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Nicomachean Ethics

Mark Thomas Coppenger
Ouachita Baptist University

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N I C O M A C H E A N E T H I C S

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Mark Thomas Coppenger

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Born in 384 B.C., in Stagira, a town in Macedonia, Aristotle was the son of a well-known physician. As he grew, Aristotle came to be acquainted with Philip of Macedonia. When he was eighteen, he came to Athens and entered Plato's Academy, where he remained until Plato's death in 347 B.C. Aristotle moved to Assos, in the Troad, Asia Minor, and remained in the court of Hermias until he was invited to return to Macedon as tutor of the thirteen year old Prince Alexander, son of his boyhood friend, Philip. The young Alexander later became conqueror of the known world, during which time, Aristotle returned to Athens to found his own school. He founded his school in a suburb of Athens, the Lyceum, and taught there for the next eleven years. The school received the name peripatetic because of Aristotle's habit of walking as he taught. In the afternoons, he addressed larger crowds and was, therefore, seated. It was during this period that the Nicomachean Ethics were formulated. When Alexander died in 323, anti-Macedonian feeling swept over Greece. Recalling the fate of Socrates, Aristotle retired to his country estate and died a year later.

We have a problem concerning the writings of Aristotle, namely, we cannot be sure whether or not Aristotle really wrote them in the form that we have them today. There are discrepancies in his works as we have them today, and three principal explanations have been made: (1) the works were not written by Aristotle but were compiled by the students from their notes (2) they represent Aristotles lecture notes, and (3) the original writings were lost, recovered in damaged form, and were pieced together by incompetent editors.¹ One point that would tend to support the first two explanations is that in the Ethics, references are made to an audience.

¹Aristotle, Philip Wheelwright, Aristotle, (New York: The Odyssey Press, Inc., 1935), p. xviii.

Prior to Heraclitus, the Greeks felt that all characteristics were divided into two opposite poles and were, therefore, in pairs. Heraclitus taught that a continuum existed from one extreme to the other, and these teachings had an effect upon Aristotle as we shall see later. When considering hot and cold as an example, according to Heraclitus, there was also a middle or transitional temperature with degrees of hot or cold proceeding in their respective directions. Plato also admitted that opposites intermingle. Aristotle differed from his teacher when it came to the question of Platonic Forms, or learning as merely a remembrance or archtypes.²

As far as the naming of the Nicomachean Ethics is concerned, there are two main theories--one holds that the Ethics is dedicated to Nicomachus, Aristotle's son, and the other claims that Nicomachus was the editor of the Ethics.³

By definition, ethics is a study of values, what is right and good.⁴ While ethics is the study, morality is the practical application of the results of the study. Ethics are theoretical, while morality is pragmatic. Politics and sociology deal with facts, and scientists are concerned with these. Philosophy deals with a critical analysis and evaluation of these facts.

Concerning politics, the Ethics is one-half of a single treatise including Politics, which Aristotle calls the "philosophy of human affairs". In fact, Aristotle's main purpose in writing the Ethics was to fit a man to be a good citizen of the state. This pragmatic

²Ibid, p. xxx.

³William S. Sahakian, Systems of Ethics and Value Theory, (Patterson, New Jersey: Littlefield, Adams, and Co., 1964), p. 1.

⁴Ibid., p. 2.

outlook stems from Aristotle's rejection of the "other worldliness" of Plato's teachings.⁵ Another source puts it this way--". . . in the Ethica and Politics, Aristotle is concerned with the good for man qua member of the city-state."⁶ He goes on to say that the Ethica is concerned with training statesmen, thereby creating the best life for all people. With these things in mind, let us begin our study of the Nicomachean Ethics .

The opening statement of the Ethica holds that all things must aim at some good. This good must be self-sufficient and final and must be looked at in the light of a complete life. Since all things aim at good, this good must be the fulfillment of nature. This brings us to a focal point of Aristotle's philosophy, namely that ". . . nature does nothing in vain." One source holds with this interpretation--"Man's essential function is the actualization of his potentialities."⁷ Aristotle recognizes that man is the only animal that can pervert nature, and along with this perversion comes frustration and unhappiness. He feels so strongly about this that he holds that evil is this perversion of nature. Accordingly, ". . . the function of man is activity of soul which follows or implies a rational principle."⁸

Man is a rational creature, and his uniqueness lies in his possession of an intellect. From what we have seen thus far, man lives a good life by living according to what he rationally perceives as being in tune with nature or the rational principle. The first responsibility, therefore

⁵Aristotle, D.P. Chase, and J.A. Smith, The Ethics of Aristotle, (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1950) p. xiii.

⁶Aristotle, R.H. Joachim, D.A. Rees, The Nicomachean Ethics, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), p. 17.

⁷Sahakian, op. cit., p. 3.

⁸Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics.

is to know what you are, and how much so you are, and then be it.⁹
 This implies that each man has different potentialities and qualities.
 To live well, a man should (1) develop physically (2) cultivate his emotional and psychological life and (3) unfold his intellectual self.¹⁰
 This life is referred to as one possessing self-realization.

To continue concerning good, Aristotle holds that there must be an ultimate good which is, as we said before, self-sufficient, and must be looked at in the light of a complete life. He says that this ultimate good cannot come from chance. He holds that this good is happiness. Although it is the ultimate good, it can depend upon external good or prosperity to some extent, because the absence of these is a severe drawback to happiness. Because of this dependence, some identify happiness with good fortune. We see that Aristotle was speaking largely to the elite of society or those who were in a position to become statesmen. We must not take the relationship between external influence and happiness as the former being the only requirement for the latter, however. The greatest good cannot come from chance as can external goods and prosperity. It must, therefore, come by study and care. Also, virtue is praiseworthy, but happiness is above praise. Here we have another relationship, that of happiness and virtue. Happiness comes from consistent engagement in virtuous activities.

Happiness is the end of human nature. In other words, action in accordance with the rational principle or the following of virtue, which is a product of the rational principle, is happiness or the key to happiness. It is neither a disposition, nor does it lack anything.

⁹Sabakian, op. cit., p. 4.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 6.

Although prosperity and good health are very important to achieving happiness, it can be achieved, nevertheless, without them. It does not lie in amusement, for amusement and relaxation are not ends but are taken for the sake of activities. The gods experience complete happiness because their life is principally contemplative, happiness lying in reasoned virtue. Since animals cannot contemplate, they cannot experience happiness. Philosophers are closest to the gods because of their contemplative activities, and they are, therefore, happiest. A paradox arises when we learn that happiness, the ultimate good, cannot be obtained by pursuing it as does the hedonist. Rather, the hedonist pursues pleasure. The derivations of the two words are different, pleasure coming from the Greek word, hedone, meaning "sensual state", and happiness coming from the Greek word, eudaimonia, meaning "beautiful state of mind".¹¹

At first glance, it would seem that happiness is obviously good, but some philosophers do scorn it. The life of enjoyment has inherent advantages including those of the intrinsic value of enjoyment, political application, and the contemplative life.¹² The first advantage applies to those who are vulgar or young and seek happiness as does the hedonist. The second applies to those who channel their pursuit of enjoyment into political areas and seek the honor which is usually the end of political life. The third advantage pertains to those who, in accordance with the teachings of Aristotle, pursue happiness in the form of the virtuous and contemplative life.

As we have said, happiness comes from virtuous living in accordance with a rational principle. In fact, happiness is a continuum as long as there is engagement in virtuous activities. This leads us to the recognition of virtue as a way of life and not just doing the right thing in

¹¹Ibid., p. 8.

¹²Ibid.

one circumstance. Virtue is acquired by repetition of the corresponding acts. The actions that produce moral virtue, however, are not good in the same sense as those which flow from virtue. Doing virtuous acts does not necessarily make a man virtuous. This brings up the division of virtues into those which are intellectual and those which are moral. The former applies to philosophical wisdom, practical wisdom, and understanding, and comes largely from instruction. The latter applies to such things as liberality and temperance, and is obtained by habit. Moral virtue is a state of character which comes from a freedom to choose the right course and the perception to do so. It is not a passion or a faculty. Since happiness stems from virtuous living and vice versa, virtue is concerned with pleasure and pain.

But what is the yardstick for virtuous acts? Aristotle holds that it is acting in accordance with a mean, or avoiding excess or defect. This mean is hard to define exactly in reference to certain virtues, so acting in accordance with the mean requires perception rather than reasoning, according to Aristotle. In cases where the mean is extremely difficult to discern, the lesser of two evils may need to be chosen. The mean of which we speak is often referred to as the "Golden Mean", an expression Aristotle did not use himself.

Now this mean refers to the Right Act, or that act which is in accordance with nature or the rational principle. Kant's concept of the Right Act is the categorical imperative, and Bentham has his hedonistic calculus, while Aristotle has the "Golden Mean". The Right Act is "to do the right thing to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right motive, and in the right way."¹³ As involved as this is, we come back to the concept that ethical superiority and moral excellence necessitate innate discernment and learning of the highest

¹³Ibid., p. 13.

magnitude. In other words, the Ethics is directed at students who are presumed to have enough general education to appreciate the points and have a solid foundation of good habits. In summary, virtue is the result of habitual action in accordance with the rational principle and is the thing which leads to happiness.

It is important to point out that the individual has a free will or choice, which makes him morally responsible for what he does. He is responsible for his good actions as well as his bad actions. In moral virtue, the object of choice is the result of previous deliberation. Moral virtue is not concerned with things which are outside our own power. We cannot really deliberate about things we cannot control. Consequently, praise and blame are concerned with voluntary actions and not those actions which are done under compulsion or out of ignorance.

Now the mean can be spoken of as the Right Act, which, when habitually practiced, becomes virtue and is concerned with virtuous actions. On the other hand, deficiency and excess can be spoken of as the immoral act, which, when habitually practiced, becomes vice and is concerned with vicious actions. Herewith will follow a discussion of certain of Aristotle's means and accompanying extremes.

Courage is concerned with the feelings of fear and confidence. The motive of it is the sense of honor, and the opposite vices are cowardice and rashness, or foolhardiness. There are five things which are often improperly called courage--(1) the courage of the citizen soldier, according to compulsion (2) experience with regard to the conflict, or professional coolness (3) passion, or action from strength of feeling (4) overconfidence because of success, and (5) ignorance of danger. Courage is involved with pain, but the pleasure which comes with the virtue is resultant. Courage could be spoken of as facing and fearing the

the right thing, for the right motive, in the right way, at the right time, and feeling confidence under the corresponding conditions.¹⁴

Temperance is the mean between insensibility and licentiousness. When considering this virtue, we should understand the world, sensual and sensuous. The first is base and refers to appetites and desires. The second deals more with appreciation of music and art. At any rate, bodily pleasures lead us to self-indulgence and to the extreme in which we become like animals. The self-indulgent man is pained when he is not experiencing pleasure, while the temperate man is not. Temperance reflects the rational principle, which Aristotle refers to as "an obedient and chastened state". The temperate man craves for the things he ought, when he ought, as he ought.

Liberality is the mean in regard to wealth. It lies between the extremes of illiberality and prodigality. The mark of a liberal man is to give to the right people, the right amounts, at the right time, with all the other qualifications that accompany right giving, and that too with pleasure or without pain. He who gives with pain is not liberal because it is the nature of the liberal and virtuous man not to look to himself. Meanness or illiberality is much more plentiful than prodigality and cannot cure itself as does prodigality. The inclusion of liberality as a virtue brings us again to the point that Aristotle wrote the Ethics primarily for a privileged group. He does say that liberality is relative to a man's substance. Finally, the liberal are almost the best loved of all virtuous characters since they are useful.

Magnificence goes a step beyond liberality and has to do with the spending of large sums of money tastefully. It is the mean between

¹⁴Ibid., p. 20.

vulgarity or showiness and niggardliness or hesitation. This virtue, of course, applies only to the rich.

Magnanimity lies between the extremes, humility and vanity. It is a high self-respect, which makes a person self-sufficient but not conceited or vain. It deals with pride, which Aristotle says is a mark of a good man. He even goes so far as to say that the greatest external good is honor. Magnanimous men ask for little but give help readily. Aristotle gets quite caught up in his description of a magnanimous man and pictures him as one who admires nothing very much, is open in hate and love, is not mindful of wrongs, has a slow step, deep voice, and level utterance, and admires beautiful rather than profitable things. The magnanimous man is Aristotle's ideal.

The extremes, lack of ambition and ambitiousness, have no name for their mean. This problem arises chiefly from the fact that ambition can be both good and bad. Sometimes the ambitious man is praised and, at other times, censured. The same applies to deficiency.

Gentleness lies between unirascibility and irascibility. Good temper is another name for this mean or virtue. One extreme is anger, and the other is a sort of indifference. It is hard to draw the line between the two states. The mean involves being angry at the right things.

Truthfulness lies between boastfulness and self-depreciation or understatement. The truthful man tends to understate the truth, however. Both extremes are actually a form of boasting when we consider the effect that self-depreciation can have. The situation can be something akin to "fishing for a compliment". A truthful man is truthful even when there is nothing to lose or gain, just for truth's sake.

Wittiness is the possession of a tactful, wholesome sense of humor. The extremes of excess and defect are buffoonery and boorishness. This virtue is connected with intelligence since this mean requires a man to

be ready-witted. Along with the virtue of wit comes tact, or the sense of what to say at what time, and vice versa.

Friendliness lies between contentiousness and obsequiousness or flattery. An obsequious person can be likened to a "Yes Man". A man corresponding to the middle state could be called a good friend. Now there are three types of friends, determined by the motives for friendship. First, there are friends for utility, such as business friends. Secondly, there are friendships based upon pleasure, and these are hedonistic. Thirdly, there is a good and pure kind of friendship. The first two are essentially selfish motives, while the last pertains to the mean.

This pure friendship is based upon an equality. Perfect friendship is the friendship of men who are good and alike in virtue, and who, therefore, are on equal terms. Along with this likeness comes a mutual recognition as bearing goodwill. Friendship is greatly promoted by common upbringing and similarity of age. Virtue is important because bad men are laden with repentance, and if a man cannot stand himself, he cannot be friendly. If we are wretched, we should work to avoid wickedness and endeavor to be good. This is the only way that we can be friendly. Sour or old people do not make friends easily. Neither do young people because their relationships tend to be more emotional or amorous. Inequality can exist in friendship, as in the case of friendship between a father and son. Other types of friendship arise from the relationships among siblings, strangers, schoolfellows, and the like.

There is a certain amount of wish for gain in friendship. Owing to ambition, we wish to be loved rather than to love. Being loved, in our estimation, is akin to honor. This desire for benefits in friendship is especially strong in unequals. In an unequal friendship, love is proportional, the better party being the best loved. The benefactor receives

more than the receiver of love because of the resulting debt of gratitude. This gives rise to a certain amount of selfishness in friendship. People love more, that which is a product of their own labor, hence, the greater love of a woman toward her children than the man. This selfishness is not bad in the case of virtuous people. In other words, by nature of his attitudes and relative goals and acts, a good man should be a lover of self, while a wicked man should not.

Goodwill is not like friendship. A person can have goodwill toward strangers. It does, however, seem to be the beginning for friendship and is an inactive friendship which arises on account of some excellence or worth. Another type of relationship which resembles friendship is unanimity. This is a friendly relationship born of a common goal rather than identity of opinion.

Unanimity is related to the point that friendship is very important, even necessary, in government. The feeling of working toward a common advantage is necessary in communities. Of course, utility friendship is irrevocably related to politics. Aristotle holds that a democracy is the best atmosphere for friendship. An oligarchy results in a poor distribution of what belongs to the city, and tyranny is characterized by an individual's pursuit of his own good. These three types of government are deviations from the three constitutions--tyranny from monarchy, oligarchy from aristocracy, and democracy from timocracy. Democracy is the least harmful of the deviation. Justice and friendship characterize constitutions while injustice and lack of friendship characterize deviations. In democracy, however, friendship exists because of equality. Parallels of the constitutions may be found in households.

The happy man should have the greatest of all external goods, friends. Since man is a political creature and one whose nature is to live with

others, a happy man needs friends. Since life seems to be essentially the acts of perceiving or thinking, a happy man will need just not any kind of friends, but virtuous friends. Too many friends are superfluous or a hindrance to the noble life. Love is an excess of friendship which can be felt toward only one person. Since good and virtuous friends are limited, we must be content with even a few in a lifetime. Friendship is more necessary in bad fortune, but is more noble in good fortune. In either case, the presence of friends is desirable. The values of a group of friends determine what they do together, hence noble deeds come from noble men. If a friend is irrevocably changed for the bad, it is all right to end the friendship. If, however, it is not irrevocable, you should try to help him.

In conclusion, friendship is the most desirable of external goods and lies between the extremes, contentiousness and obsequiousness. It is a state of character based upon equality and thrives more readily in the presence of two similar and virtuous men. It is unlike friendship for utility or pleasure because it is self-dependent, while they are transient. It is concerned with politics, and it more readily lives in a democracy because of equality. To possess the character of friendship, one must be a good friend.

Modesty lies between the extremes, shamelessness and bashfulness. This virtue deals with feelings and states of mind. Shame is not good in adults, but is permissible in youth. In fact, it is praised in youth. Shame is fear of dishonor and is connected with bad actions.

Justice is the summary of all virtue. It will find out the person who is pretending virtue. Justice is of two types, fairness and lawfulness, which is divided into distribution of wealth and dealing with criminals. The former, fairness, is particular, while the latter is universal. Justice is the virtue with regards to our action toward others

and probably the highest since it concerns the others. The just has to do with a proportion that is geometrical, which, when violated, is unjust. In other words, by acting unjustly, one term of the proportion becomes too great, and the balance of justice is upset. Rectificatory justice is concerned with the addition and subtraction of gain or loss, or the restoration of the proportion. Justice lies between the excess and defect of unjust action and being treated unjustly. In other words, the proportion deals with the amount of harm or advantage received.

You can act unjustly but not be unjust. By the same token, just acts do not make a man just. The terms, just and unjust, apply only when the acts are voluntary. In other words, there are things that are unjust but that are not acts of injustice. When an act is done out of ignorance, it is a mistake. When something happens contrary to reasonable expectation, it is a misadventure. When something is done with deliberation, it is an act of injustice. Such planned injustice makes a man unjust. Being unjustly treated, of course, is usually involuntary. Modest people treat themselves unjustly, however. A man like this largely makes up for it by receiving honor and nobility accordingly.

Suicide is not unjust to a man since it is voluntary. The injustice is suffered by the state. Suicide is fairly unique in that the man does the harm and suffers it at the same time. The determination and enforcement of justice is a complex process. For instance, a man, more or less, owns his household, so there is a difference between household and political justice and equality. In conclusion, justice is the middle term in an equal proportion, which, when upset, results in injustice. Things can only be called just or unjust when they are done voluntarily. Justice has been called the highest virtue because of its relationship with the other virtues.

Pleasure is the most closely related to human nature of all experiences. Some philosophers say it is good while others say it is not. The opposition between pain and pleasure is the avoidance of one and pursuit of the other. Pleasure is in degrees and differs with different people. It is not the ultimate good, and not all pleasure is desirable. Disgraceful pleasures are not really pleasant. Some pleasures, however, are good. Pleasure is present when both object and receiver are at their best. It accompanies activity, and since there can be no continuous activity, pleasure has to stop sometime.

The study of pleasure and pain belongs to the political philosopher. The main criticisms of pleasure are that it is a process toward an animal state, the temperate man avoids it, the practical man pursues freedom from pain rather than pleasure, it is a hindrance to thought, there is no art to it while goodness is a product of art, children and brutes pursue it, and some pleasures are base and harmful. On the other hand, some pleasures are not bad, such as those involved in learning. Besides pleasure is better than pain. In the final analysis, pleasure can be good, but it is not the good at which all things aim, and it can actually dull a person. In one man's interpretation, pleasure is not the primary constituent of well being, but rather an inseparable accident of it.¹⁵

The good is arrived at by thought, fixed by intention, aimed at by will, under the influence of practical wisdom.¹⁶ This brings us to the discussion of wisdom. The soul has the two types of virtues, those of character and those of intellect. The two parts of the soul are the one that grasps the rational principle and the one that grasps the irrational.

¹⁵Henry Sidgwick, Outlines of the History of Ethics, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1931), p. 54.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 141.

Of the part that grasps the rational principle are the part that grasps the invariable and the part that grasps the variable. The invariable can be grasped by calculation, while the variable must be grasped by deliberation and contemplation. The three things that control action and truth in the soul are sensation, reason, and desire. Sensation originates no action. Good choice results from a coupling of true reasoning and deliberate desire. Intellect plus character produces action. Thus, deliberation is concerned with the future.

The soul possesses truth by way of affirmation or denial of art, scientific knowledge, practical wisdom, philosophic wisdom, and intuitive reason. Scientific knowledge is eternal and necessary, and all of it is capable of being taught. In science, there is the inductive, which leads to universals, and the deductive, which proceeds from the inductive. Now, art is concerned with things made, while reason or wisdom is largely concerned with things done. Practical wisdom deals with generalities, not particulars. It is not scientific because there is no contemplation about necessities, and it is not art because it concerns doing rather than making. It can be defined as the true and reasoned state or capacity to act with regard to the things that are good or bad to man. It is a virtue. Along with art, it concerns variables, while scientific knowledge concerns universal truths. Scientific knowledge is different in that it results from intuitive reason rather than practical wisdom.

Philosophic wisdom is a coupling of intuitive reason and scientific knowledge and concerns practical wisdom when action is involved. Aristotle said that philosophic wisdom was remarkable, admirable, difficult, divine, and useless because it did not seek human goods. He said that one should have both philosophic and practical wisdom, but that the latter should be preferred to the former.

Practical wisdom and political wisdom are of the same state of mind but different essence. The former deals with generalities while the latter deals with particulars. A young man of practical wisdom is not to be found, because he lacks experience and knowledge of particulars. A boy can be a mathematician but not a philosopher. Deliberation or inquiry into particulars does not concern scientific knowledge because there is no inquiry into known things; they are already known. They do not concern conjecture because there is no reasoning in guessing, and it is hurried. They do not concern readiness of mind because this is just skill in conjecture. They are not opinion. Deliberation is correctness of thinking, not for evil ends, not by wrong means (false syllogism), and not if it takes too long.

Understanding is not concerned with invariables, is close to practical wisdom, and deals with judging. Learning plus practical application is understanding. Correct judgment is sympathetic and strives to discern what is true. The cumulation of these qualities is thought to be largely the result of natural endowments.

Philosophic wisdom produces happiness because the person is a part of the total virtue. Virtue concerns actions. How to do these things deals with faculty and cleverness. Wickedness perverts and deceives us, making it impossible to be practically wise without being good.

Now, for philosophic wisdom to be useful at all, a person must not be incontinent. In other words, he must act in accordance with his reason. Practical wisdom is the strongest of all states and most opposed to incontinence. Continence is regard to appetite is not temperance because temperance likens one to a person who has a bad appetite. Continence is bad when it is dogmatic. Folly coupled with incontinence is virtue. Acting by the continence of others is fallacious. Continence

is concerned with specific objects. Anger and passion are two things which lead to incontinence. Lower animals are not continent because they have no judgment. Aristotle asks the question of whether there is an incontinent person without qualification and whether all men are incontinent in some things.

It is pointed out that we regard bodily pleasure to excess as a fault while money, gain, and honor to excess are not a fault. This leads us to the discussion of self-indulgence, with which continence and incontinence deal. Self-indulgence is a habit, is contrary to nature, and can be injurious to the system. A self-indulgent man is not apt to change while incontinence, in itself, is more flexible.

Brutishness and morbidity are extensions of incontinence. Now anger is better than gluttony because it is more natural. Anger is not the result of plotting. Pain accompanies anger. A bad man is much worse than an angry man or a brute.

Incontinence is not a vice. The first principle is preserved within an incontinent man. Rather it is intermittent badness. Incontinence can come both through adhering to the wrong and ignoring the right. Continence comes by abiding by the right choice. A man cannot have practical wisdom and be incontinent. An incontinent man may either ignore his deliberation or just not take the time and trouble to deliberate. Most men lie between lives of extreme continence and extreme incontinence.

This completes the discussion of the content of the Ethics. As was said before, the Ethics comprises the first part of a general treatise, the second part being Politics. The Ethics was written especially to train statesmen who could then apply the teachings to helping form a society in which other men could achieve happiness. The love of virtue needs to be instilled in the youth. Laws should direct and punish accordingly. The punishment should fit the crime. Along with the

teachings of philosophers like himself, Aristotle holds that the family and private education do much to shape the young person. With the introduction to Politics, Aristotle concludes the Nicomachean Ethics.

The Ethics of Aristotle have had an effect on later philosophers. His philosophy lends itself to modification for religious purposes. In Thomas Aquinas' Summa contra Gentiles, he goes along with Aristotle in stressing the importance of self-realization and the possession of will. He goes on to agree with Aristotle that there is a summum bonum in the form of happiness. Aquinas held that ultimate happiness came through contemplation of God. He also recognized the importance of nature and natural law and described it as resulting from God's will. Aquinas outlined virtues with his Seven Cardinal Virtues, temperance, fortitude, wisdom, justice, faith, hope, and charity. The last three are taken from the Bible, but the first four resemble Aristotle's virtues.

To go on concerning Aquinas, he said, "The good is the object of every appetite." Therefore, all action is for good, and evil is incidental, accidental, or unintentional. Evil is not necessary to nature, and there is no supreme evil. There is one supreme good, which is God. All things tend toward God, and the supreme effort or object of Man's knowledge is to know God. Man is adapted by nature to tend to God, and the last end is to understand God. This is the end of the intellectual life. Animals have neither intellect nor joy. Carnal pleasure does not bring happiness since ultimate happiness utilizes intelligence.

As can be seen, Aquinas took the Ethics of Aristotle and applied them to Christianity. This thirteenth century philosopher determined, by his writings, for a long time, the moral philosophy of the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁷This work was initiated by Albert the Great and completed

¹⁷Ibid., p. 140.

by St. Thomas Aquinas. Aristotle's philosophy was a little Neo-Platonic, and Aquinas drew heavily from Augustine for his Christian doctrine.¹⁸ The Jesuits closely followed the writings of Aquinas.

Aristotle's concept of personal good achieved through participation in civilization profoundly influenced the so-called Neo-Hegelian idealist, Thomas Hill Green, who said that "the self is the social self."¹⁹ Also, the Muslim ethical work, Ibn Maskawaihi, is largely patterned after the Ethics. The British people as a whole are rather firmly entrenched in Aristotelianism.²⁰

In conclusion, the Nicomachean Ethics stressed happiness as the ultimate good, which was achieved by acting in accordance with reason and nature and by living according to a "Golden Mean". It was written primarily to train statesmen and leads into a discussion of politics. It has had far-reaching effect, including that of largely forming the basis of the ethical system of the Roman Catholic Church, when coupled with the teachings of Christ.

One source holds that "there is probably no treatise so masterly as Aristotle's Ethics, and containing so much close and valid thought, that yet leaves on the reader's mind so strong an impression of dispersive and incomplete work."²¹ It is, however, easily grasped and mastered, thereby capable of having a widespread following, readily practicable, provides an easy-to-follow, middle-of-the-road philosophy, and is easily

¹⁸Ibid., p. 141.

¹⁹Vergilius Ferm, Encyclopedia of Morals, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), p. 191.

²⁰Sahakian, op. cit., p. 11.

²¹Sidgwick, op. cit., P. 70.

adaptable to religion, as in the cases of Aquinas for Christianity and Averroes for the Arabs.²²

Furthermore, the Ethics is an analytical reflection upon the common moral consciousness of the day, thereby having historical interest. It gives us an idea of the "fair and good life", which was the ideal for the Greeks.²³ This concludes our discussion of the Nicomachean Ethics.

²²Sahakian, op. cit., pp. 39-40.

²³Sidgwick, op. cit., p. 58.

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