

Nicomachean Ethics 6.8-6.13

6.6

‘Understanding’ (nous): strikes me as a bad translation, since we can clearly understand things that have explanations

Basic problem is that the principles don’t have explanations or proofs; but scientific knowledge involves grasping a proof

So, can’t have episteme of the principles; this is a good point, there does seem to be a different cognitive grasp of principles than derived facts

Well, by elimination, then, can’t be episteme, phronesis, or techne

It’s also not wisdom, since mark of wisdom is ability to prove

So, only thing left is nous

Important: we’ve learned that episteme requires grasp of principles, but here we learn that grasp of principles as such isn’t (partially) constitutive of episteme

6.7

Wisdom (sophia)

Most exact form of scientific knowledge

READ 1141a18 Wisdom = understanding + scientific knowledge

Here we also seem to get a view on which quality of cognitive state in some sense depends on quality of its object

Seems like it’s gonna concern divine beings (1141b1)

6.5

Prudence (phronesis)

Who do we call prudent people? Those who can reason well about living well in general; who grasp and can reason about the sorts of things that promote living well (not some specialized area)

Prudence can’t be either scientific-knowledge nor craft, since the former deals with what can’t be

otherwise, and people are prudent insofar as the reason well about what can be otherwise

READ 1140b5

READ 1140b21

6.8

Talk generally about the idea that there seems to be prudence concerning big-scale political decisions and concerning an individual

Need experience to acquire prudence, since it involves knowledge of particulars, which comes from experience

Focus on last paragraph

6.9

This chapter deals with good deliberation (euboulia); there's an important question of what the relationship between euboulia and phronesis is

Euboulia is not scientific knowledge

Not good guessing; since that doesn't actually involve reasoning at all; nor quick thinking, since quick thinking is a type of good guessing

Nor is it belief; for weird reasons

Remaining possibility is that euboulia belongs to thought; because it doesn't involve commitment (unlike belief)

There is a normative flavor to good deliberation: it isn't just getting well to the end you set; needs a good end

Nor is it just getting to the right end, since you can do that by accident

READ 1142b30

So, euboulia seems to be the correctness that phronesis issues in

6.10

This chapter is on comprehension (sunesis): a difficult word to translate; it suggests something like quick to get what's going on; we might use the term 'perceptive' in the way that we describe someone as perceptive in, say, social situations; being quick at getting 'what's going on'

Here, Aristotle says that comprehension and good comprehension (here sunesis and eusunesia) are the same; and we do often speak this way; in describing someone as perceptive we mean they are good at it

So, what Aristotle says is that comprehension is 'about what we might be puzzled about and might deliberate about'; so it's about the same things as prudence (this is why 'being perceptive' is a pretty good

translation)

6.11

Many of the states just outlined concern grasp of particulars; those are what actions concern

Understanding (nous) is the state in which we grasp things of which there is no rational account: this occurs w/r/t both first terms and last terms; first terms (of demonstrations); last terms, in action, that this is thus and such (no proof here, just immediate grasp)

Need perception of the particulars; this perception is nous

READ 1143b15 So, maybe it is right to say that there are two virtues: prudence and wisdom

6.12

In this chapter and the next he raises some puzzles about prudence: what good is it, for those who are already good; just as, if you are healthy, you don't need to know anything about medicine; if you are good, you don't need to know anything relevant to prudence

So, maybe the answer is: it helps us become good

But, again, it doesn't seem like we must have it *ourselves* to become good; can't we just follow the advice of those who have it? Just as all we care about in becoming healthy is following the doctor's advice

This gets to a core issue of philosophy asked often in the ancient world, but still important today: are there benefits to philosophy that require one to oneself engage in it? It seems like science, for the most part, does not require someone to be a scientist to engage in it

Lastly: prudence is inferior to sophia, insofar as it concerns less valuable matters

Responses

- [1] Prudence and wisdom are choice worthy in themselves because each is the virtue of a respective part of the soul
 - Again, the worry though is, so what
- [2] Wisdom produces happiness, not as a product, but just as being a constituent
- [3] Virtue makes the goal correct, prudence the things that promote the goal correct
 - Lorenz translation: Decision, then, is made correct by virtue. But as for those things that are naturally done for the sake of that, that task belongs not to virtue, but to another capacity.
 - The 'for the sake of *that*' is often taken to pick up 'decision'
 - But, it's much more plausible that 'that' picks up virtue
 - **READ 1139a31-3**
 - So, the 'that' here is virtue; meaning, actions done for the sake of becoming virtuous
 - Go to 2.9; here, the aim is to become generous; if one recognizes that one is naturally incline to cheapness, cleverness is a matter of figuring out how to go in the opposite extreme; prodigality

- Cleverness, is a distinct capacity, but one required for prudence: it involves being good at achieving a goal, whatever that goal is
- So, virtue requires prudence, which requires cleverness

6.13

Just as prudence relates to cleverness; genuine virtue relates to natural virtue

Natural virtue has caused a lot of problems: given that, since the very beginning of book 2, we have been learning that we are not virtuous by nature, it's hard to see what 'natural virtue' could be; but, it seems to be something like, having an unreflective, 'natural' disposition to do virtuous actions

READ 1144b4-7: NB, should take 'prone' to cover all examples

Full virtue cannot be acquired without prudence

Soc. was wrong to think that all virtues were prudence (or instances of prudence), but he was right to think that all virtues require prudence

READ 144b23: Here we get the answer to 'what is the correct reason'

Now, raise the issue: what is the word 'logos' supposed to mean?

We cannot be fully good without prudence, or prudent without virtue of character

So, while people think: yes, you can be courageous without the other virtues, they are mistaken; you can have natural tendencies in line with one virtue and not others, but can't have full virtue (i.e. real virtue)

So, here the basic idea is that, the agent must actually understand why what they are doing is the virtuous thing, to be virtuous

So, even if prudence were useless in action (= WE COULD GET THE SAME RESULTS EVEN IF WE WEREN'T PRUDENT), it would still be valuable