrational is plainly twofold: the one part, the merely vegetative, has no share of Reason, but that of desire, or appetition generally, does partake of it in a sense, in so far as it is obedient to it and capable of submitting to its rule. (So too in common phrase we say we have [Greek: *logos*] of our father or friends, and this in a different sense from that in which we say we have [Greek: *logos*] of mathematics.)

Now that the Irrational is in some way persuaded by the Reason, admonition, and every act of rebuke and exhortation indicate. If then we are to say that this also has Reason, then the Rational, as well as the Irrational, will be twofold, the one supremely and in itself, the other paying it a kind of filial regard.

The Excellence of Man then is divided in accordance with this difference: we make two classes, calling the one Intellectual, and the other Moral; pure science, intelligence, and practical wisdom—Intellectual: liberality, and perfected self-mastery—Moral: in speaking of a man's Moral character, we do not say he is a scientific or intelligent but a meek man, or one of perfected self-mastery: and we praise the man of science in right of his mental state; and of these such as are praiseworthy we call Excellences.

NOTES

NOTES

Book II, chapter 1: Kinds of Virtue; Virtue doesn't come by nature but is consistent with our nature

Well: human Excellence is of two kinds, Intellectual and Moral: now the Intellectual springs originally, and is increased subsequently, from teaching (for the most part that is), and needs therefore experience and time; whereas the Moral comes from custom, and so the Greek term denoting it is but a slight deflection from the term denoting custom in that language.

From this fact it is plain that not one of the Moral Virtues comes to be in us merely by nature: because of such things as exist by nature, none can be changed by custom: a stone, for instance, by nature gravitating downwards, could never by custom be brought to ascend, not even if one were to try and accustom it by throwing it up ten thousand times; nor could fire again be brought to descend, nor in fact could anything whose nature is in one way be brought by custom to be in another. The Virtues then come to be in us neither by nature, nor in despite of nature, but we are furnished by nature with a capacity for receiving them and are perfected in them through custom.

Again, in whatever cases we get things by nature, we get the faculties first and perform the acts of working afterwards; an illustration of which is afforded by the case of our bodily senses, for it was not from having often seen or heard that we got these senses, but just the reverse: we had them and so exercised them, but did not have them because we had exercised them. But the Virtues we get by first performing single acts of working, which, again, is the case of other things, as the arts for instance; for what we have to make when we have learned how, these we learn how to make by making: men come to be builders, for instance, by building; harp-players, by playing on the harp: exactly so, by doing just actions we come to be just; by doing the actions of self-mastery we come to be perfected in self-mastery; and by doing brave actions brave.

And to the truth of this testimony is borne by what takes place in communities: because the law-givers make the individual members good men by habituation, and this is the intention certainly of every law-giver, and all who do not effect it well fail of their intent; and herein consists the difference between a good Constitution and a bad.

Again, every Virtue is either produced or destroyed from and by the very same circumstances: art too in like manner; I mean it is by playing the harp that both the good and the bad harp-players are formed: and similarly builders and all the rest; by building well men will become good builders; by doing it badly bad ones: in fact, if this had not been so, there would have been no need of instructors, but all men would have been at once good or bad in their several arts without them.

**WE ARE WHAT
WE REPEATEDLY
DO.
EXCELLENCE, THEN, IS
NOT AN ACT, BUT A
HABIT.**
~Aristotle

So too then is it with the Virtues: for by acting in the various relations in which we are thrown with our fellow men, we come to be, some just, some unjust: and by acting in dangerous positions and being habituated to feel fear or confidence, we come to be, some brave, others cowards.

Similarly is it also with respect to the occasions of lust and anger: for some men come to be perfected in self-mastery and mild, others destitute of all self-control and passionate; the one class by behaving in one way under them, the other by behaving in another. Or, in one word, the habits are produced from the acts of working like to them: and so what we have to do is to give a certain character to these particular acts, because the habits formed correspond to the differences of these.

So then, whether we are accustomed this way or that straight from childhood, makes not a small but an important difference, or rather I would say it makes all the difference.

POLITICS

*Aristotle**

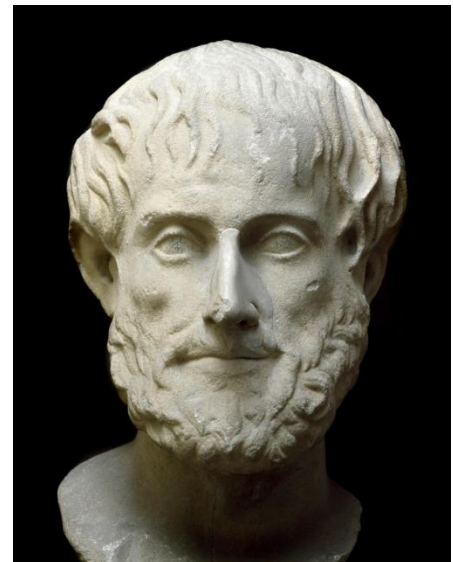
Book I, chapter 1

As we see that every city is a society, and every society is established for some good purpose; for an apparent good is the spring of all human actions; it is evident that this is the principle upon which they are every one founded, and this is more especially true of that which has for its object the best possible, and is itself the most excellent, and comprehends all the rest.

Now this is called a city, and the society thereof a political society; for those who think that the principles of a political, a regal, a family, and a herile government are the same are mistaken, while they suppose that each of these differ in the numbers to whom their power extends, but not in their constitution: so that with them a herile government is one composed of a very few,[†] a domestic of more, a civil and a regal of still more, as if there was no difference between a large family and a small city, or that a regal government and a political one are the same, only that in the one a single person is continually at the head of public affairs; in the other, that each member of the state has in his turn a share in the government, and is at one time a magistrate, at another a private person, according to the rules of political science.

But now this is not true, as will be evident to anyone who will consider this question in the most approved method. As, in an inquiry into every

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† This is the governing relationship between a servant and a master.

NOTES

other subject, it is necessary to separate the different parts of which it is compounded, till we arrive at their first elements, which are the most minute parts thereof; so by the same proceeding we shall acquire a knowledge of the primary parts of a city and see wherein they differ from each other, and whether the rules of art will give us any assistance in examining into each of these things which are mentioned.

Chapter 2

Now if in this particular science any one would attend to its original seeds, and their first shoot, he would then as in others have the subject perfectly before him; and perceive, in the first place, that it is requisite that those should be joined together whose species cannot exist without each other, as the male and the female, for the business of propagation; and this not through choice, but by that natural impulse which acts both upon plants and animals also, for the purpose of their leaving behind them others like themselves. It is also from natural causes that some beings command and others obey, that each may obtain their mutual safety; for a being who is endowed with a mind capable of reflection and forethought is by nature the superior and governor, whereas he whose excellence is merely corporeal is formed to be a slave; whence it follows that the different state of master and slave is equally advantageous to both.

But there is a natural difference between a female and a slave: for nature is not like the artists who make the Delphic swords for the use of the poor, but for every particular purpose she has her separate instruments, and thus her ends are most complete, for whatsoever is employed on one subject only, brings that one to much greater perfection than when employed on many; and yet among the barbarians, a female and a slave are upon a level in the community, the reason for which is, that amongst them there are none qualified by nature to govern, therefore their society can be nothing but between slaves of different sexes. For which reason the poets say,

it is proper for the Greeks to govern the barbarians,

as if a barbarian and a slave were by nature one. Now of these two societies the domestic is the first, and Hesiod is right when he says,

First a house, then a wife, then an ox for the plough,

for the poor man has always an ox before a household slave. That society then which nature has established for daily support is the domestic, and those who compose it are called by Charondas *homosipuoï*, and by Epimenides the Cretan *homokapnoi*; but the society of many families, which was first instituted for their lasting, mutual advantage, is called a village, and a village is most naturally composed of the descendants of one family, whom some persons call *homogalaktes*, the children and the

children's children thereof: for which reason cities were originally governed by kings, as the barbarian states now are, which are composed of those who had before submitted to kingly government; for every family is governed by the elder, as are the branches thereof, on account of their relationship thereunto, which is what Homer says,

Each one ruled his wife and child,

and in this scattered manner they formerly lived. And the opinion which universally prevails, that the gods themselves are subject to kingly government, arises from hence, that all men formerly were, and many are so now; and as they imagined themselves to be made in the likeness of the gods, so they supposed their manner of life must needs be the same. And when many villages so entirely join themselves together as in every respect to form but one society, that society is a city, and contains in itself, if I may so speak, the end and perfection of government: first founded that we might live, but continued that we may live happily.

For which reason every city must be allowed to be the work of nature, if we admit that the original society between male and female is; for to this as their end all subordinate societies tend, and the end of everything is the nature of it. For what every being is in its most perfect state, that certainly is the nature of that being, whether it be a man, a horse, or a house: Hence it is evident that a city is a natural production, and that man is naturally a political animal, and that whosoever is naturally and not accidentally unfit for society, must be either inferior or superior to man: thus the man in Homer, who is reviled for being

without society, without law, without family.

Such a one must naturally be of a quarrelsome disposition, and as solitary as the birds.

The gift of speech also evidently proves that man is a more social animal than the bees, or any of the herding cattle: for nature, as we say, does nothing in vain, and man is the only animal who enjoys it. Voice indeed, as being the token of pleasure and pain, is imparted to others also, and thus much their nature is capable of, to perceive pleasure and pain, and to impart these sensations to others; but it is by speech that we are enabled to express what is useful for us, and what is hurtful, and of course what is just and what is unjust: for in this particular man differs from other animals, that he alone has a perception of good and evil, of just and unjust, and it is a participation of these common sentiments which forms a family and a city.

Besides, the notion of a city naturally precedes that of a family or an individual, for the whole must necessarily be prior to the parts, for if you take away the whole man, you cannot say a foot or a hand remains, unless

NOTES

NOTES

by equivocation, as supposing a hand of stone to be made, but that would only be a dead one; but everything is understood to be this or that by its energetic qualities and powers, so that when these no longer remain, neither can that be said to be the same, but something of the same name. That a city then precedes an individual is plain, for if an individual is not in himself sufficient to compose a perfect government, he is to a city as other parts are to a whole; but he that is incapable of society, or so complete in himself as not to want it, makes no part of a city, as a beast or a god.

There is then in all persons a natural impetus to associate with each other in this manner, and he who first founded civil society was the cause of the greatest good; for as by the completion of it man is the most excellent of all living beings, so without law and justice he would be the worst of all, for nothing is so difficult to subdue as injustice in arms: but these arms man is born with, namely, prudence and valour, which he may apply to the most opposite purposes, for he who abuses them will be the most wicked, the most cruel, the most lustful, and most gluttonous being imaginable; for justice is a political virtue, by the rules of it the state is regulated, and these rules are the criterion of what is right.

A THREE-PART ARGUMENT

The selection you read is a part of Aristotle's *Function* argument (what I'll call AFA). Not all of the argument is located in *this* reading,* so I'll spell it out more clearly here. Aristotle argues that in order for there to be any good thing of one kind or another, there has to be a *highest* good. That's the first part of the AFA:

HIGHEST GOOD (AFA pt. 1)

1. Each craft, inquiry, action and decision is aimed at an end/good.
2. The ends of ruling crafts/arts are to be preferred to those of subordinate crafts.
3. So if there is an all-controlling craft, there is a highest good.
4. There is an all-controlling craft: political science.

5. There is a highest good.

Everything we do, everything we make, every investigation we undertake is done for some end, some goal. And if there are 'higher' (or ruling) actions, artifacts, or investigations, then the aims of these are more important than the lesser ones. That is, premise 2 says that the short-term goals or smaller things are not as important as the long-term goals or bigger things.

How so? Well consider.

What good is a carburetor without a combustion engine? The *telos* of the carburetor isn't as important as that of the engine that the carburetor is designed to enable. What's the aim of saddle-making? Great saddles. And why do we have great saddles? For

horsemanship. So the good of horsemanship is higher than that of saddle-making.



To wit: Aristotle tells us we need to keep our priorities straight. Premise 3 simply notes that, given 1 and 2, it follows that if in fact there is a *highest* craft or investigation, then its aim is going to be higher or more important than any of the intermediary ones.

* You'll get more of it if you stroll on over to chapter 20, when we're discussing his ethics more carefully.

And that highest craft is *political science*, according to premise 4. Aristotle doesn't mean some college course in civics. He means the lifelong study of people getting along together in organized society. He means statesmanship and governance and good citizenship. Living well with others. So if he's right about 4, then 5 simply follows. If any highest craft exists, then there's a highest good.

What reason do we have to think that political science is the highest craft? Why do we vote? Why do we build roads or cities or hospitals or retirement communities? Why do we have laws or militaries? Each of these are activities we undertake to make it possible for us to live excellently together. To have the society we think is the best one. In short, for political science.

Well if that's the case, then there's some highest good. Which is....

What?

This isn't going to be much of a shocker, but it's *happiness*. Why do we preserve our way of living? Why do we fight wars and overthrow governments and establish laws? Because we want to be happy.

More carefully, the kind of happiness that is the *telos* of the human being and human society is for our souls to function excellently. In fact, the term Aristotle uses for happiness is **eudaimonia**, which literally means *good-souled-ness*, which by now we should understand to mean a soul *functioning* excellently.

An activity of the well-oiled soul machine.

For Aristotle, happiness isn't some state of being, but an activity of

flourishing. A soul functioning with *arête*, an excellent soul. And not Bill and Ted excellent, dude. It's the activity of a soul that is virtuous. Here's part two of the AFA, which we'll call the **UNHAPPY** Argument:

UNHAPPY (AFA pt. 2)

1. Happiness is the highest good.
 2. The highest good must be complete, self-sufficient, and comprehensive.
 3. Happiness is thought to be pleasure, honor, or wealth.
 4. Neither pleasure, nor honor, nor wealth meet the criteria in (2).
-
5. Nether pleasure, honor, nor wealth compose happiness.

We'll need some terms defined here.

*Something x is **complete** iff x is choiceworthy for its own sake (and not as a means to some other end).*

*Something x is **self-sufficient** iff by itself (with nothing added) x makes like forth living.*

If x were all a life had and you were looking down in some weird scenario trying to pick a life out of a bag, and if you were to see *this* as a part of one of those lives, this alone would make that life choiceworthy. You'd want to pick that life solely on account of that thing it had.

*Something x is **comprehensive** iff a life containing x lacks nothing.*

Nothing could be added to this thing x to make that life any better.

So whatever happiness is, it first off is itself worth having, not for the sake of anything else. And whatever happiness is, it all by itself makes a life worth living. And whatever happiness is, a life that

has it isn't lacking anything. That's happiness.

The three activities that lead to the 'happiness' candidates stated in premise 3 are gratification (gets us pleasure), the political life (gets us honor), and money making in the business life (gets us wealth).

How do they meet the criteria? Pleasure is certainly not had as a means to anything else, but a life of pleasure, without any respect or in extreme poverty? It seems like we could add things to pleasure to make life better.

Consider.

Say you're up there and you see two possible lives in the bag; both have pleasure of the same intensity, but one has wealth and reputation and health, where the other doesn't. I'm betting you'd go for the one with the added benefits. And this gives us evidence that pleasure isn't comprehensive. Strike one.



Consider honor then. The problem here is simple. Can you gain honor on your own? Not so much. It depends on the fickle opinions of others, and in fact, it cannot even exist for you if you don't have other things in your life to enable it. The honorable person who lives in squalor and is known by maybe

two people, one of whom is suddenly misled to believe that person is a five-star poophead



instead of an honorable soul is less happy than the one who is able to use his means to demonstrate his honor. And this, by the way, is Aristotle's response to Plato's *Ring of Gyges* thought experiment (and the argument in the *Republic* from which the thought experiment comes).

Honor and justice are not the final end, not the highest good. Glaucon is right. If the just person is considered unjust, he's *not* happy. Honor isn't comprehensive. Strike two.



What about wealth, then? The only reason people want to make money is because it will *get* them things that serve as tools for gaining other things that eventually make them happy. Wealth is a means. It's neither complete nor self-sufficient. Strike three.

So premise 4 shows us that the standard views on happiness are all lacking. Happiness isn't any of these. So what is it? Here's the final

part of the AFA, which looks to the *telos* of human beings.

FUNCTION (AFA pt. 3)

1. For all things that have a function (and characteristic activity), the good or excellence depends on that (distinctive) function.
2. Humans in roles have functions.
3. Parts of humans have functions.
4. There's (probably) a human function.
5. The human good or excellence depends on the human function (if there is one).
6. The human function is the activity of the soul in accord with reason.
7. Something x that has a function F is a good x iff x performs F excellently.
8. So the human good is the activity of the soul in accord with reason, functioning excellently (or virtuously), in a complete life.

And we've got an *inductive* argument! Aristotle is looking to the best explanation, so argues here for probability.

We've basically discussed this whole argument already, but let's briefly recap. We understand the meaning of *arête* (premise 1), and we can see that when somebody has some role like saddle-maker or soldier, she's got some function that is defined by that role. And certainly arms and lungs and skin cells and hair follicles, among all the many other parts of humans all have functions as a part of the greater human being. Notice how this all leans on the thinking behind

the four causes. So if there is a *human* function, it's going to relate to whatever it is a human being does. And whatever makes for an excellent human is going to come from whatever it is that is distinctive to humans. But we've already discussed this. Premise 7 is just a formal definition of what it is to be an excellent thing of some kind. Notice how there can be two x things, but the good x is the one that does its function F well. The other x might do F horribly, but it'd still be an x. All this and our understanding of the rational soul tells us that an excellent person is the one who functions excellently, and does so in a complete life.

What's with the last part? Well, Aristotle isn't some noob. He knows that life can toss us curveballs. We have to look back on the whole life to see whether somebody reasoned excellently and had a happy life. Maybe somebody did great and then suddenly snapped and became a vengeful serial killer. Not happy.

And notice this: happiness for Aristotle is *mostly* the excellent reasoning, but it also requires conditions where we can do so. If you're deathly ill and barely scabbling by, you're not going to be able to reason well. Not happy. To be happy you'll need some basic resources. And notice that the happy person is happy only in a society that is conducive to happiness. A tyranny where people can't move freely and exercise their reasoning excellently is not happy making. So excellent reasoners are going to try to preserve a society where they can be happy and that will enable future happiness.

The *Polis*

Aristotle's Function Argument (AFA) should show us what makes for a good organized society. Of course, Aristotle meant something different than we do nowadays—in fact, so did Hobbes, Rousseau, Hsün Tzu, and Locke. Nobody had any clue about the ginormous nations we've got nowadays. But in particular, Aristotle thought of the city-state called a *polis*, which was usually only about a mile square. Athens and Sparta were city-states. To live outside of it was almost guaranteed death. And the citizen of one *polis* had rights in another only if there was peace between the city-states.

If we consider AFA, we can see a similar pattern in the *polis*. The good of the family and the good of the city are not the same. A city isn't some sort of blammo family. In a family as life ran in ancient Greece, the head of the household was so for the duration of his life. Not so the leader of the city, let alone the government of that city. In politics, there's one leader, then later there's another. It's not like today Carter will be dad, and later it'll be Joe. The lesson Aristotle starts us with is that we cannot study the individual or the family to determine its good and then abstract from this the good of the *polis* or the community.*

continued...

* And though I'm not going to discuss it here, this is the crux of Aristotle's rejection of Plato's politics as he presents his arguments in the *Republic*. The dialogue is Plato's discussion of justice, in which he discusses the balanced soul and abstracts its structure as a plausible account of the structure of a perfectly just society.

THOUGHT EXPERIMENTS & HUMAN NATURE

In *Philebus* (21a-d), Plato presents a conversation between Socrates and Protarchus:

Soc: Would you, Protarchus, be willing to live your whole life enjoying the greatest pleasures?

Prot.: Of course I would.

Soc: Granted you have such a life, without any qualifications, would you consider that you lacked anything?

Prot.: Nothing at all.

Soc: Tell me, then, would you have no need at all of intelligence, thought, calculation of your need, and all that sort of thing?

Prot.: Why? I should have everything if I had pleasure.

Soc: So you would be glad to live your life like that constantly enjoying the greatest pleasures?

Prot.: Of course.

Soc: But if you lacked thought, memory, knowledge, and true opinion, surely, to begin with, you couldn't know even whether you were enjoying yourself or not, since you would lack all intelligence.

Prot.: True.

Soc: What is more, in the same way, as you would lack memory, you would be unable to remember that you did enjoy yourself on any occasion, and no recollection at all of pleasure at one moment would survive to the next. Since you would lack the capacity for true judgement you would not judge that you were enjoying yourself when you were, and lacking the ability to predict you would be unable to predict your future pleasures. It wouldn't be a human life at all, but a jelly-fish existence, or the life of one of those sea things that live in shells. Aren't I right? Or can we escape the conclusion?

Prot.: It seems inescapable.

Soc: Could we consider such a life desirable?

The Polis, *continued.*

The natural society is the best one because

what every being is in its most perfect state, that is certainly the nature of that being, whether it be a man, a horse, or a house: besides, whatsoever produces the final cause and the end which we desire, must be best; but a government complete in itself is that final cause and what is best.

A government that enables its members to function excellently (to be happy) is a good government. The "end and perfection of government [is] first founded that we might live, but continued that we may live happily."

What's the logical relation between organized society (the polis) and its members, we the people? Unlike Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, Aristotle cannot even conceive of a state of nature. He argues that we humans are *political animals*—that is to say, *we cannot exist outside of organized society.*

He argues by analogy. The *parts* of an organized society are like the *parts* of a body. If you think of things in terms of their *teloi*, or in terms of their causes, a hand or foot or hair follicle or eardrum cannot exist *as such* without a human person (assuming these are human parts). A hand without a person is just a dead body part. Its form is different, even though the matter is the same. And like a hand cannot exist *as a hand* without the whole person, so the individual member of society, the person, cannot exist *as a person* without the whole society that enables that person to function excellently.

The whole is necessary for the parts: there is no human nature except in organized society.

Prot.: Your argument has thrown me for the moment, Socrates. I have nothing to say.

Not only does Plato look at nature of humans by looking through what *seems* right to people (teasing these intuitions out via thought experiment), so does Locke, who, besides his work with the State of Nature when arguing for Social Contract theory, writes on the essential relationship between bodies and souls:

should the soul of a prince, carrying with it the consciousness of the prince's past life, enter and inform the body of a cobbler, as soon as deserted by his own soul, every one sees he would be the same person with the prince, accountable only for the prince's actions: but who would say it was the same man?*

So what is the essence of a human person? What makes a person a person and not something else? And how does the *good* person differ from the *bad* person?

Aristotle and Plato both argue that a person is essentially a *soul*, and that the proper functioning of a soul is what defines a good person as such.

What sort of essence do you think Hobbes, Master Hsün, Rousseau, and Locke are basing their ideas on? What sort of *thingie* do you think each of them think we are in order to be essentially good, evil, selfish, or free?

For an extra credit task, take one of these thinkers. Review his argument, and then write an argument that defends your theory about this thinker's concept of human essence using his evidence (in the readings, chapter 11) for premises.

* John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Book 2, chapter 27, sec. 15. And if this intrigues you, check out chapter 14. And watch *Being John Malkovich*, a movie that is entirely a thought experiment about one person's mind in another person's body.

WHAT'S THIS ABOUT WOMEN AND SLAVES, THEN?

You've been chomping at the bit, haven't you? So let's go there.

The Greenhouse Effect

First, let's put Aristotle in his historical place. Women weren't citizens. They didn't have rights. They were barely considered human, and certainly weren't understood as *persons*. For Aristotle, women were flower pots, seed holders, in which men deposited humanity and women's only job was to take care of that fertile possibility so that it could sprout into the full virile potential of manhood. Woe unto a woman who miscarried or (shudder) had a daughter.

This wasn't unique to him. Plato theorized about some soul-reincarnation where the best a woman could hope for was to come back as a man.* But before you wash your hands of the Greeks, realize that our dear Rousseau couldn't conceive of a woman in the state of nature. Whereas Emile can be educated to be a good man, free from the constraints of evil society, Emile's counterpart Sophie is educated only as a supplement to Emile, darning his socks and making him that all-important sandwich: existing therefore *only* in the evil organized society, in fact, embodying the distracting evils of societal education.† Philosophers as a general rule, were unsurprisingly misogynistic for the duration of history in which culture has been misogynistic.

But back to Aristotle.

Martha Nussbaum points at Aristotle's unrealistic asceticism—and through it, I think, the aloof rationality of traditional male philosophy:



Aristotle cares too much about self-sufficiency and rational control to admit love in all its terribleness. He permits many risks, but he despises slavery too much to admit to intrinsic value a

kind of relation in which we are so completely within the power of another, inhabited, intertwined, with no hard core to our natures. The Stoic remedy is a contraction of boundaries. But if we refuse this remedy, we must, it seems, learn to imagine ourselves with new images: not as safe house-dwellers in the solid edifice of our own virtue, but as beings soft and sinuous, weaving in and out of the world, in and out of one another.‡

And Elizabeth Spelman shows that Aristotle's discussion of women begs the question:

Aristotle does not try to justify his view about the natural rule of men over women by reference to a general principle about ruling and subject elements, for he quite explicitly refers us in particular to the constitution of the soul. There we find ruling and subject elements, but they are highly personalized entities whose relationships are described in terms of political relationships among human beings. In light of this, we must conclude that Aristotle's argument for the natural rule of men over women is circular. He argues for the position that men by nature rule women. How do we know that they do? We know this because the rational element of the soul by nature rules the irrational element. And how do we know this? This is where we come full circle: Because men rule women (and also because masters rule slaves, because tutors rule children). In fact the rule of men over women provides us with a means of understanding the kind of relationship among parts of the soul; and, coupled with the assumption that men represent the rational



* Plato's discussion of woman philosopher-kings or guardians is probably offered tongue-in-cheek, as he argues for them both to have plenty of guardian children and to nurse them and to exercise naked in with the other (male) guardians. He is most likely offering an over-the-top statement in his characteristic sense of humor.

† See the last book in *Emile* for the education of Sophie.

‡ Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1994), p. 481.

*element and women represent the irrational element, it provides us with a means of establishing that in the soul the rational element rules the irrational.**

So do we toss Aristotle as so much bad news? Not if we're intellectually honest. To toss everything at this stage is to reason horribly by discarding much good with the ugly. Rather, we should see whether his account of happiness and the *polis* can be expanded to include women. If it can, then it's a keeper for as much truth as it may have. And surely it can.

Natural Slaves?

But what about the so-called *natural slave*? To answer this worry, we need to understand the meaning of slavery. For Aristotle,

Somebody *S* is a **slave** iff *S* is incapable of voluntary self-governance.

That means that a slave might be natural or coerced. A person is coerced into slavery if that person is conquered or otherwise made by somebody else to be a slave. But what if a person is *naturally* a slave? What would this mean? By definition, it would mean that this person would have no natural capacity to govern herself, no capacity to direct herself towards her own happiness.

The word "slave" is charged with emotion, especially in these United States. So let's for now set that term aside and tease out the concept Aristotle is getting at. Then we'll return to using the term and see if the emotional charge remains for his concept as it is for our contemporary understanding of slavery.

First, what's the point of self-governance? The aim of living well is happiness. *Eudaimonia*. But what if somebody cannot reason excellently? This might be because somebody is just a jerk (we'll discuss this possibility in the ethics part of this text) and never developed their reasoning ability. They might simply choose *not* to reason excellently. They might be vicious. Well, jerks aren't *incapable* of self-governance, they just aren't doing so. They aren't incapable even of *wanting* to govern themselves,

because they *do* govern themselves, just doing it like jerks. So that's not it.

But it might also be the case that somebody isn't mentally capable of reasoning excellently. They need others to reason for them, to protect or direct them. Who needs others to dictate their lives? Well, the first ones who come to mind are children. They certainly don't have (yet) the ability to govern themselves and aim themselves towards *eudaimonistic* living. They aren't able to, not just yet. Their brains haven't developed enough to reason half well. They lack insight and wisdom. So in that way we can see that *every single one of us* is, for a time, incapable of voluntary self-governance.

But are there any adults who fall into this category? Sure. Think of those people who have no common sense, no judgment. Maybe people who are great worker bees, as the saying goes, but who need constant supervision. Nice, kind, helpful people who aren't, as Aristotle puts it, "capable of reflection and forethought." They aren't less human, but they aren't going to be anyone's supervisor because they just don't have the intellectual capability. These people are employed in jobs that they love (in the best case scenario), where they can flourish as good workers, but always supervised by others who can reason well, in a relationship that, as Aristotle puts it, ensures their "mutual safety." *Mutual safety*. Not the lash, not the stocks, not the auction block. Aristotle is talking about soul capacity, about reasoning ability, not human trafficking.

If a person is incapable of reasoning excellently, if a person is intellectually limited in such a way that he is best off under supervision and guided for his own safety towards a life where he can flourish best in society, then he is a natural slave. For Aristotle, this is nothing more or less than one whose excellence is not rational but "merely corporeal." Do such exist? I think so. And they're some of the best people I know, as far as goodness of heart goes. But they need protecting and supervision for their own safety. And indeed, for the safety of all in society.

In short, the *natural slave* is the person who does not have the potential to voluntarily self-govern. Children have the potential, but they haven't yet the skill,

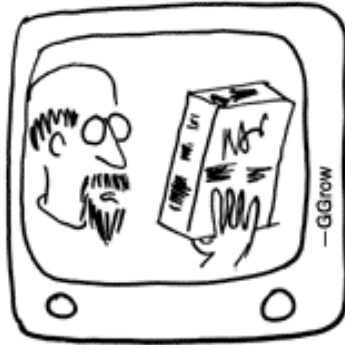
* Elizabeth Spelman, "Aristotle and the Politicization of the Soul," in *Social and Political Philosophy: Classical Western Texts in Feminist and Multicultural Perspectives*, ed. James Sterba (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1995), pp. 63-72, p. 69.

because reasoning excellently, like any other excellence, takes practice. They've not yet got the years of practice and development. In contrast, natural slaves are those who don't even have the capacity to reason excellently, so they need to be governed by others, for their own safety and to ensure that they don't run their own lives into disaster.

Who would fall into this category? People who can use their intellect but cannot reason. If we go way back to the flow chart of souls, they'd be able to apprehend and judge, but not reason. But how would we know this? If we say that those who can use all suprasentient cognitive powers are *masters* and those who can use all but reason are *slaves*, then we clearly have a different understanding of 'slave.' But what *makes* one a natural slave? Birth? Race? Culture? Religion? Who measures excellent reasoning? Aristotle has a useful point that might even make sense in some obvious cases, but how could we establish a clear definition of this in everyday life?

We can see in this ancient term how important it is to remove emotionally-charged language from our arguments! Remember the rules of discourse? The

Why Philosophers Do Not Appear on Television Commercials



"...But if you actually believe what the label says, you will conclude that the product is both good and not good, both healthy and not healthy, and you will be mired in contradictions..."

misunderstanding we easily fall into when we face a wall of easily-misconstrued terminology! So here's an extra credit Task. Carefully think about the concept 'natural slave.' Then come up with an academic and succinct replacement term that is absent of such emotional baggage. Write an analytic definition for this term. Then think of other terms you've seen in everyday conversation around school or work that carry unnecessary emotional baggage. Write down analytic definitions for these concepts, replacing the emotional terms with neutral ones. This is worth one Task grade, and is due when this reading assignment is due.

Okay, so the natural slave isn't quite what we thought. But Aristotle argues that Greeks are better than others, that they should govern the barbarians. Fine. He's wrong, again, if we're taking him to mean something like the Egyptians or Cretins, Scythians or whatever other ethnic groups he might have had in mind. But if a barbarian is simply one who is incapable of self-governance, then there's no problem here. Again, let's take his theory and put it where it goes historically, keeping what can be expanded to current understanding and setting aside the factual errors and fallacies.

