

unjust because it violates others' right to the truth or their right to be treated with respect, but that it is dishonest, and dishonesty is a vice (Hursthouse 1999: 6). Similarly, what is wrong with wrongful killing is not so much that it is unjust and violates the right to life, but that it is callous and contrary to the virtue of charity.

Which character traits should be cultivated as virtues? Aristotle proposes a much larger list of virtues than did Plato and Socrates, who identified only four or five primary virtues (wisdom, courage, temperance, justice, and piety; Prior 1991: 163). Aristotle discusses a dozen virtues that do not include justice or wisdom. James Rachels (1999: 178) provides the following as Aristotle's list:

Benevolence	Industriousness
Civility	Justice
Compassion	Loyalty
Conscientiousness	Moderation
Cooperativeness	Reasonableness
Courage	Self-Confidence
Courteousness	Self-Control
Dependability	Self-Discipline
Fairness	Self-Reliance
Friendliness	Tactfulness
Generosity	Thoughtfulness
Honesty	Tolerance

Each virtue has its own special features, and some raise distinctive issues. For example, the virtue of *courage* can present troublesome cases. Consider the case of a terrorist who gives his life for a cause, such as the destruction of Israeli society, by blowing himself up with explosives and causing the death of innocent people. Is he courageous? It can be argued that the terrorist does not really possess the virtue of courage because courage in an unworthy cause is not a virtue (Rachels 1999: 179). If his motive was not to destroy another society but to fight for the right of existence of a Palestinian nation, the analysis about whether he is acting out of courage might be altered. Another example is the Nazi soldier who fights bravely but for an evil cause. It does not seem right to say that he is not courageous. An alternative explanation is that he is displaying two qualities, one that is admirable (being brave in the face of danger) and one that is not (being willing to fight for an evil regime that aims to destroy Jews). His courage is

Considering the nature of virtue, several questions arise: What is a virtue? What character traits (a disposition to act in a certain way; e.g., to tell the truth, to help those in need) constitute virtues? What do virtues consist of? Why are these qualities important for a person to have? Virtues are personal qualities or traits of character, shown through habitual actions, that make us persons of excellent character. They can include natural qualities such as intelligence or strength, learned or acquired qualities, qualities relating to temperament, religious qualities, and qualities of character (Holmes 1998: 32). The repetition of virtuous actions causes a person to develop a virtuous character, and once that character is formed, it becomes the source of that person's virtuous actions. As Aristotle wrote,

By abstaining from pleasures we become self-controlled, and once we are self-controlled we are able to abstain from pleasures. So also with courage: by becoming habituated to despise and endure terrors we become courageous, and once we have become courageous we will be able to endure terror. (Book 2, in Prior 1991: 158)

For example, in relation to the virtue of honesty, it is not enough for someone to tell the truth sometimes or only when it is to his or her advantage. An honest person, in the sense of a virtuous person, is a person who is truthful as a matter of course, regardless of the outcome. It is important that virtuous action be habitual because when practices become habitual they make up the fixed character that determines the identity of an individual (Tessitore 1996: 25). In the best-case, a person may have a natural inclination to the virtuous, but the additional training of habitually virtuous action must complement this natural disposition. This guidance is usually provided by parents and teachers and through laws.

A virtuous person will ask himself or herself: How will I be good in this situation? What would be the normal course of action? In this way, he or she encourages moral persons to demand of themselves the highest degree of excellence of which they are capable (Tessitore 1996: 46). According to virtue ethics, what is wrong with lying is not that it is

what is a good life for man. He said that it is a life of happiness. The word happiness is meant by the word *eudaimonia*. Aristotle uses it to mean "flourishing" or "well-being," and it should be understood in this way. Aristotle regards happiness as the good that all people should aim at, and he seeks to develop a more satisfactory definition of happiness (Tessitore 1996: 20). Aristotle, when we develop as we should, thrive, and flourish, and when we are in a state of growth and decay (Darwall 1998: 195). Aristotle's strengths of character that lead to flourishing and well-being, and the weaknesses of character that hinder human flourishing (Hinman 1998: 326).

to explain the meaning of the term. Aristotle's definition in his book *Nicomachean Ethics* is that happiness is "the good life, the life in accordance with perfect virtue." But he does not say just what this means, and the various interpretations of this definition have been many. The most commonly accepted interpretation is that happiness is a state of well-being, something that is achieved by living in accordance with the virtues, rather than being a goal of life. Happiness becomes a way of living, rather than a goal of life. It is a way of not being defeated by the world, a way of engaging in life's various challenges. When we make choices that promote our own happiness, we are acting in accordance with the moral choices we make. Instead, what is a morally right action? It is to be judged in contrast to the wrong action. In this sense, therefore, happiness is seen as rules that tell us how to live, and the rules or norms will separate the good from the bad.

that "flourishing" arises not from the fact that all things have a function. Aristotle gives the example of playing a game. Aristotle (Darwall 1998: 199). He considers playing as playing that intrinsically has a certain value. One plays well, one flourishes. Similarly, an object is used for a certain purpose, and it

function determines what it is that makes it perform well. Aristotle concludes from this that human beings also have a function, as does every natural thing. For example, for plants, the function is a life of nutrition and growth. What is distinctive about human beings is the way in which ethical conceptions are located in our thoughts, feelings, or actions and the ways in which we can affect our choices by performing our functions well. Therefore, a flourishing life becomes one of excellent, distinctively human activity—that is, a life of virtuous activity. Aristotle does not think that man's function is simply biological living or perception because plants and animals also live biologically and some animals perceive (Benn 1998: 162). He concludes, therefore, that man's function is that which is unique to us as human beings: "an activity of soul exhibiting excellence" (p. 162).

THE GOLDEN MEAN

Having determined that the good life is a life of happiness, Aristotle went further by proposing that people should behave in ways that will achieve happiness. From this notion developed the idea of the mean or the *golden mean*. In situations where we have to make practical decisions, we can see that there are two extremes and a mean or average between them. Our aim should be to find that mean, and this will enable us to act rightly. How do we find the mean in particular cases? Aristotle advises that "such things depend on particular facts, and the decision rests with perception" (in Holmes 1998: 43).

This suggests that you should look at all the relevant facts of the situation, including the kind of person you are, your strengths and weaknesses, and your tendencies and dispositions. The mean lies between an excess and a deficiency so that, for example, eating too much is an extreme or excess and eating too little is going to the other extreme and is a deficiency. Eating just the right amount is the mean. However, the mean is often relative and varies according to the individual, so, for example, an act of generosity for a millionaire may be quite different from that of a beggar on the street. This leads to the consequence that ethically there are different correct ways of living for different people. What may be good for one person may not be good for another, and it is impossible to tell, using reason alone, which is the correct way of living for a particular person. The correct way can be discovered only by experimentation and trial and error. Aristotle's ethics is therefore relativistic because the right thing to do in a situation may not be the same for different people (Prior 1991: 160). This explains why his ethics may not be reduced to a set of rules to be applied universally.

Therefore, Aristotle argues that the proper way to behave in an ethical or moral sense is in accordance with the mean (Hinman 1998: 333). For example, courage is the mean between cowardice and rashness; pride is the mean between vanity and humility; and generosity is the mean between extravagance and stinginess. Aristotle concludes, therefore, that to achieve happiness, a person ought to act moderately and attempt to find the mean between the two extremes (see Figure 14.1).

Figure 14.1 The Golden Mean

