

THE GREAT IDEAS ONLINE

Nov. '21

No 2039

Aristotle on Virtue and Happiness by Mortimer J. Adler

Published in DIALOGUE, a continuing series of notable presentations from Spring Hill Center, June, 1979.

Foreword

For the past several months, a unique project has been under way at Spring Hill Center. A series of four weekend seminars led by Mortimer Adler, the distinguished scholar and director of the Institute for Philosophical Research, has brought together a small group of Twin Cities civic leaders and their spouses to discuss issues basic to our society and to the changing world around us.

The catalyst for discussion has been an anthology, specially prepared by Dr. Adler, of the major writings of Aristotle, Plato, Locke, Jefferson, Mill, de Tocqueville and other important thinkers and statesmen. The anthology and the ensuing discussion have centered on four fundamental ideas—equality, liberty, justice and property—ideas which are indispensable to our understanding of democracy and capitalism.

Spring Hill Center is pleased to offer Mortimer Adler's presentation on Aristotelian ethics as the first publication in the *Dialogue* series. We hope that the series proves to be a useful way to highlight notable presentations from Spring Hill by outstanding leaders in the arts and sciences, humanities and public affairs.

Our intent is that the *Dialogue* series will reflect the diversity of Spring Hill Center's programming and highlight our efforts to serve as a catalyst for the clarification of issues and a source of new perspectives for planned, creative change.

June 1979 Harry P. Day, *President, Spring Hill Center*

In the twentieth century there is prevalent in our universities and among the leaders of intellectual life what I would call moral relativism and moral subjectivism. This position, technically called the theory of non-cognitive ethics, states that only questions of fact can be answered by statements that are true or false. Questions of value about what is good and bad, or right and wrong, or statements about what ought to be done or ought not to be done, are not in the sphere of knowledge. Statements answering such questions are neither true nor false. The leading proponents of this view in Oxford, Cambridge, and American universities would say that when a person makes a moral judgment, he is either merely expressing his emotions or formulating prescriptions that are only his own personal prejudices and preferences. Bertrand Russell summarized this position by saying, "Ethics is the art of recommending to others the things they should do in order to get along with one's self." In other words, science belongs in the area of our knowledge of nature, our knowledge of man even, but when one gets into the field of morals, we cannot have science or knowledge.

This is a very serious matter. It is as deep a question as the question about whether there are natural rights or only legal rights. In fact, the view that there are only legal rights and no natural rights, that things are right and wrong only because the power behind law makes it so, is very similar to the position that moral judgments are subjective matters of opinion and not objectively knowledge of right and wrong.

What lies behind non-cognitive ethics is a definition of truth that goes back as far as Plato and Aristotle. Aristotle very clearly defined truth in the fourth book of the *Metaphysics*. A man thinks truly, said Aristotle, when he thinks that that which is, is, and that that which is not, is not. A man thinks falsely if he thinks that that which is, is not, and that that which is not, is. In other words, truth simply consists in putting *is* and *is not* in the right place in one's thinking.

One can recognize this definition to be correct at once because we all know what a lie is. A lie consists in saying the opposite of what you think or believe. For example, if you are a stockbroker, and you honestly think the market is going up tomorrow and you tell somebody the market is going down, you are lying. Particularly if you are not merely misstating what you think but are intending to deceive him.

A great professor at Harvard at the beginning of the century, Josiah Royce, said that a liar is the man who willfully misplaces his ontological predicates, putting *is* where he should say *is not*, or *is not* where he should say *is*. If that is what truth is, then the contemporary philosophers who say that ethics is non-cognitive have a certain basis for saying so because a statement that contains the word *ought* cannot agree with the way things *are* or *are not*. Only descriptive propositions, or propositions that say *is* or *is not*, can be true if truth consists of agreement between *is* or *is not* with the way things *are* or *are not*. In this view, then, what can *ought* or *ought not* (or *good* and *bad*, or *right* and *wrong*) possibly agree with? If truth consists in the agreement of what the mind thinks or says to itself and the way things are, how can such statements as “You ought to seek knowledge,” “You ought not to steal” or “You ought not to kill” be true?

However, Aristotle tells us that the truth of descriptive statements is only one kind of truth. The other kind of truth belongs to normative statements or, as he would say, practical statements. (A statement that says *ought* or *ought not* is practical, i.e. normative, whereas a statement that says *is* or *is not* is theoretical, i.e. descriptive.) The criterion of the truth of a normative statement, says Aristotle, is that it agrees with “right desire.” What does he mean when he says a statement which contains *ought* or *ought not* is true or false according to whether or not it agrees with right desire? Right desire, as opposed to wrong desire, consists in desiring what you ought to desire. This almost looks circular, but pushing that idea a little further, what ought you to desire? The answer to that question must be that one ought to desire that which is good. The meaning of the word *good* is identical with the meaning of the word *desirable*. The desirable is the good and the good is the desirable. Whenever we desire anything we desire it under the aspect of its being good. We never desire anything that we deem to be bad. (I am not saying whether, in fact, it is or is not really good, but only that we deem it to be good.)

In Chapter IV of the Third Book of his *Ethics*, Aristotle makes a distinction between two kinds of desire: natural desires and acquired desires. That underlies his distinction between real and apparent goods. He says that those things which we by nature tend to seek in perfecting ourselves or fulfilling our capacities are really good. For example, he says that man by nature desires to know. If by nature man desires to know, then knowledge is really good. There are many other desires that are not “by nature”; we acquire them out of our experience and we acquire them from contact with

our fellow men. Those desires also are desires for the good; we deem them to be good *because* we desire them. In sharp contrast, we desire real goods *because* they are good. In the case of apparent goods, we deem them to be good only because we desire them.

If that is so, then what we ought to desire is inexorable. Out of that comes one true, self-evident proposition: real goods ought to be desired. To test whether this proposition is self-evident, try to assert its opposite: you ought to desire that which is really bad for you or you ought not to desire that which is really good for you. If you understand the meaning of *ought* and you understand the meaning of *really good*, then *really good* and *ought to go together* and *not really good* and *ought not to go together*.

So we have one normative proposition that is self-evidently true: real goods ought to be desired. All other normative truths are derived from it. Let me take the simplest case of a practical syllogism. Knowledge is really good for me. That is a statement of fact. How do I know this? Because I know that I need knowledge, my nature craves knowledge. I have an intellect that needs knowledge as I have a stomach that needs food. Food is really good for me. Knowledge is really good for me. Therefore, I ought to desire knowledge. That conclusion follows at once.

The truth of these *ought* propositions comes from the truth of that first proposition. I ought to desire whatever is really good for me. Knowledge is a real good, wealth is a real good, health is a real good, friendship is a real good, love is a real good, pleasure is a real good. These are real goods in terms of what I understand my nature to need. Ultimately, the factual basis of my conclusions under that general premise rests in my understanding of what appetites or tendencies are inherent in my nature.

Curiously enough, it is that single sentence of Aristotle's about normative truth consisting in conformity with right desire that leads us to understand the truth of that first normative proposition (I ought to desire whatever is really good for me) and the truth of all the conclusions that I can draw from that proposition.

This takes us back to the first book of the *Ethics* in which Aristotle enumerates a series of goods and talks about happiness. The English word *happiness* is used by us in two quite different senses: the psychological meaning and the moral, or ethical, meaning. The psychological meaning of the term is the most prevalent today. In its modern, psychological use, happiness is something you feel. What kind of summer did you have last summer? A happy sum-

mer. You are describing a summer in which your pleasures and joys and satisfactions outweighed your pains and discontents and frustrations. It could even be a summer in which you had nothing but pleasures and joys and satisfactions.

Psychological happiness is something you enjoy from moment to moment. Happiness, in the ethical sense, is not something you experience, it is not something you ever enjoy, and you never have it at any moment in your life. To be sure, a happy life should have a great many happy moments in it. The second use of the word *happy* is psychological, the first use of the word is ethical. An ethically happy life should have a lot of psychologically happy moments.

Psychological happiness is a state of mind. What it really means is that you are happy when you get what you want. Your happiness can be measured from moment to moment in terms of the current state of your wants and their satisfaction. That is purely psychological and has nothing to do with morality or ethics. Most people use the word *happiness* that way, in terms of apparent goods, or the things that they deem to be good.

Let us take the classical case of the pathological miser. All he wants, he says, is gold. Not to spend, though; he wants to see it piled on the table, and in the flickering candlelight of his dark, dank cellar he looks at the gold and touches it. That is all he wants. In order to get what he wants, he sacrifices health, he has no friends, he does not participate in the life of the community, he has allowed himself to become ignorant, and his mind has been stultified. But he has what he wants. Is he happy or not? Psychologically, he is perfectly happy. Morally, he is the most miserable creature alive. He is stunted. He is dwarfed. He has corrupted his human nature. Ethically, he is as far removed from happiness as anyone in the world can be. But he says that he is the happiest man alive. Here is the chasm between the psychological meaning of happiness and the ethical meaning of happiness.

What is the ethical meaning of happiness? Aristotle says that happiness is an end which is not a means to anything else. No one, he says, can complete the sentence "I want to be happy because" You want to be happy because you want to be happy. Any of the goods I mentioned—health, wealth, knowledge, friends—are a means to my happiness, but happiness is not a means to anything else. Even the miser, the man who has misconceived his happiness, is using the word *happiness* to name the last end, the end for which everything else is a means. If that is the case, says Aristotle, then happiness must be completely self-sufficing: it must leave

nothing to be desired. For example, if the miser wanted both gold and friends and had only gold, he would not call himself happy because he lacked something he wanted. In the psychological and the moral sense, the man who calls himself happy has nothing more to desire. All his desires are satisfied.

If happiness is the ultimate end that we seek and is not a means to anything else, and happiness leaves nothing more to be desired, says Aristotle, then happiness cannot be counted as one good among many. For if happiness were one good among many, then you could have happiness but not some other goods that you desired. If one understands what Aristotle means by happiness, one can never call it, as it has been miscalled throughout the history of Western thought, the *sumum bonum*, the highest good. Happiness is not the highest good; rather, it is the *totum bonum*, the whole of goods. The happy man is the man who has acquired, in the course of a complete lifetime, all the things that are really good for him. He has nothing left to desire.

Among all of the goods there is an order, and some are means to others. For example, wealth is really good: one needs a certain amount of external goods for subsistence. One needs health. One needs friends. One needs a good society in which to live. One needs to be a citizen and to participate in political life. One needs to be self-governing. One needs knowledge. Among these goods that constitute the parts of happiness, some are limited goods and some are unlimited goods. Wealth is not an unlimited good; you can have too much wealth. Knowledge is unlimited; you cannot have too much knowledge. Pleasure is a real good, but you can have too much pleasure. In order to pursue happiness one must moderate achieving certain goods to allow for possession of other goods. The happy man is the man who achieves in a lifetime the *totum bonum* in which all real goods are present.

Happiness is the end of life, the goal we all seek. Think of that curious meaning of the word *end*. When you and I say we are going to Venice and think of Venice as the termination of our journey, we get there and come to rest. In Christian terms, the ultimate goal is eternal salvation; when you die and go to heaven and achieve the state of the blessed in the presence of God, you have it, you enjoy it. But happiness in this life is a very peculiar thing. It is an end you never reach because it is a temporal whole. It is, therefore, not like a terminal end which is something you arrive at, enjoy, and possess at a moment in time (or forever in the case of eternal happiness).

Happiness in this life is like a performing art. When a conductor conducts a symphony, the symphony does not exist at any moment. The first movement is over, the second movement is over, the third movement is over, the fourth movement is over, and when it is all over, you do not have the symphony. You have heard it and it is now done. It was a good symphony if it was played well, but at no one moment is it a good symphony. The conductor has an ideal of the total performance which he is trying to produce at every moment and this ideal guides him in what he does. A life is exactly like a symphony. It is a temporal whole, it has parts, it is ordered. And just as the conductor must at every moment be thinking of producing that whole in time, so you and I are obligated to try to live decent lives and are, at every moment, making choices to produce a whole life.

An architect can go through the long process of building a building. When he is finished, he has the building. It is there, in space. It can be lived in and enjoyed. That goal is quite different from the goal of the conductor who conducts a symphony and never has it at any moment. The difference between the two kinds of works, spatial wholes and temporal wholes, is very important to understand. You can produce a temporal whole, but you cannot have it or enjoy it. That is why you cannot, in this life, obtain happiness at any moment. You are conducting your life to make it a good life the way the conductor of the symphony is conducting the music to make it a good performance. But when can you say it is a good performance? Only when it is finished!

You cannot call a football game *good* at the half, because it is only a half-played game. If you go out in the middle of a football game and your friend says to you, "It's a good game, isn't it?", you should say, "No, it is not a good game, but it is becoming one. If the third quarter is as good as the first two, and the fourth quarter also, it will have been a good game when it is finished."

A final illustration. The first book of Herodotus tells the story of an early Greek wise-man named Solon who was visiting the great Lydian king, Croesus, a man of untold wealth. Croesus said, "Tell me, wise-man, of all the men you know, who is the happiest?" And Solon replied, "Harmodius and Aristogiton." Croesus said, "Tell me about them." And he told them about them. Croesus then said, "Tell me about some other people who are, in your judgment, happy." Solon named some others. Finally, Croesus got very impatient and said, "But why don't you think of *me* as happy? Look at the power I have. I am king of Lydia and the wealthiest man in the world. Why don't you call me happy?" And Solon said, "You

are not dead yet.” In fact, within the next year the Persians invaded Lydia and Croesus was killed in battle. His life ended abruptly. Aristotle uses the story to make his point. One cannot ever reach the *totum bonum* in this life, one can only pursue it.

You cannot teach ethics to the young, you cannot even teach them moral philosophy. When you are young, you cannot understand this. You have to be older to understand the notion of making a whole life for yourself. Children and young people up to the age of twenty or twenty-five are thinking of today, tomorrow, and the next day. It is very hard for them to think of their actions today as somehow directed toward the construction of a whole life. It is beyond their imaginations. And yet to lead the moral life, you must have that curious kind of goal in mind as you make choices from moment to moment throughout a lifetime.

Now, says Aristotle, there are three principal means to happiness: acquiring the real goods that constitute happiness; being virtuous, or cultivating the habit of making good choices; and being blessed by good fortune. An essential element in acquiring those real goods is the habit of making choices among the things that are presented to you in order to create that temporal whole. That is what Aristotle means by the word *virtue*, the good habit of freely choosing the right means to that end.

The other factor in happiness is good fortune, and here is what is so extraordinary about Aristotle. Almost every other moralist would say that it is quite enough to be virtuous. Aristotle says no, that virtue makes a *man* good but not a *life* good. Take the case of Priam, the king of Troy: a virtuous man, a virtuous father, a virtuous husband, and a virtuous king; but he died with his city destroyed, his wife taken into slavery, and his sons killed. Was this his fault? No, bad fortune. He was a virtuous man, but, not through any fault of his own, he did not have a good life because it did not end well. Some of the goods that belong to happiness are not within our power. One can recognize when fortune is smiling and take advantage of it. Some people are slow to take advantage of the good twists of fortune and miss those opportunities. We can make good choices and yet all kinds of accidents can happen to us, no matter how virtuous we are.

Each of these two factors, virtue and fortune (good habits and good luck) are necessary for happiness, but neither one by itself is sufficient. A man with good fortune but bad habits of choice will not achieve a happy life. A man with virtue, or good habits of choice, but beset by bad fortune will not lead a happy life. This is

not only good common sense but it has a bearing on the tragic aspects of any life, even for the virtuous man, who is beset by misfortune.

Only Aristotle says that virtue is not enough. For example, other theories of happiness take the view that the purpose of organized society is to ensure the happiness of its citizens. But if virtue were enough, the state could not contribute to it. The state cannot make you virtuous. In the historic view that virtue is enough, Epictetus, the slave, is as happy as Marcus Aurelius, the emperor. But Aristotle says that a man must have some other goods that organized society can help in providing, even for the virtuous man. Take the simple case of health. You can be as virtuous as you want about watching your diet, exercising, and keeping your body clean, but if the organized society in which you live is not concerned about giving you health care and does not provide a healthy environment, your health can be ruined.

There are many other things that no individual can provide for himself that the state must provide in order to promote human happiness. But the state cannot make human beings virtuous, since virtue is a habit of good choice and the habit is formed by free choices. The state certainly can support the development of such choices, but it is never, by itself, sufficient. Only in Aristotle's theory of happiness is there any point to the state serving human welfare and promoting happiness. If virtue were enough, the state would have no function so far as happiness is concerned.

What is virtue? It is a habit of choice, says Aristotle. We are choosing all the time and we do it by habit most of the time. The number of times we are conscious of making choices is very small, but because we have habits of choice, the choices we have made become habituated. Every moment of our lives we are choosing to do this or that. The choice is virtuous, says Aristotle, if the choice is for an important real good in terms of our life's development. The virtuous man is one whose choices are always directed to that end.

The three aspects of virtue are justice, temperance, and courage. One must desire the right end and one must make judgments, or be prudent, about the right means to it. Sometimes there are wrong means, means that are ill-adapted to the end. Prudence is an intellectual virtue judging about means. Prudence is involved in all the other virtues because the means that one chooses are the end in the process of becoming.

In the last chapter of the sixth book of the *Ethics*, Aristotle says you cannot be good without being practically wise, and you cannot be practically wise without being good. He means by *wise* not philosophical wisdom but prudence—practical wisdom. For example, there are good thieves and bad thieves, clever thieves and bunglers. The question is, Is the very clever thief, the thief who knows how to steal and get away with it, a prudent thief? No, says Aristotle, he is not a prudent thief because he cannot be prudent if he is a thief. He can be a clever thief but not a prudent thief because prudence means choosing the right means to the right end, not the right means to a wrong end. Just as you cannot be a prudent thief, you cannot be a prudent coward or a prudently unjust man, or a prudent intemperate man.

If you are prudent, you must have the other virtues, and similarly, in order to be just, temperate, or courageous, you must make a prudent judgment about means. In the case of temperance and courage, says Aristotle, you must choose between indulging in certain immediate pleasures or postponing them for the sake of a long-term good. In the case of courage, you must at times be willing to undergo certain pains for the long-term good.

If I have virtue, I must be making prudent choices in terms of what is really good for my whole life and to do that I must not only have temperance and courage, I also must have justice. If I am unjust, I am not really thinking about what is good for me. When I act unjustly, it indicates that the direction of my whole life is not toward the *totum bonum*, but toward something else—toward the accumulation of wealth, as if wealth were an end, not a means, or toward the accumulation of power, as if power were a real good. If that is the case, I cannot be temperate or courageous in the full meaning of those terms. Although I appear to be injuring only others, in fact I am injuring myself as well.

Why should I be just? I should be just because being just is part of pursuing my own happiness. The pursuit of happiness is cooperative, not competitive. Happiness is the only thing that you can pursue without doing other people in because of pursuing it. If you pursue power as an end, for example, you may step on other people in the course of pursuing it. If you pursue unlimited wealth as an end, you may be tempted to step on other people in the process of doing that. But if you pursue happiness, you cannot possibly step on anybody else. In fact, you will help those within the range of your conduct to pursue happiness also. Happiness is the only completely cooperative pursuit.

Those two points—that the pursuit of happiness is cooperative and that virtue is not enough—are not only good answers to the moral question, but also provide a very important understanding of an extraordinary line in the Declaration of Independence. “We are endowed with certain inalienable rights,” Jefferson wrote. “Among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Locke enumerated the basic rights as life, liberty, and estates. Jefferson dropped the word *estates*. James Mason, in drafting Virginia’s constitution, said that among the rights are the rights to pursue and *attain* happiness. Jefferson dropped the word *attain*. *We* have a right to pursue happiness, Jefferson said, but not a right to attain it because obviously it is not within our power to attain it. He must have understood Aristotle’s meaning of happiness. In other words, Jefferson is saying in that extraordinary line that we are endowed with certain inalienable rights and, among these, are life, liberty and the right to anything else we naturally need in order to pursue happiness.

Among those things are certain goods that society can help us achieve. Jefferson says that, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men. For example, I have a natural need for knowledge. Do I have a right to knowledge? No, because no state can give me knowledge. What I do have a right to is help from the state in gaining knowledge. I have a right to schooling. I am deprived if I am deprived of schooling. Schooling is an instrumental but not indispensable means to knowledge. I could, in fact, gain knowledge without schooling, but I am helped in my pursuit of knowledge by the advantages of schooling. The state at that point is an accessory to my pursuit of happiness.

Is power over other men a real good? If we really did need power in order to pursue happiness, we would then have a natural right to it. Jefferson tells us that the state should try to secure our natural rights. But how can it secure the right of all its citizens to have power over others? That is not cooperative, but conflictful and competitive. If I have power over you, you do not have power over me. One of us has to be dissatisfied. The goods that are really good for us are the ones that all of us can possess without excluding anyone else from possessing them. Power is not that kind of good.

An understanding of that fundamental proposition in the Declaration of Independence is closely connected with Aristotle’s conception of happiness and of natural rights. Natural desires indicate what is really good for us as opposed to what is apparently good for us merely because we desire it. We have a natural right to those goods which by nature we need in order to lead a good life.

Are the only things that we should desire those which we need by nature? Is every man's happiness identical with everyone else's? The answer is no, because in the complex lives we lead, we are different individuals with different temperaments and different wants. We have the same needs but different wants. Among our wants are many innocuous things. They are innocuous because we can want and get them without interfering with the pursuit of happiness by others. The individual pursuit of happiness is the same for all in that it involves striving for the same real goods. It is different in that we have different acquired desires which are not inimical to our pursuit of happiness or injurious to others. We are proscribed from wanting that which can be achieved only by injuring others or that which prevents us from achieving the *totum bonum*.

Another way of saying this is in terms of what I call the main activities of life: sleep, work, play, leisure, idling, and rest. Sleep consists of all biologically necessary activities: eating, slumbering, washing one's self, cleaning one's self, exercising. Those activities occupy a certain amount of time and involve some of the real goods—the health and vigor of one's body. Whereas sleep is biologically necessary, work is only economically necessary. I use the word *work* in a limited sense: that which is necessary to gain the means of subsistence. In this sense, work is purely a means to an end. Subsistence-work has no justification except that it is exchanged either for money or for the commodities which are the means of subsistence. If you are not equipped with inherited wealth, then you must spend at least six or eight hours a day in sleep and six to eight hours a day in work. That leaves another eight or ten hours of free time.

The next two basic activities are playing and leisuring, or more correctly, playing and leisure-work. Playing is good because it is an activity in which we engage simply for the pleasure of doing it. It is the only activity that has no extrinsic end. When play is relaxing or when play removes the strains of tension, it is therapeutic play, it is not real play. Real play is done for its own sake.

Most people think that the only way they can fill time is sleeping, working, and playing. That is wrong. A life built upon only those three things is really an aborted life. Imagine that you had to sleep six hours a day and you did not have to work for a living. What would you do with the rest of your time? Play?

So we come to the fourth kind of activity, leisure-work. Most peo-

ple do not have wealth without toil, though some are very fortunate to earn their subsistence by doing what they want to do. They are fortunate because although they may think they are working for a living, they are really not. They are engaged in leisure-work and getting paid for it. They would continue to do exactly what they are doing if wealth were secured for them. If that is not the case, they are working, not leisuring. I earn my living by editing, writing, lecturing, and teaching. If I did not have to earn a living I would do exactly the same things. I would not change my life at all. (If people didn't pay me to lecture, I'd pay them to listen.) A good life need involve no subsistence-work. A good life must have three things: sleep, in its broadest sense; play; and leisure-work.

What is the essential character of leisure-work? Subsistence-work is for an extrinsic compensation. But leisure-work is intrinsically rewarding. It does not have to be extrinsically compensated. It is the kind of activity that produces the things which make a life good. As Aristotle says, one plays for the sake of work and works for the sake of leisure.

The two other activities of life are idling and rest. Idling is a very important element. When the motor of an automobile is turning over but the gear is not engaged, the car is going nowhere; it is idling. When I come in a room and sit down with an empty stare on my face, I am idling. I do that a certain amount of time every day because all kinds of things occur to me. I sit there and do nothing; I don't try to think but I let the motor run without going anywhere. Many creative things happen in idling.

To understand the meaning of the last activity, rest, one must refer to Genesis. On the seventh day, Genesis says, God rested. You know that God did not sleep, work, play, leisure, or idle on the seventh day. What did God do? When He rested He looked at the world and said it was good, very good. He admired it. Rest, to put it another way, is contemplation. The third commandment is to keep the Sabbath day holy as a day of rest. In orthodox Judaism, not an ounce of work is done on the Sabbath. You can't even light the stove. You can't cut a piece of bread. You must do nothing. If these things have to be done, they have to be done by a Gentile, not by a Jew. The only thing you can do on the Sabbath is pray. The day is spent in prayer, which is rest. Most of us have very little of it in our lives.

The greatest of the goods of happiness are the things we create in our leisure pursuits. All leisure activities are creative. The leisure worker learns, grows morally, intellectually, and spiritually. For

example, friendship is a creative activity. Do you think friendship is easy? No, friendship is a hard job. You cannot have a large number of good friends because you have to devote time to them, you have to devote thought to them, and you have to devote activity to them. It is a creative activity that is spiritually enriching, but it is work, leisure-work.

Sex can be sleep, play, work, or leisure. When it is performed as a biological necessity, it is sleep; when it is performed just for sexual, sensual pleasure, it is play; when, as in prostitution, it is performed to earn a living, it is work; and when it is performed as an aspect of love, it is leisure. So you cannot look at the activity and say what it is. You have to ask how it is being done and for what reason it is being done.

Augustine, in a single sentence, sums it all up by saying, “Happy is the man who has all that he desires provided that he desires nothing amiss.” In other words, he has desired what he ought to desire and not desired what he ought not to desire. The Aristotelian way of saying this is: “Happy is the man who has all that he desires virtuously.” Moral virtue is the habit of desiring nothing amiss.


The Christian view, of course, is that this life is a vale of tears and suffering, and at its best, happiness in this life is a very poor thing indeed, mixed with tragedy and grief. As creatures of God with immortal souls, our end is not in this life, but hereafter. Our end is the vision of God, if we achieve what Christians call *salvation*. For this end, ordinary moral virtue is not enough. You must have the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. How do you acquire these theological virtues? By what you do? Not at all. They are gifts of God’s grace. The doctrine of grace and salvation is very strict. You cannot earn salvation, but you can predispose yourself by what you do to be receptive to divine grace.

The pursuit of eternal happiness is quite different from the pursuit of temporal happiness. Can one and the same man aim at these two ends, one in this life and one in the next life? Is it possible to live so that one can achieve a good earthly life and also achieve eternal salvation? I do not see any conflict between those two, particularly if you have God’s grace. If you do not have God’s grace, you may achieve one but not the other.

If you think of happiness as a whole life—twenty-four hours a day, so many days a week, so many weeks a month, so many months a year and so many years to a life—it is a temporal whole,

and virtue consists in making those choices from moment to moment that will produce a whole good life, if it is attended, of course, by the accidents of good fortune. □

MORTIMER ADLER is the director of the Institute for Philosophical Research in Chicago and chairman of the board of editors of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. A renowned philosopher, educator and editor, Dr. Adler received his Ph.D. from Columbia University and later became professor of the philosophy of law at the University of Chicago. He is a leading advocate of adult and general education through study of the great writings of the Western world. He co-edited with Robert M. Hutchins the 54-volume *Great Books of the Western World, Gateway to the Great Books* and from 1961 an annual, *The Great Ideas Today*. Dr. Adler's other books include *How To Read a Book*, *A Dialectic of Morals*, *The Capitalist Manifesto* and *The Revolution in Education*. Books published from several series of his lectures at the University of Chicago include *The Conditions of Philosophy*, *The Difference of Man and the Difference It Makes* and *The Time of Our Lives*.

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THE GREAT IDEAS ONLINE

is published weekly for its members by the

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE GREAT IDEAS

Founded in 1990 by Mortimer J. Adler & Max Weismann

Elaine Weismann, Publisher and President

Roberta Friedman, Research Assistant

312-943-1076 312-280-1011 (cell)

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