Robert Prus
University of Waterloo, Canada

Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*:[i]
Laying the Foundations for a Pragmatist Consideration of Human Knowing and Acting

Abstract

Whereas a great many academics have presumed to speak knowledgeably about Aristotle's work, comparatively few have actually studied his texts in sustained detail and very few scholars in the social sciences have examined Aristotle's work mindfully of its relevance for the study of human knowing and acting on a more contemporary or enduring plane.

Further, although many people simply do not know Aristotle's works well, even those who are highly familiar with Aristotle's texts (including *Nicomachean Ethics*) generally have lacked conceptual frames for traversing the corridors of Western social thought in more sustained pragmatist terms. It is here, using symbolic interactionism (a sociological extension of pragmatist philosophy) as an enabling device for developing both transsituational and transhistorical comparisons, that it is possible to establish links of the more enduring and intellectually productive sort between the classical scholarship of the Greeks and the ever emergent contemporary scene.

After (1) overviewing the theoretical emphasis of symbolic interactionism, this paper (2) locates Aristotle's works within a broader historical context, (3) situates Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* within the context of his own work and that of his teacher Plato, and (4) takes readers on an intellectual voyage through Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Not only does his text address a great many aspects of human lived experience, but it also has great instructive value for the more enduring study of human group life.

Accordingly, attention is given to matters such as (a) human agency, reflectivity, and culpability; (b) definitions of the situation; (c) character, habits, and situated activities; (d) emotionality and its relationship to activity; (e) morality, order, and deviance; (f) people's senses of self regulation and their considerations of the other; (g) rationality and judgment; (h) friendship and associated relationships; (i) human happiness; and (k) intellectual activity.

In concluding the paper, one line of inquiry that uses contemporary symbolic interaction as resource for engaging Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is suggested. However, as indicated in the broader statement presented here, so much more could be accomplished by employing symbolic interactionism as a contemporary pragmatist device for engaging Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Keywords

Before Aristotle embarked on a statement of political science (i.e., the science of managing the *polis* or community) which he defined as the most essential of all human sciences, he realized that he needed to develop a broader approach to the study of human knowing and acting.

Thus, whereas *Nicomachean Ethics* [*NE*] is only one of several texts that Aristotle developed on the human condition and also is best comprehended in conjunction with his other works, *Nicomachean Ethics* remains one of the most highly enabling statements ever written on human knowing and acting.

Because Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* represents the key to comprehending all of the variants of pragmatist social thought that would be developed in the human sciences in the ensuing centuries, including our own time and beyond, it would be most instructive for every student of the human condition and especially those working in symbolic interactionism and related pragmatist and constructionist traditions to be familiar with this text. Indeed, if one were to know only one manuscript from the classical Greek era, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is clearly among the most indispensable.

Focusing on activity, *NE* has an enduring relevance as a highly enabling set of concepts as well as a set of comparison points and analytical linkages with more contemporary realms of activity. Thus, *NE* is an extremely valuable resource for achieving transhistorical conceptual continuity in the study of human knowing and acting. Further, because of its relevance to all manner of human endeavor, *NE* provides an exceptionally viable pragmatist basis for communication among scholars from a wide variety of disciplines and nations.

Although few social scientists seem familiar with Aristotle's works on ethics and people often use the term "ethics" in ways that more exclusively imply notions of civil relations, justice, and generalized politeness, Aristotle not only engages a wide variety of topics of fundamental relevance to social scientists in his analysis of ethics but, even more consequentially, also lays the foundations of pragmatist scholarship. Thus, he establishes what may be known as "the pragmatist divide."

Whereas Aristotle (c384-322 BCE) has learned much from Plato (c427-347BCE) and benefits from Plato's pragmatism as well as other aspects of his scholarship, Aristotle dispenses with Plato's theology along with Plato's ideal forms. As well, because Aristotle *focuses so centrally on **activity** as a humanly engaged process*, he also moves well beyond the open-endedness of much of Plato's dialectic considerations of the "nature of knowing and acting." Clearly, Aristotle has learned much from Plato's reflective, "quasi-pragmatist" dialectic analyses. However, in a manner that more closely approximates Plato's considerations of activity in *The Republic* and *Laws*, Aristotle much more singularly concentrates on the enacted features of human group life.

For Aristotle, the humanly engaged world is the single and primary source of human knowing. Thus, people are to be recognized as biological essences and, like all living things, people are to be understood in terms relative to their capacities for sensation and movement. Accordingly, for Aristotle, people exist, function, and are to be understood as community-based animals who, on acquiring speech, also achieve capacities for thought, deliberation, intentionality, purposive activity, and collective enterprise. As well, Aristotle insists on the (empirical) necessity of developing concepts from examinations of the instances and the related use of

instruction-based knowing (especially see Spangler 1998) and analytic induction (i.e., comparative analysis).

Elsewhere (Prus 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006), I have addressed the affinities between symbolic interactionism and classical Greek scholarship (particularly the works of Aristotle). Still, recognizing the natural skepticism that many contemporaries, who are unfamiliar with this literature, have expressed about the accomplishments of classical Greek scholarship and its correspondence with 20th and 21st century developments in the social sciences, it is important to provide a more sustained, closely documented statement on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics.*

Aristotle is known to most social scientists in only the most superficial of terms and even most philosophers have a rather limited familiarity with Aristotle's pragmatism. Nevertheless, Aristotle's works on ethics, rhetoric, politics, and poetics amongst others, have provided the foundations for virtually all instances of pragmatist social thought in Western social theory. This most certainly includes the development of American pragmatism (associated with Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, John Dewey, and George Herbert Mead, see Prus 2005).[ii]

While attending to notions of good and evil in comparatively sustained manners, Aristotle also addresses a number of issues that are central to community life (and the foundations of political science) in highly insightful, explicit, and analytically precise terms.

In the process of developing *Nicomachean Ethics,* Aristotle directly and consequentially deals with (1) *the human quest for good* (i.e., desired ends, purposes); (2) *virtue and vice* (as humanly engaged realms of activity); (3) *human agency* (with respect to voluntary behavior, deliberation and counsel, choice, practical wisdom, and activity); (4) *character* (as formulated, enacted, and alterable); (5) *happiness* (with respect to pleasure, pain, virtues, and activity); (6) *emotion* (as experienced, developed), (7) *justice* (as in principles, law, and regulation); (8) *self regulation* and an altruistic attentiveness to the other; and (9) *interpersonal relations* (as in friendship, family, benefactors, and citizenry).

Relatedly, whereas Aristotle is deeply concerned about people developing virtues (and competencies) on more personal levels as well as fostering a greater sense of well-being in the community at large, Aristotle recognizes that morality of both sorts cannot be understood apart from sustained examinations of (1) the nature of community life and (2) the ways that people actually do things.

Thus, Aristotle not only intends to use *Nicomachean Ethics* to lay the foundations for a more extended theory of political science, but he also endeavors to establish the base for comprehending all manners of meaningful human activity (including the interchanges and relationships that people develop with one another in the course of community life).

Still, before focusing more directly on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, it is important to (1) provide an overview of the theoretical approach that centrally informs this consideration of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, (2) locate Aristotle's scholarship within the broader historical flow of Western social thought, and (3) situate *Nicomachean Ethics* within the context of Aristotle's other considerations of human knowing and acting. Although these matters may seem diversionary to some readers, this material is fundamental not only for understanding the neglect of Aristotle's work in the social sciences but also for appreciating the roots of the positivist - idealist - pragmatist schisms that one presently encounters in the human sciences.

The Theoretical Frame

Because it is symbolic interaction (and pragmatist social thought more generally) that provides the conceptual mechanism that enables this project to develop in more sustained analytic terms, it is instructive to review the premises that inform an interactionist analysis of human group life.

In developing a larger project on the linkages of classical Greek thought and the contemporary human sciences, of which Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* represents a highly consequential component,[iii] I have built fundamentally on the symbolic interactionist tradition associated with George Herbert Mead (1934), Herbert Blumer (1969), and Anselm Strauss (1993).[iv] Since Mead and Blumer are particularly instrumental in articulating the theoretical and methodological foundations of a social science that attends to people's lived experiences (i.e., the ways that people engage all aspects of their known worlds), their work serves as a consequential reference point throughout.

Because all research and all theory makes claims or assumptions about the world (regardless of whether these are explicitly recognized) and so much variation exists in the human sciences, it is essential to provide readers with a more precise indication of what the present approach entails (and, correspondingly, what it does not).

Thus, before comparisons of a more meaningful sort can be made, one requires a conceptual technology or apparatus for considering similarities and differences between things as well as their connections and consequences. This also is necessary to offset the tendency on the part of many to view the material and intellectual productions of the past as largely inconsequential and/or essentially as matters of passing curiosity (whereby considerations of the classical Greek and Latin eras may be likened unto ventures into an archaic museum).

In developing the conceptual framework for the present paper, eleven premises or assumptions that inform the interactionist paradigm are briefly outlined:[v]

1. *Human group life is intersubjective.* Human group life is accomplished (and made meaningful) through community-based, linguistic interchange.
2. *Human group life is knowingly problematic.* It is through symbol-based references that people begin to distinguish realms of "the known" and (later) "the unknown."
3. *Human group life is object-oriented.* Denoting anything that can be referenced (observed, referred to, indicated, acted toward, or otherwise knowingly experienced), objects constitute the contextual and operational essence of the humanly known environment.
4. *Human group life is (multi) perspectival.* As groups of people engage the world on an ongoing basis, they develop viewpoints, conceptual frameworks, or notions of reality that may differ from those of other groups.
5. *Human group life is reflective.* It is by taking the perspective of the other into account with respect to one's own being that people become "objects unto themselves" (and act accordingly).
6. *Human group life is sensory/embodied and (knowingly) materialized.* Among the realms of humanly knowing "what is" and "what is not," people develop an awareness of [the material or physical things] that others in the community recognize. This includes appreciations of the [sensory / body / physiological] essences of human beings (self and other); acknowledging capacities for

stimulation and activity as well as denoting realms of practical (enacted, embodied) limitation and fragility.

7. *Human group life is activity-based.* The interactionists approach human activity as a meaningful, *formulative*, multifaceted process.
8. *Human group life is negotiable.* Because human activity frequently involves direct interactions with others, people may anticipate and strive to influence others *as well as* acknowledge and resist the influences of others.
9. *Human group life is relational.* People do things within group contexts; people act mindfully of, and in conjunction with, specific other people.
10. *Human group life is processual.* Human lived experiences (and activities) are viewed in emergent, ongoing, or temporally developed terms.
11. *Human group life takes place in instances.* Group life is best known through the consideration and study of the particular occasions in which people engage things. Conceptions of human experience are to be developed mindfully of, and tested against, the particular occasions or instances in which people attend to and otherwise act toward things in the humanly known world.

Although this paper uses symbolic interactionism with its pragmatist philosophic foundations as an enabling technology (Prus 2004) for developing more sustained, informative, and consequential comparisons with Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, something more is required to effectively establish the linkages between classical Greek scholarship and contemporary social thought.

Accordingly, even within the confines of the present statement, it is important to acknowledge *the historical flow* of Western social thought

The Historical Context

Although people often assume that scholarship has developed in a highly systematic, cumulative manner with progressively new ideas replacing the less adequate materials of the past, those who actually take the time to examine scholarship in historical terms learn that this simply is *not* the case.

Indeed, given (a) the great many instances of political (and religious) turmoil that has characterized human affairs over the millennia, (b) the wide range of human interests and tensions, (c) other human limitations and frailties, and (d) a broad array of natural disasters, the development of scholarship has been far from uniform, cumulative, or progressive.

Further, while we may recognize the value of many newer developments, it also is instructive to see what may be learned from the past. Indeed, despite the optimistic claims frequently made by "the champions of the new" and their often-intense denunciations of the past, closer examinations of the documents developed by earlier authors indicates that there is much to be learned from the scholarship of the past (also see Durkheim 1977).

This is particularly true for the literature developed in the classical Greek and Latin eras. Not only have virtually all realms of the human and physical sciences been built on aspects of classical Greek thought,[vi] but much highly instructive material in the classical Greek and Latin literatures has been overlooked by academics in the centuries following.

This material also (as Durkheim 1977 insists) has unparalleled relevance for students of the human condition. Not only is Western civilization rooted in classical Greek and Roman thought, but it also is to be appreciated that the people of the

present can only be better understood in reference to (and in comparison with) those who have lived (and acted) in other places and times.

Popular attention typically has focused on Greek art, architecture, and mythology (and superheroes), but it is in the realms of philosophy (including logic, science, theology, and ethics), rhetoric, history, and poetics that the Greeks have contributed most uniquely, instructively, and consequentially to Western social thought.

Whereas the Greeks or Hellenes of the classical era (circa 700-300BCE) would derive inspiration from the various peoples with whom they had contact in the broader Mediterranean arena, the classical Greeks emerge as a most exceptional community of scholars. Not only did they establish a phonetic alphabet but they also developed and preserved a wide assortment of texts that dealt with virtually every area of human knowing and acting in extended detail.

Further, although aspects of classical Greek thought have been with us for some 2500 years, there still is much to be learned from the exceptional intellectual legacy they have left behind. This may seem an odd claim to readers who think that those in classical studies, philosophy, history, and literature would have gleaned in more thorough, systematic terms all of the essential materials and insights from the classical Greek and Roman eras.

This has *not* been the case. Not only has this literature been subject to much inadvertent neglect, general ignorance, and extended confusion, but much intellectual material also has been lost through the willful denunciation and intentioned destruction of classical Greek and Latin texts.

It is not possible to trace the development of Western social thought in detail, but if we are to understand the place of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* or other materials from the classical Greek era within the context of Western social thought, it will be necessary to establish some base-line historical markers.

Using Homer's (circa 700BCE) *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as starting reference points and recognizing that the Greek empire broke up with the death of Alexander the Great (356-323BCE) and the Greeks subsequently became more theological and moralistic in thrust (with scholarship largely stagnating thereafter), one may define the classical Greek era as that period between 700BCE and 300BCE.

Without going into detail (see Prus 2004 for a somewhat more extended commentary on the more notable participants and emphasis of classical Greek scholarship), it should be emphasized that the classical Greeks not only made great progress in all manners of craft and trade but also emerge as the most remarkable of educators, poets, rhetoricians, historians, philosophers, theologians, and politicians.

Still, whereas one finds an incredibly wide assortment of structuralist, skepticist, pragmatist, entertainment, moralist, and religious themes in the classical Greek literature, Greek scholarship deteriorated dramatically following the death of Alexander the Great.

Greek thought subsequently became much more focused on moralist, fatalist, and religious matters, with scholarly (and scientific) enterprise sliding into comparative disregard. Thus, whereas aspects of classical scholarship persisted in Greece and what later would become known as East Rome and Byzantine, it tended to assume more static and, in many respects, substantially retrogressive, dimensions

Even though the Romans would emerge as the next great European empire, Roman social thought is very much a product of Greek scholarship.

Through contact with Greek educators and texts in the preceding centuries, the Romans already had absorbed a good deal of Greek civilization prior to taking possession of Greece in 146BCE. However, it clearly was a substantially weakened

realm of Greek scholarship that the Romans would carry into the Western European and Mediterranean territories that they invaded.

Thus, although some of Plato's and Aristotle's texts were translated into Latin, the Romans appear to have lost and/or ignored many other texts that have been written by Plato, Aristotle, and other Greek scholars. Indeed, if not for Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43BCE) and some of his associates (many of whose texts also would be disregarded in subsequent centuries) even more contact with Greek rhetoric and philosophy would have been lost.

In general terms, the Romans were much more interested in military technology, rhetoric, and poetics than Greek philosophy and history. Further, the Romans typically sought to impose more distinctively Latin stamps on the Greek materials they used.

As the Roman Empire disintegrated over the next few centuries and education (and scholarship) fell more completely into Christian hands, even more pagan Greek and Latin materials were ignored, denounced, or destroyed.

In turn, it was a series of Christian theologians (notably including Augustine, 354-430) who preserved elements of Latin civilization and maintained something of an educational focus during the Western European dark ages (c500-1000).

Still, when Alcuin (732-804) and Charlemagne (742-814) embarked on the task of developing an educational program in France, it is to be understood that they worked with the threads and fragments of their Roman-Latin heritage. Relatedly, although the Christian scholars also acknowledged aspects of Greek thought, Latin was the primary language of instruction. Likewise, it would be Rome rather than Greece that generally would be seen as the intellectual base of Western civilization.

Remarkable strides were made in restoring Latin grammar during the Carolingian era of the 8th–10th centuries and in re-establishing dialectic analysis during the Scholastic era of the 12th–13th centuries.[vii]

Even more vast intellectual gains were on the horizon when the scholastics gained access to some of Aristotle's texts through crusade-related contacts with the Islamics, Jews, and Byzantine (Eastern Christian) Greeks. This is especially evident in the scholarship of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) who engaged Aristotle's work in uniquely enabling terms. However, classical Greek scholarship would encounter yet other setbacks as a consequence of the 16th century Renaissance and the somewhat related Protestant Reformation movement.

Ironically, as well, although the Renaissance is commonly associated with a re-emphasis on classical Greek and Latin scholarship, the Renaissance movement contributed unevenly to the reintroduction of Classical Greek social thought in Western European scholarship.

Thus, whereas artistic accomplishments and literary expression were prominently emphasized, philosophy, rhetoric, and history were comparatively neglected where these latter subject matters were not more intensively denounced as corrupting by prominent Renaissance authors (e.g., Francois Rabelais, Desiderius Erasmus, and Michel de Montaigne).

Likewise, whereas Aquinas and the scholastics had invoked Aristotelian logic and pragmatism in developing their theologies, it was the theological and idealist emphases in Platonist thought that Renaissance authors generally emphasized over the pagan pragmatism of Aristotle.[viii]

Focused on the rejection of Catholic theology, the Protestant Reformation characterized by the more austere, individualized religious emphases of Martin Luther (1483-1546) and John Calvin (1509-1564) also fostered an extended

disregard of the works of Thomas Aquinas as well as those of Aristotle (on whom Aquinas and some of his Catholic associates so centrally had built).

Although various scholars have attempted to reintegrate Greek scholarship more directly into Western social thought over the intervening centuries, this has not been very successful. Beyond the clearly pronounced Roman-Latin loyalties of Italian academics, intellectual developments in France, Britain, and Germany also are deeply rooted in Latin traditions.

Generally speaking, scholars in all of these major arenas of Western European scholarship have been comparatively resistant to classical Greek thought when they have not been more adamant in proclaiming the superiority of their own (contemporary) brilliance over that of all of their predecessors.

Thus, for instance, while their own materials are centrally informed by aspects of classical Greek thought, Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536), Francis Bacon (1561-1625), Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), René Descartes (1596-1650), and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) have all adopted positions that disparage the contributions of earlier scholars. In turn, deriving much inspiration from the works of René Descartes, David Hume, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) effectively set the philosophic (idealist / rationalist) tone for much German social theory.

Turning more directly to the contemporary scene, it should be appreciated that (a) academics in "classical studies" generally do not focus on the philosophic contributions of classical Greek scholars, (b) most philosophers are Platonists and/or tend to deal with Aristotle primarily as a formalist and logician, and (c) most historians give little attention to the works of the Greek historians (Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon). Similar observations may be made about contemporary academics in rhetoric, political science, and poetics (literary fiction) most of whom also exhibit only fleeting familiarity with classical Greek scholarship.

Social scientists, including those in political science, psychology, sociology, and anthropology are generally even less informed than those "in the humanities" about the potential that classical Greek scholarship has to offer for the study of human group life.

Thus, while representing only a modest step in this direction, it is hoped that this statement on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* may alert readers to some of the enormous potential that this text (and the broader classical Greek and Latin literature in which it is embedded) has to inform present day research and analysis.

Aristotle's Works in Context

To this point, we have (1) outlined the conceptual frame for this project and (2) located Aristotle's works within the broader flow of Western social thought. While much more could be said in both respects, it also is important to (3) consider Aristotle's approach to ethics mindful of Plato's viewpoints on morality and activity and (4) situate *Nicomachean Ethics* within the broader context of Aristotle's own works. Although it also will be necessary to deal with these latter two topics in highly compacted terms, when these matters are in place we can engage Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* in more direct terms.

Plato vs. Aristotle on Virtue, Vice, and Activity

As with many aspects of Aristotle's writings, it is instructive to consider Aristotle's works on ethics as a *counterpoint* to positions developed by Plato. Thus, when one examines Aristotle's analysis of ethics or human conduct (as in *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Eudemian Ethics*, and *Magna Moralia*), it is helpful to be mindful of Plato's *Republic* and *Laws*, as well as various of Plato's dialogues on virtue and human knowing (especially, *Protagoras*, *Meno*, *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, and *Philebus*).

In addition to being Aristotle's mentor, Plato has been the single most prominent intellectual source for philosophers, theologians, and scholars in the humanities more generally.

Notably, too, because Aristotle's works on ethics very much engage matters with which Plato also dealt, the two authors not only represent valuable reference points with respect to one another but also foster a greater comprehension of one another's works and the more general issues with which they deal.

To a very large extent, Plato appears to follow Socrates on philosophic matters pertaining to theology, morality, and dialectics (or reasoning). Still, Plato acknowledges an assortment of diverse positions in his dialogues. Thus, while Plato does not fully or systematically articulate the positions that Aristotle later will develop with respect to human knowing and acting, Aristotle more directly engages many of the issues that Plato identifies (but often disclaims) in various of his texts.

In *Protagoras*, Plato (with Socrates as his spokesperson) takes issue with the sophist position that virtue can be taught. Thus, Socrates adopts the viewpoint that virtue is an inborn quality, the eventual realization of which is contingent on people's philosophic wisdom. Virtue is seen as multifaceted, as well, signified by courage, temperance, justice, and holiness, but these qualities are only realized through people's wisdom or capacities to recognize the value of these other virtues.[ix]

Relatedly, for Socrates, vice, evil, or wrongdoing is attributed not to any intention to do things of this sort but to people's ignorance or lack of wisdom.

Plato develops a somewhat related set of viewpoints in *Meno*, wherein Socrates argues for the importance of higher (divine) virtue, but questions the viability of (more mundane) human notions of virtue.

In *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus*, Plato argues that philosophers are the best sources of virtue (conduct and wisdom). This is because philosophers have greater interests in maintaining the moral integrity their souls. As well, it is posited that their souls possess greater awareness and recollection of virtue as a consequence of their (transcendental) souls' earlier instances of divine contact. Plato presents somewhat similar notions of virtue and vice in *Republic* and *Laws*.

Still, in other ways, Plato's *Philebus* represents a more consequential reference point for many of the issues that Aristotle develops in *NE*. This is particularly evident in matters pertaining to considerations of whether pleasure or wisdom is the most desirable of human states (as these take shape in human theaters of operation).

Likewise, those who examine Plato's *Republic* and *Laws* will find much in these texts of a distinctively pragmatist quality. Thus, even though Plato presents these materials as models of more ideal states (one governed by philosopher-kings, the other regulated by constitution, respectively), Plato's consideration of the programs, plans, procedures, and problematics of implementing basic features of community life (as in education and scholarship, religion, family life, politics, justice, deviance and regulation, the marketplace, entertainment, outside relations and warfare) are not only exceptionally detailed but these matters also are engaged in processual terms

and addressed from multiple standpoints. As such, Plato's *Republic* and *Laws* represent remarkable contributions to the pragmatist analysis of human knowing and acting.

In developing his work on ethics, Aristotle extensively builds on as well as distinctively recasts Plato's analysis of human conduct. While retaining some of Plato's moral emphases (i.e., on the importance of achieving individual virtue as well as the moral order of the community - as in loyalty, responsibility, and justice), Aristotle puts the focus much more singularly and directly on the human known world (vs. Plato's divinely inspired and humanly experienced worlds). Notably, Aristotle approaches moral conduct (virtue and vice) as a community-based and deliberative, human-enacted process.

Aristotle has learned a great deal about pragmatist thought from Plato, but Aristotle's approach to virtues and vices is much more consistently pragmatist than is that of Plato. Thus, whereas Plato also deals with notions of divinely-enabled (and inborn senses of) virtue, Aristotle envisions people only as having inborn animal species capacities for sensation and motion. Aristotle focuses on human knowing and acting as a developmental, instructional, and enacted, community-based process. Consequently, although he is not the first to emphasize matters of these sorts, it is Aristotle, more than anyone of record, who essentially establishes "the pragmatist divide."

Approaching human knowing in active, developmental terms, Aristotle is attentive to people's tendencies to develop habits (and characters of sorts) before they achieve capacities for linguistic comprehension. Thus, activity precedes thought, as likewise also may the development of habits. Activity and knowing, therefore, occur as a developmental process. Viewing character as encompassing people's (developmental) habits and dispositions, Aristotle considers the tendencies, (practices, preferences, and resistances) associated with character as basic for understanding human behavior.

However, in contrast to those who may be inclined to draw more direct (determinist) linkages between character and action, Aristotle also envisions *activity* as entailing a minded, voluntaristic, and deliberative essence that extends far beyond people's habits and dispositions.

Although people may assume more characteristic ways of doing things over time and, likewise, may develop sets of interests, preferences, and attitudes, Aristotle says that these notions are inadequate for explaining the production of human activity.

Thus, while acknowledging people's habits and preferences, as well as other dispositions and reluctances, Aristotle envisions people as acting with intention, exercising choice, invoking deliberation, knowingly participating in action, attending to their own activities and outcomes as well as the matter of being judged by others.

Relatedly, whereas people may attempt to shape or control other people's behavior via the application of rewards and punishment and the provision of instruction, so may they also monitor, criticize, and adjust their own activities.

No less consequentially (and in contrast to Socrates and Plato), Aristotle does not envision human vice or wrongdoing as a direct or primary consequence of ignorance. Instead, Aristotle insists that vice is to be explained within the very *same* conceptual frame as virtue.

For Aristotle, vice and virtue are parts or products of the very same process. Hence, although only some aspects of human activity may be viewed as virtuous or evil, virtue and vice are to be understood centrally with respect to matters of human

agency (i.e., voluntariness, intentions, deliberation, choice, activities, assessments, and adjustments).

Further, whereas virtue and excellence, or conversely, vice and deviance are often envisioned as individual qualities, Aristotle extends these notions somewhat by locating virtues and vices (or the production, analysis, and guidance of human conduct) within a community context.

Aristotle does not deny people's capacities for meaningful, intentioned behavior as individuals, nor is he inattentive to people's habitual styles of doing things. However, Aristotle still envisions people's involvements in good and evil as part of a larger humanly enacted, community-based process.

Without pursuing the matter further at this point, it also may be observed that the great many of the debates in the humanities and social sciences reflect positions that Plato and Aristotle articulated. Notably, thus, in contrast to Plato who often approaches the matters of human knowing and acting in more theological, idealist, and skepticist terms, Aristotle stresses the necessity of envisioning people as biologically enabled, community-based, linguistic beings as well as the necessity of studying purposive activity as the basis for comprehending all aspects of human group life.

Aristotle on Knowing, Acting, and Achieving

Aristotle's work on ethics or human conduct (*Nicomachean Ethics*, *Eudemian Ethics*, *Magna Moralia)* represents only part of his extended analysis of human knowing and acting. Thus, in addition to Aristotle's depictions of more scholarly practices of reasoning in *Categories*, *De Interpretation*, *Prior Analytics*, *Topics*, *Sophistical Refutations*, *Physics,* and *Metaphysics*; readers should also be aware of Aristotle's related, more generic considerations of mindedness in the human condition in *On the Soul*, *Sense and Sensibilia*, and *On Memory*; as well as Aristotle's more direct discussions of human reflectivity, interchange, and relationships in *Poetics*, *Politics*, and *Rhetoric*.

Further, while developed as part of a larger agenda to develop a philosophy of human affairs (*NE* X: ix), Aristotle also envisioned his work on ethics as a foundational statement on political (from *polis* or city state) science or the analysis of the production and maintenance of social order in the community (i.e., as a prelude to *Politics*).

Three major works on ethics are conventionally attributed to Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics* (*NE*), *Eudemian Ethics*, and *Magna Moralia.* In what follows, I have focused primarily on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Whether or not *Nicomachean Ethics* is a more appropriate choice in our quest for a pluralist social science than *Eudemian Ethics* or *Magna Moralia*, *NE* is presently the most accessible (reprinted) text and thus offers readers greater opportunities to examine one of Aristotle's statements on ethics.

Sidestepping these issues somewhat, one might appreciate the value of these three texts on a collective basis. Although each of these texts contains some distinctive emphases and divergencies, these statements more generally provide valuable confirmations of one another. Indeed, reading the texts as a set typically helps one better appreciate materials developed in each of the individual texts.

At the same time, though, readers should be cautioned that Aristotle's works on ethics are intellectually intense, multifaceted statements. Not only does Aristotle deal with a wide range of topics, but he also engages an incredible number and diversity

of ideas about each topic within a highly compacted text. As a result, it is very challenging to summarize his texts and yet convey his views on so many issues.

This also means that readers not only should anticipate that Aristotle will deal with a broad array of topics relating to the human condition in *Nicomachean Ethics*, but readers also should be prepared to find that Aristotle engages these matters in remarkably insightful analytic detail. Relatedly, because Aristotle's texts are so highly condensed, a great deal can be learned from comparatively short passages of his work.

In developing this statement, thus, I have made ongoing references to NE and followed his ordering of issues. This way, readers can more readily locate pertinent sections of his text and examine these in greater detail. As well, in the absence of more extended quotations, these "chapter and verse" citations will allow readers to more quickly access (and assess) the statements I have attributed to Aristotle.

While some may be disenchanted with Aristotle for some of the standpoints that he develops in his works on ethics, it would be most unfortunate (and small minded) for people to let either Aristotle's moralities *or* their own interfere with a fuller appreciation of the highly conceptually enabling materials that Aristotle has provided.

Accordingly, the immediate objective is not one of endorsing or contradicting Aristotle in matters of morality or fact. Instead, the emphasis is on examining the materials he has bequeathed to us as (a) a series of conceptual departure points for subsequent inquiry and (b) a body of observational material for comparative analysis with similar issues on a more contemporary plane.

Because of his sustained focus on activity, including human interchange and reflective thought, Aristotle also anticipates much of what is presently encompassed by a "symbolic interactionist approach" (see Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969; Prus, 1996, 2003, 2004, 2005) to the study of human group life.

As a result, Aristotle's ethics offers particularly valuable insight into the *study of human knowing and acting* as well as representing an invaluable transhistorical reference point or testimony to some of the more generic and enduring features of human group life.

Still, Aristotle's agenda is not so readily or singularly defined. Following Plato, Aristotle also attempts to promote higher levels of personal accomplishment as well as a more effective social order. For readers interested in social reform of one or other sorts, this may be the more intriguing aspect of Aristotle's ethics. It is here, thus, that some may engage Aristotle's materials with greater moral passion. For our more immediate purposes, though, Aristotle's attempts at moral guidance may be seen to obscure or obstruct the quest for a more pluralist or nonprescriptive social science. Still, even with these limitations, Aristotle's work on ethics has so much to offer the student of the human condition.

Nicomachean Ethics (NE)

In developing this commentary, I have maintained the flow and divisions of Aristotle's text. However, because Aristotle presents so much material in highly compacted manners, some subheadings [in brackets] have been provided for readers' convenience.

While I will be citing Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* "chapter and verse" in developing this statement so that readers can more readily locate these materials in Aristotle's text, the intellectual payoff for this venture is threefold: (a) to generate an increased awareness with one of the most astute analysis of the human condition ever produced; (b) to provide materials that could serve as reference points for more

sustained comparative, conceptual analysis of human endeavor; and (c) to indicate particular features of Aristotle's considerations of human group life that could be used to inform contemporary and enduring research on the human condition.

Relatedly, although I have introduced some commentary in footnotes and in the conclusion of this paper, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* contains so much instructive insight to pertaining to human knowing and acting that I have concentrated on presenting his material and as clearly, comprehensively, succinctly, and accurately as I could.

Book I [On Human Good -- Objectives]

Aristotle begins *NE* (I: I) by observing that the *good* is that (goal, end, purpose) to which human activities are directed. In developing this position, Aristotle notes that the various arts and sciences are directed toward different objectives. He also says that some pursuits may be subsumed by others and that these broader ends appear more worthwhile than the lesser pursuits (and objectives) that they encompass.

Aristotle (*NE* I: ii) extends these notions further, arguing that the supreme good would be that which is most consequential for the conduct of human life. Focusing on the human community (*polis*) for which (and in which) all human arts and sciences are developed, Aristotle contends that the ultimate good should be approached within the context of a *political science*.

Emphasizing *the centrality of the community over the individual*, Aristotle defines the good of the people (in the community) as the primary objective of the science of politics.

Aristotle (*NE*, I: iii; also *NE*, I: vii) further states that we should not expect equal levels of precision across all realms of study (philosophy, arts, science) and asks readers to recognize the more tentative nature of the present subject matter.

Aristotle also observes that although age is no guarantee of wisdom, young people generally lack an experiential base with which to appreciate the study of political (community) life. As well, he notes that people who are unable to achieve emotional detachment from the analysis of their subject matters do not make good students.[x]

Next, Aristotle (*NE*, I: iv) observes that almost everyone would agree that *happiness* is the major goal in life. However, he immediately notes, there is great disagreement about the *nature of happiness*.

Acknowledging Plato's analytical practices, Aristotle insists on the importance of establishing first principles or a fundamental conceptual frame before considering happiness in more direct terms. For Aristotle, this means to start with what is known.

Aristotle (*NE*, I: v) then distinguishes four broad ways in which people may pursue happiness: (a) enjoyment, (b) politics, (c) contemplation, or (d) wealth.

Quickly dispensing with the highly generalized but less refined attractions of sensate pleasure as too superficial, Aristotle next deals with the life of politics. Then, after distinguishing (the more superficial) honor accorded to prominent citizens (in politics) by others from political virtue as an enacted quality, Aristotle indicates that virtue, too, is inadequate as an end (virtue does not guarantee happiness).

Saying that he will attend to a life of contemplation later (see *NE*, Book X), Aristotle then quickly dispenses with centralizing concerns with financial prosperity. Money, Aristotle states, also is not an appropriate end in itself. While noting that some people become engrossed in the pursuit of wealth, Aristotle says that money is of value primarily as a means to other things.

Aristotle (*NE*, I: vi) next asks *if* there is a universal (human) good. After observing that people use the word "good" in many different ways, Aristotle declares that there is *no* single, universal notion of good.

Then distinguishing (a) things good in themselves from (b) things good as a means to other things, Aristotle asks if there are things that truly can be considered good in themselves.

Noting that people's conceptions of good depends on their objectives, Aristotle (*NE*, I: vii) asks if it is viable to judge the value of things in terms of people's more final objectives. In this respect, Aristotle says, *happiness* seems to be the most final objective because happiness is one thing that is chosen for its own sake rather than a means of realizing some other objective.

From there, Aristotle comments, the good of humans may reside in the unique essences of humans, assuming that they have some unique qualities or functions.

Subsequently, Aristotle notes that (a) all living things (plants and animals) are involved in matters of nutrition and development, and (b) all animals experience sensations. What is unique about people, accordingly, is the use of the human mind or *psyche* and the related human capacity for virtue or minded excellence.

In an aside of sorts, Aristotle states that he is only offering an outline or generalized conception of human good and, mindful of the limitations of one's subject matter, the ensuing task will be that of developing a more adequate comprehension of good with respect to the human condition.

In approaching this task, Aristotle reiterates, it is important to establish the frame or first principles in a manner that is as precise, accurate, and thorough as possible.

Aristotle (*NE*, I: viii) then distinguishes goals directed toward external objects from ends directed toward human bodies and minds.[xi] More specifically, Aristotle declares, happiness is effectively contingent on activities that are directed to ends associated with the human mind or *psyche*. Recognizing that people may value different ends or objectives in the pursuit of happiness (as in virtue, wisdom, pleasure, prosperity), he emphasizes the importance of excellence in pursuing those ends.

While viewing happiness as the most desirable and pleasurable of things, Aristotle further stresses people's more virtuous or noble expressions and experiences of happiness.

Continuing, Aristotle also observes that people require access to external resources if they are to assume nobler, benevolent roles. After referencing several types of external advantage (e.g., friends, wealth, political position), Aristotle argues for the importance of resources of these sorts for people who intend to achieve virtuous life-styles.

Aristotle (*NE*, I: ix) subsequently asks if happiness is something that can be learned, or whether it is a divinely enabled tendency or, perhaps, even the function of people's fortune.

He adopts the viewpoint that while the capacity for happiness is widely diffuse, more virtuous notions of happiness can be attained through study and effort.

Likewise, Aristotle posits, happiness is greater when people are more actively involved in its instances of achievement as opposed to obtaining things through gifts or fortune.

Aristotle then restates his goal for political science. It is to encourage people to adopt virtuous standpoints and to participate in noble activities. Still, he says, as a life-long quest or objective, happiness requires the effective and continual realization

of one's goals (interests). Happiness, thus (I: x) would require good health and fortune throughout one's life.

Given these conditions, he asks if people can be deemed truly happy in their (human) lifetimes. In contrast to those who discuss the importance of people's happiness after death, Aristotle (I: xi) assigns little credence to matters of people's (individual) happiness after their deaths.

Approaching things in this manner, he proceeds to argue that happiness is best located in people's excellence of mind and that happiness is best achieved by acting in ways consistent with these excellences.

Then, after noting that it is the noble and honorable things leading to happiness that merit praise rather than happiness in itself, Aristotle (*NE*, I: xii-xiii) argues for the importance of political leaders learning about and attending to human nature.

Aristotle observes that the human soul (*psyche*) consists of an *inseparable,* nonrational bodily component and a minded or reasoning capacity. Mindful of these two aspects or features of the human organism, he intends to focus on the virtues, moral and intellectual, as these pertain to people's excellences of character.[xii]

Book II [Agency and Virtues]

Aristotle (*NE*, II: i) begins his consideration of moral virtues by distinguishing these from intellectual virtues.[xiii] Whereas *intellectual virtues* or the virtues of thought (discussed later, *NE*, VI) are seen as contingent on explicitly developed instruction and experience, *moral virtues* or the virtues of habit are seen to derive from people's longstanding habits or styles of doing things. Although Aristotle sees people as born with capacities for both intellectual and moral development, he explicitly states that none of people's moral virtues are determined by nature.

While Aristotle (later, *NE*, II: iii) defines moral virtues and vices as contingent on people acting appropriately (or inappropriately) with respect to pleasure and pain, he envisions virtues and vices in developmentally learned and enacted terms.

Thus, Aristotle (*NE*, II: i) states that people's moral excellences directly reflect people's earlier activities. They reflect the habits that people develop around *ways of doing things* and the types of associations that people develop with particular others. Because people's habits begin to develop early in life, he contends that people's early childhood training (and education) can be especially consequential for shaping one's character and dispositions in this regard.

Continuing, Aristotle (*NE*, II: ii) notes that one of the problems pertaining to people's conduct is that people, *as agents*, must decide what is most appropriate to do in the circumstances at hand. Recognizing the highly variable nature of human conduct, Aristotle says that models dealing with this subject matter will necessarily be somewhat imprecise.

Aristotle (*NE*, II: iii) also states that considerations of moral virtues are to be understood centrally with respect to people's concerns with joy or pleasure and sadness or pain.

However, while people pursue things because of the attractions or pleasures they afford and avoid things because of the sorrows or punishments they associate with particular things, he notes that people's notions of pleasure and pain need not correspond with things that others would so define.

Still, Aristotle defines moral virtue as a matter of acting in the best or most honorable way with respect to people's senses of joy and sorrow. Conversely, vice is defined as the failure to act in appropriate fashions with regard to pleasure and pain.

Aristotle then isolates *three motives of choice* that help define acts as more or less virtuous: noble vs. common (or base) interests; advantageous vs. harmful considerations; and pleasure vs. sadness.

Still, in order *for acts to be considered virtuous*, Aristotle (*NE*, II: iv) says that certain criteria must be met. Thus, people must (a) act with knowledge about what is being done; (b) act with intention; and (c) act mindfully of a moral standpoint.

Aristotle (*NE*, II: v) subsequently distinguishes virtues from people's emotions and capacities. While virtues may involve emotions such as anger or shame, and are contingent on people's capacities to act, he says that virtues most basically represent habits or dispositions to act.

Next, Aristotle (*NE*, II: vi) introduces the concept of *the midpoint*, which he defines as half way between the two extremes of a continuum. Still, he observes, the midpoint is a quality of (relative) human definition rather than a quality of the thing under consideration.

This midpoint is important for Aristotle's notion of virtue, for he defines both extremes (i.e., excesses and deficiencies of qualities) as undesirable states or vices. Prudent or wise people, thus, would attempt to regulate their lives so as to avoid both extremes (and alternative sets of vices).[xiv]

To clarify his position further, Aristotle (*NE*, II: vii) references a diagram in which he distinguishes twelve types of action or feelings that he associates with virtues (and vices). A chart of that sort is presented here.

Table 1: Virtues and Vices[xv]

Excess	Virtuous State	Deficiency
Brashness	Courage *(or fortitude)*	Cowardice
Gluttony	Temperance *(or self regulation)*	Abstinence
Extravagance	Liberality *(spending/sharing)*	Stinginess
Vulgar Display	Magnificence *(public generosity)*	Miserliness
Vanity	Honor *(pride in self)*	Disregard
Ambitiousness	Dedicated	Inattentive
Irritable	Gentle	Spiritless
Boastful	Sincere *(regarding self)*	Self-depreciative
Buffoonery	Wittiness /Charm	Distant
Pretentious	Friendly	Rude
Shameless	Modest	Bashful
Envious	Righteous (or just)	Malicious

After briefly justifying the categories he introduces, Aristotle (*NE*, II: ix) observes that one reason that it is difficult for people to be virtuous is that it is hard for people to find the midpoints in anything. Thus, for instance, it may be appropriate for people to become angry, exhibit public generosity, or feel shame but it is quite another matter to do so in an appropriate (midpoint) fashion.

As a set of basic guidelines, Aristotle then proposes that people (a) strive for midpoints as a general rule; (b) try to ascertain the particular errors or extremes to which they are more habitually oriented and try to adopt corrective (midpoint) positions; and (c) be cautious of things that seem pleasurable since it is in reference to pleasures that people are more particularly inclined to lose impartiality of judgment.

Still, Aristotle notes, how much people actually err from desired midpoints and how particular departures from these midpoints are assessed is a matter of (relative) human judgment.

Book III [Voluntariness, Virtues, and Vices]

Aristotle assumes two tasks in Book III. The first, and most important one for our purposes, is his consideration of human responsibility. His second objective is to begin a more detailed examination of the specific moral virtues.

Stating that virtue revolves around emotions and actions, Aristotle (*NE*, III: i) says that *praise and blame* are appropriate only when people engage in *voluntary action*. To this end, Aristotle embarks on considerations of voluntary and involuntary action and the related matters pertaining to choice, deliberation, ignorance, and opinion, as well as an identification of several of the components of action.

Noting that the issue of *actor responsibility* is apt to be of concern to people assigning rewards and punishment to others as well as to students of human conduct, Aristotle says that actions are generally characterized as *involuntary* when people are able to exercise little control over the direction of their action either as a result of compulsion or ignorance.

Aristotle also recognizes that many instances of action are *mixed* in effect, whereby people may have some abilities to choose or control things in the setting, but may still encounter other kinds of limitations. As well, he distinguishes cases of more general ignorance (wherein one does not know many things), from those instances in which people lack a more specific awareness of some aspect or circumstance of the act at hand.

Accordingly, Aristotle distinguishes a number of *features of the situation* that people may consider in assigning voluntary or involuntary status to those involved in particular episodes. There are (a) the agent; (b) the act; (c) the things (i.e., persons or other objects) affected by the act; (d) the instruments or devices employed in conducting the activity; and the outcomes of the act; (e) the outcomes of the act; and (f) the manners (e.g., gently or violently) in which particular acts were performed.

Relatedly, Aristotle observes, while people (as agents) often know about these things in advance, when people are unaware of certain features of acts or misjudge any of these components, this may be seen to introduce an involuntary feature into the event at hand.

Voluntary acts, Aristotle notes, refer to situations in which (a) an activity is initiated by a person and (b) the person is more completely aware of all of the aspects of the situation pertaining to that activity. He adds that it should not be presumed that acts that are generated amidst anger or desire are involuntary. In part,

he explains, if people can voluntarily act in noble terms under these conditions, it makes little sense to characterize ignoble acts based on the same explanatory motives as involuntary.

Aristotle (*NE*, III: ii) next turns to the matter of *choice*. Because people may not be able to act as they desire or intend, he reasons, people's choices may provide better understandings of their virtues than their eventual actions. He views choice as a voluntary act, but notes that not all voluntary acts entail (deliberative) choice.

Although people often describe choice as desire, passion, wish, or opinion, Aristotle says that these viewpoints are mistaken. Choice is not a desire or other standpoint on things.

Choice involves a selection between two or more items and implies some *deliberative activity*. Likewise, while people may have definite viewpoints, opinions, or preferences pertaining to things, it is not to be assumed that people will automatically make choices that correspond to those ideas.

Aristotle (*NE*, III: iii) then addresses the topic of *deliberation* in more direct terms. Rather than deliberate about everything, he says that people tend to deliberate about things over which they have some control and seem attainable through their activities. As well, he adds, people deliberate about things about which they are more uncertain. And, when they consider particular issues important, people are more likely to involve others or seek counsel in their deliberations.

Continuing, Aristotle notes that deliberation constitutes a form of investigation wherein people may consider, in varying degrees of detail, all aspects of the situation about which choices are to be made. As well, because all voluntary actions are purposive or intended to do or accomplish something, deliberation revolves around the ways that one might attain things.

Aristotle (*NE*, III: iv) then reminds readers that because wishes are for certain outcomes or ends, people's wishes or desires are to be distinguished from choices and deliberation about how to achieve wishes or other ends.

Aristotle (*NE*, III: v) then turns more directly to *virtues* and *vices*. Having excluded certain actions from praise and blame because they are involuntary in some way, Aristotle argues that *both* virtues and vices are to be understood as *voluntary matters*. Still, he reminds readers, people are not as readily able to control dispositions as many other features of their actions.[xvi]

Subsequently, Aristotle (*NE*, III: vi-vii) embarks on a more extended discussion of the virtues,[xvii] beginning with courage.

Noting that *courage* or fortitude represents a midpoint between cowardice and brashness, Aristotle says that courageous people deal with fear and discomfort in moderated and reasonable fashions.[xviii]

Aristotle (*NE*, III: viii) then stresses the reasoned nature of courage by distancing virtuous courage from activities (a) pursued at someone else's command; (b) associated with experience with similar situations; (c) arising from anger; (d) associated with feelings of superiority, and (e) attributable to ignorance of the dangers at hand. He adds (ix) that in addition to moderated composure in the face of fear, virtuous courage also may be associated with those who endure pain and suffering in noble fashions.

Aristotle (*NE*, III: x) next focuses on *temperance* or self-control. After distinguishing the pleasures of the body from that of the *psyche*, he explains that temperance refers to moderation in bodily pleasures. He (disdainfully) associates bodily pleasures, particularly those pertaining to touch, with lower animals and urges moderation in these matters.

Book IV [Virtues and Vices, continued]

In Book IV, Aristotle focuses on generosity, self-esteem, anger, and some social (interpersonal) graces and failings.

After distinguishing more typical practices of liberality in spending and/or sharing one's possessions with others from more substantial or magnificent (usually public) acts of *generosity*, Aristotle (*NE*, IV: I-ii) encourages people to be mindful of midpoints in their practices. More specifically, while recognizing the differing financial base with which people work, he discourages people from being miserly on the one hand and irresponsible with their money on the other hand.

One should, Aristotle contends, give appropriate amounts, to appropriate people, at appropriate times, and so forth, adding that one also should act so in manners that are mindful of the advantages and limitations of one's own circumstances. He further considers the ways in which people obtain the money they spend, indicating some nobler as well as more despicable ways of obtaining money.

Aristotle (*NE*, IV: iii-iv, vii, and ix) also attends to people's senses of *self worth* as this pertains to notions of honor, ambition, sincerity, and modesty. Interestingly, while encouraging people to attend to midpoints in their emphases, Aristotle is concerned that people claim what they deserve and that they be sincere in any references they make to themselves.

Thus, Aristotle is critical of (apparent) vanity as well as (undue) self-depreciation, the excessively ambitious as well as the highly complacent, the boastful as well as the excessively modest, and the shameless as well as the excessively bashful.

Further, although Aristotle often refers to these virtues as (a) dispositions, he also references virtues as (b) qualities that people would attribute to others as well as claim (and disclaim) for oneself, and (c) ways of acting and modifying one's own behaviors.[xix]

Aristotle (*NE*, IV: v) also deals with *anger*, noting that while indignation may be appropriate in some cases, one should try to be congenial, to avoid undue anger as well as excessive complacency. In this respect, Aristotle pointedly indicates, as well, that it is difficult to say when and how, in what manners, to what extent, and for how long, one might appropriately be angry. He also notes that definitions or assessments of appropriate notions of anger will depend on people's perceptions of things as opposed to particular expressions of anger.

Somewhat relatedly, Aristotle (*NE*, IV: vi) next considers people's *friendliness* toward others in group contexts. Here, he distinguishes excessive acquiescence, responsible pleasantry, and excessive surliness. Aristotle encourages people to act responsibly in their dealing with others but to do so in more pleasant, diplomatic fashions.

Aristotle's (*NE*, IV: vii) commentary on people's *expressions of self worth* (boastfulness, sincerity, and self-depreciation) further attests to his concern with responsible pleasantry, as does his subsequent (*NE*, IV: viii) discussion of amusement. Thus, he contrasts playful conversation with buffoonery on the one hand and those stances in which one is strictly opposed to all humorous exchanges on the other.

Aristotle concludes this part of *NE* (IV: ix) with a statement on *modesty and shame*. While encouraging people to avoid things that might cause them to feel shame or a sense of disgrace, Aristotle asserts that excessive modesty is also inappropriate.

Book V [Justice]

 While continuing his discussion of the moral virtues in some respects, Aristotle focuses Book V of *NE* more directly and consequentially on *justice*.

 After noting that people use the terms just and unjust in several ways, Aristotle (*NE*, V: i) introduces two themes that will become central to his analysis. These pertain to people (a) being law abiding and (2) receiving fair or equitable shares of things.

 Aristotle states that "what is lawful" is a matter of legislation, noting that what this actually includes and how this is decided reflects the type of government in effect at the time. Thus, Aristotle defines justice in reference to the political body in charge of the community.

 Aristotle also argues that justice should be envisioned as the most consequential of the moral virtues because it is engaged mindfully of others.

 Justice, thus, is seen to represent a community standpoint that goes beyond the interests of the individual. While virtue is envisioned as an individual disposition to act in an ennobling fashion, justice may be seen to epitomize virtue because it is directed toward the good of the community in a more comprehensive sense.

 Continuing, Aristotle (*NE*, V: ii) reaffirms the centrality of justice as a virtue and injustice as a vice. He then distinguishes distributive or proportionate justice from remedial or corrective justice.

 Aristotle defines *distributive justice* as an equitable, proportional distribution among people who employ pre-established norms of comparative merit. Thus, for instance, citizens or equal partners may share things equally among themselves but are not obliged to share things with those who do not possess this status.

 Remedial or restitutive justice is intended to correct imbalances that are attributable to the undesired effects of people's behaviors on particular others. Thus, the negatively affected parties may seek restitution for their losses, pursue other kinds of remedial services for themselves, or desire correctional treatments for the perpetrators. Remedial justice may involve situations in which the aggrieved parties participated voluntarily (as in marketplace transactions), but the injured parties also may have had things involuntarily imposed on them (as in theft, robbery).

 Focusing more directly on restitutive justice, Aristotle (*NE*, V: iv) states that people go to judges to seek justice because judges represent the personification of justice, adding that in some locales judges are labeled *mediators* because people presume that judges will invoke a midpoint (or median) in determining what is just to the parties involved.

 In discussing the problem of determining justice (as in costs and repayments), Aristotle (*NE*, V: v) explicitly acknowledges *money* as a particularly valuable standard. While observing that the value that people put on money will fluctuate somewhat (as with other things), he notes that money not only facilitates exchange of all sorts but money also represents a resource that people conveniently may use at future points in time.

 Aristotle (*NE*, V: vi) then discusses *political justice*, applying this term to people who are free and equal with respect to one another within a particular community context. Relatedly, he notes, this is why people emphasize the law over a ruler. The appropriate function of the ruler is to be guardian of justice.

 Subsequently, Aristotle (*NE*, V: vii) distinguishes two conceptions of political justice. One is *natural justice*, wherein the same notions of justice would apply to everyone, everywhere. The other, Aristotle describes as *conventional justice* and

envisions it as having a local quality. He insists that there is a natural justice, while observing that all rules of justice (presumably as invoked) are variable.

In a similar manner, Aristotle points to a distinction between things considered just or unjust and actual conduct that is just or unjust.

Aristotle (*NE*, V: viii) then notes that *considerations of just and unjust conduct* are contingent on people acting in voluntary manners, exercising choices, and acting in ways that are mindful of the outcomes that could be expected under the circumstances.

Thus, Aristotle observes that the penalties associated with injury may be minimized when injurious acts are done without evil intent, are due to outside forces, or reflect uncontrollable instances of passion.

Aristotle (*NE*, V: ix) then asks if people might knowingly intentionally harm themselves. He argues that people would not wish to act unjustly toward themselves.

More consequentially for our purposes, Aristotle (*NE*, V: ix) states that things prescribed by the law are actions but that actions need to be qualified when matters of justice are invoked. Thus, while people contemplate acting in certain ways, he notes that it is not easy to know exactly how to act so that the result would be considered a just or appropriate act.

Next, Aristotle (*NE*, V: x) briefly comments on the relationship of equity and justice, observing that the two are not synonymous. He suggests that concerns with equity, as a concern with fairness to the parties at hand, may provide a corrective of sorts to justice that has a more abstract or generalized application. He also notes that because laws are intended as general statements, they cannot be expected to fit all cases.

Aristotle (*NE*, V: xi) concludes this section with a consideration of self-injury. He argues that since no one would voluntarily direct injustice to oneself, suicide would seem to be an act directed toward the state rather than oneself. This is why, he reasons, the state envisions suicide as an offense against the state. Aristotle then concludes this section suggesting that there may be an internal sense of justice between the rational and nonrational parts of one's *psyche*.

Book VI [Knowing, Deliberating, and Acting]

Whereas Books III-V focused primarily on the moral virtues, Aristotle uses Book VI to engage the *intellectual virtues* in more direct terms.

In an interesting turn, Aristotle (*NE*, VI :i) states that while his earlier statements on the importance of striving for the midpoint in fall virtues is correct, his emphasis or instruction is not at all enlightening in itself.

After referring to people's moral virtues as the nonrational (not as fully or directly subject to the reasoning part of the *psyche)*, Aristotle divides the rational component into two, corresponding to the scientific and the deliberative features of the mind.

Using the term *scientific* to refer to things considered invariable, as in first principles, premises, or things taken as factual, Aristotle envisions *deliberation* as a calculating or contemplative feature about the things that are less certain.

Aristotle (*NE*, VI: ii) then identifies three aspects of the human *psyche* that control action and shape definitions of the truth. These are sensation, thought, and desire.

After stating that sensations cannot in themselves generate rational (as in minded or deliberative) action, he observes that desires (as in moral virtues) provide

direction, but that people's desires also are inadequate for explaining human behavior.

Thus, Aristotle states, the more effective cause of (human) action is *thought* in the form of choice. Still, he adds, thought in itself moves nothing. Thought is consequential in causal terms *only when* it is directed toward some ends and when it is manifested in action. Aristotle continues, stating that people, thus, are *originators of action*, by unifying desire and thought.

Focusing more directly on the ways that people acquire notions of the truth, Aristotle (*NE*, VI: iii) says that there are five ways in which people affirm or disconfirm *knowing* pertaining to things. These are: art or technology; scientific knowledge; prudence; wisdom; and intelligence.

Aristotle first discusses *scientific knowledge*. Here, he references premises pertaining to things thought invariant or eternal in nature, claims about things that are external to particular individuals, or principles of a more generic and enduring quality.

To know things scientifically, thus, is to comprehend the principles that explain those things in some way. Without an awareness of these principles, one only knows science incidentally at best.

Likewise, because scientific knowledge transcends instances, Aristotle contends that all scientific knowledge can be shared by teaching and that knowledge of this sort is contingent on people learning things.

Still, Aristotle observes the first principles of science can be achieved only through induction wherein people make inferences about the certainties of things based on comparisons. Deduction, by contrast, is contingent on earlier established premises or notions of universals. Aristotle adds further, that where people are more certain of their premises, they place greater faith in the conclusions derived through their deductions.

Aristotle (*NE*, VI: iv) describes art or technology (*techné*) as both a procedure for making something and the study of the ways of making something (presumably to develop more adequate or effective procedures). In the process, he explicitly stresses the rational, reasoned features of "techné". Thus, Aristotle considers (also see Aquinas, *CNE*, VI: iii) how things would be produced, as in locating and assembling the required materials, and accomplishing the actual work entailed in the production of things.

Aristotle (*NE*, VI: v) next considers *phronesis* or *prudence*. Here, he refers to people's capacities to deliberate effectively about matters of concern; to achieve carefully reasoned judgments on things of some consequence.

While noting that some people reason well in more general terms and others in more limited respects, Aristotle says that deliberation is not synonymous with scientific knowing because people do not deliberate about things that they consider as certain. Nor is deliberation synonymous with the art (or technology) involved in doing something. Instead, prudence is a deliberative consideration of what is most likely true or viable. Prudence, thus, lays the basis for people making choices about their subsequent activities.

Aristotle (*NE*, VI: vi-vii) next deals with *wisdom*, arguing that wisdom is the most perfect of all modes of knowledge. Still, while observing that wisdom is generally contingent on some degree of scientific knowing and often assumes the mastery of some arts or technologies, he uses the term wisdom to encompass a yet more comprehensive or transcendent sense of knowledge than implied in scientific knowledge per se.

Likewise, wisdom also would incorporate aspects of effective deliberation. However, whereas prudence is largely confined to the practical affairs to people, wisdom would be expect to extend well beyond a knowledge of the things people do.

Approached in this manner, wisdom is seen as a philosophic virtue that combines understanding, science, and an extended analytic capacity for engaging a wide variety of subject matters. Still, Aristotle observes, some people of exceptional wisdom have shown themselves to be highly impractical in more (mundane) human affairs.

Aristotle (*NE*, VI: viii) then refocuses the analysis more directly on *prudence* or phronesis. Prudence, he says, is more akin to political science, except that instead of directing one's thoughts to the affairs of state (as in legislature, the domestic economy, and the judicial system), prudence is more specifically directed towards one's own actions and circumstances.

As well, because prudence represents the basis for action, Aristotle is attentive to the importance of people (who would act prudently) having a viable knowledge of both scientific (universal or abstracted) principles and the ways in which things take shape in instances of the sort under consideration (also see Aquinas, *CNE*, VI: vi).

As in his consideration of political science, Aristotle states that young people typically lack the experiential base to make the more viable decisions associated with prudence as a virtuous quality.

Continuing, Aristotle (*NE*, VI: ix) says that because deliberation (as in prudence) deals with uncertainties, it entails a process of investigation. However, in further contrast to science (that deals in concepts of a more universal sort), the emphasis in deliberation (as prudence) revolves around the understanding and anticipation of specific instances or applications.

As well, Aristotle (*NE*, VI: ix) states prudence is not synonymous with either a quickness of mind or the practice of deliberating at length about something. Instead, prudence is contingent on people arriving at better, more effective decisions.

Aristotle (*NE*, VI: x) also distinguishes prudence from the fuller understanding or familiarity that people may achieve about more specific things, again referring to prudence more directly as the ability to judge effectively.

Likewise, Aristotle (*NE*, VI: xi) isolates prudence from people's thoughtfulness of others. As well, he notes, prudence is different from *intelligence*, wherein the emphasis is on comprehending things and drawing the existing and possible connections between things.

Aristotle (*NE*, VI: xii) then asks about the value of the intellectual virtues. After noting that the intellectual virtues do not insure that people will act in morally virtuous terms, he argues for the importance of prudence for moral conduct.

While Aristotle takes issue with Socrates for claiming that all of the virtues represent variants of prudence, Aristotle says that Socrates was correct in saying that the moral virtues cannot exist without people exercising prudence.

Aristotle does not intend to argue that prudence is more consequential than wisdom but he is aware of the centrality of deliberation for *all* meaningful human conduct. Drawing an analogy between prudence and virtue and religion and politics, Aristotle [1926] concludes with the following observation:

> And again, one might as well say that political science governs the gods,
> because it gives orders about everything…in the state. (VI: xiii)

Book VII [Human Failings]

Although Book VII, which focuses on *the weakness of the will*, is somewhat less well developed, Aristotle uses this as a means of extending his consideration of prudence.

In discussing people's apparent lack of self-restraint, Aristotle (*NE*, VII: ii) takes direct issue with Socrates. According to Aristotle, Socrates implies that there is no such thing as a lack of self-restraint and claims that people do not intentionally engage in evil things but only do so through ignorance. Aristotle asserts that this view simply does not correspond to what is known.

Aristotle (*NE*, VII: iii) says that the way to begin is to ask whether people exhibit restraint or a lack of self-control with respect to specific things or whether people's actions are determined by dispositions of character.

Aristotle also acknowledges situations in which people consider things to be wrong but do not think of it that way when they do certain things.

As Aristotle develops this material, he emphasizes the desirability of self-restraint, particularly with respect to moral virtues, qualities which he envisions as further differentiating people from (other) animals.

Then, Aristotle (*NE*, VII: xi) embarks on a discussion of pleasure and pain (a prelude of sorts to Book X). The topics of pain and pleasure, he says, are important to students of politics as well as people interested in morality more generally because moral virtues and vices revolve around matters of pleasure and pain.

While Aristotle had earlier defined desirable states pertaining to pleasure as ones that are more in keeping with the moral virtues, it is important to acknowledge the *variety of viewpoints* that Aristotle introduces *with respect to pleasure and pain*.

First, Aristotle notes, some people argue that pleasure and virtue are incompatible. At one extreme, some people encourage others to avoid all pleasure, claiming that pleasure interferes with people's judgment and that pleasure is suitable only for children or lower animals. Others contend that while some pleasures are evil, disgraceful or harmful, others are acceptable or good. Some also argue that although pleasure is good, it cannot be the supreme good or end (but is instead a process).

Aristotle (*NE*, VII: xii) challenges these positions. First, he says, that one should differentiate the good (i.e., pleasure as an end) with respect to absolute and relative standpoints. Notably, Aristotle argues that things that are seen as absolutely bad need not be so viewed when applied to, or by, particular people.

He also observes that since people may derive pleasures from opposite physical sensations (as in sweet and bitter), it should not be assumed that certain physical states are automatically or absolutely pleasurable.

While some contend that pleasure is a process or motion, Aristotle insists that pleasure is instead an activity (more encompassing and different from a process) of a more natural sort.

When discussing pain, Aristotle (*NE*, VII: xiii) notes extensive consensus that pain is an evil to avoided as well as an impediment to human activity. Freedom from pain, thus, is generally seen as desirable; although only some argue that pleasure (as the opposite of pain) should be viewed as good.

Aristotle also notes that while all animals and all people pursue pleasure, they do not pursue the same notions of pleasure. However, because physical pleasures (as in food, drink, sex) are the ones most readily achieved by all, sensual pleasures often are the ones most readily referenced. He also claims that bodily sensations are apt more seem particularly intense for people incapable of experiencing other pleasures.

Still, Aristotle adds, nothing can continue to give people consistent pleasure because of the complexity of human minds. Thus, Aristotle notes that changes are important in enabling people to experience pleasure [Aristotle re-engages several of these themes in Book X, although Books VIII and IX (on friendship) also deal with aspects of happiness].

Book VIII [Friendship]

Envisioning *friendship* as a noble, as well as an enabling and essential feature of the human condition, Aristotle (*NE*, VIII: I) embarks on an extended consideration of the nature, forms, and continuities of friendship.

While recognizing that (a) some people claim that friendship is based on the attractions of similars, and (b) others contend that friendship arises from the attractions of opposites, Aristotle intends to examine friendship (c) as it is humanly engaged.

Aristotle's analysis of friendship is skewed throughout by his concerns with moral virtues, but Aristotle's consideration of friendship provides readers with a remarkable appreciation of friendship as a generic or enduring transcontextual and transhistorical phenomenon.

Aristotle also provides present day readers with a vast array of conceptual materials with which to consider their understandings of the friendship phenomenon. The central value of this material, thus, for the social sciences rests not on proclaiming the validity of Aristotle's position in any specific sense but rather in recognizing the potency of the many analytical themes that he provides for further research and analysis.[xx]

Early in his analysis, Aristotle (*NE*, VIII: ii) states that people love or are attracted to others not on the basis of what is good for them in a more absolute sense, but rather what appears to them to be good for them. Or, conversely, what is loved is viewed as good.

Relatedly, Aristotle (*NE*, VIII: ii) also contends that the term friendship is not properly applied to inanimate objects (even though people may love or become thoroughly intrigued with these things) because no reciprocity of affection is possible in the case of inanimate objects. Aristotle further distinguishes "goodwill" from friendship, saying that people may act kindly to people they have never seen, whereas friendship assumes some mutuality of affection.

Thus, Aristotle (*NE*, VIII: ii) defines genuine or more complete *friendship* by reference to states in which two people (a) have goodwill toward each other, (b) are aware of their mutual goodwill, and (c) appreciate the goodwill that each has for the other.

Aristotle (*NE*, VIII: iii) then distinguishes *three types of friendship*, wherein affection for the other is based on (a) *utility* of the other to oneself, (b) *pleasure* that the other provides to oneself, and (c) *virtuous* caring for the other in a more enduring sense.

Aristotle posits that friendship among the elderly is often based on utility, while the young are more likely to concentrate on friendships based on notions of pleasure. Relatedly, Aristotle suggests, virtuous friendships are most likely to be found among good or noble people who have more sincere and extended concern for the well-being of the other. However, he states, because good people are comparatively rare and virtuous friendships require time and familiarity, these fuller, more ideal relationships are comparatively uncommon for people generally.

Continuing, Aristotle (*NE*, VIII: iv) says that friendships that are based on pleasure more closely approximate the virtuous ideal than do those based more exclusively on utility. Still, he observes, friendships based on both of these elements are prone to dissolution whenever people's interests or situations change. Also, Aristotle suggests, longer-term friendships are less likely to be destroyed by gossip and suspicion.

Still, in a note that runs throughout his analysis, Aristotle insists that bad people do not make good friends (either in their actions as friends to others or as the objects of friendship on the part of others). Aristotle claims that virtuous friendship can exist only between good people.

After elaborating further on the preceding matters (*NE*, VIII: v-vi), Aristotle (*NE*, VIII: vii) next considers friendships that involve *status differentials*, wherein one person is able to do more for the other than can be reciprocated in any direct manner.

In cases of these sorts, Aristotle suggests that the person who is disadvantaged in this manner might restore balance to the friendship unit by being more affectionate toward the other than vice-versa. Aristotle (viii) later adds that although many people love honor (and thus are susceptible to flattery), affection is generally a more desired element than is honor. Indeed, he contends, affection is one of the most consequential signs of a good friendship.

Aristotle (*NE*, VIII: ix) then shifts frames somewhat as he begins to consider parallels between friendships and other (civil) relationships that people might experience.

Thus, Aristotle references the *affinities* that people develop through association in other group contexts. These relationships are more common among shipmates, fellow soldiers, fellow travelers, members of political associations, and people bound together in religious groups. While some tendencies toward friendship may be noted among people in all of these circumstances, the affinities that develop within these associations are generally more situational as opposed to more enduring friendships.

Next, Aristotle (*NE*, VIII: x-xi) considers three *forms of state* or governing arrangements. To this end, Aristotle distinguishes monarchies or kingdoms; aristocracies or the rule of elite groups; and timocracies (or constitutional governments, including democracies).

After briefly commenting on some weaknesses and strengths of these three types of government, their transitions and their particular vulnerabilities to failure (also see Aristotle's *Politics*), Aristotle applies his notions of friendship to the relations of those in various forms of government.

Although the relations of governors to those governed vary notably within and across these political arenas, Aristotle observes that the concept of friendship (good and bad) may be invoked to characterize the relationships of the people in each political arena.

Then, stating that all friendships are to be understood within community contexts, Aristotle (*NE*, VIII: xii) considers *family relations* as variants of friendship. He observes that parental affection for their children is generally more intense and enduring than that of children for their parents. Not only is the parents' affection for their children likely to start earlier and be of longer duration than that of the children for their parents, but parents also view their children as extensions of themselves.

Because their differing situations generally preclude the types of friendships that may develop between equals of long-term association, Aristotle suggests that the friendships of parents and children are commonly based on pleasure and utility. He also characterizes the friendship of husbands and wives as based on utility and

pleasure combined. However, he adds, marital relations also may be based on virtue where both spouses are of a noble character.

Aristotle (*NE*, VIII: xiii) then returns to a more general consideration of friendship. Whereas relationships based on pleasure are prone to disaffection when people cease to view others as enjoyable companions, people involved in relationships characterized by utility are apt to become disenchanted when they define their benefits as inadequate relative to their contributions to the other.

When relationships are unequal in status, Aristotle (*NE*, VIII: xiv) notes that both parties may envision themselves as deserving more. People giving more (material goods, services) to the other may see themselves as warranting more affection in return, while those to whom things are given may see themselves as deserving more because they have less than their friends.

People on either or both sides of the relationship, thus, may become disaffected with the other for not doing more. Aristotle sees this as potentially troublesome for people's friendships because people in unequal situations may begin to concentrate on what they think is due them rather than what they can do for the other.

Book IX [Friendship… cont'd]

Aristotle (*NE*, IX: i) concludes his discussion of friendship based on utility or pleasure by discussing people's disappointments with inappropriate returns for their friendship. Beyond not obtaining the things they want, he observes that people who do not obtain as much as they want often see themselves as getting nothing at all.

Aristotle (*NE* IX: ii) also raises the matter of *loyalty* in friendship asking to what extent people should concentrate on repaying those who have in various ways benefited them as opposed to helping (as in gifting to) others who have done less for them.

Aristotle (*NE*, IX: iii) subsequently asks when people might *continue or terminate* their friendships. In addition to those relationships that fail to provide what people had formerly enjoyed or found advantageous, he notes that other changes might also generate ruptures.

Thus, Aristotle observes that relations may be severed when formerly good people become evil, or at least are so perceived by their associates. Likewise, formerly equal associates might find that their friendships have become imbalanced relative to one another as a consequence of the gains or losses (as in virtue, wealth, education, abilities) of one person compared to the other.

Aristotle (*NE*, IX: iv) also asks if people can be good friends to themselves. After observing that people normally desire their own well-being, share in their own interests and tastes, and act in those terms, as well as find their own company agreeable, he concludes that people can indeed be good friends to themselves.

Interestingly, Aristotle contends that evil people would not be good friends even to themselves. He says that bad people are of such inferior moral worth that they even fail to act in their best (longer term) interests. As well, they find little in themselves that is likable.

Aristotle (*NE*, IX: v) then distinguishes goodwill (see *NE*, VIII: ii) that people may direct toward others from friendship, although he notes that goodwill may provide some early rudiments of what later may become friendship. He (*NE*, IX: vi) also comments on the desirability of widespread friendliness (as in goodwill or concord) in the community for the general good of the community.

Aristotle (*NE*, IX: vii) next examines the relationship of *benefactors* to their beneficiaries. Likening the position of the benefactor to that of the artist, Aristotle [1926] says that people generally appreciate the things they have accomplished:

> [W]e exist in activity, since we exist by living and doing; and in a sense… one who has made something exists actively, and so he loves his handiwork because he loves existence. (IX: vii)

Moreover, Aristotle continues, there is a nobility associated with giving. While the beneficiaries may appreciate the items they gain, the beneficiary role lacks the virtuous quality of giving. Because benefactors achieve greater nobility through the act of giving, Aristotle suggests, they are more apt to retain more pleasant memories of the experience than is the recipient. Further, he adds, people who put more effort into things are more apt to appreciate the ensuing outcomes than are those who witness or benefit from the activity.

Aristotle (*NE*, IX: viii) returns to the question of *affection for self* and whether people should love themselves or other people more. he notes that people generally condemn those who openly put themselves first and argue that noble people put their friends' interests over their own.

However, Aristotle points out, if people take the viewpoint that one should love one's best friend best, it is one's own self that fits all the attributes of the best friend.

In an attempt to resolve these two viewpoints, Aristotle contends that by invoking a noble sense of self (virtuous, caring as opposed to a more materialist or sensate sense of self), people would be able to love and benefit both their associates and themselves. In this sense, he concludes, one should strive to obtain the greater amount of nobility for oneself.

Subsequently Aristotle (*NE*, IX: ix) asks *if friends are necessary for happiness* or whether the truly happy person has no need of friends. Relatedly, he asks if friends might be more valued at times of prosperity or difficulty.

Stating that people are social beings, Aristotle says that it seems odd that someone might chose to be happy on the condition that one must do so alone. Indeed, he says, people require friends in order to be happy.

Still, Aristotle reasons that a happy person would not require friends of utility, for a happy person would have no desires that would require instrumental or material objects or services. He also questions whether a happy person would require friends for pleasure, since the happy person is already happy. On these bases, one might infer that happy people do not require friends at all.

Aristotle then approaches the matter from another viewpoint. If happiness is a form of *activity* and activity is something that people do, as opposed to something that people possess in a more material sense, then people who engage others in more sustained, pleasant terms would have greater opportunities to be happy on a more enduring basis.

Noting that people have the capacities for sensation, thought, and activity, Aristotle argues that it is in (meaningful, self conscious) activity that the fuller human reality exists. Further, this human consciousness of self is enhanced, he adds, when people interact with others, when they share their thoughts and activities with others. Without this, people's senses of, or capacity for, happiness would be incomplete.

Aristotle (*NE*, IX: x) next asks *how many friends* ought to have. Observing that each friendship entails ongoing commitments and interchange, and that it is desirable that all of one's friends are friends with one another, he says that is will be difficult for people to be good friends with a large number of people at the same time.

Aristotle (*NE*, IX: xi) then considers the importance of friends when people are doing well as opposed to faring poorly in other matters. He begins by noting that those experiencing adversity require assistance while those enjoying prosperity wish to have companions for pleasure as well as companions toward whom they can (nobly) express their generosity (as benefactors).

In addition to any direct aid one may receive from friends when experiencing difficulties, Aristotle also observes that friends also may help alleviate the sense of loss or sorrow experienced by those encountering difficulties. This may come about either through the realization that one's friends share in one's grief or through the more routine pleasure of their company.

At the same time, Aristotle points out, people sometimes avoid their friends when they are encountering difficult times. This way, their friends would not be burdened or sorrowed by the difficulties that they are suffering. Relatedly, Aristotle observes, people adopting this (more noble) stance would only be inclined to ask for their friends' assistance when it could be of great service to them and would generate a minimum of disruption for their friends.

Aristotle adds that it is fitting for people to quickly offer assistance when their friends encounter difficulties. However, should their friends enjoy prosperity, he suggests that it is appropriate for people to be slow in presuming the role of beneficiaries of their friends' good fortune. Nevertheless, should their friends endeavor to share their well-being with them, then people should be gracious in accepting (as beneficiaries) the things their friends offer to share with them.

Aristotle (*NE*, IX: xii) continues, adding that friends thrive on witnessing the well-being of their friends. Indeed, he states, it is in encouraging and sharing the other person's happiness that life is worth living. Then, stating that friendships among more virtuous people are likely to result in greater states of happiness and the production of yet more noble characters, he claims that closer associations between evil people are likely to lead to yet more depraved states and characters,

Book X [Pleasure, Activity, and Mindedness]

Aristotle (*NE*) begins Book X by introducing two common but contrasting *views of pleasure*; that pleasure is a desirable state and (conversely) that pleasure is an undesirable experience.

Aristotle (*NE*, X: ii) first references the position of Eudoxus who claims that pleasure is good. While noting that part of the popular appeal of this position revolved around Eudoxus' outstanding reputation as a citizen, Aristotle attributes the following arguments to Eudoxus.

First, all animals (including humans) seek pleasure and when all creatures pursue a similar objective, this attests to the desirability of that objective. Second, since pain is evil or undesirable, and pleasure is the opposite of pain, then pleasure must be good. Third, whatever is sought as an end in itself, as opposed to a means to an end, is most desirable. Fourth, since pleasure makes any activity more desirable, then pleasure also deserves recognition as a good on that basis as well.

Eudoxus' position is largely consistent with Aristotle's own position on pleasure and, Aristotle takes direct issue with those who refuse to recognize something (pleasure) that all creatures seek is good. Aristotle also considers it absurd that both pain and pleasure can be considered evil, for people do not prefer neutral states but instead strive to avoid pain while striving to obtain pleasure.

Aristotle (*NE*, X: iii) then notes that some of those (Plato, *Philebus*, 24e, 31a) who object to pleasure argue that pleasure comes in degrees and thus lacks the purity of other virtues.

Aristotle asks why pleasure, like health, may not exist in degrees rather than absolutes. Aristotle also takes issues with those (Plato, *Philebus*, 53e-54d) who reject pleasure because they say that it is a physical motion or movement as opposed to a virtue. Aristotle says that pleasure is not something in motion because it has neither absolute nor relative velocity. Nor, he states, is pleasure a state of restoration to the body (as in an injury or deprivation), even though relief from pain may be greatly appreciated.

Aristotle also disagrees with those who claim that disreputable or disgraceful activities are not pleasurable. However, when those who disapprove of pleasure argue that some pleasures are more morally virtuous than others, Aristotle (who earlier had adopted this position) leaves this point uncontested.

After reviewing and commenting on these notions of pleasure, Aristotle (*NE*, X: iv) intends to establish his own views.

Aristotle begins by claiming that pleasure is not a specific thing but has a more unified or encompassing quality. Pleasure, thus, cannot be envisioned as a physical motion or a process in itself or even the result of a process. Likewise, while contending that the potential for pleasure is greatest when people's capacities for sensory perception are at their functional best, he wants to emphasize that it is the mind that is stimulated. It is through the mind that people experience pleasure.

However, pleasure is *not* simply a matter of (minded) definition in this respect, nor is pleasure contingent exclusively on action or the sensations that human bodies encounter. Instead, Aristotle contends, people's experiences of pleasure necessarily reflect *the interlinkages of actions, sensations, and minded focusing*.

Continuing, Aristotle (*NE*, X: v) explains that there are affinities between particular kinds of pleasures and particular kinds of activities. Likewise, while noting that activities are supplemented by pleasures associated with them, he also observes that the pleasures that individuals typically associate with an activity are apt to diminish when the participants are distracted by other things of both pleasurable and unpleasant sorts.

Aristotle further alleges that people's pleasures, like other activities, vary in moral value. However, he emphasizes, activities are not the same thing as pleasure and likewise, neither are thoughts or sensations. Instead, pleasure arises, and is sustained, through a composite of activities, thoughts, and sensations.

Then, after noting that all animals have their own realms or modes of pleasure that derive from exercising their functions, Aristotle acknowledges that different people may consider a great variety of things to be pleasurable. Still, he does not justify all pleasures on this relativist base.

Instead, returning to his emphasis on the virtuous person, Aristotle condemns some pleasures saying that they lead to physical harm and moral corruption. Conversely, he intends to place the highest premium on those *pleasures that are more distinctively human* (vs. animalistic) in quality.

Developing this last point more fully, Aristotle (*NE*, X: vi) subsequently differentiates between amusements and more virtuous forms of pleasure. While acknowledging both the popularity of amusements among people in general and the importance of people obtaining relaxation from their labors, Aristotle comments that it would be odd for people to work so hard merely to engage in more frivolous or childish past-times. He also observes that anyone can enjoy sensual pleasure.

Neither of these modes of pleasure (amusement or relaxation), thus, can be seen as enabling or attending to the best, most distinctive essences of humans.

Aristotle (*NE*, X: vii) then proceeds to emphasize the happiness that can be derived from a life of *contemplation* or study. He states that activity accompanied by wisdom is the most pleasant of activities that can be associated with virtue.

Not only is contemplative activity seen as the element that most clearly differentiate people from other animals, but because it also offers people continuous sources of mental stimulation it represents a perpetual source of (minded) pleasure.

As well, contemplative activity can be pursued alone and in conjunction with others. Further, Aristotle contends, insofar as anything better approximates the divine in humans, it would be contemplative activity. Study, thus, is the most virtuous or noble of human qualities. He adds that because the intellect is the best feature of humans, it is in the realm of intellectual activity that one is to find the greatest happiness.

Aristotle (*NE*, X: viii) continues, stating, by comparison, that the life of moral virtue is of secondary importance to contemplative activity. Moral virtues, Aristotle says, are more bound up in people's emotions, physical states, financial circumstances, and relations with others; things that are human in a more mundane sense. The intellect, Aristotle contends, is somewhat more removed from matters of that sort.

The pursuit of intellectual virtues, Aristotle adds, also allows people to more closely approximate the gods as they are presumed to be.[xxi] Noting that the gods do not need to act or conduct business as people do, and that the gods need not be concerned about being evil, generous temperate, courageous, and the like, the only thing left for the gods is the activity of contemplation. The people who embark on lives of contemplation, then, would more closely approximate the (residual but primary) activities of the gods.[xxii]

Nevertheless, Aristotle notes that even philosophers (because they too are humans) require external well-being and sources of income. He also observes that it is in the practical accomplishment of human life that the matters he discusses here will be most effectively put to the test, with their ensuing implications for new states of knowledge.

As he moves to the conclusion, Aristotle (*NE*, X: ix) says that if the human sciences are to have practical ends, it is not enough to remain at a theoretical level. One must instead embark on a realm of practice.

Moreover, if one could to generate a community of virtuous people merely through discourses on ethics, Aristotle continues, texts of the sort he develops would be adequate. However, since this is not the case, other modes of regulating human conduct must be considered.

Aristotle notes that while some people credit people's virtues to nature, and others attribute virtues to habit, still others view virtues as qualities to be taught.

In reply, Aristotle says that we have to accept nature as a given, but one can only expect subsequent teaching to be effective where habits conducive to learning have earlier been established.

For those who are less receptive to instruction, Aristotle stresses the importance of legal regulation. He also observes that the law can impinge on people without drawing disfavor of the sorts that would be assigned to individuals assuming similar stances on things. Thus, Aristotle argues for the necessity of a system of public regulation.

Somewhat relatedly, he says that compared to other areas of science, the science of legislation is poorly developed. Noting that people who teach about politics

(i.e., the sophists) do not engage politics and that people who practice politics seldom address the analytical features of politics in written text, Aristotle encourages politicians to assume a more scholarly role.

Were those holding office to write about the affairs of office, Aristotle says, those politicians who could do so could generate an invaluable legacy for their associates and future generations (i.e., a contribution that is much more consequential than their terms of incumbency).

Likewise, Aristotle observes, no one will become an expert in legislation by simply studying collections of laws and constitutions without adopting more discerning analytical stances on these matters.

Recognizing limitations of these sorts Aristotle indicates that he intends to develop a statement that focuses more directly on politics (as in institutions, legislation, constitutions, and transitions of governments) as part of his broader agenda of formulating a philosophy of human affairs.

Conclusion

Attending to human knowing and acting in distinctively comprehensive manners, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* represents an exceptionally intense, compact and insightful analysis of community life. Although some may take issue with Aristotle in certain matters of consistency and clarity, and some others with respect to personal notions of morality, criticisms of these sorts seem particularly petty and small minded when one considers the intellectual resources that Aristotle provides for those who take the time to examine his manuscript in more sustained detail.

As well, although Aristotle attends to people's activities and experiences as "individuals" within the community, he also recognizes that people are to be understood as "interconnected members of the community." Indeed, although people have the capacity for engaging in activity as reflective, purposive agents, the community is the foundational source of all of human knowing and meaningful activity.

It is for this reason, as well, that Aristotle places so much stress on political science as a field of scholarship. His point is that unless the community is reasonably well regulated, matters pertaining to moral order and especially opportunities for intellectual development (i.e., the development of the intellectual virtues) are put in jeopardy.

Still, rather than a "prescriptive science" that stresses particular policies and implementation, Aristotle insists that "the science of the polis," the community, is to be *thoroughly informed by the study of human knowing and acting*. Thus, whereas one may have government, policies, and regulatory agencies of all sorts, *there can be no viable political science without a comprehensive understanding of the more fundamental nature of group life as an ongoing realm of human activity*.

For Aristotle, the community may be seen as constituted in the great variety of associations that people develop with respect to one another as well as the contexts and settings in which human interchanges take place. Thus, he is mindful of the wide range of activities and viewpoints that people may invoke as well as the tendencies of people to both pursue their own activities and deal with others in more habitual manners. As well, while acknowledging a wide range of relationships, Aristotle also is attentive to the enduring centrality of influence, cooperation, and resistance for comprehending human group life.

As readers may now appreciate, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* provides contemporary scholars with a vast array of departure points for subsequent study and analysis. As a result, but it will be necessary to rely on the knowledge, wisdom, and resourcefulness of readers to pursue these matters further.

Still, as but one line of inquiry that may serve as a suggestion of many others that might be developed, I will conclude this paper by briefly indicating how the study of Aristotle's moral virtues might be examined ethnographically by those invoking symbolic interactionist (or kindred constructionist) methodologies.

Toward an Ethnographic Study of Aristotle's Moral Virtues

Defining moral virtues as habitual tendencies or dispositions to do good (as acting in noble, balanced, and just manners), Aristotle characterizes people's moral virtues as nonrational essences because they assume a pronounced, more enduring habitual quality. Thus, even through people's moral virtues become behaviorally, emotionally, cognitively, and socially embedded within people's beings with the acquisition of language and associated capacities for comprehension, these dispositions are developed on early prelinguistic, biological foundations and may represent points of considerable resiliency to subsequent modification.[xxiii]

As a result, the moral virtues are not as amenable to choice and direct control as are the intellectual virtues. Nevertheless, Aristotle indicates that people's moral virtues may be modified overtime by purposive self-reflection and more sustained, enacted instances of choice.

That is, while moral virtues (and vices) represent dispositions or inclinations to act in certain ways, people may not only adjust their dispositions somewhat over time but they also may more consciously deal with these dispositions when they are deciding how to act or do things. Still, the challenges to changing one's habits can be highly formidable for resistance to change can occur at any point (and within any medium) in which people's activities (and habits) are embedded.

At first glance, Aristotle may appear somewhat presumptive in identifying (and characterizing) the moral virtues and their extremes or vices (denoted by excesses or deficiencies of the same qualities).

However, while one may encounter considerable variation in the emphases and valuings that particular peoples (as well as groups and individuals within specific communities), place on specific moral and intellectual virtues, the moral qualities that Aristotle identifies in *Nicomachean Ethics* seem fairly generic across human groups.[xxiv] Indeed, the virtues that Aristotle discusses cut across a wide range of human activity and interchange and thus merit extended attention.

In promoting moral standpoints pertinent to both individual virtues and community loyalties and responsibilities, Aristotle also frequently stresses the importance of people doing the *right* or proper things, in the *right* ways, to the *right* people, with the *right* intentions, in the *right* circumstances, at the *right* times, and in the *right* proportions. Still, Aristotle (*NE*, VI: i) recognizes the limitations of this viewpoint and *explicitly states that encouragements to choose the midpoint are little value in themselves*. Thus, Aristotle comments on the ambiguities of the virtues that he discusses (both as dispositions to act and also with respect to the particular features that people commonly associate with different virtues).

Accordingly, if one recasts these notions in *more situated, processual, enacted terms*, Aristotle's notions of virtues and vices become much more amenable to sociological inquiry and analysis.

While acknowledging people's tendencies to develop more habitual viewpoints and activities, one still may ask *when and how people are likely to act* (activity always presumes particular instances) in ways that are more consistent with specific virtues or vices.

For instance, even when researchers attend to the more habituated differences that people may develop, both as representatives of particular groups and as individuals within, one can still ask when and how *anyone* might experience and deal with tendencies toward courage, brashness or cowardice *in the actual instances* in which people consider and implement their activities.

Similarly one could ask when and how people experience and express anger, gentleness, or extended disregard in particular situations. Likewise, one might ask when and how people engage extravagance, liberality, or stinginess in more situated instances as well as more sustained terms.

In these ways, by examining the fuller range of people's activities *in the instances in which they take place*, scholars may begin to better appreciate the processes and problematics of the matters that Aristotle defines as moral virtues--not only as situated choices but in ways that also are mindful of people's more enduring individual tendencies (habits) and their more explicit, situated notions of choice.

Relatedly, mindful of people's abilities to influence, accommodate, and resist one another in the course of everyday life particulars, it is essential to ask when and how people *attend to others* generally and specifically as well as the ways that people *enter into one another's realms of experience* and the ways in which *they work out particular instances of activity in conjunction with these others*.

Whereas Aristotle addresses a great many conceptual issues pertinent to the study of habits, activities, and relationships not only in *Nicomachean Ethics* but also in *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*, those interested in pursuing ethnographic inquiry along these lines may find *Subcultural Mosaics and Intersubjective Realities* (Prus, 1997) helpful in outlining the theoretical and methodological standpoints and practices associated with interactionist research and analysis.[xxv] This latter volume also references many interactionist ethnographies of relevance to a broad assortment of social processes and topical subject matters. Although very consistent with Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* on a conceptual pragmatist level, this material is more exclusively focused on research and scholarship of a more pluralist nature.

Indeed, if Aristotle may be faulted as a social scientist, it may be for trying to do too much; for trying to be too helpful.[xxvi] Thus, while not minimizing the relevance of the *Nicomachean Ethics* as a remedial/directive statement that could contribute much to the realization of people's potential as individual members of the community and the articulation of viewpoints and practices that foster a greater good for the community, Aristotle's concerns with fostering personal accomplishments and generating a more viable social order at times obstruct a more sustained analysis of human knowing and acting.

Mindful of Aristotle's unparalleled accomplishments as a scholar, the conceptual dilemmas generated by not maintaining a sharper separation of morality and the study of human knowing and acting may serve as a reminder to other social scientists to focus more exclusively on "what is" rather than what "should" or "could be."

Ironically, by avoiding the prescriptive traps in which Aristotle at times appears to have become ensnared in his analysis of the moral virtues, *a reformulation of emphases along these more completely pluralist lines is consistent on Aristotle's more general insistence on learning about the more fundamental or generic features of things by examining the instances in which things of that sort occur.*

Still, even with this (prescriptive) caveat in mind, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* represents an exceptionally potent set of conceptual reference points.[xxvii] Not only does *NE* provide an array of highly instructive departure points for inquiry but Aristotle's work on ethics also provides a valuable set of resources for pursuing *comparative analysis* with respect to the interim literature and contemporary research.

Particularly consequential, thus, are matters pertaining to (a) deliberation, choice, practical wisdom, and agency; (b) character as processually formed and dispositional, as well as a deliberatively enacted, alterable phenomenon, (c) happiness, pleasure, pain, and people's experiences with emotionality more generally; (d) relationships (including friends, family, and more fleeting associations) in the making; (e) benevolence, benefactors, and beneficiaries; and (f) morality, justice, law, and regulation.

Approaching *Nicomachean Ethics* in this way, as material to be engaged in more extended, scholarly terms and in ways that are mindful of the potential of ethnographic research for examining things in the instances in which they take place, we may be in position not only to build on the ideas and concepts that Aristotle has bequeathed to us but also to benefit from the more extended sets of comparative analyses that his works enables us to achieve.

In sum, although this paper has focused primarily on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (and this represents only one of several of his texts that address human knowing and acting in more direct and sustained terms), this synoptical presentation of *Nicomachean Ethics* (as does his text more completely) *provides sustained evidence of the fundamental pragmatist features of Aristotle's analysis of the human community*.

Further, not only has Aristotle's work, directly and indirectly, been foundational to virtually all academic considerations of pragmatism in Western social thought but contemporary social scientists who engage Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* will find a great deal of highly instructive and enabling materials in *NE* with which to develop and strengthen their own scholarly considerations of human knowing and acting.

Still, as a concluding caveat, it should be noted that a fuller appreciation of Aristotle's texts, along with other materials from the classical Greek era, will require patience and perseverance as well as an ethnographic openness to learning (i.e., examining these materials in the contexts in which they were produced) and some capacity for engaging a remarkably sophisticated set of conceptual materials. Conversely, this material is not recommended for the impatient, the arrogant, or "the timid of mind."

Acknowledgements

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Endnotes

i   This statement draws heavily on William David Ross' (1925; *Ethica Nicomachea*) and Harris Rackham's (1934) English translations of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. This statement is also informed by Aristotle's *Eudemian Ethics* (J. Solomon's English translation) and *Magna Moralia* (George Stock's English translation) as well as the more comprehensive collection of Aristotle's works found in Barnes (1984). Although I have not incorporated Thomas Aquinas' *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics* directly into the present statement, Aquinas' (two volume) text can be described as truly remarkable in overall care and depth of analysis. Accordingly, the present statement should not be seen as replacing Aristotle's *NE* or Aquinas' commentary on *NE*. The purpose of the present statement, much more modestly, is to examine the relevance of Aristotle's *NE* for contemporary pragmatist scholarship – i.e., the study of human knowing and acting.

ii   For a more focused consideration of causality that has been developed mindfully of the viewpoints of Plato, Aristotle, George Herbert Mead, and Herbert Blumer, see Puddephatt and Prus (forthcoming).

iii   In addition to the more distinctively philosophic emphasis on human knowing and acting that is signified by the present consideration of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, the Greek project (as I call it) has taken me into several (interrelated) realms of scholarship. These include poetics, rhetoric, education, ethnohistory, theology, and politics. Although overwhelming in some regards, the more sustained emphasis on the development of pragmatist thought from the classical Greeks to the present time has provided the primary conceptual mechanism for traversing the corridors of time within these realms of scholarship (also see Prus 2004).

iv   More extended discussions of the interactionist tradition (theory, methods, literature, concepts) can be found in Prus (1996, 1997, 1999) and Prus and Grills (2003).

v   Although symbolic interaction (a) builds centrally on American pragmatist philosophy, interactionism also is (b) methodologically and empirically informed by ethnographic examinations of human group life in the making, and (c) attentive to the task of developing process-oriented concepts of more generic or transsituational sorts that are analytically grounded in the study of the instances in which people do things. Whereas very few interactionists have used detailed historical accounts of human group life as data, I have been approaching the classical Greek and Latin literature mindfully of its value as "ethnohistory" (Prus 2003, 2004). This not only allows researchers to examine texts from the past as representations of the life-worlds in which these statements were developed but this approach also enables researchers to ask about the ways that specific authors engaged their roles as scholars of the human condition in their own times.

vi   For a fuller appreciation of Greek developments in the physical sciences, see Sarton (1952, 1959).

vii   Albeit often taken for granted, both an analytical language and more sustained logical reasoning practices are fundamental to the development of more advanced scholarship, as also is the preservation of written (ideally phonetically-based) text. Given the immense amount of intellectual material and capacity that had been lost in the intervening centuries, the comparatively modest accomplishments of the 8th–13th century academicians still may be seen as monumental in consequence.

viii   In the course of developing this project, I have become aware that many philosophers have rather limited contact with the broader set of Plato's texts. I also have realized that most philosophers tend to adopt Platonist rather than an Aristotelian emphases in their own approaches to scholarship. Accordingly, their exposure to Aristotle (beyond the realm of formal logic) generally is notably restricted. Like many other academics, the philosophers also have tended to focus on more recent, often "trendy" developments within their own times. As well, insofar as people's knowledge of the past is limited, they may not recognize ideas that are recycled but now appear in new attire or guises. French postmodernism or poststructuralism of the late 20th century is very much a case in point. Derived from Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche (who, in turn, had been influenced by some earlier Greek philosophers), postmodernism reflects a synthesis of some aspects of preAristotelian Greek thought.

ix   In *Republic* and *Law*, by contrast, Plato references only four virtues: courage, temperance, justice, and wisdom.

x   Plato (with Socrates as his spokesperson) makes a very similar observation in *Republic* (Book VI: 498-500, Books VI and VII more generally) when he discusses the training and experiential base required for the making of viable philosophers.

xi   It should be appreciated that Aristotle (a) includes people among objects more generally and (b) maintains a unity of body and mind (i.e., as an inseparable entity) that can only be realized through activity.

xii   Aristotle talks about people generally, but he also sees more educated people as having greater potential for virtuous and intellectual life-styles. Even here, however, Aristotle is attentive to habits and preferences that people have developed from early (prelinguistic, then limited understanding) childhood. Because people have to contend with their earlier habits and failings, these could represent limitations and obstacles to the subsequent development of more virtuous styles of doing things.

xiii   In addition to discussing virtues and vices as (a) *character-based* (developmentally acquired habits, emotionalities, preferences) and as (b) *intellectually* achieved (through instruction, study, and practice), Aristotle also discusses virtues as (c) *enacted* (as with people acting in minded terms; i.e., as knowing, deliberating, choosing, monitoring, adjusting agents), (d) subject to *judgment* by others (as in responsibility, and praise or blame), and as matters of (e) *collective* as well individual concern. Unfortunately, these latter three uses and the related shifts of emphases are not always explicit in his text. Defining moral virtues as habitual tendencies or dispositions to do good (as in noble, balanced, and just manners), Aristotle characterizes people's moral (character) virtues as nonrational essences because they are emotionally and behaviorally developed and, thus, are not as amenable to choice and direct control as are

the intellectual virtues. Nevertheless, Aristotle indicates that people's moral (character) virtues may be modified overtime by mindful self-reflection as well as effectively redirected through more sustained instances of choice. That is, while virtues and vices represent moral standpoints or inclinations to act in certain respects, people may not only adjust their (character) dispositions somewhat over time but also more consciously may deal with these dispositions when they are deciding how to act or do things.

xiv   Presumably, Aristotle envisions people as having mixes of virtues; as having characters that are composed of assortments of virtues and vices. Still, some people are depicted as more distinctively (uniformly) good or evil.

xv   This table is a modified version of the chart presented in *NE* (Aristotle 1926: 32). Although Aristotle references a chart of this sort in his text, no actual chart exists in the text. Still, it is a useful device and we can be grateful to Rackham for his attempt to reconstruct this table.

xvi   Aristotle suggests that because of the virtues and vices that people develop as characters (i.e., habits, dispositions, preferences), people are not be able to control or direct their behaviors as fully as they (or others) might like. Given that characters (once established) imply certain tendencies on the part of people, Aristotle takes the position that it would be more pleasurable for people to act in line with their dispositions and, conversely, more painful (if not generally more difficult or demanding) for people to act in ways that are contrary to their dispositions.

xvii   Some may be inclined to envision the virtues that Aristotle lists as unique to his own era. However, when the desirable and undesirable human characteristics that he identifies are contraposed with the array of ethnographic materials developed by the interactionists and anthropologists as well as playwrights, novelists and other authors over the centuries, these virtues appear to have a fairly generic relevance across wide ranges of human groups. Relatedly, many notions of deviance that people invoke appear to reflect their assessments of people's (over or under) participation along dimensions of these very sorts.

xviii Readers also may appreciate Plato's attempts to examine courage as a humanly known essence in *Laches*.

xix   Readers may appreciate the value of sustaining these distinctions for purposes of inquiry and analysis.

xx   Here, as throughout Aristotle's text more generally, I have assumed the liberty of converting many of Aristotle's (conventionally translated and seemingly intended) references to man /men into a more generic form (i.e., people). When recast in this manner, Aristotle's analysis of friendship seems even more analytically compelling than otherwise might be the case.

xxi   Judging from Aristotle's other works, it is most unlikely that he puts any credence in "the gods' as popularly envisioned (following the writings of Homer and Hesiod). Nevertheless, like Plato in this respect, Aristotle appears highly attentive to the integrative functions and popular appeals of religion.

xxii   Readers familiar with Epicurean notions of the gods may observe more consistencies between this statement of Aristotle and the Epicurean position (on the contemplative activities of the gods) than that of the Stoics. Cicero's *On*

the Nature of the Gods provides an intellectually engaging account of these viewpoints, as contrasted with Academic (or Platonist) skepticism.

xxiii For a fuller statement on the relevance of "memory as a socially engaged process" for the study of human knowing and acting as well as the centrality of language for "the pragmatist metamorphosis" that characterizes all meaningful human endeavor, see Prus (2007a,b).

xxiv Clearly, we may expect considerable variation across human communities (and groups within) as well as within the same groups over more extended time frames. However, this does not deny the value of these moral qualities as comparison points or realms of inquiry.

xxv For other materials that address symbolic interactionist theory, methodology, and practices, see Blumer (1969) Strauss (1993), Prus (1996, 1997, 1999), and Prus and Grills (2003).

xxvi Ironically, faulting people for "trying to do too much" may have a counter-productive effect (i.e., effectively destroying scholarship) in some cases. Thus, had Plato, Aristotle, and Thomas Aquinas, for instance, been constrained "to do less" (i.e., to develop only this or that emphasis or to pursue topics in some specific form) they may never have developed the many texts nor achieved the wealth of conceptual materials and insights on human knowing and acting that they have left for us. Still, our task as social scientists is to focus on those materials that most directly and pluralistically attend to the study of human knowing and acting.

xxvii The value of Aristotle's work on ethics as a conceptual reference point would be further enhanced by closer examinations of Aristotle's *Eudemian Ethics* and *Magna Moralia* as well as an attentiveness to Plato's *Republic* and *Laws* as additional points of comparison for comprehending and engaging Aristotle's works on human knowing and acting.

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