

Virtue Theory

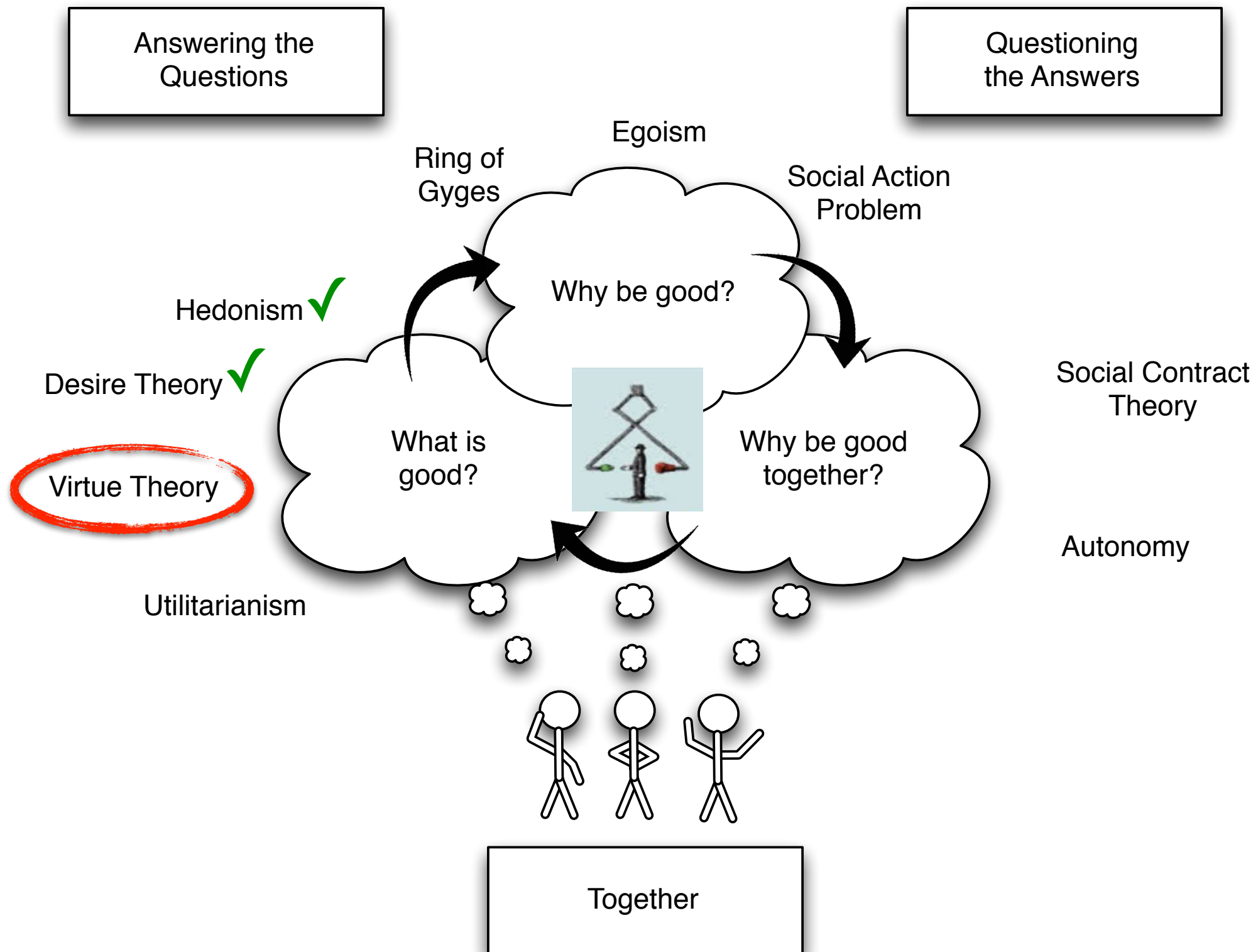
1. Objectives
2. Administrivia
3. Virtue Ethics

Objectives:

By the end of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Define ethical pluralism;
2. Sketch the basic idea of virtue theory;
3. Describe Aristotle's virtue ethics

1. Last written reflection this Wednesday



Let's say a police officer obeys the law, but only reluctantly. He only does the minimum required of him. If he could get away with it, he would extort money from business owners, brutalize prisoners, and doctor evidence. He doesn't do any of these things, but that's only because he is afraid of what would happen to him if he were caught.

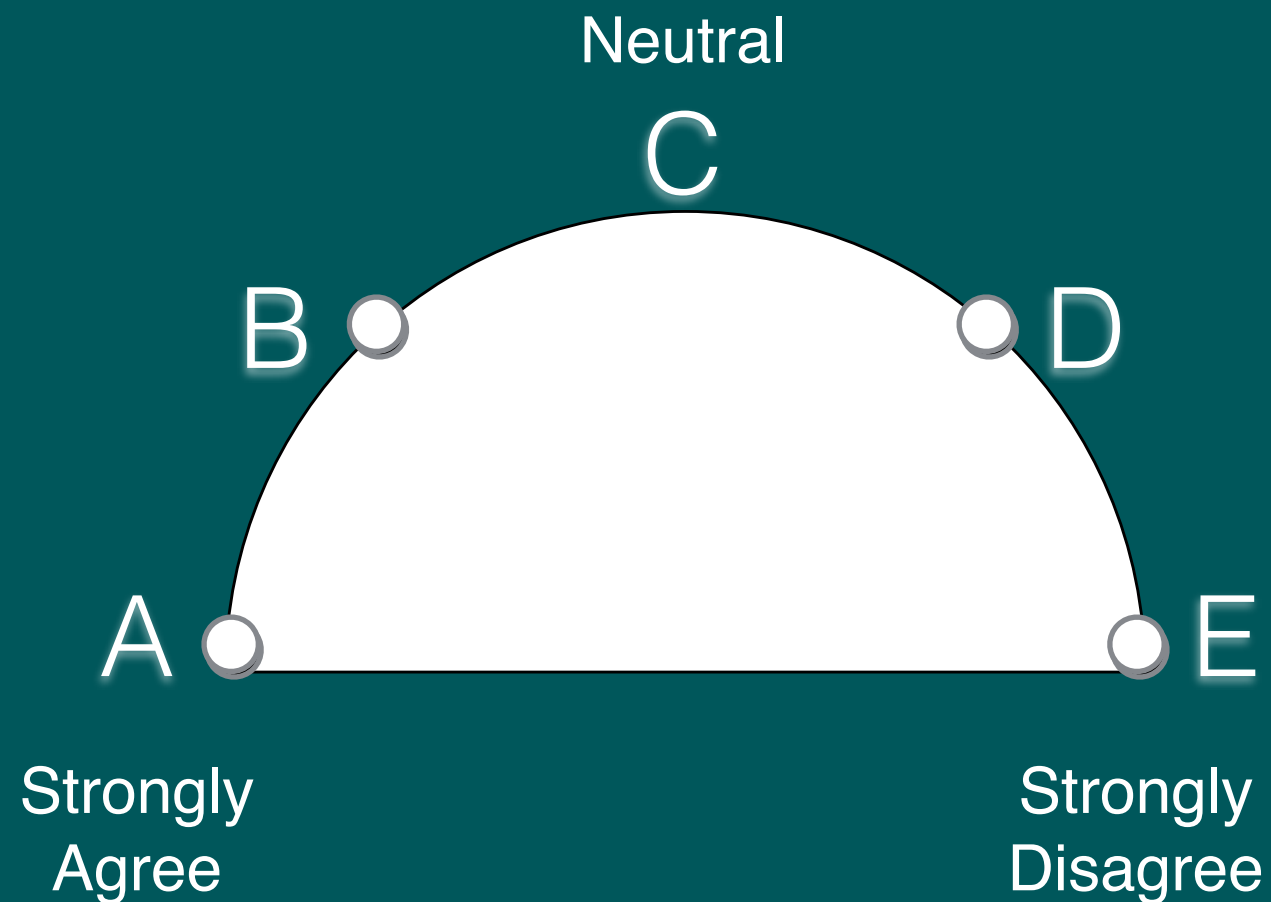




Poll

Question

Is the police officer a good person?

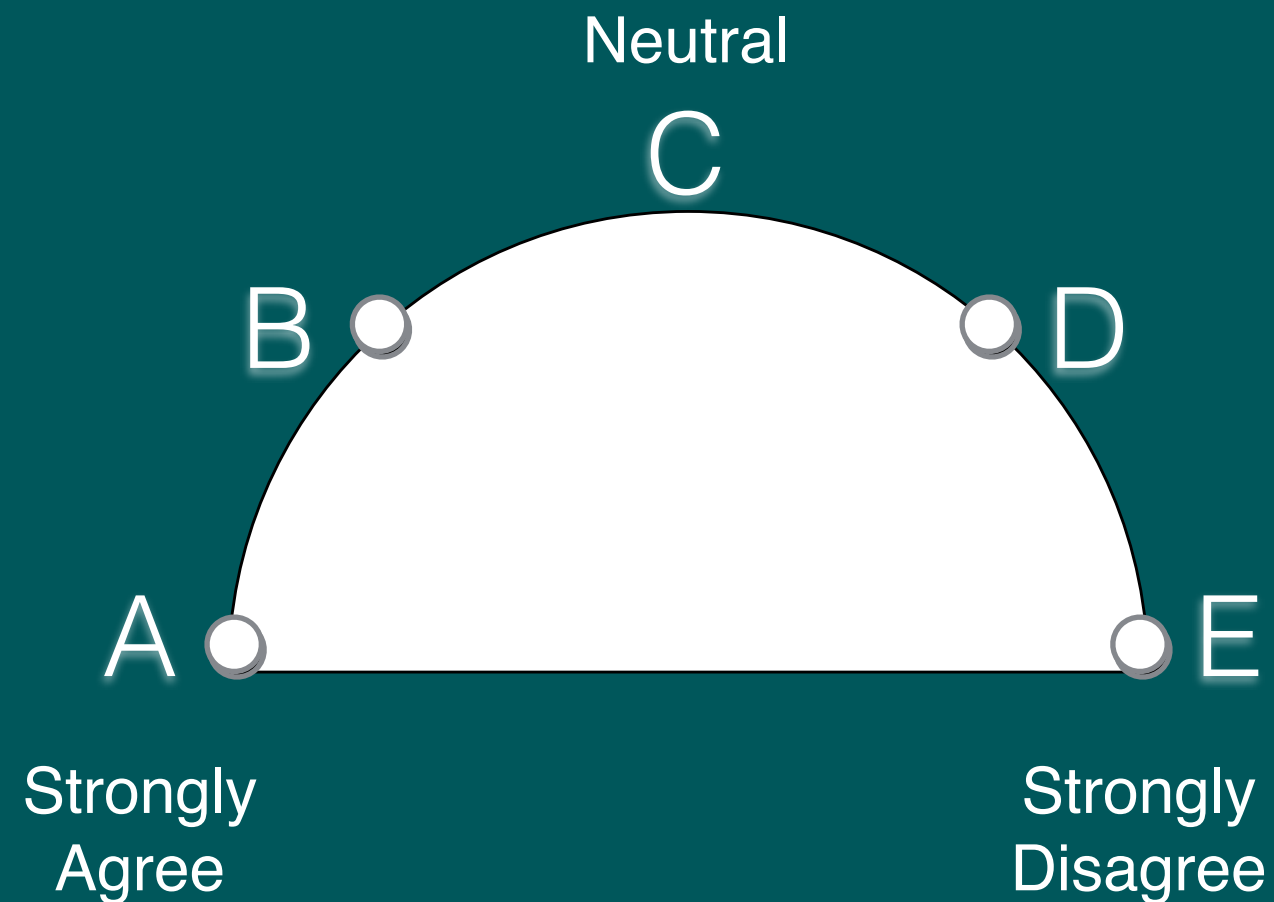




Poll

Question

Does it matter?



“



Russ Shafer-Landau

If we think only about whether he had done his duty, there is nothing to criticize him for. But that just shows that we need to broaden our thinking.

- Text, p. 254

”



Russ Shafer-Landau

“

We should focus less on matters of moral duty, and concentrate much more on ideals of character. Following that advice leads us directly to a consideration of virtue ethics.

- Text, p. 254

”

It is the difference between asking:

What should I do?

v.s.

What sort of person should I be?



Russ Shafer-Landau

“

According to virtue ethicists, actions aren't right because of their results, or because they follow from some hard-and-fast-rule. Rather, they are right because they would be done by someone of true virtue.

- Text, p. 254

”

That doesn't mean there aren't any rules

An act is morally right just because it is one that a virtuous person, acting in character, would do in that situation.

In effect there are many moral rules

Virtue:

honesty
loyalty
courage
temperance
wisdom

Vice:

gluttony
infidelity
prejudice
laziness
murder

Ethical pluralism is the view that there are at least two, if not more, fundamental ethical principles



So what do we do when our principles conflict with each other?





Russ Shafer-Landau

“

Virtue ethicists reject the idea that there is any simple formula for determining how to act...To them, ethics is a complex, messy area of decision making, one that requires emotional maturity and sound judgement.

- Text, p. 256

”



Russ Shafer-Landau

“

Aristotle cautions that we must not expect the same degree of precision in all areas of study, and implies that morality lacks rules and methods of thinking that are as precise as those, say, in mathematics.

- Text, p. 256

”



Aristotle

384 - 322 BCE

- A student of Plato's
- A tutor of Alexander the Great
- Another system builder
- Simply referred to as The Philosopher



Aristotle

384 - 322 BCE

Elements of Aristotle's Ethics

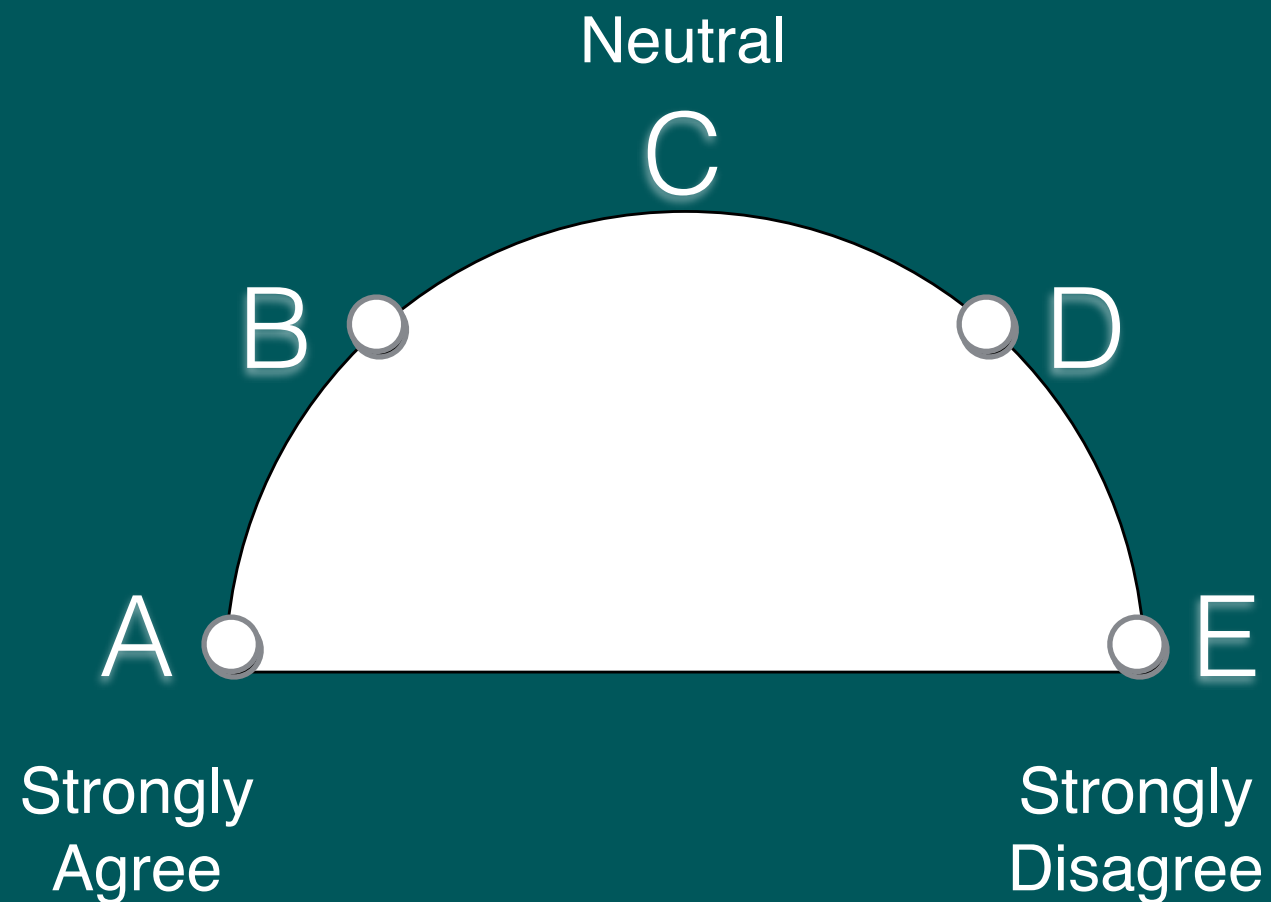
- ☐ Function
- ☐ Happiness
- ☐ Virtue
- ☐ Mean



Poll

Question

Do you think everything has a purpose?



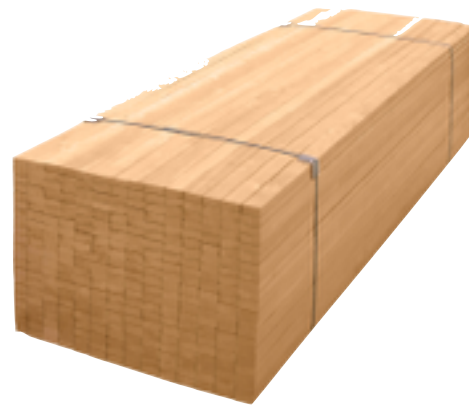
What does it mean to be good?

What does it mean to be human?

What does it mean to be a table?



Material Cause:
The wood



“That from which...a thing comes to be...”

e.g. The wood of a wooden table.

Formal Cause:
Having 4 legs & a flat top



“The form is the account...of the essence...”

e.g. Having four legs and a flat top
is just what it is to be a table.

Efficient Cause:
The carpenter.



“The source of the primary principle of change...”

e.g. A carpenter is what produces a table.

Final Cause:
What's it for?!

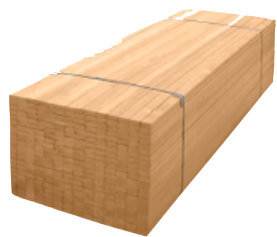


“Something’s end--i.e. what it is for.”

e.g. Eating on and writing on is what a table is for

Material Cause:

The wood

**Final Cause:**

Eating on and writing on is what a table is for

Efficient Cause:

The carpenter.

**Formal Cause:**

Having 4 legs & a flat top



**Aristotle**

384 - 322 BCE

“

Every craft and every line of inquiry, and likewise every action and decision, seems to seek some good...

- Author

”

**Aristotle**

384 - 322 BCE

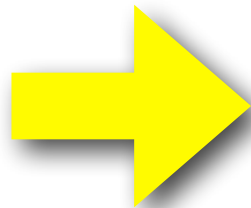
“

It seems different in different actions and arts; it is different in medicine, in strategy, and in the other arts likewise. What then is the good of each? Surely that for whose sake everything else is done.

- Aristotle, N.E. 1096a15

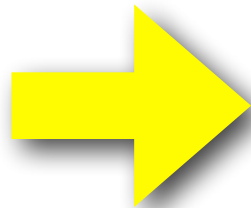
”

Medicine



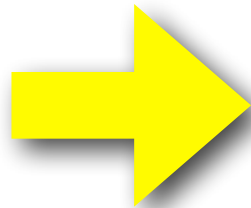
Health

Strategy



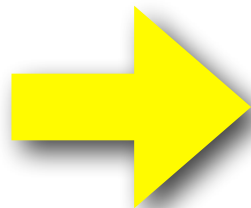
Victory

Architecture



House

Human



?



Poll

Question

What is our end?

- A To make lots of money
- B The life of nutrition and growth
- C The life of sense-perception
- D The life of an active soul
- E Not sure



Aristotle

384 - 322 BCE

Elements of Aristotle's Ethics

- ☒ Function
- ☐ Happiness
- ☐ Virtue
- ☐ Mean

**Aristotle**

384 - 322 BCE

“

An End pursued in itself...is more complete than an end pursued because of something else...

- Aristotle, NE, 1096a32

”

**Aristotle**

384 - 322 BCE

“

...and an end that is never choiceworthy because of something else is more complete than ends that are choiceworthy both in themselves and because of this end...

- Aristotle, NE, 1096a32

”

**Aristotle**

384 - 322 BCE

“

...and hence an end that is always choiceworthy in itself, never because of something else, is unconditionally complete.

- Aristotle, NE, 1096a32

”

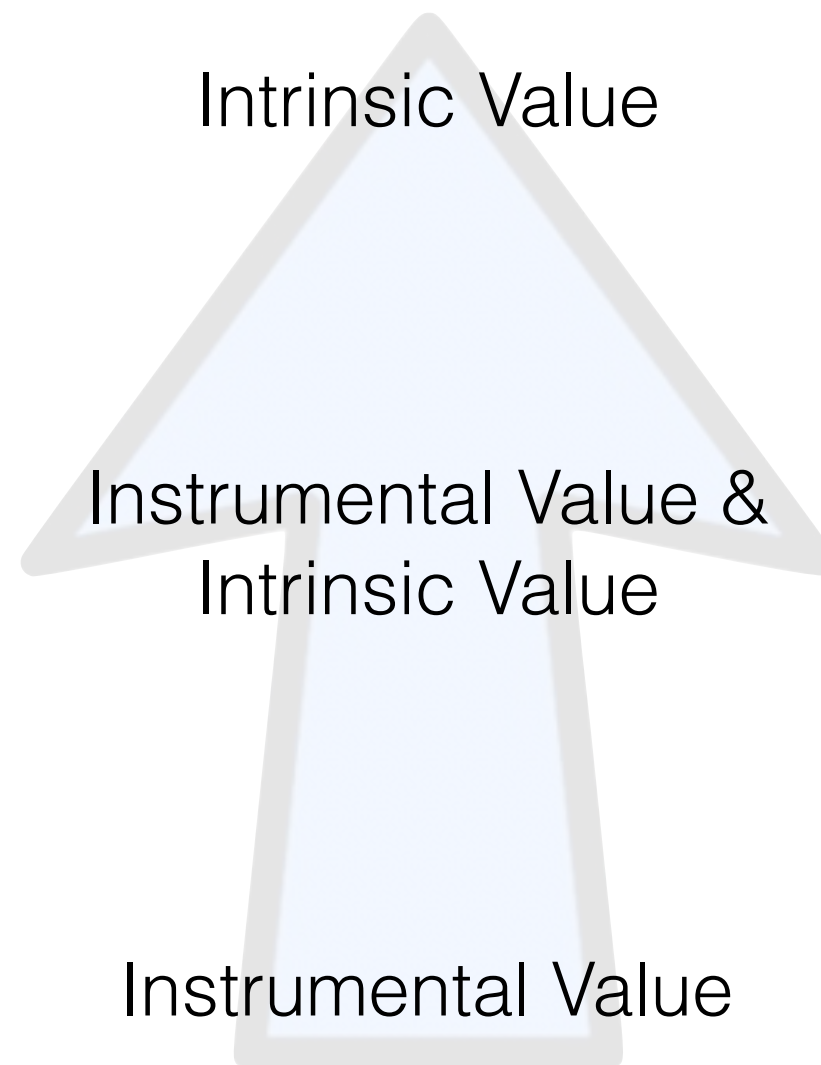
Something that is sought after for its own sake.

(is better than)

Something that is desired both in itself and as a means to something else

(is better than)

Something that is sought after as a means to something else



**Aristotle**

384 - 322 BCE

“

“Now happiness more than anything else seems unconditionally complete, since we always choose it because of itself, never because of something else.”

- Aristotle, NE, 1097b

”

So what is the connection
between happiness and
the function of humans?

To live rationally is to have all of your actions directed towards living well

Living a well-lived life is the best possible good for a human

To live well just is to live your life under the guidance of the virtues of the soul



Aristotle

384 - 322 BCE

life well lived = happiness



Aristotle

384 - 322 BCE

The human good is to live a
life of virtue in accordance
with reason