The Idea of the Good in John Dewey and Aristotle

Gregory M. Fahey

Gannon University

Follow this and additional works at: https://commons.pacificu.edu/eip

Part of the Philosophy Commons

Recommended Citation
John Dewey looks to the *Nicomachean Ethics* of Aristotle for the general outlines of his ethical thought. In his 1932 *Ethics*, he describes the ethical framework that he shares with Aristotle in terms of knowledge, choice and character: "The formula was well stated by Aristotle. The doer of the moral deed must have a certain 'state of mind' in doing it. First, he must know what he is doing; secondly, he must choose it, and choose it for itself, and thirdly, the act must be the expression of a formed and stable character."¹ This paper examines the interaction of these elements within Aristotle's and Dewey's ethical thought. In particular, it discusses the idea of the good as a link between the character virtues and practical deliberation. It will show how this idea of the good that guides practical deliberation is also an expression of one's character virtues.²

The first section of this paper discusses the unity of the virtues. The Aristotelian character virtues consist in a great variety of diverse ways of acting. It is imperative to understand how these virtues can be integrated if they are to contribute to an idea of the good. Both Dewey and Aristotle propose an aesthetic unification of the various virtues. Dewey writes, "The Greek emphasis upon *Kalokagathos*, the Aristotelian identification of virtue with the proportionate mean, are indications of an acute estimate of grace, rhythm and harmony as dominant traits of good conduct."³ In integrating a variety of aims, goals and means within situations, the virtues produce a harmonious, beautiful action. The harmonious integration of character within a virtuous act gives a depth of meaning to these acts.

Neither Aristotle nor Dewey conflate the aesthetic and the ethical, however. Aesthetic harmony is neither necessary, nor sufficient, for virtuous action. Both Aristotle and Dewey recognize that meaningful human action depends upon factors that are beyond our control. The second section of this paper examines the operation of the virtues when chance events preclude a harmoniously integrated action. In these situations, Dewey and Aristotle discuss the breadth of meaning inherent in a sympathetic regard to the goals and values of others. Their discussions of friendship, shame, justice and duty illustrate that the virtues are not always expressed in harmonious actions. Rather, discriminating passions that include a sympathetic attention to others are also appropriate expressions of a virtuous character.

The final section of this paper discusses the idea of the good in Aristotle and Dewey. This idea of the good orients and guides practical deliberation; but it is also a product of the character virtues. The characteristics of virtue discussed in the previous sections express themselves not only in actions and passions, but also in reflection and deliberation. The aesthetic harmony of the virtues finds its expression in deliberation as a wish for integration, an absent ideal of unity. Sympathy and justice are expressed in deliberation as a broadening of this ideal to include the standpoints of...
This recognition of the close connection between character virtues and the idea of the good in practical deliberation is critical for understanding the ethical thought of Aristotle and John Dewey.

A. The Unity of the Virtues

A discussion of virtue must address the question of how these diverse traits of character are unified. This question is difficult because a virtue, at first glance, encompasses a number of widely dissimilar particular habits. For example, the virtue of benevolence consists in acts as diverse as a gift to charity, time spent with friends, or a cheerful greeting. Depending upon the circumstances, any of these may be benevolent. Furthermore, the act of sending a check to a particular charity may or may not be benevolent. Depending upon a manifold of relations, this act could be one of benevolent concern for others, of smug self-satisfaction, pride, or a dramatic demonstration of one's sympathy for others, of deliberate blindness to the concrete details of the situation, of compulsion, of money laundering, etc. There are an indefinitely large number of possibilities for describing such an action, and only a small percentage of these describe virtuous action. In calling acts benevolent, we are distinguishing apparently similar acts, as well as associating apparently dissimilar ones.

Common attributes are further attenuated when subsuming different virtues under the general heading of virtue. The claim that individual acts of benevolence, courage and temperance are acts of virtue unites widely differing acts under the description of virtue. Subsuming contributions of time or money, acts of self-sacrifice in battle, and refraining from having or acting upon excessive bodily desires under the heading of virtue requires justification. In order to claim non-vacuously that these ways of acting are all virtues, there must be an element of unity to these divergent activities, just as claims that a diverse group of activities are benevolent must have some content in order to justify their association. The purpose of this section is to determine in what this unity of the virtues consists.

We must carefully delineate the type of unity that we are seeking. In paragraph three of Dewey's "Theory of the Moral Life," he argues that any act, however discontinuous it appears, is actually part of a series. He writes: "The idea of conduct as a serial whole solves the problem of morally indifferent acts. Every act has potential moral significance, because it is, through its consequences, part of a larger whole of behavior." Because human beings are habitual creatures, all conduct is continuous with our past and future. This abstract level of unity entails that voluntary actions originate from a recognizable self. "Our actions not only lead up to other actions which follow as their effects but they also leave an enduring impress on the one who performs them, strengthening and weakening permanent tendencies to act." The unity of the habitual self unifies the character and conduct of every sane individual, making us responsible for our actions. In ascribing responsibility to the person performing the actions, Aristotle and Dewey ascribe a degree of unity to that person that is distinguishable from the further unity inherent in a virtuous character. Human beings are unified because our habits are continuous; the virtues further unify the character of an individual by making widely differing particular actions qualitatively good.

It is helpful to dissociate Aristotle's account of this unity of the virtues from Plato's account of such a unity. In many of Plato's dialogues, Socrates associates a particular virtue with knowledge. At the conclusion of the Protagoras, for example, Socrates speaks for the argument itself personified: "If
v Competence were something other than knowledge, as Protagoras tried to prove, obviously it could not be taught. But if it turns out to be, as a single whole, knowledge (which is what you are urging, Socrates), then it will be most surprising if it cannot be taught. 7 Socrates does not describe the type of knowledge that he associates with virtue. But, this association of virtue and knowledge is important because of the unity that knowledge brings to a subject matter. Knowledge unifies by abstracting from particular circumstances in order to make complex discriminations. In the Laches, for example, Plato's Socrates directs the conversation to the conclusion that the virtue of courage must include a cognitive discriminatory ability that distinguishes rash acts from courageous ones. 8 Widely differing particular acts share similar abstract relations; the unity of the virtues consists in these abstract knowledge relations. It is hard to resist the conclusion that Plato considers some kind of discriminatory knowledge to be the truest expression of virtue, and alone sufficient for virtuous action. In Plato's Republic, the metaphor of the idea of the good expresses both the unity of all good things, and the cognitive nature of this unity.

In one of the more difficult passages in the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle denies that such an idea of the good can exist separately (choristos) and unify the diverse group of things termed good. 9 Aristotle further denies that there may be a common (koinon) meaning applicable to various good things. 10 Rather, he asserts that these diverse senses of the term good are mere analogues. 11 In limiting this idea of the good to analogy, he recognizes that there cannot be a unified science of all good things, from sunsets to courageous acts, from reproduction to art. Hans-Georg Gadamer observes in The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy that restricting his Ethics to a discussion of the human, practical good enables Aristotle to unify this more limited, human good. Gadamer writes: "Being able to give justification, being responsible for what one does, is essential to the ethical disposition, and that implies that the whole of one's ethical consciousness and ethical being are at stake here." 12 The virtues unify the character of a concrete individual. Despite the fact that Aristotle often expresses this unification in terms of the orthos logos, or right rule, this delimiting rule is invariably found within the character of a prudent individual. 13 The dependence of this unification upon a concrete character implies that the unity of the virtues may not be separated or abstracted from the concrete expressions of virtue.

In his discussion of each particular virtue, Aristotle emphasizes the concrete aesthetic unity exhibited in a particular moral act. For example, in his discussion of the virtue of courage, concerned with the particular actions and passions involved in risking one's life in battle, 14 he repeatedly qualifies courageous acts as 'kalon,' writing, "[Courage] chooses or endures things because it is noble to do so, or because it is base not to do so." 15 Kalon may be translated either as 'noble' or 'beautiful', but both involve an aesthetic element. Gauthier and Jolif argue that it is precisely in courageous acts being kalon in themselves that unifies a diversity of particular acts: "Voilà le dernier mot d'Aristote sur le courage: il nous avait bien dit qu'être courageux, c'est savoir mourir en beauté." 16 Aristotle's aesthetic justification of these particular virtues, that they are intrinsically good because they are beautiful or noble, entails that these virtues are not unified in an abstract cognitive principle, but rather that cognition helps to foster such an aesthetic unity. The complex concrete elements of the situation are made beautiful in an act that balances these elements, that finds appropriate expression for each. For Plato, the knowledge is itself beautiful; for Aristotle it is the courageous death that is beautiful. Aristotle distinguishes his unification from that of Plato's Socrates by claiming that the virtues are not instances of knowledge, but involve
knowledge.\textsuperscript{17}

Aristotle addresses the dependence of this harmony upon particular circumstances in his discussion of the virtue of magnificence (\textit{megaloprepia}). This virtue is concerned with providing the city with appropriate public benefactions, not only proportionate to the wealth and status of the giver, but also appropriate for the occasion. The magnificent man is concerned primarily with the beauty of the city in which he resides. He spends on votive offerings, religious buildings and public sacrifices. Great expenditures are necessary not for their own sake, but because acts that beautify the city are not cheap. Aristotle further claims that the magnificent person will make his house more beautiful, spending money on permanent objects, for these are the most beautiful (\textit{kallista gar tauta}).\textsuperscript{18}

Aristotle explicitly links the beauty of the act to the appropriateness of the situation when he writes that a fine ball or bottle is a magnificent gift for a child.\textsuperscript{19} A magnificent individual discriminates gifts appropriate for the circumstances. By contrast, the vulgar man spends in a disharmonious and ugly manner: "On small objects of expenditure he spends much and displays a tasteless showiness."	extsuperscript{20} An appropriate expenditure balances many factors, including one's own wealth, the status of the recipient and the purpose of the gift, in order to produce a beautiful act.

Aristotle associates the beauty of noble acts with the end of such action as well as with the rightness of the act. Gauthier and Jolif write, "L'élément essentiel de la définition du courage... c'est que le courageux agit 'pour la fin pour laquelle il doit agir'. Aristote entprend maintenant de prouver que cette fin, c'est la beauté même de l'acte de courage."\textsuperscript{21} A particular act is courageous if it unifies the various concrete conditions of a battle, the appropriate strength of individuals, the weaknesses of the particular armies, etc. If the act harmonizes all these elements, it is a beautiful act. The harmonizing beauty of the act of courage is its own end. In the same way, Aristotle associates the rightness of the act with this beauty. Aristotle writes about liberality that "virtuous actions are noble and done for the sake of the noble. Therefore the liberal man will give for the sake of the noble, and rightly; for he will give to the right people, the right amounts, and at the right time, with all the other qualifications that accompany right giving."\textsuperscript{22} In this passage, Aristotle explicitly correlates the harmonious nature of the temperate act with the rightness of the act.\textsuperscript{23} A virtuous act is the right thing to do primarily because it harmonizes the concrete elements of a situation. It is beautiful because it harmonizes the right elements. And the end of the act is this particular harmony itself. Aristotle associates the aesthetic harmony of virtuous action to the fulfillment and rectitude of these virtuous acts.

Such an aesthetic unity includes the ability to harmonize the expression of other virtues in a particular act of courage. Among the constraints upon courageous action, Aristotle includes not only physical and social conditions, but also more particularly, conditions imposed by other virtues. A beautiful death cannot be one that denies expression to other good habits. Aristotle argues that the most noble and beautiful exemplars of courage possess the other virtues: "The more he is possessed of virtue in its entirety and the happier he is, the more he will be pained at the thought of death; for life is best worth living for such a man, and he is knowingly losing the greatest goods, and this is painful."\textsuperscript{24} Courage at its best is harmonized with other virtues because the courageous individual must be willing to sacrifice what is best, a virtuous life, in order to achieve the rightness and fulfillment of an aesthetically consummatory act.
Aristotle often associates particular virtues with one another. For example, liberality and magnificence have the same objects, and differ with respect to degree of the noble action. He explicitly calls megalopsuchia the crown of the virtues, implying that in possessing this virtue, one possesses all others. In discussing temperance, Aristotle writes: "The things that, being pleasant, make for health or for good condition, he will desire moderately and as he should, and also other pleasant things if they are not hindrances to these ends, or contrary to what is noble, or beyond his means." Here, Aristotle limits the proper desires inherent in the virtue of temperance not only to general circumstances, but he also limits the corresponding temperate actions by considering the ability of a person to acquire the desired objects, the noble aspects of these objects, the health that these objects can produce, and other possible ends that these objects promote. While denying that the virtues may be unified in a kind of knowledge, Aristotle emphasizes that there are mutually limiting factors in the expression of each virtue; they impose limiting conditions on one another. The aesthetic element of unity that virtuous acts express implicates one's entire character, and therefore the other virtues. This aesthetic, as opposed to cognitive, unity of the virtues may be expressed by the phrase that they are a matter of good taste.

In his discussion of virtue in general, Aristotle elaborates upon the nature of this aesthetic unification, the good taste of virtuous acts. His claim that the mean is relative to us entails that the circumstances of the situation and habits of a particular individual are crucial elements of this harmony. He rules out actions that are expressions of a single interest or impulse as being extremes of action. The danger of limiting virtue to a harmonious mean is that the competing and mutually limiting habits may be compromised, resulting in a mediocre act. This is why Aristotle adds that in such an aesthetic unification the mean is also an extreme. Instead of mutually limiting each other, virtuous habits resonate with each other to form an extreme of good action, a unified activity.

It is thus, then, that every art does its work well--by looking to the intermediate and judging its works by this standard (so that we often say of good works of art that it is not possible either to take away or to add anything, implying that excess and defect destroy the goodness of works of art, while the mean preserves it; and good artists, as we say, look to this in their work).

A harmonized character does not produce mediocre acts because the virtues are not mutually limiting. Rather because they are expressive of a variety of harmonizable elements, they are mutually productive of a beautiful act. The formed act harmonizes the concrete elements of a situation. While it is possible to speak of the form of such a virtuous action, only the concrete act may fully embody the harmony, just as only the concrete work of art expresses the extremes of beauty. The virtues are extremes of artful tailoring of action that integrate competing tendencies within a concrete situation.

In claiming that each virtuous act, like each work of art, looks to a standard of beauty, Aristotle recognizes that the virtues are sensitive to the appreciations and ends within a situation. Any abstract standard of beauty, however, abridges the concrete elements that comprise the harmony of the situation. The beauty and harmony of virtuous acts must be expressed concretely. The more elements in a situation that we are able to incorporate into our acts, the more complex an aesthetic harmony we are able to embody. Similarly, the more complex and discriminatory the habits we
have developed, the more we can tailor an act to a particular situation. We will return to the topic of sensitivity and discrimination in looking to the standard of beauty in our final section. It is important to emphasize that the complex virtues, as concrete dispositions, themselves possess a degree of sensitivity and discrimination that are often sufficient to produce an artfully tailored act.  

John Dewey also emphasizes the unity inherent in an individual's character. He writes in *Human Nature and Conduct*: "Were it not for the continued operation of all habits in every act, no such thing as character could exist. There would be simply a bundle, an untied bundle at that, of isolated acts. Character is the interpenetration of habits." This interpenetration reaches down to unify even the most trivial or mechanical of activities. "Any act, even that one which passes ordinarily as trivial, may entail such consequences for habit and character as upon occasion to require judgment from the standpoint of the whole body of conduct." Nevertheless, these illustrations of a harmonious unification of character are not limited to the virtues; base and vicious acts may also interpenetrate to form the entire body of conduct and character that express the fundamental nature of an individual.

In the *Ethics*, Dewey's account of the virtues suggests that they are able to unify situations to a greater extent than can the vicious traits of character. He acknowledges the temptation to cultivate individual virtues, such as courage, in isolation from others. Indeed, the virtue of courage is often placed in the service of vicious ends. He argues that these separately cultivated virtues are narrow and disharmonious. Temperance, in isolation from other virtues is a "sour constraint," but within a unity of virtues can become "a positive harmony characteristic of integrated interest." Dewey considers the collective harmonization of the virtues to provide the most likely preconditions for such a harmonious and integrated interest. His claim that temperate acts in the service of vicious ends fail to harmonize the situation is an empirical claim that nonetheless rings true. Denial of immediate pleasures is often necessary to achieve further ends. If the further ends are not integrated into the character of the individual, however, we often become resentful at the arbitrary and limiting nature of this asceticism.

Aristotle argues that temperance should be directed not at the repression of all acts of pleasure. Rather, temperance restrains the pleasures of the body, which lead us astray because their brute particularity and plurality resists harmonization. Aristotle writes: "The contact characteristic of the self-indulgent man does not affect the whole body but only certain parts." It is an empirical matter that pleasures of the body are often singular and resistant to integration in a harmonious character. Such pleasures even tend to disintegrate such a character. The virtue of temperance requires harmonization of such bodily pleasures within a meaningful act. Food and sex are not to be denied to an individual, but integrated into wider, harmonious actions. Food and drink should be elements in expressions of friendship and philosophy. Sex should be integrated into loving relations. While the pleasures of the body often resist integration into a harmonious character because we can satisfy them individually, temperance assures their proper harmonization.

Neither Aristotle nor Dewey means to imply that vicious or base acts are to be judged by the subjective feelings of those involved. Rather, they intend to show that vicious and base acts tend to be partial and narrow, expressive of a particular interest rather than a harmonious, broad interest. This empirical claim has some evidence to support it. Throughout Dewey's discussion of virtue, there are references to such harmony inherent in the virtues. For example, in discussing courage he
points out that "single-mindedness of purpose would be narrow were it not united to breadth and impartiality of interest." Courage severed from broader considerations of justice may be a vice because of the disharmony it fosters in one's actions. Dewey's empirical claims, however, do not hold true for every act. There exist obviously vicious acts that are sublime in their unification of various situational elements, perfectly planned crimes or harmoniously unified campaigns of genocide. Dewey might acknowledge this, but also claim that virtuous habits tend to harmonize situations to a greater extent than do base and vicious acts. Possible counterexamples to this general principle only demonstrate that harmony and unity cannot be the sole judge of the goodness of acts; aesthetic harmony itself does not entail goodness.

Aristotle and Dewey share a concrete, aesthetic understanding of the unity of action that the virtues tend to promote. The unity of the virtues consists in their harmonizing the various habits and events operating within a situation. Gadamer writes: "What Aristotle rejects as such in Plato's philosophy is not the structured order of the whole but the derivation of that structural order from the hen (one) and the ontological primacy that Plato gives to mathematics as a consequence." The world is not harmonious because rational, rather our cognitive faculties in concert with our habits allow us to make the world more concretely harmonious. This aesthetic harmony also entails that such actions are extremes of beauty; they are properly termed virtues. As such, these concrete harmonies are the desired ends of action, making these acts right in themselves. Because there exist certain stabilities within our social and natural environments, specific virtuous habits tend to achieve this harmonious action. But this discussion has also indicated that harmonious unification is neither necessary nor sufficient for good action. Integration may also be a characteristic of vicious acts, and there may be situations in which no aesthetically harmonizing act is possible. This discussion of the unity of the virtues suffers from the problems of all formalist approaches. The next section addresses these deficiencies. In so doing, it expands the concept of virtue to include ways of being properly affected.

**B. Precariousness, Disharmony and the Content of the Virtues**

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle recognizes that such a formal, aesthetic, act-based approach to ethics cannot be complete. He acknowledges that even a life spent entirely in virtuous activity does not assure it being harmonious or happy. The Greek tragedians illustrate a related point that Aristotle himself acknowledges: namely, that there are virtuous actions that do not harmonize the various elements in a situation. In defining virtue as a harmonious action, we have developed a model of virtue that is blind to the precariousness of human action. In providing content to these virtues, we will address certain elements of virtue that are less subject to external fortune. The fact that virtue describes ways of being properly affected as well as tendencies to act well suggests that the virtues include elements of content that may be more resistant to the vagaries of fortune. Virtue does not consist solely in harmonious activity, but also in the exhibition of the proper passions and in sensitivity to acts that intend harmonies, even if these acts do not produce a unified situation.

Aristotle considers precariousness to be a double-edged sword. Meaningful human action requires a world that is changeable; but many situations are so precarious that human action cannot achieve its purposes. In Book 1 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle argues that human happiness cannot be a product of chance because "to entrust to chance what is greatest and most noble would be a
very defective arrangement." The elements of human action that are subject to chance are not part of \textit{eudaimonia}, but are auxiliary to it. Nevertheless, Aristotle's discussion of the misfortunes of Priam illustrates that chance events can destroy the \textit{eudaimonia} of a virtuous individual. Aristotle concludes that while a man such as Priam cannot be happy, he is not miserable either because he "bears all the chances of life becomingly and always makes the best of circumstances." There are elements of nobility within virtue that remain even when circumstances preclude the harmonizations that the virtues can engender. Aristotle concludes that virtuous acts contain elements that are somewhat resistant to chance, but also that circumstances may preclude these acts from being harmonious.

One of Aristotle's favorite tragedies, \textit{Oedipus Rex}, provides an example of a noble act that fails to harmonize the situation. The play concludes in Oedipus's act of blinding himself. His self-mutilation demonstrates that he takes full responsibility for his acts despite the fact that they were committed in ignorance. This act reflects Oedipus's recognition of his own stubborn blindness earlier in the play. It is an act of homage to blind Teiresias, who saw the ramifications of Oedipus's stubbornness more clearly than Oedipus himself could. Most importantly, it is an act of shame; he is unwilling to again look upon either the living or the dead. Jonathan Lear in his article "Katharsis" writes: "Even when they are responsible for their misfortunes, humans remain capable of conducting themselves with dignity and nobility. Even in his humiliation and shame, Oedipus inspires our awe and admiration." While his self-blinding acknowledges his shame, his action is neither beautiful nor harmonious. There are many more mundane examples of individuals who virtuously muddle through difficult situations, exhibiting a degree of virtue that in no way can be said to harmonize the various elements of the situation.

In situations like that of Priam or Oedipus where transformations of terrible proportions occur, the virtuous individual can muddle through because virtue includes finely discriminated passions. As viewers, we recognize a degree of nobility in these acts; we are sensitive to their virtue despite their failure to achieve a proper external harmonization. For example, Priam's begging Achilles to gain the return of his son's body is a poignant example of how one acts nobly even in the worst of circumstances. Priam overcomes feelings of shame, hatred, and despair because it is the only option available to him that enables his son to receive a proper burial. We share a sense of the nobility of this act, even if it falls short of a full objective harmonization. Because we discern that these acts reflect the virtues that Priam possesses, we can see his act as fitting and noble, without thereby seeing it as a beautiful harmonization. It is precisely this nobility that persuades Achilles to return the body of Hector. Sensitivity and discrimination run ahead of objective actions and harmonizations; we sense the nobility of acts even as they lack objective harmony.

Most important, expression of discernment and sensitivity are sometimes virtuous in themselves without yielding any action at all. We sense Priam's nobility because he limits his terrible grief to achieve his ends; his passions are appropriately restrained for the exigencies of the situation. \textit{Oedipus at Colonus} depicts the discerning passion of Oedipus as the central action of the play. Oedipus now possesses a discrimination of his passions that was not possible for him when he was king. He views his acts as committed in ignorance, and therefore not entirely his responsibility: "Those that I killed would have killed me. So in law I am innocent and came to all this in ignorance." Nevertheless, he also considers himself a shameful and wretched creature because of
what he did. Oedipus exhibits the virtue of discriminating passions; he has a proper attitude toward what he did and underwent long ago. Appropriate passions are often coordinated with virtuous acts; but they are properly understood as elements of virtue in their own right, and so properly felt for their own sake. Sometimes external circumstances limit the proper expression of virtue to a discerning passion.

The expression of virtue is more than acting harmoniously, and Dewey's discussion in the *Ethics* recognizes the limitations of this harmonious activity model. Independent of the harmonies involved, Dewey considers expressions of discriminating sympathy and duty to be expressions of virtue. We shall see that Aristotle also considers sympathy and duty to be common elements in various virtues. Feelings of sympathy and duty are appropriate in themselves, in addition to their tendency to yield acts of virtue. These elements of the virtues refer beyond particular objective harmonies to provide discrimination in passions throughout an entire life. This discrimination is always expressed concretely, so we must be aware of the possible distortions that any abstract discussion of sympathy and duty might include. A careful elucidation of proper expressions of sympathy and duty common to various virtues adds a complexity and concrete content to the virtues that is independent of their expression in a harmonious action.

1. **Sympathy:** Sympathy immediately orients perceptions and actions with respect to the pains and pleasures of others.

   Because of sympathy we praise acts which assist others even when our own fortunes are not involved; we are moved sympathetically to indignation by willful infliction of suffering on third parties. Sympathy instinctively transports us to their position, and we share their glow of liking and their fire of resentment as if we were personally concerned.\[47\]

   This discriminating orientation enables us to discern immediately elements of suffering and benefit to others, independently of any reflective idea of good, duty, or right. Dewey writes that we exhibit sympathy "without conscious reflection, without reference to the ideas of either a Good end which is to be attained or of a Duty which is authoritative."\[48\] An immediate discriminating response to a situation includes passions that are shared with others in the situation. Sympathy also enables us to discriminate and feel passions that are not idiosyncratic to our own habitual constitution. For example, we may recognize that others do not share the same disproportionate fear of heights that we have. We can exhibit an appropriate degree of sympathetic apprehension on these occasions. We can view situations in terms of the habits and goals of other people. Sympathy enables us to view a situation from a standpoint other than our own, often idiosyncratic, emotional responses.

   Sympathy also provides an emotional recognition of another individual. "Emotional reactions form the chief materials of our knowledge of ourselves and of others."\[49\] Original sympathetic emotional responses divide the objects in the world into those that deserve consideration as other people, and those that do not. Discerning sympathy ensures that we identify emotionally with others, that we consider them as deserving of respect. Each virtue that is directed toward others includes an element of sympathy. For example, the virtue of generosity, liberality or magnificence, all addressed to appropriate giving, include sympathy. "A person of narrow sympathy is of necessity a person of confined outlook upon the scene of human good. The only truly general thought is the generous
The virtue of generosity includes sympathy because this discriminating passion immediately orients acts of giving with respect to the appropriate feelings of others. While sympathy and generosity do not always extend beyond intimate relations, they always orient acts and passions from the standpoint of an other. Sympathy, then, 1) provides an immediate emotional recognition to other people as deserving certain consideration, and 2) discerns and feels the appropriate goals of others. These elements of virtue do not depend upon the objective harmonization of acts, although they may ultimately lead to greater harmonies because sympathy broadens the possible harmonizations available to us by ensuring attention to others.

2. Sympathy and Shame: Approval and disapproval of actions depend upon sympathy, because sympathy emotionally transports us to the position of another person. We immediately feel the effects of certain actions on others, and so immediately praise or blame the person committing these acts. Because of this, sympathy also enables us to feel the shame or pride of the person committing the act. This reflexivity of sympathy, felt as approbation, has a regulative effect on our own behavior. Together with a sympathetic discernment of the feelings of others, this reflexivity enables us to distinguish praise from praiseworthiness, shame and shameworthiness. We can immediately feel shame and pride at our own actions based upon a fine discrimination of the appropriate effects of our acts upon others. A proper feeling of shame, Dewey argues, does not merely internalize the standards of the group, but also subjects even these standards to the scrutiny of reflection. Without reflection these feelings of pride and shame remain merely negative, directing us to refrain from shameful acts, rather than encouraging praiseworthy ones.

Aristotle considers shame to be an emotional response to a situation that is only appropriate for those who are in the process of acquiring the virtues. A feeling of shame, fostered by a sympathetic response to others, discriminates the appropriate responses of others to a particular act. In full virtue, this appreciation of others is incorporated within the virtues themselves, discriminating appropriate actions as a part of virtuous activity. The very young possess no shame because they have not yet acquired the habits that allow them to discriminate virtuous and vicious actions with respect to other people. The virtuous do not feel shame because they do not act in a base way. But shame is crucial for acquiring the virtues because the young "live by feelings and therefore commit many errors, but are restrained by shame." Our initial emotional responses to other people, developed in interactions with them, soon include a discriminating feeling of shame that becomes incorporated into the virtues. The feeling of shame is a precursor to virtue, but this discriminating sympathy remains, ensuring that virtuous acts properly consider the standpoint of others.

While Aristotle does not recognize anything like an impartial spectator, he does claim in the Rhetoric that "it is necessary for a man to be ashamed of those evils that seem shameful either to him or to those whose opinion matters to him." Acquiring the virtues requires sympathetic identification with individuals whom we respect. In his claim that one's parents are most suited to begin one's moral education, Aristotle recognizes the internalization of the virtues originates in emotional responses to other individuals. Throughout the process of acquiring virtue, virtuous people with whom we sympathize provide more discrimination in our feelings of shame and pride and help us to acquire the virtues themselves. Shame begins the process of incorporating into our immediate habits the discrimination of the attitudes and perceptions of a respected individual. While shame is not a virtue, and thus cannot be part of the harmonization of ends that a virtuous action constructs, it enables individuals to acquire a level of discrimination to virtuous action. We act...
3. Sympathy and Friendship: Friendship, and the discriminating sympathy that it involves, is a necessary component of virtue. Lynda Myers has illustrated the effect that friendship and sympathy have upon choice in her dissertation, "Aristotle and the Role of Friendship in Choice." "While both philia and the virtues are concerned in the establishment of the end of action, the moral virtues establish the hou heneka in the sense of the end that is to be achieved, philia establishes the end in the sense of the one to be benefited." Aristotle recognizes that the virtues cannot merely be harmonized actions, but must be appropriate for the persons involved. Friendship completes virtue because in order to act virtuously, we must act with respect to the right person. Myers adds: "A man must have the proper disposition (hexis) toward his web of friendships as a complex whole if he is to make consistently appropriate choices involving his friends." Friendship is a unique disposition because a friend views the situation not solely in terms of objective harmonization, but also in terms of the appropriate passions of others.

Friendship, like sympathy, introduces an element of otherness into the self. Because the friend is another self, our permanent dispositions include habits that are constitutive of our friend.

If as the virtuous man is to himself, he is to his friend also (for his friend is another self):--if all this be true, as his own being is desirable for each man, so, or almost so, is that of his friend. Now his being was seen to be desirable because he perceived his own goodness, and such perception is pleasant in itself. He needs, therefore, to be conscious of the existence of his friend as well, and this will be realized in their living together and sharing in discussion and thought.

Conversing and communicating enable a friend to share his consciousness of his existence. In incorporating these discriminations into one's own soul, the friend's habits and desires become part of oneself. This is precisely what Dewey terms sympathy, where the desires and emotions of another are felt as though they were one's own.

Arthur Madigan, in "EN IX 8: Beyond Egoism and Altruism?" concludes from this passage that Aristotle's notion of the self is complex and somewhat obscure. "The complexity and obscurity of the self, even of the nous, indicate a dimension of otherness within the self. The notion of kalon suggests that the supreme good or interest is somehow jointly constituted by self and the other or others." Friendship is important because we ourselves become part of another person. If one's habits and virtues constitute the fundamental parts of one's character, and in interaction with another person we acquire their habitual sensitivity and discrimination, then we have acquired elements that are most distinctive about that person. Aristotle considers kinship to be a paradigm of friendship. This means that raising a child, sharing elements of our habitual discriminations and passions, involve sharing some of ourselves. Through friendship we achieve a degree of immortality in that some of our habitual discriminations survive our death.

Aristotle also incorporates friendship and sympathy within particular virtues. The virtue of liberality involves a discriminating respect for the other person. In order to give appropriately, one must discriminate precisely what would benefit the other. Liberal action, however, also fosters love and
friendship for the giver; "The liberal are almost the most loved of all virtuous characters, since they are useful and this depends on their giving."63 The close interconnections of the virtues, sympathy and friendship illustrate the importance of a discriminating emotional response to others as part of harmonious action. But appropriately felt sympathies, shared grief and sadness may also be virtuous responses in themselves.

Both Dewey and Aristotle recognize that friendship and sympathetic dispositions are insufficient for acting virtuously because they are often expressions of partiality. Aristotle writes: "It is found difficult, too, to rejoice and to grieve in an intimate way with many people."64 Further, unreflective sympathy often only discerns blatant cases of harm or benefit. Dewey writes: "Unreflective admiration and disesteem are superficial. They take account of striking, conspicuous cases of help and injury, but not those of a more delicate and subtle sort; they take notice of consequences in the way of assistance and harm which show themselves in a short time, but not those which emerge later, even though the latter are in truth the more important."65 It is also the case, Dewey argues, that certain institutional harms that have become habitual escape our sympathy because they are taken for granted. Immediate passions of sympathy often do not adequately reflect the relevant elements of a situation. We often empathize unreflectively with those who are close to us in space and time or with those who are blatantly harmed or helped. Deliberation and reflection are necessary to broaden these initially partial sympathies.

In the absence of conditions that might promote a beautifully harmonized act, one may still feel the proper emotions because one has acquired a discerning eye to view situations in terms of the proper pains and pleasures of others. Sympathy is an element in harmonious acts of virtue, but it also enables us to view situations from the standpoint of another. In providing an emotional sense of what others are experiencing, sympathy or friendship allows us to express appropriate passions in these situations. In Priam's concern for providing an appropriate burial for his son's body, we sense his love for his son; his sympathy is a fundamental aspect of his virtue independent of the objective harmonizations achieved. In friendship, we acquire the habits of others, and sympathize with them because our habitual sensitivities and discernments are shared. Habits of sympathy enable us to discern the appropriate passions, and view situations from a broader standpoint than our idiosyncratic habits allow. Expressions of shared passions are often the only appropriate expressions of a virtuous disposition.

4. Right, Justice and Duty: Dewey also considers the habitual discriminations involved in a sense of duty to be distinct from the harmonization of the good that the virtues provide. In some cases, we feel that it is our duty to act in a certain manner despite the harmonizations that may result from neglecting this duty. A sense of duty originates with parental authority. "When a parent says 'this is right and therefore you should do it,' it is to be hoped that the performance of the act will actually conduce to some good. But as an idea, 'right' introduces an element which is quite outside that of the good. This element is that of exaction, demand."66 As Dewey makes clear, social institutions originally construct these habits of duty. He writes: "Right, law, duty, arise from the relations which human beings intimately sustain to one another, and that their authoritative force springs from the very nature of the relation that binds people together."67 Just as friendship institutes a sympathy for other human beings, the institutions of our political associations instill a sense of duty to others.

Despite the fact that duty has been the final appeal of certain systems of morality, Dewey argues
that its proper function is not to dispense with debate, but to expand the relations that are part of the debate. "A person with a general conception of duty will have a new attitude; he will be on the lookout for situations in which the idea applies. He will have an ideal or standard to which he must bring up particular cases." Duties are elements of habitual discrimination that "make us sensitive to the relations and claims involved in particular situations." We have such a sensitivity because of the claims of others that have become internalized in our habits. Being part of organized social structures habitualizes certain duties, and we can discriminate appropriate circumstances in which a duty, an obligation arises. A sense of duty looks ahead to the social institutions that are potentially affected by our actions. We are concerned with the fairness and appropriateness of certain actions because we ourselves have acquired habits through these social structures.

As Gauthier and Jolif have pointed out, Aristotle's ethics includes the concept of duty (deon) throughout. Aristotle often assimilates duty to the good as disclosed by phronesis. For example, in discussing the liberal man, he writes that pain is felt if he should, "Spend in a manner contrary to what is right and noble (para deon kai to kalos)." There is an obligation or imperative that is closely associated with the nobility of the action. Aristotle notes, however, that this feeling of obligation must be nurtured in the young, before a full discernment of virtue is possible. "The nurture and occupations [of the young] should be fixed by law; for they will not be painful when they have become customary." The sense of duty can be nurtured independently of, and prior to, the acquisition of the virtues. In the fully virtuous individual, the discernment of the virtues matches the sense of obligation that is fostered in the young. In this way, felt moral imperatives become closely associated with the nobility and goodness of virtue.

Aristotle does recognize that in a fully virtuous individual, there is a sense of duty to others that is not fully expressed in the particular virtues themselves. Because of this, Aristotle distinguishes the form of justice from the good inherent in virtuous actions: "The form of justice, then, is complete virtue, but not absolutely, but in relation to our neighbor." The prescriptions of law that command us to act appropriately habitualize a general sense of justice that sensitizes one to appropriate demands of others. The practice of justice, as virtue in relation to others, is much more difficult than the practice of virtue in one's own affairs. Aristotle argues here that this sense of justice, a sense of the claims and commands of others, reflected through the laws of a society, widens ethical sensitivity. We extend our virtues through appropriate regard for the entire community. Harmonized acts that are accomplished at the expense of neighbors are not fully virtuous, however much they harmonize the interests of the individual. Justice in its formal sense sensitizes the virtues to social relations. Aristotle argues that such duties "tend to produce and preserve happiness and its components for the political society." An act of courage may itself be a harmonization of the habits of an individual, but also may preserve the political state and thus also be viewed as just.

In this section we have described both the appropriate discernment of duty and right within a situation as well as the sympathies involved in friendship. These are elements of virtue that are somewhat independent of the formal harmonizations discussed in our previous section. As elements of content within the habitual virtues, they orient passions as well as actions. Ideally, sympathy and duty promote greater harmonizations because they extend the self beyond individual idiosyncrasies to considerations of friendship and political relations. But we are often unable to fashion an act that harmonizes a situation, and in these situations expressions of virtue include a sympathy for the
needs of friends, and the duties of social and political affiliations. Sometimes, emotions proper to friendship and duty are the sole expression possible for a virtue. While sympathy and duty are components of individual virtues and so must be expressed concretely, they indicate the ethical nature of action independently of the harmonizations that the virtues sometimes provide.

We must caution that we have not conducted a survey of the various individual virtues; their particular habitual discriminations are necessarily broader than any such discussion might allow. Inculcating the particular virtues is an achievement of a lifetime, if it can be made at all. Achieving a virtuous disposition requires more than simply possessing a minimal degree of discernment and sensitivity. Original unreflective commands of duty and feelings of sympathy are themselves not sufficient to act well or even to feel the appropriate passions. Full virtue includes a subtle discernment acquired through years of experience. Our final section addresses the virtues' contributions to the reflective components of conduct. The discrimination and sensitivity that are found in the virtues are relevant not only for acting and being affected well, but also for choosing and deliberating well. We now turn to a discussion of these necessary prerequisites to excellence in choice.

C. Virtue and the Idea of the Good

Virtue is not only necessary to act nobly and exhibit discerning emotions. It also plays a central role in good deliberation because it orients the reflective virtue of prudence in its search for an appropriate act. The requirements of harmonization, sympathy and justice demand a sensitivity to the good of a situation that is expressed in both action and deliberation. In their sensitivity to the appreciations and ends within a situation as a whole, the virtues orient us toward the good in action and reflection. In their discrimination of relevant elements in a situation they generate material upon which we reflectively deliberate. Habits arrange perceptions, passions and deliberations as well as actions. Complex moral conduct requires a good that is deliberated upon and chosen; this, in turn, necessitates an orientation and material for such deliberation. This orientation and material is provided by the sensitivity of the character virtues. 75

1. Aristotle The expression 'idea of the good' signifies this vague orientation provided by the virtues. But we must distinguish our terminology from that of Aristotle in criticizing the Platonic idea of the good. It is true that Aristotle claims that a Platonic ideal would be of no practical use. Such an idea of the good is "universally predicable of goods or is capable of separate and independent existence."76 An individual's habitual sensitivity is neither universally predicable nor is it separate and independent. Because virtuous habits are oriented within particular situations, this idea cannot be severed from the particular events of the situation. Because the complex virtues are originally sensitive to a number of diverse goods within a situation, we cannot predicate a determinate good of all situations. Aristotle's objections to a separate, universally predicable idea of the good are irrelevant to our discussion. Indeed, we shall provide substantial evidence that Aristotle considers the sensitivity and discrimination of the virtues to orient and guide deliberation by providing an initial sense of the good.

The controversy regarding the relation of the virtues and the cognitive aspects of moral conduct is perhaps the most heated debate in the secondary literature on Aristotle's ethics. Despite the controversy, Aristotle makes perfectly clear that the virtues contribute to deliberation. In his
definition of virtue, Aristotle claims that a virtue is not only a disposition to act and be acted upon, but also a *hexis prohairetike*, or a disposition to choose appropriately. "The origin... of choice is desire and reasoning with a view to an end," and, for this reason, choice involves not only discursively rational elements that determine the interrelations of various situational objects. Choice is also appetitive. Aristotle writes that choice is "either desiderative reason or ratiocinative desire." We are not going to address the details of deliberation, but we are only concerned to show that the appetite nature of choice entails that character habits are intimately involved in practical deliberations. The virtues provide motivational force so that practical deliberation results directly in action.

Aristotle closely associates wish (*boulesis*) with deliberation and choice: "Wish relates rather to the end, choice to the means. We wish to be healthy, but we choose the acts which will make us healthy." Aristotle argues in *On the Soul* that wish is part of the appetitive soul, but it is also the rational aspect of these appetites. Human action originates with appetites. "That then such a power in the soul as has been described, i.e. that called appetites, originates movement is clear." Because wish is a rational appetite, its source must be in the discriminating appetites of appropriately formed habits. The virtues contain discerning sensitivities that reasonably orient desire and action. But Aristotle argues that wish alone cannot achieve its object because we can wish for things that are impossible to achieve, or beyond our powers. An original wish for health must be accompanied with reflective deliberation and choice that enables us to achieve this wish. Gauthier and Jolif argue, "La décision est donc sans aucun doute pour Aristote l'œuvre de l'intellect, mais de l'intellect mis en branle par le désir de la fin." Wish orients and guides deliberation as well as action.

Aristotle explicitly associates the virtues with this discriminating eye for the good in a number of places in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. "The work of man is achieved only in accordance with practical wisdom as well as with moral virtue; for the virtue makes us aim at the right mark, and [*phronesis*] makes us take the right means." The most plausible interpretation of this passage assumes that the aiming is both an element in action as well as reflection. The sensitivity of virtue, that it orients passions and actions toward a good, enables us to deliberate with an eye to this good. In addition, such a disposition also enables us to discern objects that are relevant for this deliberation. Wish, a prerequisite for deliberation, conceptualizes the rational appetites inherent in the virtues. Some interpreters limit the aiming that Aristotle discusses here to the orienting of action, with *phronesis* directing this action by finding the appropriate means. This interpretation requires that prudence include a perception of the end that is independent of a discerning virtue. It could not fashion an appropriate mean without such direction. But there are many passages in Aristotle that associate character with this perception of the end.

In book three of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle also restricts deliberation to the discovery of means. Just after this well-known passage, Aristotle addresses the reputable belief that the appearance of things depends upon character. "The end appears to each man in a form answering to his character. We reply that if each man is somehow responsible for his state of mind, he will also be himself somehow responsible for the appearance." Admittedly, Aristotle is restating a reputable belief, and this belief is addressed to the separate question of attributing responsibility to action. Nevertheless, reputable beliefs do carry weight, and he never disputes the connection of character habits and the appearance of the end.
Aristotle subsequently argues that an individual's responsibility for the appearance of the good to him means that he originally possesses a vague perception of the good that, over time, acquires determination from his virtues of character. "Each state of character has its own ideas of the noble and the pleasant, and perhaps the good man differs from others most by seeing the truth in each class of things, being as it were the norms and measure of them." The good man is the measure of the noble and pleasant because he embodies the virtues. The embodied virtues sense the good within a situation; the virtuous individual sees the good because he is good. These passages emphasize the close connection between the appearance of the good and the discerning sensitivity of the character virtues.

Although all virtues contain a sensitivity to the good, the virtue of temperance has a unique relation to good deliberation and prudence. Aristotle's (perhaps dubious) etymology derives temperance (sophrosune) from preserving or saving (sozo) prudence (phronesis). Our earlier note that Aristotle considers the bodily passions to be elements of disharmony extends to their disintegrating effect upon prudence. "The exercise of appetite increases its innate force, and if appetites are strong and violent they even expel the power of calculation." Dewey agrees that strong particular appetites intrinsically exclude action and deliberation that could incorporate other interests. "The cue of passion... is to keep imagination dwelling upon those objects which are congenial to it, which feed it, and which by feeding it intensify its force, until it crowds out all thought of other objects." The close connection of prudence and temperance is reflected in the fact that temperance is necessary to counter the overwhelmingly disharmonious actions of particular individual passions.

A further connection between the virtues and the good is found in the harmonies that are appropriate to each. If the end of a virtue is the harmoniously virtuous act itself, then the end wished for by one's character habits is also the appropriate virtuous act for a situation. Gadamer writes, "The good appears in them as that which unifies, gives unity, that is, as the unit, or one." This unifying harmony is the end that draws desires; it is the wish for the reasonable good that the virtues discern within a situation. It orients deliberation by drawing our desires toward it; but it often orients us toward an impossible end, an end that cannot be achieved. Deliberation is thus required to find an appropriate expression of this end originally provided by the virtues. The passages that we have discussed show that Aristotle associates the discrimination and sensitivity of the virtues with a rational desire, a wish for the end that orients and begins deliberation, as well as concluding deliberation in choice.

### 2. Dewey

Dewey associates habits and practical cognition in *Human Nature and Conduct*: "Forecasts, perceptions and remembrances form a subject-matter of discriminated and identified objects. These objects represent habits turned inside out." The fact that we begin deliberation already sensing a good within a situation, and already able to discern problematic aspects of our situation, means that habits initially serve to orient these deliberations. He distinguishes moral goods from other goods based upon the degree of harmony that is involved in this projection.

The good, then, whatever else it is or is not, cannot be an aggregate but is a system, an organism, something which pervades a variety of different forms of value and which holds them together in such a way that the good cannot be realized except as these goods...
can be realized... The moral good... is the endeavor to organize all other goods and values.\textsuperscript{95}

Habitual discernment projects a moral good, a good from the standpoint of an entire character. This good encompasses other technical goods within a harmonious activity. The more comprehensive the good taken from these character habits, the more harmonized the possible final action is, but also the more indeterminate it is at the outset. In non-moral deliberation, we often begin with a determinate conception of the act to be performed, and deliberation addresses a detail of that action. At the outset of moral deliberation, the virtues are sensitive to a complex good that precludes any immediate discernment of an appropriate action, or even the assurance that there is such an action. Because the virtues include a semi-harmonized complex discernment of particular situations, the ideals projected will be vague and deliberation will necessarily be more wide ranging.

Because moral goods are ideals of harmonization of one's entire character, they possess strong motivational force. Such an idea of the good includes not only a vague objective content, but also a desire to achieve this good. Ends of habits are projected as good. "Any statement regarding the good which falls in the practical sphere at all must assume that regulative form, that imperative or at least optative form. And the moment you get that, you get a reconstruction instead of a mere passive explanation of it."\textsuperscript{96} The idea of the good is not separable from present attitudes, discernment and desires. "Mere thinking would not lead to action; thinking must be taken up into vital impulse and desire in order to have body and weight in action."\textsuperscript{97} The idea of the good consists in both the complex of ends found in deliberation as well as the attitude that the virtues foster toward this end. It has an imperative form because virtues and habits organize desires to achieve their ends. Deliberation thus results in action because this is where habits are objectively expressed.

While the idea itself, in its content, is 'merely intellectual', that factor determining what this content shall be, is not 'intellectual' at all: it is character: which may be stated, in emotional terms as the interest in the adequate reorganization of what one is doing; in volitional terms as the habit of attending to the bearing and value of acts.\textsuperscript{98}

The idea of the good implicates one's entire character. Both elements of desire and discrimination are contained within this idea of the good.

Because the good is found both in deliberations and in habitual discriminations, it cannot become entirely objectified within deliberation. It appears to us as the pre-reflective background to deliberations about discriminated objects. This appearance of the good enables deliberation to gain its bearings. In any particular situation the virtues orient deliberations vaguely and appetites reasonably.

The Good must be an ideal.. and not a natural, or given fact. Because the idea of it grows out of the failure of our experience to satisfy us, and then our projecting ourselves beyond anything we have actually got and formulating this conception of what experience must be transformed into if it is to be satisfactory.\textsuperscript{99}

The good is pre-reflective and orienting; it cannot be fully realized in action because all realized goods are partial. In determining an object for desire, we narrow this idea of the good, and it loses
its ideality. "Instead of the generic or universal coming at the end as the empiricists would have it, the universal is your starting point and is becoming more definite as the process goes on." 100 Practical cognition begins with a vague conception of harmonious unified action tailored to a particular situation that draws our desires. As a necessary precondition for practical cognition, it cannot, as a whole, enter into cognition. In guiding cognition to a determinate harmonious act, the idea of the good, as background, recedes to indeterminacy. Human beings act in the world of particulars, referring to this idea of the good. But this ideal does not directly instantiate nor determine an act within a situation.

Our previous quote from Dewey is unclear on a fundamental issue, whether the good is a satisfaction for an individual or whether it satisfies the ideal itself. We have already developed tools with which to assimilate the satisfactory nature of the good itself to the satisfaction of an individual of an appropriately formed character. Because the habits we acquire from our environment incorporate dispositions of other people and institutions within ourselves, we can view situations from the standpoint of another person. The sensitivity and discrimination of habits are not ours alone, but also consist of the habits of friends and the organization of the environment. It is the harmonization of the virtues themselves that is viewed as good. The aim is not partial to our idiosyncratic habits and desires, but a satisfaction with respect to these aspects of sympathy and justice that are social ideals contained within our character habits. In the case of the good individual, whatever satisfies the ideal also satisfies the individual. In this way, the virtues that sympathy and duty ensure that idiosyncratic, individual satisfactions alone do not determine whether a particular act is good.

Dewey notes that the most important role for sympathy is not in terms of its habitual orientation of the passions. Rather, sympathy "functions properly when used as a principle of reflection and insight, rather than of direct action. Intelligent sympathy widens and deepens concern for consequences." 101 Sympathy broadens the idea of the good to include attention to others; it ensures that deliberations are not partial and idiosyncratic. In deliberation, sympathy and justice converge. "To put ourselves in the place of another, to see things from the standpoint of his aims and values, to humble our estimate of our own pretensions to the level they assume in the eyes of an impartial observer, is the surest way to appreciate what justice demands in concrete cases." 102 Justice and sympathy initially orient the passions, but an unreflective orientation may be partial. It is in deliberation, in broadening the idea of the good to include the standpoint of others, that sympathy and justice have their most praiseworthy effects. Indeed, Dewey writes in his 1908 Ethics that "adequate thoughtfulness is possible only where there is sympathetic interest in others." 103 A sympathetic character is critical to the deliberative process in broadening the aims and ends, the idea of the good that character habits present to deliberation.

Our final concern in this section is to address why Aristotle and Dewey frame deliberation through the discernment of habit. The reason for this emphasis on habitual discernment is that it is broader and richer than explicit syllogistic or discursive reasoning. Because this discernment is a reflection of one's entire character habits, we can sense elements that are absent from a situation as well as those explicitly present. Indeed, deliberations are often framed in terms of what is not here, what might have been expected within a situation, what is lacking. A sense of the good is precisely this vague sense of what is absent. Rule-following is often considered the pinnacle of practical rationality. But if it is fully discursive and explicit, it cannot capture this element of discernment.
The idea of the good, because it is necessarily vague, orients discursive deliberations rather than being a part of them. Looking toward the good is more complex than may be delineated by a rule because this idea of the good is the result of the complex discrimination and sensitivity that constitute the virtues.

Aristotle recognizes that practical discernment cannot be exhaustively conceptualized as rule-following.

All law is universal but about some things it is not possible to make a universal statement which shall be correct.... The error is not in the law nor in the legislator but in the nature of the thing, since the matter of practical affairs is of this kind from the start.... [To correct the law is] to say what the legislator himself would have said had he been present, and would have put into his law if he had known... When the thing is indefinite the rule also is indefinite, like the leaden rule used in making the Lesbian moulding; the rule adapts itself to the shape of the stone and is not rigid, and so too the decree is adapted to the facts."104

Aristotle emphasizes that no practical matter can be exhaustively determined by, or even properly conceptualized by, rules. The indeterminacy and indefiniteness of particular things and practical actions is a recurring theme in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In a passage that opens the entire work, Aristotle argues that practical matters, by nature indeterminate, cannot expect a precise delineation.105 Because of this constraint, he relies upon the good character of his listeners to discriminate the good within his discussions. In the quoted passage, he explicitly argues that a rule itself cannot determine a good action, but rather the rule is adapted to the facts perceived by a prudent individual. The fact that the good transcends a discursive description is closely related to the breadth and power of habitual discernment. It also suggests why the skeptic cannot be converted through argument alone; the only recourse is to his shame, an appeal to his own discernment of character. These deficiencies in rule following and discursive rationality do not thereby entail that practical matters stand at the edge of an abyss of nihilism. Instead, one relies upon the complex discerning virtues that are elements of non-discursive knowledge embodied in one another's character. This sensitivity to the ends and discrimination of the relevant particulars is a necessary prerequisite to proper deliberation and choice. It is the result of experience, but more accurately, of a properly formed character. We have shown that both Dewey and Aristotle consider the virtues to provide a practical aim or end that 1) harmonizes the situation, 2) sympathetic guides and orients deliberation and action, and 3) makes fine discriminations among various actions.

**E. Conclusion**

In the ethics of Aristotle and John Dewey there is a close relationship between the character virtues and the idea of the good that orients deliberation. The idea of the good is a rich and fertile source for moral deliberation because character habits are far more discriminating than are explicit moral rules and prescriptions. An idea of the good based in the character virtues is able to discriminate relevant elements of a situation, the means of action. In being sensitive to the ideals of virtuous action, it senses the possibilities in a situation, what is absent. Character habits also give practical deliberation its imperative quality. Because the same habits shape desires and passions, deliberation concludes directly in choiceworthy action. In constituting an individual's character, the virtues
provide meaning not only to actions and passions, but also to reflection and deliberation.

A virtuous act expresses a variety of passions, discernments and means within a unified action. The richness and depth of the particular character virtues, the fact that they interpenetrate and provide meaning to mundane actions, mean that the idea of the good also possesses a depth of meaning. The interpenetration of the virtues in a beautiful action is expressed in practical deliberation as an ideal harmony, an expression of unity. This vague, harmonizing idea of the good orients deliberation as a wish. Further, the qualities of sympathy and justice, intrinsic to many virtues, ensure that these ideals are broad, that they include others. Acts that express friendship and justice, even in their failure to harmonize a situation, remain expressions of virtue. Dewey writes, "A person of narrow sympathy is of necessity a person of confined outlook upon the scene of human good. The only truly general thought is a generous thought." These characteristics of virtue enable individuals to broaden their idea of the good to consider standpoints that are foreign to the idiosyncratic habits of an individual. The aesthetic integration of the virtues ensures that our idea of the good possesses the depth of meaning of our entire character; elements of sympathy and justice ensure that this idea possesses a breadth of meaning that can orient us properly with respect to the goals and aims of others.

Dewey writes in one of his earliest ethical works that "ideals are like the stars; we steer by them, not towards them." We have shown that a rational wish, a reflection of the discriminations of virtue, is at the fringe of practical deliberation. It guides and orients deliberation rather than itself becoming part of deliberation. Its standards of duty and sympathy ensure that deliberation incorporates the standpoint of others. It reconstructs itself to changing situations, changing the actual with respect to possible harmonizations available to it. These ideals cannot become fully determinate because the world is thoroughly precarious. But, we cannot cut our ties to these ideals because they contain what is valuable in ourselves and we embody them as best we can in action. In providing a goal, the good opens deliberation to prospects that are not initially determined; the ideal draws deliberations ahead through its sensitivity to what is not present, but should be.

Gregory M. Fahey
Gannon University

Notes


2. Recent expressions of virtue ethics have disassociated the virtues from practical reason. For example, Alasdair MacIntyre, in After Virtue, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), claims that both the virtues and practical reasoning find their justification in the narrative tradition of the community. The mediation of a narrative core of texts between the virtues and practical reason is found in neither Aristotle nor Dewey.


7. Plato, Protagoras trans. W.K.C. Guthrie in Protagoras and Meno (New York: Penguin Books, 1956), 99 (361b). This *aporia* is how the dialogue closes, suggesting that Socrates thought virtue was a kind of knowledge that cannot be taught. *The Meno*, of course, arrives at similar conclusions. See Socrates' arguments at 92c-95a to the effect that virtue cannot be taught, and his earlier claims that virtue is knowledge at 87b-89a.

8. Plato, *Laches*, 192c-195a. Socrates' discussion of the knowledge involved in courage here terminates in *aporia*, which again suggests that Plato is somewhat less sanguine about the possibility of describing such knowledge.


13. In his definition of virtue at *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1107a1-2, Aristotle comments that the *horismene logo*, or delimiting principle of virtue is determined by a concrete individual, a *phronimos*.


17. This, of course, is how Aristotle conceives of the difference at *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1144b28-30.


21. Gauthier and Jolif, 227. "The essential element of the definition of courage... is that the courageous person acts 'for the end for which he must act.' Aristotle now undertakes to prove that this end is itself the beauty of the courageous action." (translation mine).


23. At 1121b13, Aristotle explicitly associates the mean (*to meson*) with the right (*to deon*).


In the *Poetics*, Aristotle compares a well-constructed plot with a living creature: "To be beautiful, a living creature, and every whole made up of parts, must not only present a certain order in its arrangement of parts, but also be of a definite magnitude." Aristotle, Poetics, trans. Ingram Bywater, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, p. 1462 (1450b34-36). In many passages throughout his corpus, Aristotle associates a harmony with appropriate action, while excess and defect destroy this proper activity. See, especially, *On the Soul*, 435b10-19 and *Physics*, 246b3-10, where he explicitly associates this harmony with excellent activity.


34. It may be the case that Aristotle's psychology precludes him from distinguishing between bodily pleasures and non-bodily pleasures. Nevertheless, he is concerned with the individuality of such pleasures, not their source.


37. Gadamer, 156.


42. In the *Poetics*, 1453b1-8, Aristotle claims that the plot of *Oedipus Rex* itself is sufficient to produce the pity and fear that is characteristic of tragedy. See S.A. White, "Aristotle's Favorite Tragedies," in *Essays on Aristotle's Poetics*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 221-240, where he argues that Aristotle's favorite tragedies depict an agent accepting responsibility for his actions, and thus exhibiting virtue in a situation that is predominantly the result of misfortune.

43. Lear, 335.


46. He claims "Do not lay bare my sufferings that are beyond shame" at *Sophocles*, 102 (576-577).

47. Dewey, *Ethics*, 238. In this section, 'sympathy' does not specifically refer to emotional responses upon viewing the suffering of others. Rather, it is used more generally to refer to the ability to discern others' habits and desires.


51. Dewey considers the most important aspect of sympathy to be its effect upon deliberation. See our discussion in the final section of this paper.

52. Dewey writes that there is a "Reflex origin of the traits regarded as virtuous and vicious. They are derived at the outset from the conceptions of merit and demerit, of deserts; and meritoriousness,
deservingness, is measured by the reactions of others." Dewey, *Ethics*, 254.


57. This is why Aristotle writes that friendship is a virtue, or involves virtue (*met' aretes*) at *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1155a4. Friendship is distinct from virtue in that it orders the rightness of the person to be benefited, but it identified with virtue in being a disposition of the soul affecting choice.

It is also true that virtue completes friendship, because true friendship necessarily involves virtue.

58. Myers, 309.


60. Madigan points to Aristotle's argument that one can see oneself in one's friend more clearly than one can see oneself haplos in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1169b33-35 to illustrate the obscurity of the self.


62. Elijah Millgram, "Aristotle on Making other Selves," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 17 (June 1987): 361-376 provides an account of the love that we feel for our friends as a result of the fact that we help to constitute who they are. This is, of course, reciprocal in many cases.


64. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1091 (1171a6).


70. Gauthier and Jolif, 570. Because Dewey discusses moral duty in Kantian terms, he initially severs the concept of duty from teleological or utilitarian concerns. Aristotle's discussion of duty, on the other hand, remains closely intertwined with the nature of the good as determined by the
individual who possesses the right rule. Gauthier and Jolif observe that there is nothing of this Kantian absolute duty in Aristotle; there is no "moral obligation of an absolute character, independent of any end." (translation mine) Gauthier and Jolif, vol 2, 573.


75. This section discusses the sensitivity of character habits to the good within a situation. Our previous section discussed the discrimination of these same virtues to the appropriate desires and needs of others. These reflect the sensitivity and discrimination of habits that are required for good deliberation and choice.


82. Gauthier and Jolif, vol 2, 205. "Decision is, without doubt, the work of the intellect for Aristotle, but intellect put to work by the desire for the end (wish) and moved by this desire." (my translation)


84. This is Gauthier's and Jolif's interpretation. They restrict virtue to the negative role of being able to carry out the prescriptions of *phronesis*.


86. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 973 (1114a33-1114b3).


91. Dewey argues that the etymology of deliberation and deliberate is also important; deliberation requires a reverberation of habitual action in order to construct a more harmonious whole.

92. Gadamer, 155.

93. The position of Gauthier and Jolif (page 552), is that virtue merely orients our practical deliberation, while it is the work of *phronesis* actually to view the good within the situation. We are not concerned to argue that virtue actually pictures the good, merely that the complex virtues provide a discerning orientation for deliberation, an initial orientation toward the good.


_______________________________________________________________

Copyright © 2002, Humboldt State University