Virtue ethics, Aristotle and organisational behaviour

Peter Bowden

Abstract

A number of theorists have claimed that virtue ethics provides a sound base for guiding normative ethical decisions, both individually and within an organisational context. Most claim a strong Aristotelian backing for these theories, a claim that provides virtue ethics with an implied legitimacy that goes back 2500 years.

I aim in this paper (a) to show that this legitimacy is misplaced, that in fact the heirs to Aristotle’s ethics are not today’s virtue ethicists but the writers of the many how-to-be-successful publications, and (b) to reinforce those arguments that claim that, by today’s standards, Aristotle’s ethics are not particularly virtuous.

The paper then asks (c) although virtue ethics (VE) may not have a legitimacy that goes back 2500 years, does it have value in moral decision making. It also asks (d) what might be its role in achieving eudaimonia, a fulfilling life. The answers are mixed. VE, in any of its variations, cannot guide ethical decision making, for too many of the virtues conflict. But if we draw on research that shows a positive relation between organisational success and several personal virtues, we can at least argue that these virtues do reward those for whom personal fulfillment is achieved through an organisation.

The claims for virtue ethics

The first step in this analysis is to document the claims made for virtue ethics, and that they are based on Aristotle’s thinking.

The claims are widespread. Justin Oakley and Dean Cocking in Virtue ethics and professional roles describe VE in an organisational context as ‘a plausible and distinctive alternative to utilitarian and Kantian approaches to understanding and evaluating professional roles’. They claim, in fact, the ‘superiority of virtue ethics approach to contemporary consequentialist and Kantian theories’.

Thomas Faunce in the Monash Bioethics Review argues that VE provides a moral foundation for whistleblowing in the health care industry. Faunce’s article generated considerable opposition, although, as will be seen, he had anticipated some of the weaknesses in virtue theory when applied to whistleblowing, as well as the problems of relying on VE entirely.

The Model Code of Ethics Principles for the Professional Standards Council, an agency of the NSW Attorney General’s Department, also argues for virtue as part of a wider set of rules and standards: ‘Codes of ethics should … include not only action guiding
principles but also virtues and desirable attitudes.’ These principles also evidence a concern with character, an intrinsic aspect of virtue ethics. The model code states:

Codes of Ethics are concerned with ethics … actions an individual person … ought to do, and … what kind of character an individual person ought to have.

And again

Virtues, and vices, are habits or dispositions to act … elements of a person’s character … include virtues such as courage, honesty and determination.4

Many theorists support these statements. Daniel Statman claims that VE ‘is now recognized as a serious rival to traditional moral theories, utilitarianism and deontology’.5 Gregory Trianosky makes the statement that it has come to be seen as a ‘third option’ competing with both deontology and utilitarian views.6 It has an ‘attraction’, claims Statman, which ‘is due to … a growing dissatisfaction with some central features of modern ethical theories’. Julia Annas believes that, when we are faced with an ethical decision, ‘a simple choice between consequentialist and deontological ways of thinking [is] something deeply inadequate’.7 Annas is of course correct to claim that a difficult ethical decision cannot be made as a choice between the two major competing theories. But, as shall be argued, to replace them with the ethics of virtue is a position that is difficult to support

Crisp goes even further: ‘it is hard to deny that the predominance of utilitarian and Kantian ethics is at least under threat, and possibly already over’.8 Hayden Ramsay tells us that their dominance is already over: ‘mainstream ethics a generation ago consisted … of debate concerning utilitarianism and Kantian theories, it is now … over virtue ethics’.9

The dependence of VE on an Aristotelian prescription was first raised by Elisabeth Anscombe in her 1958 essay ‘Modern moral philosophy’, in which she ‘called for the restoration of Aristotelian notions of goodness, character and virtue’.10 This well-known article has been widely endorsed. Statman describes the essay as ‘celebrated’.11 Trianosky, Alderman and Louden ascribe to it the renewed interest in the virtues.12 Rosalind Hursthouse sees it in almost the same terms.13 Crisp sees her article as ‘a return to the Aristotelian view of ethics … on a conception of human flourishing with virtue at its centre’, calling it ‘one of the most influential philosophy articles of the twentieth century’. Hursthouse in fact describes virtue ethics as neo-Aristotelianism.14 So does Ramsay.15 Oakley and Cocking state that VE is ‘eudaimonistic’, drawing ‘on the Aristotelian view’.

Annas also puts morality and Aristotle together: ‘morality might be importantly concerned with … views of [our] life, with happiness and with virtue’. This concern has resulted in ‘a growth of serious interest in [early] ethical theories, particularly that of Aristotle’.16

It is these virtues, set out in *Nichomachean ethics*, that will form the basis of this paper’s claim that Aristotle’s place as the originator of the use of the virtues for ethical
decision making is seriously overstated. The paper goes on to claim that in fact Aristotle’s ethics are only minimally concerned with virtue as we use the word today; that in fact they are more an early version of the many modern texts on achieving personal and professional success.

Aristotle’s moral virtues

This section argues that Aristotle’s Ethics is a guide for a man who wants to be noticed, to be accepted by people who ‘matter’, to influence such people. They are not particularly a guide for moral decision making.

Alasdair MacIntyre claimed that Aristotle’s ethics are little more than a list of characteristics that should be exhibited by an upper class Greek male in 350BC. He in fact describes it as the ‘code of a gentleman’, and, possibly with his tongue not entirely in his cheek, ‘very near an English gentleman’.

This claim has large elements of truth, but it is not entirely true. Aristotle’s Ethics goes further than being a guide for gentlemen. The commentator in the Penguin edition of Ethics, Jonathan Barnes, states that a precise reading of Aristotle’s text suggests that his immediate aim ‘is to make us “good men” – not morally good men but expert or successful human beings’; that ‘Aristotle shows remarkable indifference to the effect of a good man’s actions on his fellows’ and that his theory is ‘well removed from anything we might … think of as a system of morality’.

Richard Taylor takes a similar line: ‘Aristotle never asks what is morally right and morally wrong. He asks what is a good man ... what makes some men better than others? What are their virtues...? … No one has asked these questions better than Aristotle.’

Both go too far, for there are a number of moral arguments in Nichomachean ethics. This present paper, nevertheless, broadly agrees with McIntyre, Taylor and Barnes. Aristotle’s work is not a system of ethics, but, as will be argued, is a system of ‘multi-purpose’ virtues, that are largely self-serving. It will not consistently set out the directions to be taken by a morally good person.

The belief that Aristotle gives us a system of moral virtues arises in part from the more commonly used translations. Barnes makes the point that ‘success’ or ‘fulfillment’ rather than ‘happiness’ are alternate translations of eudaimonia. They are not sufficiently precise, however, and happiness, along with a fulfilling or flourishing life, is often used. The other translation issue is arête, where again the common rendition is ‘virtue’. An alternate translation, however, is ‘goodness’ or ‘excellence’, with good in the sense of accomplished or competent – eg ‘He is a good tradesman.’ William Frankena clearly states that ‘excellence’ is a better translation for arête than virtue. He argues that a number of Aristotle’s virtues are not fully ethical virtues, for ‘rarely, if ever, did [the ancient Greeks] mean by arête only the moral dispositions that we associate with the word virtue.

Aristotle’s own words reinforce the view that his objective is personal success. It is in his twelve moral virtues that we can best see the objective toward which he is working,
particularly in his choice of the two the extremes on either side of each virtue. These extremes provide the clearest measure that the full purpose of his virtues is achieving the ultimate good, *eudaimonia*, a flourishing life, not necessarily an ethical or virtuous life.

The strongest indication is in ‘truthfulness’, the excess for which is boastfulness and the deficiency is understatement or false modesty. These extremes demonstrate that truthfulness is about the portrayal of one’s self to the outside world. The virtue that Aristotle admires, that of not boasting about yourself, nor of unduly downplaying yourself, are aspects of a person’s character that we would admire in anyone who exhibits them. Aristotle’s truthfulness, however, is not about telling the truth, or even about identifying the difference between right and wrong, between good and bad, between justice and injustice.

Another ‘virtue’ that illustrates Aristotle’s purpose is ‘munificence’ or magnificence, of which the extremes are vulgarity and pettiness. The munificent man is a big spender, out to impress people, by outfitting a warship, or leading a delegation to a festival. When the munificent man behaves according to his mean, in his displays of wealth, the virtue that he must achieve is a balanced position using what Aristotle describes as taste. A degree of wealth is needed, of course, to be munificent.

Many of us will not like this munificent man, regarding him, at least as described by Aristotle, as somewhat inclined to ostentatious display, as one who does not allow ordinary people to forget that he is wealthy. The virtue is only in that the display of wealth is not vulgar, that it is tastefully done. Such values may have been acceptable to Aristotle, or upper class Greek society, for they are attributes that are still used today by those wishing to impress. Today, of course, additional characteristics of munificent people have emerged, which also give a clear indication of the self-seeking nature of this Aristotelian virtue. Attributes such as dressing well, sponsoring sports teams, visible donations to public appeals, and well furnished offices or luxury cars are now the symbols that are used. It is a field of administrative study termed impression management. It is not about ethical behaviour, for these displays are not concerned with helping decide right from wrong, or good from bad, but with promoting the image of the player, and therefore with building his or her influence. Aristotle’s virtuous people are all men, of course, for women, labourers and slaves are excluded.

Alasdair MacIntyre gives yet another example, this time using the example of ‘righteous indignation’, where the virtuous person is upset by the undeserved good fortune of others. The extremes, envy and spite, offer no virtuous middle path. This example is also a strong indication that Aristotle was preaching to those climbing a social or organisational ladder who may be jealous of others getting a quicker leg up. A virtuous person would congratulate a friend or colleague who had unexpected fortune. MacIntyre argues that, in reading the *Ethics*, the words ‘supercilious prig’ often spring to mind about Aristotle.

We may still have difficulty, although less so, with other virtues. Magnanimity, between vanity and pusillanimity, is concerned with our attitude and public approach toward others. It is certainly more virtuous than the munificent big spender, but it is not asking us to be magnanimous to the poor or disadvantaged, only that we are big hearted to everybody. It is not a mean, therefore, that appears to be particularly virtuous. The
virtue between conceited (or ambitious) and unambitious (Aristotle tells us that there is no word for this mean, but ‘balanced ambition’ is usually supplied) is another example. These are characteristics that very few people today would describe as virtuous.

Courage is also a virtue on which we will be ambivalent. For Aristotle, the noblest courage is in war, ‘where the danger is greatest and most glorious’ (1115a30). He acknowledges lower forms of courage, but it is physical courage that is his virtue. Surprisingly, a number of modern virtue ethics writers also adopt courage without question. It is an attribute worth endorsing when people risk their lives to save others, or speak out against injustice in the face of strong or violent opposition, but few would endorse courage in warfare as a virtue. It was, however, regarded in Athenian times as a necessary quality in men who wish to reach a leading position in the city.

Two of Aristotle’s virtues warrant particular scrutiny. The first is friendliness, which he places as a mean between surly and obsequious. That it is a self-benefiting virtue is clear from the way Aristotle describes it in his later discussion on friendship, an intellectual virtue to which he allots more space than any other. Friendship is based on three grounds: (i) mutual affection, (ii) usefulness, that is, a person can derive benefit from the friendship, and (iii) pleasure and enjoyment of the other’s company. The second type, using friendships for personal advantage, is the difficulty. It is somewhat akin to a work that is close to 70 years old: Dale Carnegie’s *How to win friends and influence people*. This is a book, still in print, that gives the impression that at least in part we should use our friendships to benefit ourselves.

Set apart from his virtues is justice, which Aristotle himself states as ‘the only virtue that is regarded as someone else’s good, because it secures an advantage for another person’ (1130a4). He provides two types: legal justice and fairness. He, in fact, considers justice as ‘not part of virtue, but the whole of it’ (1130a12), describing how the excesses and deficiencies of other virtues create injustice. It is clear that in justice we are examining an ethical virtue with which we will have no disagreement.

Justice warrants special attention in that it is the only virtue that Aristotle claims as unambiguously a virtue. As will be seen later, this minimalist approach to defining the necessary moral virtues is also a feature of the modern how-to-be-successful writers. It is also, however, self-serving, and Aristotle would see it that way: as beneficial to one’s self as well as to another. A person who adopts the principles of justice will influence other people’s opinion of them, and will generate positive attitudes and responses. He or she will likely earn immediate approval and perhaps gain reciprocal benefits on a later occasion. Adopting this both-way virtue could ensure that one was acting for the benefit of others, but also working to one’s own benefit.

Justice, in Aristotle’s sense of fairness, therefore, introduces this additional concept – that of a virtue that works to one’s own benefit as well as the benefit of others. Examples would include integrity, reliability, trustworthiness, civility, decency, tactfulness, as well as fairness itself. A person adopting these virtues will not only benefit others, but will generate a response that will likely bring benefits in return.
**Eudaimonia today**

The above paragraphs argue that Aristotle’s ethics are aimed at achieving a flourishing life through personal success. If this is the case, then his work is more closely related to the multitude of books that are written today on achieving success. As will be seen, today’s writing also argues, without exception, for some form of moral behaviour. They can also be divided, at least in the very broad, into Aristotle’s classification of moral and intellectual virtues.

In discussing those who tell us today how to achieve *eudaimonia*, the successful life, we can start with Mary Midgley’s approach, that of taking popular works seriously. We can use in this part of the argument, therefore, two books that will be familiar, Steven Covey’s *The seven habits of highly successful people* and Dale Carnegie’s *How to win friends and influence people*. These two approach the moral virtues end of Aristotle’s spectrum.

Covey argues for our rational selves – to be proactive, know what we want to achieve, and to put first things first. In our dealings with others, he asks us to understand first before seeking to understand, to seek solutions that win for all and to build on our relationships. His seventh habit is to work for continual improvement of these skills. Carnegie starts by stating that we should never criticise, condemn or complain. He then provides over thirty recommendations that all strengthen one’s relationships with other people.

Covey evidences a strong desire to interact honestly, openly and constructively with others. Carnegie, on the other hand, initially raises the suspicion that he is advocating manipulation, or at least sycophancy. Nevertheless, his theories have an acceptable ethical objective. If opposing parties, everywhere, set out to avoid criticism, to build empathy, even when each is striving to achieve their own ends, the world will be a less harmful place.

We could consider Covey and Carnegie, with their recipes for achieving social recognition and standing, as Aristotle’s successors. There is one major difference, though. Neither advocates any skill resembling an Aristotelian intellectual virtue required by people wanting to be successful or influential. Aristotle identified a number of intellectual virtues as necessary for *eudaimonia*. Aristotle presented eight (depending on how one counted them) intellectual virtues, ranging from scientific knowledge (episteme), to technical skill (techne), to practical common sense (phronesis).

It would be easy to support Covey and Carnegie’s belief that effective interpersonal skills are all that is necessary to flourish. We have no greater need, they are suggesting, than to relate openly and without guile with the people around us. No particular excellences are required. As Jonathan Barnes has pointed out, ‘the vast majority of happy people have no outstanding excellences’. But Aristotle was addressing people who desired to achieve recognition in the political life of the city. For that he advocated a wide set of intellectual virtues. In today’s world, people seek recognition in many social, professional, business, academic, or political fields. They need a wide set of virtues.
The intellectual virtues

There is a multitude of studies and theories set out in the literature that tell us the skills needed to be successful in all works of life. For people in organisational life they reach from Peter’s and Waterman’s *In search of excellence* to a range of self-help theories and many works on leadership and management.38

This section concentrates on the virtues that are required for success in structured organisations, not for any lack of theories on how to succeed in other forms of life, but for the reason that the success in such organisations is measurable, and a number of studies have measured this success. As will also be seen, although the theories and research results vary widely, a number of studies have indicated broadly the types of virtue that are required. These findings have implications for the theories behind virtue ethics.

Two examples will be used initially: the work of Rosabeth Moss Kanter in *The change masters* and others of her writings, along with those of John Kotter.

Kanter, Professor of Management at the Harvard Business School, identified forty seven companies with a ‘most progressive’ reputation in their industry. She then matched them with control group of companies in the same industry and compared the performance of each group over a twenty-year period.39 She found: ‘The companies with reputations for progressive human-resource practices were significantly higher in long term profitability and financial growth than their counterparts.’

These companies were participative, held respect for individuals, and had fluid boundaries and a free flow of ideas across the organisation. They were innovative, enjoyable places to work, with a high level of employee involvement.

The non-progressive companies, on the other hand, were hierarchical, compartmentalised, and operated along strict and formal lines of command. They were not committed to well-established principles of participation, employee commitment and structural flexibility.

John Kotter, with JL Heskett, came up with a supporting set of findings. In a series of studies covering more than 200 large US firms, the authors examined the relationship between corporate culture and business performance.40 Performance was measured through growth in income, return on investment and growth in stock price. Corporate culture was the extent to which a ‘strong’ or ‘weak’ set of shared values was held throughout the company.

The authors found that in ‘unhealthy’ or unadaptive cultures managers cared about themselves, were ‘self-interested’ (instead of being committed to the organisation), and behaved insularly, bureaucratically and even politically. In such an environment, a strong and arrogant culture develops, which ‘turns people off, particularly those whose personal values include an emphasis on integrity, trust, and a caring for other human beings’. Even though they admitted that adaptive value systems, in written form, sound ‘hopelessly idealistic’, or even ‘inappropriately religious’, Kotter and Heskett endorsed such a corporate culture.
The Kotter and Kanter studies give results only from large US corporations. It is a large leap to apply the results from their samples to organised groups everywhere, including the public or non-profit sectors. But the studies do suggest that an organisational culture that cares for the people within its boundaries produces some measure of *eudaimonia*, or fulfillment, both for the leaders and the led.

All Kanter and Kotter’s virtues are ethical virtues. It could be argued, however, that they are also self-regarding as well as other-regarding, for they benefit both sides of the organisational structure. They are certainly not virtues concerned solely with benefiting others. They do describe, however, intellectual virtues that require skills at working with people in organisations.

Aristotle’s justice as fairness, the only virtue he claimed as other-regarding, is not far removed from one that appears repeatedly in the organisational literature: integrity. It is not always precisely defined, but usually stated as a major virtue and sometimes the only virtue by modern writers on organisational behaviour.

Peter Drucker, for instance, in his classic *Management*, advocates personal integrity as the sole ethical requirement. He regards it as an aspect of character. In his words, it is not through an answer to the question, ‘who is right’, but through ‘what is right’ that he defines integrity. He places the emphasis on the action, not the person. His integrity is again a both-regarding virtue. Treat with integrity those with whom you deal and you will likely benefit. However, his listing of the other capabilities – the intellectual virtues that are required to rise through an organisation – are covered in many publications.

The intellectual virtues to which we should aspire are difficult to identify. We could, for instance, argue that ability with words, written or spoken, was a necessary intellectual virtue. After all, the words of Aristotle and his compatriots have had an impact for more than two thousand years. We could also adopt Kotter, and argue for a commitment to life-long learning as a virtue that brings *eudaimonia*. When we include the work of other theorists, for example Kenneth Blanchard and Warren Bennis, the search for the desirable intellectual virtues is unlikely to reach any agreed conclusion. But it does seem axiomatic that a person seeking to flourish would need skills or knowledge additional to that suggested by Covey and Carnegie, or additional to any solely moral virtues.

**Virtue ethics today**

In examining where VE has reached today, one obvious development is that numerous virtues that display a caring for the well-being of others and an unwillingness to cause harm have been added to Aristotle’s list. David Hume has over sixty. Robert Solomon provides almost thirty in total: honesty, loyalty, sincerity, courage, reliability, trustworthiness, benevolence, sensitivity, helpfulness, cooperativeness, civility, decency, modesty, openness, cheerfulness, amiability, tolerance, reasonableness, tactfulness, wittiness, gracefulness, liveliness, magnanimity, persistence, prudence, resourcefulness, cool-headedness, warmth, hospitality. Many of these virtues are
related to Aristotle’s original list. They will assist us in developing successful personal relations with others.

Many of them, however, reach beyond Aristotle. Today’s virtue ethicists have, almost without exception, introduced several additional characteristics that have regard for other people: virtues such as honesty, benevolence, helpfulness, and so on.46 Most modern supporters of virtue ethics also see these other-regarding traits as necessary for eudaimonia. MacIntyre argues that ‘The Ethics shows us what form and style of life are necessary to happiness.’47 Hursthouse’s ‘neo-Aristotelianism’ is illustrated by many other-regarding and self-regarding virtues, and she defines a virtue ‘as a character trait that a human being needs to flourish or live well’.48

It can be argued reasonably successfully, therefore, that in one sense today’s VEs have taken their virtues further than Aristotle. It can also be argued, however, that if one version of eudaimonia, as it will be for many, is to contribute to or even reach a position of influence in a social organisation, most modern texts would also require a range of intellectual virtues over and above integrity-related virtues. For the most part, as discussed below, these virtues are not a part of the VE thesis. It can also be argued, as also in the following paragraphs, that by its nature VE is not a tool for making useful decisions in difficult ethical situations.

The further incompleteness of organisational virtue

Earlier paragraphs have argued that although the ‘how-to-be-successful’ books do advocate virtues, albeit often through an all-embracing virtue such as integrity, they are not enough for resolving difficult ethical decisions. Neither, however, is virtue ethics.

There are several examples of ethical conflicts where the virtuous person, the person with integrity, will need help; and where virtue ethics does not provide this help. One of the more obvious is whistleblowing. The conflict is between the virtue of loyalty and the virtue of honesty, or at least of stopping dishonesty. As Simon Illingworth, a police whistleblower, has stated, ‘Do I tell the truth or do I remain loyal? That’s the hard one.’49 That conflict is the underlying reason why whistleblower protection legislation has been introduced over recent years in all Western countries. Thomas Faunce recognised the conflict, drawing on philosophical arguments going back to the first decade of the last century to define a concept of loyalty that does not create conflict. He used Josiah Royce’s 1908 definition as the promotion of a universal loyalty among human beings.50 Faunce consistently describes his loyalty as ‘the relief of individual patient suffering’. This relief is he says the telos of a virtue-based foundation for health care whistleblowing.

There are several examples, however, in health and in other fields, where the loyalty to preserving one’s family, or to maintaining the friendship of work colleagues, or to ensuring the continued existence of the organisation, has been the major loyalty. There are many virtuous people who have decided not to blow the whistle.

Numerous other ethical decisions illustrate the difficulty of using virtue as a decision making guideline. What is the virtuous level of expenditure on occupational health and
safety? Or the extent to which a bridge engineer should check his design calculations? Or the degree to which a government, or an activist, should oppose old growth logging?

Oakley and Cocking draw on Hursthouse’s definition, which they claim as central to any form of virtue ethics: ‘An action is right if and only if it is what an agent with a virtuous character would do in the circumstances.’51 It is a near-impossible definition to use, for in difficult dilemmas nobody knows what a virtuous character would do. They later admit that a strongly virtuous character may take an issue further than is reasonable: a committed environmentalist, for instance, may make a wrong decision on logging. They counter this common criticism of VE, however, by stating that this position is an extreme and, in any case, a problem common also to Kantianism and different forms of utilitarianism and consequentialism (pp 31–38).

This response is arguable, for there are many variations and combinations of the commonly accepted theories that are used, some of which do help and are widely used in making ethical decisions. In any case, the claim that Kantianism and consequentialism also suffer from the same defects as VE does not justify the statement that VE is a superior form to these more widely accepted ethical decision making approaches.

**In conclusion**

Does that, then, make virtue ethics a largely irrelevant addition to the body of ethical theories that we use in making decisions?

The answer has to be no. We cannot seriously reject a guideline that extols virtues such as justice or fairness, or kindness and consideration to others, or even honesty. We also cannot deny a guideline that, at least with some virtues, and in an organisational sense, produces superior organisational performance.52 For those in a position of influence in these organisations, or for those whose objective is to outshine others in the climb up some form of organisational ladder, some virtues are likely to produce *eudaimonia*.

I have argued, however, that virtue ethics has built its theories on a false base, and that the true successors to Aristotle’s *Ethics* are a series of publications that tell us how to be successful in today’s organisational world. VEs today do not extend themselves beyond those skills and character traits that strengthen our relationships with others. They do not outline those intellectual virtues that help us bring ourselves or the organisation to a point of complete fulfilment. I have also argued that virtue ethics, in today’s context, provides an incomplete set of ethical guidelines for individual and organisational decision making. It would be, for example, inappropriate as a guideline in a code of ethics. It also does not help resolve some difficult ethical decisions.

In summary then, virtue ethics will not bring a form of fulfilment that will be important to many people. Nor is it an answer when making complex moral decisions. The claims that it makes, therefore, should be treated with great caution. But the concept of behaving virtuously, with consideration and assistance to others, deserves support, for it will still bring many forms of personal and organisational reward.


4 Miller, op cit, pp 25, 26.


9 Hayden Ramsay, *Beyond virtue: integrity and morality*, London, Macmillan, 1997, p x. He also claims that the debate is on ‘versions of objectivist or natural law theories’, as well as virtue ethics.


11 Statman, op cit, p 3.


15 Ramsay, op cit, p x.

16 Annas, op cit, p 4.

17 *Nichomachean ethics* is regarded as a later and fuller version of Aristotle’s thinking than his *Eudemian ethics*.


19 Ibid, p 79.


22 See Barnes, op cit, p 36.


24 Frankena, op cit, p 15.

25 Aristotle insists that this need only be moderate wealth.


27 Some accounts correct Aristotle’s rendition, by describing the virtue as indignation at a neighbour’s good or bad fortune. Unfortunately, Aristotle says, we should only be indignant at good fortune, and rejoice at misfortune (1108a1).

28 MacIntyre, op cit, p 66. In fact these thoughts would come earlier, at munificence. Righteous indignation is usually counted as Aristotle’s twelfth moral virtue.

29 *Megalopsuchia*. Thomson says there is no exact equivalent for this ‘very upper class Greek virtue’: ‘The ethics of Aristotle’ (trans JAK Thompson), op cit, p 153.

Justice is not always included in a tabular list of Aristotle’s moral virtues, possibly because it is not clearly set out as one, or possibly because its excesses and deficiencies do not fit the standard formula.


Covey’s title may not be altogether a fortuitous coincidence. The editor of Penguin’s *Ethics* notes that *ethos* as ‘character’ or ‘custom’ comes from the same root as *ethos* (p 91). Aristotle himself says ‘Moral goodness is the result of habit, from which it actually got its name, being a slight modification of the word *ethos*’ (1103a18).

Or perhaps of Aristotle being the Dale Carnegie of the fourth century BC.

Jonathan Barnes, introduction to *The ethics of Aristotle: the Nichomachean ethics* (trans JAK Thompson), op cit, p 41.


Peter Drucker, *Management*, London, Heinemann, 1988, p 361. However, he also advocates doing no harm to others in another of his books.


Hume, op cit, p 30.


It is assumed, without too much questioning, that virtues that have regard for others are ethical virtues. Virtues that are solely concerned with one’s self are not.

MacIntyre, op cit, p 57. Presumably, in the ‘us’, he is stating that Aristotle’s ethics can be used today.