

# Social Media and the Virtues

## Chapter 2: Computing and AI Ethics

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# Essential Questions

- What kind of people do we **become** through our daily digital habits and social media use?
- Can **virtue ethics**—a 2,400-year-old philosophical tradition—help us navigate the challenges of social media?
- How has the rise of **Web 2.0** fundamentally changed the way we form communities and relationships?
- Is social media actually causing a **mental health crisis** among teenagers, or is the evidence more complicated?

## Guiding Theme

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.” —Aristotle

# Why Virtue Ethics for Social Media?

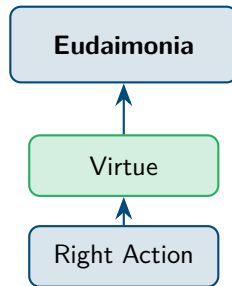
- **Rule-based ethics** asks: “Is this particular action right or wrong?”
- **Virtue ethics** asks: “What kind of person does this action make me over time?”
- Social media is not just about individual posts or clicks—it **shapes our character** through daily habits.
- Philosopher Shannon Vallor argues that technologies can either **cultivate or undermine** virtues like patience, honesty, and empathy.

## Key Insight

Virtue ethics focuses on long-term character formation, making it especially suited for analyzing technologies we use every day.

# Aristotle and Eudaimonia

- **Aristotle (384–322 BCE)** was a Greek philosopher, student of Plato, and tutor to Alexander the Great.
- **Eudaimonia** is often translated as “happiness,” but is better understood as “human flourishing” or “living well.” (Aristotle 2009)
- Eudaimonia is not a temporary feeling but a **way of living**—achieving your full potential as a human being.
- Aristotle’s key insight: “Happiness is an activity of the soul in accordance with **virtue**.”



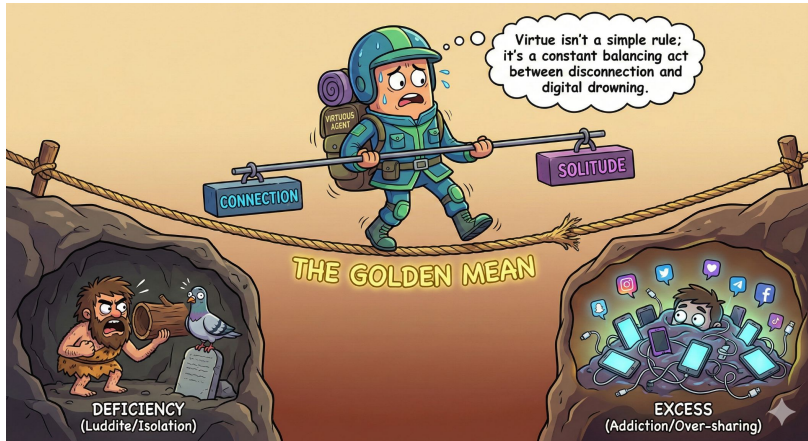
# What Are the Virtues?

- A **virtue** is a stable character trait that enables us to act well and to flourish as human beings.
- Virtues are developed through **practice and habituation**—we become courageous by repeatedly acting courageously.
- Each virtue lies between two corresponding **vices**: one of excess and one of deficiency.

| Vice<br>(Deficiency) | Virtue (Mean) | Vice (Excess)   |
|----------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Cowardice            | Courage       | Recklessness    |
| Insensibility        | Temperance    | Self-indulgence |
| Stinginess           | Generosity    | Wastefulness    |
| Self-deprecation     | Truthfulness  | Boastfulness    |

# The Doctrine of the Mean

- The **doctrine of the mean** states that virtue is the balanced midpoint between two extremes (vices of excess and deficiency).
- The mean is **not mathematical**—it varies depending on the person, situation, and context.
- Finding the mean requires **practical wisdom** (phronesis) to judge what is appropriate in each circumstance.



# Phronesis—Practical Wisdom

- **Phronesis** (practical wisdom) is the intellectual virtue of knowing what to do in particular situations.
- It is not enough to know *that* honesty is good—phronesis tells us *how* to be honest in a specific context.
- Susan Sauvé Meyer: “You are not a good person unless you exercise **good judgment**.”
- Phronesis is developed through **experience and reflection**, not just by learning abstract rules.

## Applying Phronesis to Social Media

Practical wisdom helps us judge: When should I post? What should I share? How should I respond to criticism? What content deserves my attention?

# Aristotelian Virtues for Social Media

- **Truthfulness online:** Are you presenting yourself honestly, or does your profile show a more glamorous life than reality?
- **Appropriate humor:** Aristotle recognized that jokes often come at someone's expense—what will you laugh at or share?
- **Self-presentation:** The vice of excess is **bragging**; the vice of deficiency is **false modesty** or inauthenticity.

## Key Insight from Susan Sauvé Meyer (Meyer 2023)

Technology has increased our opportunities for social interaction, but it has not changed our fundamental human concern with how others perceive us.



# Communitarianism and Civic Virtue

- **Communitarianism** emphasizes that human identity and virtue are formed within communities—including **political communities**.
- Key thinkers (MacIntyre, Sandel, Taylor) argue that liberal individualism neglects our obligations to the **common good**.
- **Civic virtues** are character traits necessary for democratic citizenship: tolerance, civic friendship, commitment to truth, willingness to deliberate.
- Aristotle: Humans are *zoon politikon*—"political animals" who flourish through participation in **shared civic life**.

## Michael Sandel on Civic Virtue

Democracy requires more than voting—it requires citizens with the **character** to engage respectfully with those who disagree, to seek common ground, and to place the common good above narrow self-interest. (Sandel 1996)

# The Civic Virtues in Detail

## Essential Civic Virtues:

- **Civic friendship:** Seeing political opponents as fellow citizens, not enemies
- **Tolerance:** Respecting others' right to hold different views
- **Deliberative capacity:** Ability to reason together about the common good

## Supporting Virtues:

- **Epistemic humility:** Acknowledging we might be wrong
- **Commitment to truth:** Valuing facts over tribal loyalty
- **Civility:** Engaging respectfully even in disagreement

## The Democratic Stakes

These virtues aren't optional extras—they're **necessary conditions** for democracy to function. Without them, we get tribalism, gridlock, and the erosion of shared reality.

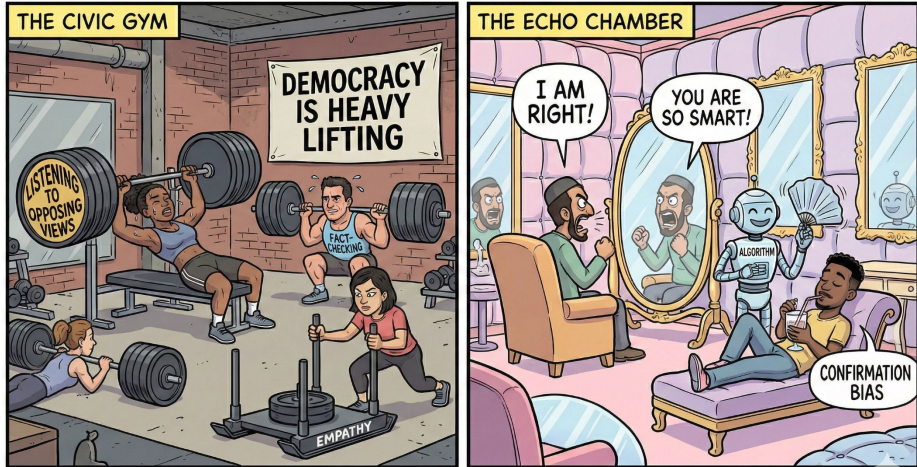
# MacIntyre, Practices, and the Common Good

- Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (MacIntyre 1981) warned that modern society has lost **shared frameworks** for moral reasoning.
- Without shared traditions and practices, moral discourse becomes mere assertion of preferences—"emotivism."
- **Key insight:** Virtues are cultivated through participation in **practices** with shared standards and goods.
- Democratic deliberation is itself a **practice** requiring specific virtues: listening, reasoning, compromising.

## The Question for Our Age

If virtues require shared practices and communities, what happens when our primary "community" is a social media feed algorithmically designed to show us only what we already believe?

# Social Media as Training Ground for Civic Vice



**Civic virtue requires heavy lifting. The echo chamber offers comfortable stagnation.**

Image generated by Google Gemini (like all cartoons in this chapter).

## Review Questions—Part 1

- 1 **Define eudaimonia.** Why is “flourishing” considered a better translation than simply “happiness”?
- 2 **Explain the doctrine of the mean** using an example relevant to social media use.
- 3 **What are “civic virtues”?** Why do communitarians believe they are essential for democracy?
- 4 **According to MacIntyre,** what has modern society “lost” that makes moral reasoning difficult? How might this apply to online discourse?
- 5 **Discussion:** Can a person develop civic virtues like tolerance and deliberative capacity primarily through online political engagement? Why or why not?

# Technology and the Virtues

- Recall: For Aristotle, virtues are developed through **practice within communities** that model and reinforce good character.
- Philosopher **Shannon Vallor** argues that technologies are not neutral tools—they **shape the conditions** under which virtues can (or cannot) flourish. (Vallor 2016)
- **Key question:** How has the rise of Web 2.0 changed the communities and practices through which we develop virtue?
- Psychologist **Sherry Turkle** warns that digital communication may undermine capacities for empathy, patience, and authentic self-knowledge.

## Vallor's Central Claim

“New social media invite **new habits** of communication and social interaction... [that] have the potential to impact our cultivation of the virtues.” —Shannon Vallor, *Technology and the Virtues* (2016)

## Before Web 2.0—Communities of Virtue

- **Web 1.0** (approximately 1991–2004) was the “read-only” web—users consumed content created by professionals.
- From a virtue ethics perspective, Web 1.0 had **limited impact** on character formation—it was more like a library than a community.
- Traditional **communities of practice** (families, schools, neighborhoods, churches) remained the primary sites where virtues were cultivated.
- Face-to-face interaction was still the default mode of social life, preserving opportunities for **empathy, patience, and presence**.

### Aristotle's Insight

Virtue is formed through repeated practice in community with others who model good character. The question: What happens when our “communities” become digital?

# Defining Web 2.0—A New Context for Character

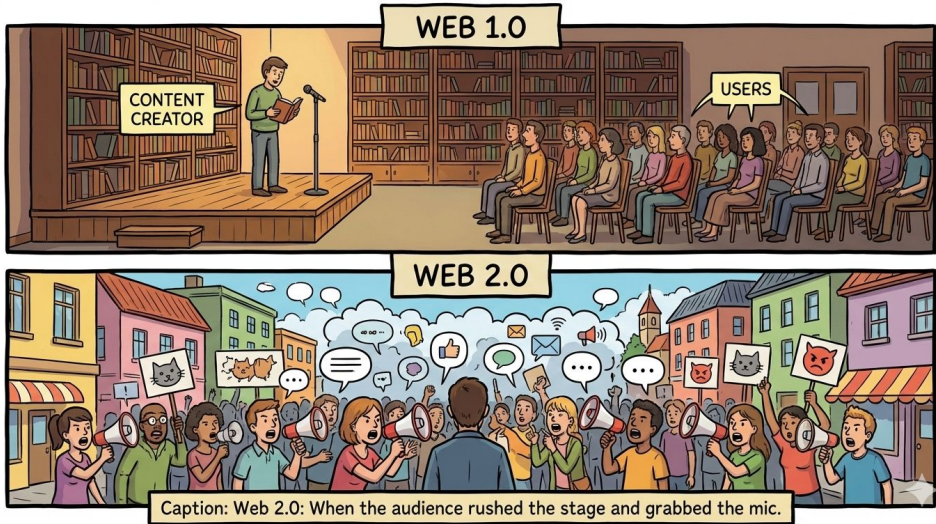
- “**Web 2.0**” (coined 1999, popularized 2004) marked the shift from passive consumption to active participation online.
- Tim O'Reilly's definition: “The web as a platform”—users now **create content**, not just consume it.
- From a virtue perspective, this is profound: our daily **habits of communication and self-presentation** now occur in digital spaces.
- Vallor asks: Do these new habits cultivate virtues like honesty and empathy—or do they cultivate their opposing vices?

## The Virtue Ethics Question

Web 2.0 isn't just a technological change—it's a change in the **environment where character is formed**. What kind of people are we becoming through our daily digital practices?



# Web 1.0 vs Web 2.0: A Visual Comparison



# Core Characteristics Through a Virtue Lens

## Web 2.0 Features:

- User-generated content
- Social networking
- Participation and collaboration
- Global reach and scale

## Virtue Implications:

- New contexts for **truthfulness** (or deception)
- New forms of **friendship** (or isolation)
- Opportunities for **generosity**—or narcissism
- **Weak ties** replace thick community

## Sherry Turkle's Warning

“We expect more from technology and less from each other.” Digital connection may **simulate** community without providing the sustained, embodied relationships where virtue actually develops. (Turkle 2011)

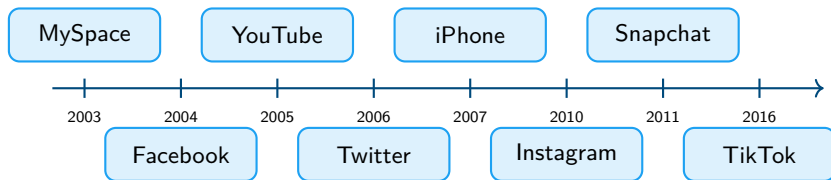
# TIME Person of the Year 2006—Optimism and Concern

- In 2006, **TIME Magazine** named “You” as Person of the Year, celebrating user-generated content and collaboration. (Grossman 2006)
- TIME declared: “It’s about the many wresting power from the few and helping one another for nothing.”
- From a virtue perspective, this **optimistic vision** emphasized potential for generosity, collaboration, and democratic participation.
- But even then, some worried: Would online interaction cultivate **genuine virtue**—or merely its appearance?

## The Aristotelian Question

Aristotle distinguished between **true virtue** (stable character expressed consistently) and merely **appearing virtuous** in particular situations. Does social media reward genuine character—or performative displays?

# Platform Evolution and Habit Formation



- Each platform introduced new **habits of interaction**: status updates, likes, stories, short videos.
- Recall Aristotle: “We are what we repeatedly do.” These daily micro-habits **shape character over time**.
- Vallor notes that platforms are designed to maximize engagement—not to cultivate user flourishing.

# The Smartphone and Constant Connectivity

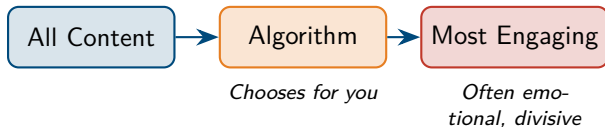
- The **iPhone** (2007) put social media in our pockets, enabling constant connectivity and instant response.
- Sherry Turkle argues this undermines **solitude**—the capacity to be alone with one's thoughts, essential for self-knowledge.
- Constant notifications interrupt **sustained attention**—what Vallor calls a key “technomoral virtue” for our age.
- The virtue of **patience** is particularly challenged when we expect instant responses and infinite content.

## Turkle on Solitude and Self-Knowledge

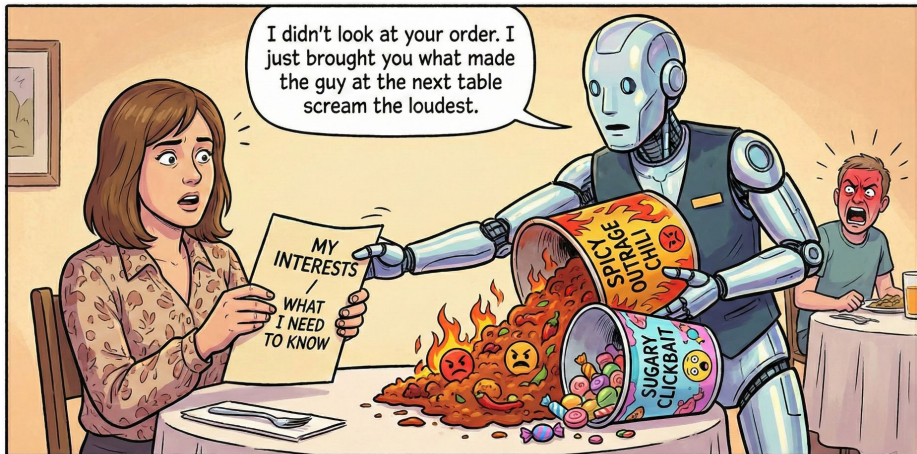
“If we don't teach our children to be alone, they will only know how to be **lonely**.” Solitude is necessary for the self-reflection that virtue ethics requires.

# Algorithms and the Erosion of Phronesis

- **Algorithmic feeds** decide what we see based on predicted engagement—removing our need to *choose* what deserves attention.
- This may erode **phronesis** (practical wisdom): the capacity to judge what is worth our time and attention.
- Content that triggers strong emotions (outrage, envy, fear) is amplified—potentially cultivating **vice** rather than virtue.
- Vallor warns of “**moral deskilling**”: when technology makes choices for us, we lose practice in making them ourselves.



# Moral Deskillling



Caption: Moral Deskillling: When we let the algorithm decide what deserves our attention.

Image generated by Google Gemini.

# Echo Chambers and the Erosion of Civic Virtue

- **Echo chambers** are social media environments where users encounter only views similar to their own.
- Algorithms maximize engagement by showing content that **confirms existing beliefs**—and outrage at the “other side.”
- This directly undermines **civic virtues**: Why practice tolerance if you never encounter reasonable disagreement?
- Legal scholar Cass Sunstein warned in *Republic.com* (2001) that personalized media would fragment the **shared public sphere** democracy requires.

## The Filter Bubble Problem

Eli Pariser: Algorithms create “**filter bubbles**” that invisibly edit our view of the world. We lose the **common ground** necessary for democratic deliberation. (Pariser 2011)



# Polarization and the Decline of Civic Friendship

- Research shows Americans have become significantly more **politically polarized** since the rise of social media.
- **Affective polarization**: We don't just disagree with the other party—we *dislike* and *distrust* them as people.
- This represents a failure of **civic friendship**—the Aristotelian virtue of seeing fellow citizens as partners in a shared project.
- Social media rewards **performative outrage** over thoughtful deliberation—cultivating vice, not virtue.

## Evidence of Polarization

Pew Research: The share of Americans with “very unfavorable” views of the opposing party has **more than doubled** since the 1990s. We increasingly see opponents as not just wrong, but as **threats to the nation**. (Sidoti and Faverio 2024)

# The Attention Economy and Democratic Attention

- The **attention economy** captures our attention for profit—but attention is also a **civic resource**.
- Democracy requires citizens who can sustain attention on **complex issues**—not just react to outrage.
- Persuasive design (infinite scroll, notifications, variable rewards) trains us toward **distraction**, not deliberation.
- Platforms optimize for **engagement**, which favors emotional, divisive content over nuanced civic discourse.

## The Civic Cost of Distraction

Self-governance requires the capacity to **think carefully** about policy, weigh evidence, and consider long-term consequences. An attention economy that fragments focus undermines democratic competence itself.

# Turkle on Conversation, Empathy, and Citizenship

- Sherry Turkle argues that **face-to-face conversation** is essential for developing empathy—a virtue with civic dimensions.
- **Civic empathy**: The capacity to understand fellow citizens' perspectives, even when we disagree.
- Digital communication lets us **curate and control**—we avoid the difficult work of truly listening to different views.
- Turkle: “We expect more from technology and less from each other”—including less from ourselves as citizens.

## Research Finding

One study suggests empathy among college students has **declined 40%** since 2000. This affects not just personal relationships but our capacity for democratic life with diverse others. (Konrath, O'Brien, and Hsing 2011)

# Vallor's Technomoral Virtues—Personal and Civic

## Personal Technomoral Virtues:

- **Self-control:** Resisting compulsive use
- **Honesty:** Authentic self-presentation
- **Humility:** Accurate self-knowledge
- **Patience:** Tolerating delays and difficulty

## Civic Technomoral Virtues:

- **Civility:** Respectful disagreement
- **Justice:** Fair treatment online
- **Empathy:** Understanding diverse others
- **Epistemic responsibility:** Commitment to truth

## Technomoral Wisdom

**Technomoral wisdom** is the master virtue: knowing how to live well *with* technology—both as individuals and as citizens of a democratic society.

# Vallor's Vision—The Garden Metaphor



Aristotelian friendship requires shared life and cultivation. Online connection often offers scale without depth.

Image generated by Google Gemini.

## Review Questions—Part 2

- 1 **According to Vallor**, how do new technologies affect the development of virtue? Why aren't technologies “neutral tools”?
- 2 **What are “echo chambers”?** How do they threaten civic virtues like tolerance and deliberative capacity?
- 3 **Explain “moral deskilling.”** How might algorithmic feeds contribute to this problem for both personal and civic virtue?
- 4 **Why does Turkle** emphasize face-to-face conversation? What virtues does it cultivate that digital communication may not?
- 5 **Discussion:** Vallor proposes “technomoral virtues” for the digital age. Which do you think is most important for *democratic citizenship*? Why?

# Interpreting Statistics Through Virtue Ethics

- Statistics on social media use reveal patterns of **habit formation**—and habits shape character.
- Aristotle: “We are what we repeatedly do.” Daily digital practices are forming (or deforming) the virtues.
- **Key interpretive question:** What do these patterns tell us about temperance, honesty, friendship, and practical wisdom?
- Communitarians add: Statistics also reveal how digital environments affect **civic virtue** and shared democratic life.

## The Virtue Ethics Approach to Data

Instead of asking only “Is social media harmful?” we ask: “What kind of **people**—and what kind of **citizens**—are we becoming through these daily digital habits?”

# Akasia—Weakness of Will as a Source of Vice

- Aristotle identified **akrasia** (weakness of will) as a key obstacle to virtue: knowing what's good but failing to do it.
- The akratic person's **appetites** overpower their **reason**—they act against their own better judgment.
- Pew (2024) reports **45%** of teens say they spend “too much time” on social media; 44% have tried to cut back.
- This is textbook akasia: They *know* moderation is better, but *cannot* achieve it.

## Why Akasia Matters

Platforms are **engineered** to exploit weakness of will—variable rewards, infinite scroll, and social validation trigger appetites that overwhelm rational self-control. This isn't mere personal failure; it's a **designed environment** that systematically produces akasia.



# Sources of Vice in Digital Environments

## Aristotle's Sources of Vice:

- **Akasia:** Knowing better but failing (appetite defeats reason)
- **Bad habituation:** Trained into vice through repeated practice
- **Ignorance:** Not knowing what's truly good
- **Moralized cruelty:** Treating harm as justified or righteous

## Digital Manifestations:

- **Akasia:** "I'll just check one more time..."
- **Bad habits:** Daily scrolling becomes automatic vice
- **Ignorance:** Misinformation shapes false beliefs
- **Moralized cruelty:** Cyberbullying as "deserved"; outrage as "justice"

## The Special Danger of Moralized Violence

Online environments enable **moralized cruelty**—harming others while feeling righteous. Pile-ons, doxxing, and cancel culture often frame cruelty as justified punishment, making vice feel like virtue.

# Temperance, Honesty, and Humility in the Data

- **Temperance:** WHO (2024) reports 11% “problematic use” (up from 7%)—Aristotle's vice of excess is spreading. World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe 2024
- **Honesty:** The “highlight reel” problem cultivates **boastfulness**—the vice of exaggerated self-presentation.
- **Humility:** 46% feel worse about body image; constant comparison distorts accurate self-knowledge.
- **Patience/Self-control:** Nighttime use disrupts sleep, reflecting inability to wait or rest. Woods and Scott 2016

## The Interconnection of Vices

These aren't isolated problems. Lack of temperance leads to more exposure to dishonest images, which undermines humility, which drives more anxious checking—a **cycle of mutually reinforcing vices**.

# Friendship, Civic Virtue, and Community

- **Aristotelian friendship:** Teens feeling “supported” dropped from 67% to 52% (2022-2024)—suggesting shallower connections.
- Aristotle distinguished **virtue friendships** (mutual character development) from mere **utility/pleasure friendships**.
- **Civic friendship:** Polarization data shows collapse of seeing opponents as fellow citizens—“very unfavorable” views doubled since 1990s.
- **Trust in institutions:** Historic lows (2024) reflect erosion of the shared frameworks communitarians say virtue requires.

## The Communitarian Concern

MacIntyre warned that without shared practices and communities, moral discourse becomes mere assertion. Echo chambers fragment the **common world** democratic deliberation requires.

## Review Questions—Part 3

- 1 **Define akrasia.** How does the statistic that 45% of teens think they use social media “too much” illustrate this concept?
- 2 **Explain how platform design** might systematically produce weakness of will. Is this different from other temptations humans face?
- 3 **What is “moralized cruelty”?** Give an example of how online environments might make harmful behavior feel righteous.
- 4 **How do the statistics** on social comparison relate to the virtues of **honesty** (in posters) and **humility** (in viewers)?
- 5 **Discussion:** Communitarians argue virtue requires shared communities and practices. What do polarization and declining institutional trust suggest about our capacity to develop civic virtue today?

# Framing the Debate—Character and Resilience

- Jonathan Haidt's *The Anxious Generation* (Haidt 2024) can be understood as a claim about **virtue formation**.
- His core argument: The “phone-based childhood” is producing young people who lack **resilience**—the ability to cope with adversity.
- Haidt draws on the concept of **antifragility**: like bones and muscles, character *needs* challenges to develop strength.
- From a virtue ethics view, this is a claim that social media environments **systematically prevent** the development of certain virtues.

## The Virtue Ethics Translation

Haidt's thesis: Children are being denied the **practice and habituation** necessary to develop virtues like courage, resilience, and emotional regulation. Social media provides the wrong kind of challenges.

# Haidt's Evidence as Character Formation Data

- **Timing** (decline begins 2012): Coincides with smartphone saturation—a fundamental change in daily habits.
- **Gender patterns**: Girls, who use image-focused platforms more, show greater effects—consistent with virtue challenges around **truthfulness** and **humility**.
- **Multiple indicators**: Rising anxiety, depression, self-harm, and loneliness suggest failures in developing **emotional resilience**.
- Haidt frames this as a **generational character shift**—not individual pathology but systematic environmental change.

## The Two-Part Problem (Virtue Ethics Reading)

- 1 **Online**: Constant comparison, validation-seeking, and curated self-presentation cultivate *vices*.
- 2 **Offline**: “Safetyism” denies children the challenges needed to cultivate *virtues* like courage and resilience.

# The “Great Rewiring” as Habit Transformation

## Play-Based Childhood Habits:

- Negotiating conflicts face-to-face
- Tolerating boredom
- Taking physical risks
- Experiencing natural consequences
- Developing through unstructured play

## Phone-Based Childhood Habits:

- Avoiding difficult conversations
- Instant entertainment on demand
- Physical safety, digital exposure
- Algorithmically curated experience
- Constant adult monitoring

## Aristotle's Insight Applied

If “we are what we repeatedly do,” then these two childhoods are forming **fundamentally different characters**. Haidt argues the new habits cultivate fragility rather than resilience.

# Haidt's Recommendations as Virtue Interventions

- ❶ **No smartphones before high school**—Protect the period when foundational character habits are formed.
- ❷ **No social media before 16**—Delay exposure to environments that cultivate vices of comparison and validation-seeking.
- ❸ **Phone-free schools**—Restore opportunities for face-to-face interaction that cultivates empathy and social skills.
- ❹ **More unsupervised play**—Provide the challenges necessary to develop courage, resilience, and practical wisdom.

## The Collective Action Argument

Individual families practicing these virtues face social costs. Haidt argues we need **community-wide norms**—precisely what communitarians like MacIntyre say virtue requires.



# The Critics—Questioning the Causal Story

- **Candace Odgers** (Odgers 2024) argues Haidt confuses correlation with causation.
- She points to alternative explanations: economic insecurity, school violence, climate anxiety, academic pressure.
- From a virtue perspective, these are *also* challenges to character formation—but different ones than Haidt emphasizes.
- Critics argue the international patterns don't match smartphone adoption timing as closely as claimed.

## The Virtue of Intellectual Humility

Both sides of this debate should practice **intellectual humility**—acknowledging uncertainty, considering alternative views, and proportioning claims to evidence. This is itself a technomoral virtue.

# Research Quality and Epistemic Virtue

- Critics like **Aaron Brown** (2024) and **Andrew Przybylski** argue that most studies Haidt cites have significant methodological weaknesses.
- Przybylski accuses Haidt of “vote counting”—emphasizing **quantity** of studies over **quality** of evidence.
- Only 22 of 476 cited studies have data on *both* heavy social media use *and* serious mental health issues in adolescents.
- This raises questions about **epistemic virtues**: Are we believing what the evidence actually supports?

## Vallor on Epistemic Virtue in a Digital Age

Vallor emphasizes that **good judgment about information** is a crucial technomoral virtue. The Haidt debate itself is a case study in how difficult this is when evidence is complex and stakes are high.

# Alternative Explanations and Intellectual Honesty

- Critics suggest Haidt underweights alternative factors: economic precarity, academic pressure, COVID effects, climate anxiety.
- **Melinda Wenner Moyer**: “I think Haidt is over-stating the research... in ways that undermine faith and trust in science.”
- **Tobias Dienlin**: The crisis may be “largely limited to the U.S.”—suggesting cultural factors beyond technology.
- The virtue of **intellectual honesty** requires acknowledging what we don’t know and presenting uncertainty accurately.

## Multiple Factors, One Framework

Even if social media is only *one* factor among several, virtue ethics still provides a useful lens: All these challenges affect the **conditions under which character develops**. The question is which factors matter most.

# The Full Picture—Personal and Civic Virtue

- Social media affects both **personal virtues** (temperance, patience, honesty) and **civic virtues** (tolerance, civic friendship, commitment to truth).
- Haidt focuses primarily on personal mental health; but the evidence also shows threats to **democratic health**.
- Echo chambers, polarization, and misinformation undermine the **shared civic life** communitarians say virtue requires.
- A complete analysis must address both individual flourishing *and* our capacity for democratic self-governance.

## The Communitarian Synthesis

Personal and civic virtue are connected: We develop character *within* communities, including political communities. When social media fragments the public sphere, it damages both individual and collective flourishing.

# Vallor, Turkle, and Democratic Renewal

## For Personal Virtue:

- Cultivate **technomoral virtues**: temperance, honesty, patience, humility
- Reclaim **solitude** for self-reflection (Turkle)
- Practice **face-to-face** conversation
- Develop **technomoral wisdom** about personal use

## For Civic Virtue:

- Seek out **diverse viewpoints** intentionally
- Practice **epistemic humility** about political beliefs
- Cultivate **civic friendship** across divides
- Support **shared institutions** and factual discourse

## The Dual Challenge

We need practices that cultivate both kinds of virtue—and we need **communities** (families, schools, civic organizations) that support these practices against algorithmic incentives.

# Practical Wisdom for Personal and Civic Life

## Questions for Personal Phronesis:

- Am I practicing **temperance** in my social media use?
- Am I presenting myself with **truthfulness**, or curating a false image?
- Is my use **supplementing** or **substituting** for real relationships?

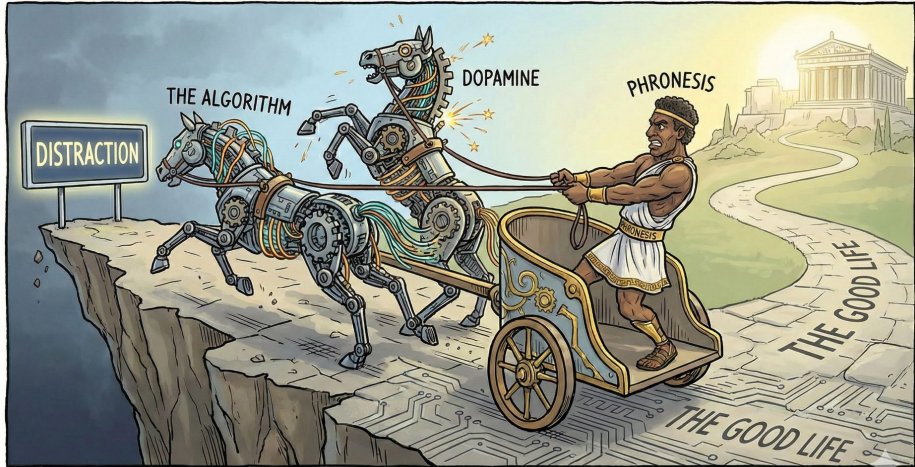
## Questions for Civic Phronesis:

- Do I encounter **diverse perspectives**, or only views I already hold?
- Do I treat political opponents as **fellow citizens** or as enemies?
- Am I committed to **truth** even when it challenges my beliefs?
- Am I contributing to **deliberation** or just performative outrage?

## Aristotle's Fundamental Question

“What kind of **person**—and what kind of **citizen**—am I becoming through these daily digital habits?”

# Plato's Chariot Allegory



Technomoral Wisdom isn't about abandoning the chariot; it's about learning to steer powerful new horses.

Image generated by Google Gemini.

# Final Review Questions

- 1 **Distinguish personal virtues from civic virtues.** How does social media potentially threaten each type?
- 2 **What is “civic friendship”?** Why do communitarians believe it is essential for democracy, and how might social media undermine it?
- 3 **Explain the connection** between echo chambers, polarization, and the decline of deliberative capacity.
- 4 **Evaluate this claim:** “The threat social media poses to democracy is more serious than its threat to individual mental health.” Do you agree? Why or why not?
- 5 **Final Discussion:** Design a “virtue-centered” social media policy for a democratic society. What would it aim to cultivate? What practices and institutions would support it?

**Reflection:** What civic virtue do you most need to develop in your own online political engagement?



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