

Revision: *Ethics*, Book VI (continued)

Summary so far



Contemplative Intellect

Theoretical Science
Mathematics etc.
Demonstration
Superlunary

Wisdom (*sophia*)

intuition (*nous*)

science (*episteme*)

Calculative Intellect

Practical Science
Art (*Techne*) *Poiesis*
Deliberation *Praxis*
Sublunary

Art (*techne*)

Practical Wisdom
(*phronesis*)

Intuitive Reason (*nous*) - this is the firm grasp of first principles, the self-evident truths from which reason must proceed

Science (*episteme*) - which reasons according to principles and causes. The man who possesses scientific knowledge does not merely know a set of facts, but why the facts are as they are.

Wisdom (*sophia*) – knowledge in its most complete and finished form. Wisdom is knowledge of first principles, and reasoning in terms of those principles. So *sophia* = *nous* + *episteme*

Art (*techne*) - "know-how" or productive skill

Practical Wisdom (*phronesis*) – grasp of what makes for human fulfilment

In the next parts of Book 6, A. discusses states of mind (such as understanding, judgement and so forth) that are 'natural allies' to the prudent person. As natural gifts, these states are not virtuous (in the strict sense). However, as essentials in the very exercise of virtue, these states may take on a virtuous colour.

Part ix
Resourcefulness or good deliberation (euboulia)

For A., to deliberate is to use your head to figure out a course of action in the changing, contingent world. Should I lend him that £500? Can I afford to? What else is at stake? Would it be overgenerous? Is he deserving? ...

Euboulia ≠ knowledge (since knowledge is something fixed – once you know something is the case, you don't mull over in your mind whether or not it is the case)

Euboulia ≠ inquiry; but it's a sort of inquiry

Euboulia ≠ belief or opinion (since an opinion is a 'shot at truth' that may or may not be on target)

Euboulia = correct thinking (that is, the correct process of inquiry that leads one to an appropriate moral conclusion (prohairesis))

Note:

A. makes use of what has been called the 'practical syllogism'. The practical syllogism is (at its minimum) a three-stepped process.

Example of syllogism in logic

All As are Bs.
 C is an A.
 ∴ C is a B

Example of a practical syllogism

Generous acts ought to be performed.
 Lending him £500 would be generous.
 ∴ I should lend him £500.

A. makes the point that it is possible to 'achieve the right end, but not by the right means, the middle term being false'. This is not an example of *euboulia*. So, for example, if I think for the middle step: 'Lending £500 to him would make me appear generous, but also enable me to call in the favour later for my own advantage', then I'm veering away from good deliberation, as A. understands it.

Part x
Understanding (sunesis)

Understanding ≠ scientific knowledge or opinion (if it were, then everyone would exhibit this quality in some degree)

Understanding ≠ prudence (but it is in the same sphere: understanding makes judgements, whilst prudence/practical wisdom is imperative – prompts one about what one should do or not do)

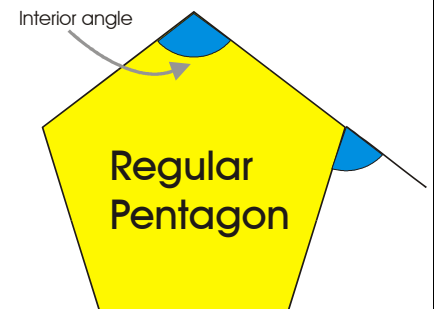
Understanding = faculty that deals with matters that may cause perplexity and call for deliberation

Note:

Again, A. wants to compare calculative with contemplative thought.

Example in Contemplative thought

For any n-sided regular polygon, the interior angle is given by $(180^\circ - 360^\circ/n)$.



A. says the 'act of learning is called understanding when one exercises the faculty of scientific knowledge'. So, if you could derive the formula above from first principles, then you would be deemed to understand the formula and its application.

Example in Calculative thought

Your friend says to you, 'I lent him £500, even though I couldn't really afford it and he didn't really deserve it, but I'll call in the favour when I come for re-election to the people's assembly'.

You would exhibit understanding in the practical sphere, when you can weigh up your friend's account of matters and pass an interior judgement on it (one that would say your friend had been imprudent).

Part xi Judgement (gnome) and consideration

(Sympathetic) Judgement = that faculty of judging correctly what is equitable (impartial & even-handed)

Note:

A. senses that when judgement is not equitable, it is almost always in favour of one's own interests to the detriment of others'

For this reason, he says that the common view of an equitable man is one who is especially sympathetic in his judgements.

Presumably, A. would have gone on to argue that it isn't simply 'the warmth of human feeling' that marks a judgement as equitable; the judgement must be also correct – i.e. giving each one their due.

Part xii Cleverness (deinotes)

Cleverness = faculty of being able to carry out actions directed to the successful achievement of our goals

Note:

A. seems to see this as a more 'mercenary' faculty; it can serve both good or evil, which is why we call both a prudent and wicked person 'clever'

Prudence requires cleverness of this sort. If a wicked person and a prudent person are gifted with an equal cleverness, what separates them?

The answer is that the prudent person is, by definition, able to perceive what genuinely makes for their fulfilment, whilst 'wickedness distorts the vision' about what makes for genuine fulfilment.

Part xii

What's the use of intellectual virtues (e.g. wisdom, prudence, etc.)?

A. asks this question and presents the case against.

- Wisdom (sophia) seems useless. It can't make you happy as it is not concerned with any process (in the contingent world).
- At least prudence is concerned with the pursuit of happiness - but knowing what you should do doesn't make you capable of doing that.
- And if you say that prudence is useful in order to become good, then we're in another quandary.
- Since prudence would then be useless to the already-good person (i.e. like a ladder than is redundant and can be kicked away).
- It's also, when you think about it, not particularly useful to the on-the-way-to-becoming good person. Why not? Because this person merely could act on the advice of another prudent person (like a person seeking health acting on a doctor's advice, rather than becoming a doctor themselves).

Having made a pretty good case against, A. then makes the case for the intellectual virtues.

- First, since both wisdom and prudence are both virtues or excellences, then they are worthwhile having in themselves, irrespective of 'results'.
- Second, they do produce results in a way. A. says that wisdom produces happiness as a formal rather than efficient cause. In other words, wisdom gives shape to what it is to be fulfilled; it is constitutive of happiness rather than instrumental to it.
- Third, excellence at being human requires a combination of prudence and the moral virtue. A. makes a subtle argument to back up his point:
 - *We recognise the kind of character who does just acts but is still not just (e.g. lending £500 for an ulterior motive) ...*
 - *Which suggests we recognise the kind of character who does just acts in such a way as to be called good – and this must flow from their own deliberation and moral conclusions (implying an intellectual as well as moral virtue)*

Part xiii

Concluding remarks

A. says cleverness (*deinotes*) is to prudence (*phronesis*) as natural virtue is to real virtue.

For natural virtues, it is possible to exhibit some in the absence of others, e.g. to appear to be courageous but also to act selfishly.

A. affirms the unity of moral virtue:

- It is not possible to have one moral virtue (e.g. courage) without them all.
- And this unity flows from the fact that the moral virtues (actually we should simply say moral virtue) are wound together by prudence.
- But prudence arises and crystallises in the character that attempts to practise moral virtue.
- So prudence and moral virtue complement each other and have a mutual dependence.