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Aristotle's ethics

The aims of life

In this chapter I shall conduct a quick tour of a central work by Aristotle (384–323 BCE): *Nicomachean Ethics*. This book is not primarily about morality as we understand it today. What Aristotle means by "ethics" may be discerned if we consider the ancient Greek root of the term: *ethos*. This term refers to the customs of a society, including the characteristic outlook on life that is held by most members of that society. To speak about ethics in this sense is to speak about the customary behaviour of a people, the standards of human excellence they hold themselves bound to, and the attitudes through which they express their character as a people. These will include the attitudes that they have to one another. What kind of person do people in a particular society admire? What kinds of actions do they praise and what kinds of actions do they despise? Further, Aristotle is offering us a theory about human beings and what it is for them to flourish: a theory that will ground sound advice on how to live life well. He does not take himself to be laying down the moral law for his fellow citizens of ancient Athens. He takes it for granted that everyone understands what actions are wrong and that no one would be tempted to think that murdering someone, for example, could be any part of an answer to the question of how we should live our lives. What we would think of today as moral prohibitions of this kind were not up for discussion in Aristotle's text because attitudes towards them were not optional and were not a matter for individual judgement. For Aristotle the issue

was "How should we live well?" rather than "What is the morally right thing to do?"

> If then, our activities have some end which we want for its own sake, and for the sake of which we want all the other ends – if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else (for this will involve an infinite progression, so that our aim will be pointless and ineffectual) – it is clear that this must be the Good, that is the supreme good.
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> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094a17–22

Aristotle begins his book by saying that the good or goal towards which we aim in any given project can itself be questioned as to what it is good for. If I say that I am studying philosophy in order to increase my job prospects, I can go on to ask why I would want to increase my job prospects. And if I answer by saying that I want more money I can then go on to ask why I want more money. And if I say it is because I want to live in luxury I can ask why I want to live in luxury, and so on. At some point I am likely to reach an answer such as "Because I want to be happy", and this is a point beyond which my questioning cannot go. Why not? Because it does not make any sense to ask "Why do I want to be happy?" This is a goal or a good that does not need any further reason or justification. The series of questions "Why is that a good or a worthwhile goal?" comes to an end when you have identified a goal that justifies itself or needs no further justification. Aristotle claims that there is one end-point for any such series of questions: one thing that we all want for its own sake. And he calls this "the Good".

Aristotle explains that the Good for human beings consists in *eudaimoniā* (a Greek word combining *eu* meaning "good" with *daimon* meaning "spirit", and most often translated as "happiness"). Whereas he had argued in a purely formal way that the Good was that to which we all aim, he now gives a more substantive answer: that this universal human goal is happiness. However, he is quick to point out that this conclusion is still somewhat formal since different people have different views about what happiness is. Some people say it is worldly enjoyment while others say it is eternal salvation. Aristotle's theory will turn out to be "naturalistic" in that it does not depend on any theological or metaphysical knowledge. It does not depend on knowledge of God or of metaphysical and universal moral norms. It depends only on knowledge of human nature and other worldly and social realities. For him it is the study of human nature and worldly existence that will disclose the relevant meaning of the notion of *eudaimoniā*.

Aristotle's thinking is teleological (from the Greek words, *telos* meaning "goal" and *logos* meaning "knowledge"). This means that he understands things in terms of the goals that they pursue and the functions that they are designed to perform. Note that a "goal" in this sense does not need to be a purpose that is consciously entertained by the thing that is said to have the goal. Just as a plant evinces the goal of growing and propagating itself (witness the striving of a weed that forces its way through the concrete of a car park), and an animal evinces the goal of surviving long enough to propagate itself into the next generation, so human beings also evince goals. Aristotle takes the example of a flautist. The goal, purpose or function of a flautist is to play the flute and to do so as well as possible. In a similar way, suggests Aristotle, human beings have a goal or a function. In a purely schematic way we might say that the goal of a human existence is to do those things that are distinctly human and to do them well: that is, to be good *as a human being*. Now the activities that are distinctly human are rational activities since Aristotle thinks that a human being is an animal that is distinguished from other animals in being rational. So the fulfilment of the functions of a human being, or being good at being a human being, consists in the exercise of rationality in actions that are rational. Aristotle refers to the rational activity that will make us happy as virtuous activity. We shall be happy, he says, when we act in accordance with virtue and we shall be most happy when we act in accordance with the highest form of virtue. This teleological schema provides the basic structure of Aristotle's book.

Accordingly, any discussion of ethics, in so far as it concerns the nature and goals of human life, must discuss what it is to be a human being and what it is to fulfil the tendencies inherent in our nature as human beings. Aristotle gives us his conception of what a human being is by describing the human soul. He identified four "parts of the soul" as making up a full human being. These were the vegetative, the appetitive, the deliberative and the contemplative. Because these categories are so important I shall spend some time describing them and anticipating some of the ways in which Aristotle will make use of them later in the text.

The vegetative level

The vegetative level of our existence is what we would describe today as the biological functioning of our bodies. It consists in those many processes of growth, metabolism, blood circulation and so forth that make up the dynamic operation of our bodily existence. The vegetative aspect of our being is the body conceived as a machine. Do note, however, that

while the body as machine was conceived by Cartesian modernism as an objectified and purely biological entity – a body without personality or subjectivity – Aristotle does not theorize the body in this abstracted way. His premodern terminology of "parts of the soul" makes it clear that he is talking about an aspect of a whole. The soul is the whole, single and distinctive animating principle of the person and to delineate a "part" of it is not to identify an entity that constitutes a portion of a larger whole in the way that an engine is a part of a car: the part that makes it move. Rather, we should think of Aristotle as identifying different kinds of functioning that make up the whole living, active and thoughtful person. The vegetative "part of the soul", or the living body, comprises those aspects of the dynamic existence of the human person that centrally involve her body. These aspects cannot be distinguished clearly or definitively from other aspects of human existence.

Aristotle understands the vegetative part of the soul as a mode of functioning of the person that aims at a specific goal. For him, all of the parts of the soul have a tendency or internal goal that is distinctive of them and that they seek to fulfil. I do not *use* my skin to protect me from infections and other hurts; the skin has this purpose and goal within itself. This is its internal goal and it is good *as skin* to the extent that it fulfils this goal.

The appetitive level

Aristotle's positing of an "appetitive part of the soul" is based on the obvious fact that human beings desire things and strive to attain them. Just as we share the vegetative part of our souls with plants, so we share the appetitive part of our souls with animals. It is clear just from observing them that animals desire things. Indeed, one might say that their whole lives are ruled by desires. When our pet cat is not asleep, it is constantly active in pursuit of a variety of desires that it seems to have. And this also applies to human beings.

That we have appetites and desires is undeniable. It is in the nature of the kind of being that we are to be desirous, to be directed upon things that we want and a future that we seek, and to be striving for the objects of our inclination. We are not just passive beings to whom things happen and who can only act if caused to do so by external forces. Our desires and motivations are the internal sources of the energy and enthusiasm with which we approach life.

The appetitive aspect of our being also allows us to understand emotion and feeling. In so far as desire generates movement in our being

towards cognition, action and reaction, there is a dynamic aspect of our existence the flow of which is often experienced as feeling. Not only are we actively engaged with the world and with others but we experience that engagement as desire, curiosity, longing and enjoyment. When desire is frustrated we feel pain or anguish. When such feelings are integrated with cognition we experience emotions. Such emotions as fear, anger or joy combine a cognitive grasp of the situation in which we find ourselves with inchoate feelings. Were we not desiring beings, such reactions would not occur in us. And nor would they were we not whole and integrated beings. The cognitive dimension of existence needs to be present for emotion to be possible. Even an animal needs to apprehend the danger in its environment in some way in order to express its tendency towards survival by feeling fear and taking flight.

Notice that the desiring aspect of our being is also fundamentally teleological. Indeed, it is almost definitive of what teleology means for Aristotle. To be desirous of something is the human or animal way of having a tendency towards a goal. Whether or not the desire is present to consciousness, it constitutes the orientation of the organism towards that which would meet its need or fulfil its tendency. But these would be external goals of the organism. The internal goal of desire or appetite might be understood, not as a desire for something outside the organism, such as a child's desire for ice cream, but as a comportment of the organism towards its own fulfilment. In order to distinguish this idea from the common-sense notion of desire where desire is always a desire for some object, Aristotle suggests that the appetitive aspect of our being is the tendency of the organism to seek its own fulfilment through the excellence of its desires. This fulfilment is not only the excellent pursuit of its desires or the successful attainment of its desires, but also the having of desires that perfect its being. Desiring the right things is as important as obtaining what is desired. In this way a person who desires drugs of addiction would not fulfil the internal goal of her being whether or not she obtains what she desires. This is a self-destructive desire to have.

As we shall see later, it is this point that allows Aristotle to draw the ethical implication that we should desire well, and he understands this not only in terms of the external objects of our desire, but also in terms of such internal qualities as the intensity of the desire and whether the desire enhances our being. Our desires should be an expression of self-fulfilling inclinations and we should not be excessive or deficient in our desires. In a less moralistic tone, we might draw the conclusion that our having desires is part of what constitutes the richness and excitement of our lives. We can enjoy desiring.

Aristotle distinguishes the vegetative and appetitive parts of the soul from the rational part. He thinks of this latter aspect of our being as distinctive of us as human beings and says that animals do not share in it. He then goes on to suggest that the ethical problem that all people face is that of having the rational part of their soul remain in control of the desiring part. On this view we will live our lives well if our reason controls our inclinations. This is a view that was developed by Plato and that has since been taken up by Christianity and by Kant as a description of our moral psychology. However, it will turn out that Aristotle's view of the internal psychology of human beings is considerably more complex than this. First, the rational part of the soul is itself divided into two different kinds of function – the "deliberative" and the "contemplative" – and secondly, the way in which we exercise self-control will turn out to be much more subtle than would be suggested by Plato's model.

The third part of the soul that Aristotle identifies is the "deliberative" or "calculative" part. He has in mind our ability to think about what we do, to plan our actions, to be strategic in our approach to our needs and to review the effectiveness of what we have done. Rather than being driven by instincts or habits, human beings can be rational and reflective in their approach to the exigencies of life. It is this aspect of our being that tempts modern philosophers to dualistic ways of thinking. It is this aspect of our being that leads us to posit a "faculty" called "reason" or a "thinking substance" called "mind". Aristotle makes no such mistake. He sees it as just as much an aspect or level of our whole being as the vegetative and appetitive aspects. Deliberation or rational thinking is just one of the functions that whole human beings perform and through which they can fulfil themselves in their being.

Notice that the deliberative function is also teleological in the two ways that I have identified: having internal and external goals. Our deliberation, as Aristotle will say later, is about the means that we need to attain our goals. It is strategic. In this sense it is directed to a goal. But it is also teleological in the sense that our doing it well constitutes a fulfilment of our being. In so far as we are rational beings, we enjoy exercising our intellects. That we play chess and other mind games shows that we gain a satisfaction from the sheer exercise of our deliberative functions whether or not it is directed to some purpose external to us. This internal fulfilment is the inherent goal of the deliberative aspect of our being.

The deliberative part of our being is inextricably linked to action. For Aristotle, it is distinctive of human beings that we act rationally. We

engage in actions and practices that have goals, and our deliberation is our thinking about how those practical goals can be achieved. Now these goals are, once again, of two kinds. There are the more obvious external goals that are the ends that we pursue in our actions, and there are the internal goals, which are the satisfactions that come from doing the job well. They are internal in the sense that the agent experiences them, more or less self-consciously, as feelings of attainment, or of enjoyment in the exercise of the task. Just as a craftsman relishing the sheer physical activity of working with his materials would be an example of the fulfilment of the appetitive aspects of his being in that his enjoyment arises from feeling himself able to overcome difficulties and from enjoying a form of physical well-being in rapport with his materials, so a worker whose job involves thinking, calculating and planning enjoys overcoming the difficulties that intellectual problems pose. Being rational beings, we fulfil ourselves when we think clearly, coherently and effectively so as to increase our ability to attain our goals. These rational skills are the internal goals or "excellences" of our functioning as deliberative beings in the practical spheres of life.

The contemplative level

The fourth part of the soul or aspect of our being that Aristotle identifies is what he calls the contemplative part. He sees contemplation as a further aspect of our reasoning, but it is distinguished from the deliberative part in terms of what it is about: that is, in terms of its objects. Whereas deliberative reason is about the means that we need to achieve our goals and about the things we can change in the world by our actions, contemplative reason is about the things we cannot change. What Aristotle has in mind here includes the goals and values that we strive after (which he takes to be given by our human nature), the laws of physical nature that order the way the world works, and the nature and will of the gods. In brief, Aristotle suggests that the contemplative aspect of our being is detached from our active lives and is fulfilled by thinking about eternal and changeless things. Examples of such thinking would include theoretical physics, mathematics, philosophy and theology. I think of it as a form of theoretical thinking that has as its goal the understanding of the universe and of our existence in it, and that has as its internal satisfaction and fulfilment the creation of a sense of wholeness and meaningfulness in our lives. We are interested in such big questions as the origin and nature of the universe, the source and meaning of morality, the existence or non-existence of God and the

significance of beauty and truth in our lives, because thinking about such things (whether or not we achieve answers) is part of what makes our lives meaningful. Moreover, having a theory about such things (whether we acquire it from our cultures or by our own efforts) gives our lives an integrity or structure in which day-to-day events can gain their meaning as part of a coherent whole. It allows us to feel that we are part of a larger story or reality.

The fulfilment of this aspect of our being does not necessarily consist in gaining demonstrably true answers to our theoretical questions. Rather, the fulfilment of this aspect of our being consists in contemplating well. This means being honest with ourselves and being consistent. It means not clinging to false hopes or merely comforting theories if they are inconsistent with our other beliefs. It means having faith that is not superstition. It means not being superficial or shallow. And it means being able to affirm life with our most spiritual intellect as well as our deepest emotion.

Virtues of character

As we have just seen, Aristotle distinguished the vegetative and appetitive functions of the soul from the rational functions (which he later divides into calculative and contemplative). In so far as he chooses to disregard the vegetative part of the soul further, we can summarize Aristotle's distinction as being a twofold distinction between the desiring functions and the rational functions. Each of these kinds of function can be exercised well or poorly. When we exercise them well we display virtue. Accordingly, there are two kinds of virtue, corresponding to the two kinds of function. There are the "intellectual" virtues that consist in exercising our rational functions well, and there are the virtues of character (often translated misleadingly as "the moral virtues") that consist in exercising our appetitive functions well. In this section we shall explore the virtues of character.

The intellectual virtues are the result of teaching and the virtues of character are the result of the training of habit. We are not born virtuous. This is interesting because it is arguable that we are born with certain character traits and talents. Some children seem "naturally" more boisterous than others and some seem more tentative from an early age. While theorists debate the issue of "nature or nurture" at great length, it does seem that some basic patterns of personality are genetic. It is certainly clear that our talents are. That some people's fingers move

more easily over the piano keyboard, or that some people are tall and agile enough to be good at basketball seems to be a product of natural endowment. This is not to deny that practice and training can make up for a lack of natural advantage in some cases, but there are other cases where natural talent clearly contributes to the accomplishments that a person displays in life. However, these natural abilities are not deemed to be virtues, even though they are admirable and may contribute to *eudaimoniā*. Even if being a good piano player requires that we have some talent, it is also obvious that it requires practice. It is much the same with virtue, says Aristotle. Although we are not born with virtue, nature does give us the basic ability to be virtuous. But we need to practise virtue in order to acquire it. We need to get into the habit of acting virtuously and this habit will then become a disposition to act in that way. We acquire, for example, the virtue of courage by doing courageous things. We should avoid being either foolhardy or cowardly. If we act in either of these ways, we shall acquire the habit of acting in that way and we shall not acquire the virtue of courage, whereas if we face up to danger bravely on a number of occasions, we shall gradually become courageous.

But if we become virtuous by performing virtuous actions, how can we start to become virtuous? What would lead us to that first courageous or generous action if we were not already virtuous? Aristotle's answer to this is that others have to train us. We must be rewarded for doing the virtuous thing and punished for doing the vicious thing. In this way we shall acquire the habit without, at first, knowing what the virtue is and without having the disposition to act virtuously. The first steps towards virtue are the result of encouragement and training.

How would I know whether my training in virtue was complete? When could I know that I had become virtuous? Others might tell me by what they say or by how they come to trust me with difficult tasks, but I would also be able to tell by how I react to situations of temptation. If I react to situations of danger with the feeling that I want to run away and hide then I am not courageous, whereas if I face the situation without distress, I am. Aristotle's subsequent discussion of courage makes it clear that he does not suggest that being courageous implies not feeling any fear. It is quite appropriate to feel fear in the face of danger. To not do so would be to misunderstand the situation that one was in or to be insensitive to what was important in it. It is how we handle fear that defines us as courageous. If it leads us to want to run then our disposition is not courageous, whereas if we feel ourselves willing and able to face our fear, then that shows that we have acquired the habit or disposi-

tion to be courageous. Similarly, a person who wants to give money to the needy and positively enjoys doing so is truly generous. If you have to force yourself to give to a cause that you judge to be worthy, then you are having to fight against inclinations that show that you are not yet a generous person. A generous person would not feel the inclination to be stingy and a courageous person would not feel the inclination to run from danger. Accordingly, to be virtuous is more than acquiring a habit or a disposition to act in a certain way. It involves wanting to act in that way.

> But virtuous acts are not done in a just or temperate way merely because *they* have a certain quality, but only if the agent also acts in a certain state, viz. (1) if he knows what he is doing, (2) if he chooses it, and chooses it for its own sake, and (3) if he does it from a fixed and permanent disposition.
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> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1105a28–34

Aristotle argues that if virtue consisted only in trained behaviour then it would seem to be enough for an action to look virtuous for it to be virtuous. It would only be the outward behaviour that mattered. A youth being trained to be generous could give alms to the needy and thereby look virtuous and could even have acquired the habit of doing so. But is this enough to make him virtuous? No, as Aristotle has already said, he must also enjoy doing so if we are to regard him as truly virtuous. There is an important internal dimension to virtue. Not only must the virtuous person be glad to be acting virtuously, but he must also know what he is doing, choose to do it for its own sake (not for the sake of the praise that one might receive or for the sake of forming the habit of acting virtuously), and have the disposition of character to act in that way. So he is only truly virtuous when he has internalized the habit, along with the relevant attitudes and understandings, of the virtue into which he has been trained.

Aristotle defines virtue as a disposition rather than a feeling or a faculty. He has already argued for this by saying that it is acquired by habit and that we are not born with it (as we are with our faculties), and by saying just how feelings are involved (namely, as an indication that one has acquired a virtue). Aristotle then goes on to say how a virtuous disposition differs from other dispositions. A virtue is a disposition that makes us good as a human being in that it makes us perform our functions well. Given our teleological nature, what is good for us is that we fulfil the tendencies and goals of our natures. Accordingly, any state or action that consists in our fulfilling our functions well is a virtue. In the case of the virtues of character that are concerned with

the appetitive parts of the soul, this means that desiring well is what virtue consists in.

> So too it is easy to get angry – anyone can do that – or to give and spend money; but to feel or act towards the right person to the right extent at the right time for the right reason in the right way – that is not easy, and it is not everyone that can do it. Hence to do these things well is a rare, laudable, and fine achievement. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1109a26–29

Aristotle goes on to describe a number of virtues (I list them in Chapter 5) and to give us a rule of thumb for recognizing them. In order to prepare the ground for doing this he tells us what he means by the term "the mean". He says that in some matters "the mean" simply means the average or the middle. So the mean of two and ten is six. But when we speak of "the mean relative to us" we have a different concept in mind. It is the concept of the right amount or degree: the amount or degree that avoids deficiency or excess. The word "right" here does not mean "morally correct". It means "appropriate" or "in accordance with the mean for that person". To act virtuously in a specific situation is to avoid the deficiencies or excesses that that situation presents to the agent as temptations or problems to be avoided. Courage, for example, is the mean between cowardliness and foolhardiness. Aristotle makes the point that what is right or appropriate cannot be worked out in abstract or quasi-mathematical terms. It has to be judged in relation to the particular individual involved. A suitable meal for a supermodel would be different from a suitable meal for a Sumo wrestler.

Many people have interpreted Aristotle to be saying that, to be virtuous, a person should always act in a moderate way. This would be the view that virtue consists in avoiding extremes and taking a measured approach to life. They then criticize this view on the grounds that it seems to applaud mediocrity. On this view the sorts of commitment and determination that make for artistic achievement, sports heroism, loyalty under pressure and military courage would be ruled out on the grounds of being excessive. And there are certainly many passages in which this is what Aristotle seems to be saying. However, I would argue that Aristotle does not mean this. The "mean" is relative to the person acting and to the situation she is in. Some situations do call for highly intense responses. Great danger calls for high courage. Great challenges call for extreme effort and so on. Acting "rightly" in such situations would indeed go beyond the mediocre or moderate response. Aristotle is not preaching moderation in all things. But he is talking about the habits and disposition that we should have and it would make no sense

to say that we should be in the habit of acting in an extreme way. By their very nature extreme or intense actions would not be habitual. They would not be what we are normally disposed to do. Occasionally, situations will call for heroic responses but our normal dispositions are attuned to the everyday rather than to the unusual.

In unusual or extreme situations a person will have to exercise judgement and, in so far as this involves the intellectual virtues, Aristotle is not yet ready to discuss what this amounts to. In so far as he is discussing the virtues of character by themselves at the moment, he can only be talking about relatively routine situations in which we act in accordance with our habits and dispositions. In such situations we do not give much thought to what we do and do not exercise our judgement. In so far as we are acting from our dispositions, therefore, it would be best if our dispositions were to act in accordance with the mean: that is, in such a way as to avoid excess or deficiency. It is only in extreme situations that we need to exercise judgement and see what unusual and intense actions are required of us. So Aristotle is not advocating mediocrity or moderation in all things. He is just saying that in everyday life, when we do not have to think about what we are doing, we had best have a disposition to do what is the mean for us in that situation.

> So virtue is a purposive disposition, lying in a mean that is relative to us and determined by a rational principle, and by that which a prudent man would use to determine it. It is a mean between two kinds of vice, one of excess and the other of deficiency.
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> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1106b36–1107a3

Aristotle's definition of virtue merits close study. Aristotle begins by calling virtue a "purposive disposition". This means that it is a disposition to perform purposive actions. In more modern terms we might say that it relates to actions that we perform intentionally or "on purpose". He then says that the disposition is a disposition to actions that lie in a mean that is relative to us and determined by a rational principle. We have already seen what this means. The actions that a virtuous person is disposed to perform are those that avoid extremes where what this means in a particular concrete case is specified relative to the circumstances of the person involved and, moreover, determined by a judgement of what the appropriate or "mean" course of action would be. Aristotle refers to a "rational principle" because he expects that the judgement made as to what the mean or appropriate course of action would be in a given situation will be determined by a judgement that is rational and well informed. How those judgements should be made

is a matter that he will discuss when he turns to the intellectual virtues in Book 6 of his text. At this point he says nothing more than that the rational principle involved would be that which a prudent man would use. Since he has not yet explained to us what prudence is, he cannot spell this out any more fully at this point. His intention here is simply to suggest that if you do not have the necessary intellectual skills or virtues to make the judgement as to what the appropriate action would be in a given situation, and if you do not have a habit to act in the appropriate way in such situations, then you had better take the advice of a prudent person and act in the way that he or she would.

Aristotle's doctrine of the virtues of character as the mean is not his final and considered position. The fully virtuous person certainly has dispositions to avoid extremes, but he also has the discernment to see what a given situation calls for. The younger person who is not yet fully formed in all the virtues and is still struggling to acquire the virtues of character can only depend on the notion of virtue as a mean and on rules of thumb for finding what that mean is. This is laudable, but it is not mature virtue. Aristotle's doctrine of virtue as the mean is only a part of a fuller picture of virtue that he is developing. What is needed further is judgement.

Pleasure as an ethical problem

Before moving on to the question of what judgement is and to the more general topic of what the intellectual virtues are, we should discuss at least one of the virtues of character that Aristotle analyses: temperance. I choose to explicate his view of temperance because it illustrates very well Aristotle's typical approach to the virtues of character, and also because it raises ethical issues that are broader than the more limited domain of morality.

The first point that Aristotle makes (1117b22) is that temperance is a virtue that belongs to the "irrational part of the soul". You will recall that this would mean the desiring or appetitive part of the soul. So this is a virtue of managing one's desires. The object of the relevant desire is pleasure and the virtue of temperance concerns itself with the proper management of the desire for pleasure. While one can be excessive or deficient in avoiding pain, the central meaning of temperance for Aristotle is that it is the mean between being too preoccupied with pleasure (licentiousness) and having too little interest in it (insensibility). For Aristotle, not being attracted to the pleasurable things of life is just as much an ethical failure as indulging in them to excess.