The Metaphysical Foundations for Aristotle's Ethics

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As we are faced with various kinds of events in varying circumstances, different types of explanations are needed. Aristotle lists four: the nature of the various kinds of material involved, the person or thing which introduced the crucial change, the formula for, or essential nature of that sort of thing, and the end striven for. Nevertheless, Aristotle does not contend that there are these four different kinds of things in nature, each initiating different kinds of motion. There are only two things in reality, Form and substratum; and of these, only one is capable of causing motion or change -- Form, acting as an end striven for.¹ The reason why we need four kinds of explanation instead of one is surely that events generally show the combined effects of several Forms, some subordinate to others, some merely overlapping in the substratum over which they have influence, and so on. Sometimes, therefore it will be the subordinate Forms, such as water, blood or wood, which we must discover in order to grasp what has happened.² Sometimes it is rather the identity of the man or wolf who intervened and upset the expected pattern. Sometimes it is some insight into the nature of blood, wolf, or man which, when found, will make us understand. And sometimes, it is further knowledge of what that kind of thing by its nature apparently strives to achieve -- whether water, blood, wolf, or man -- which will give us the key to the event in question. If instead of trying to cope with individual events which involve ourselves, however, we were capable of omniscience and desired only to know the whole truth, we should see that, however complex an event, there is ultimately only one kind of cause: Forms acting as ends striven for. The constant kaleidoscopic shifts in the over-lapping and hierarchical pattern of the Forms influencing a given stretch of substratum force us to be constantly on the alert for the details in this pattern itself. Nevertheless, ultimately there is only the one kind of cause, Form acting as a good striven for.

This is Aristotle's metaphysical program, which he attempts conscientiously to carry out in every one of the traditional areas of philosophical research. It is precisely in the main feature of this metaphysical program that Aristotle differs most profoundly from Plato. It was Plato who first worked out the suggestion that Form is good and causes order in the world as a pattern striven for. But Plato concluded that there was also random motion in the world, motion directed toward no particular good.³ Aristotle, on the other hand, asserted that the only other thing in the universe besides Form, the substratum, by its nature strove toward Form, and did not introduce any motions of its own.⁴ He was thus able to eliminate the Demiurge, the World-Psyche and the self-moving psyches of plants and animals. Aristotle's universe is nearer than Plato's; and the result of his innovation is greater precision in many fields: ontology, psychology, cosmology, and the laws of scientific investigation. Ethics, on the other hand, as well as politics, rhetoric, and poetics, all the areas where success and failure in purely human endeavors are investigated, presented a greater challenge for Aristotle than for Plato. Aristotle created a new problem: If there is not a single motion in the universe which is not caused by a good striven for, then why do we treat the strivings of men differently from the strivings of rocks, trees, and horses? What is it that enables us to say of men alone (and of those animals which are able to learn) that some of their strivings are good and some bad?

Aristotle's first point is that there is a plainly observable difference between the striving of a man to secure his well-being and the striving of a stone to be at the center of the world: a man can always be trained to strive for something else (even, presumably, his own pain or extinction) but a stone can never ever be trained to tend in any direction but 'down'.⁵ The crucial difference between an intelligent and a blind act is that the first might have been different had the past experiences of the agent been different, while the latter could have been different only if the other entities involved in the event itself had been differently disposed. Both the man in choosing a job and the stone in falling from a ledge are seeking their fulfillment, their true well-being. There may be obstacles
in the way of each. But the man has the ability to make inferences from past experience and thus circumvent some of the obstacles; the stone has no such ability, and so is completely at the mercy of the obstacles. Here we discover something peculiar: the stone could never make an error about its true well-being; that is, whenever it was carried in the opposite direction, it was not its fault. There was nothing it could have done which would have led to better results. It kept right on pressing downward with complete fidelity. The man, on the other hand, may be making a ghastly error, leading directly to his doom. Intelligence apparently means the ability to make a mistake.

But here is the difficulty. If every motion in the universe is caused by a good striven for, if there is no such thing as a purely random motion, then what account can be given of the act of an intelligent agent when he is acting with less than perfect efficiency toward his true well-being? Like Plato, Aristotle saw that the key to destructive decisions lay in our tendency to follow desires and appetites too uncritically. But if only that decision is truly rational which is toward our true well-being, then those desires and appetites (themselves internal motions, according to the Socratic way of thinking) which tend to lead us in any other direction must be absolutely irrational; but if irrational and not leading toward a true good, are they then the only exception to the rule that all motions are caused by goods striven for? Or if the uncritized desires and passions are considered natural, like the weight of a stone, the anger of a lion, or the upward thrust of a plant, then is the rational will which goes contrary to some appetite the only unnatural, and so in a sense the only irrational thing in the universe?

Suppose we did not have Aristotle's writings on ethics. What should we suppose he would do with this problem? Should we not expect him to do exactly what he did? First, he makes the most of the fact that there is no specific tendency in a man, qua man, which cannot be trained out of him (except, presumably, growth into the shape of man). Man can always be trained to desire the very opposite. This, after all, is a real difference between man and the stone, the zinnia, and the bee. The only thing you can count on is that he will strive for whatever appears to him to be his true well-being. No specific action is 'natural' to him qua man as weight is to a stone. This means that a man's desires, passion, and appetites are not on the same footing as the desires manifested in the non-intelligent entity about him. Or rather, since it is inevitable that man will seek his own true well-being (however bizarre and self-destructive may be the means chosen by some men) only those desires which are truly consistent with his actual well-being are completely natural.

What, then, is the status of the desire which he ought to refuse to indulge? Plato, in his earlier dialogues, tended to think that a man always pursues an apparent good. An irrational desire, then, was a desire for an illusory good. Later, he came to lay much stress on the definition of psyche as self-generating motion. This suggested that an irrational act by a psyche might be entirely random energy, not necessarily directed toward any goal, real or illusory. (This manner of talking actually appears only in Laws X, but it is latent in the Timaeus and even the Phaedrus.) A depraved appetite, then, according to Plato's later thought, need not be directed toward a goal at all; it is arbitrary incomprehensible energy. As we might have expected, Aristotle was unwilling to admit that any activity in the universe whatever was by definition unknowable and unpredictable. We should not be surprised, therefore, to find him returning, in effect, to Plato's earlier position: all actions, whether 'rational' or 'irrational' are really rational in that they are called forth by goals -- real goals. An 'irrational' act is an act which, however real the goal which inspired it, is inefficient for the fulfillment of the ultimate goal, the complete development of the human psyche, the realization of the Form 'what it is to be a Man'.
Thus no action, whether stupid or intelligent, is by definition unknowable, as all are equally determined by real goals, Forms being striven for. But then we ask, how is it that a man may be faced with a goal which is real, and therefore truly good, which, however, he had better reject? How can it be a real good if to pursue it is bad? This is a staggering problem for a teleologist who is also a monist. Aristotle offers an ingenious, if not entirely convincing, solution. No man is ever really faced with a single real goal suggesting an immediate course of action contrary to his ultimate goal. What happens is rather that he is inevitably faced with pairs of (practically, not logically) incompatible goals. A hen may pursue a perfectly legitimate goal in eating her grain, although, if she were able to think, she would see that her ultimate well-being would be better served if she stopped pecking at her grain and began planning against future fox raids. Since the hen, like the stone, does not have this ability, all her actions are equally 'rational'. Man, however, does have the ability to sacrifice the less efficient to the more efficient goal, so in his case we may significantly call some of his actions more 'rational' than others.

This scheme will work, however, only if it is assumed that a man is never ever faced with a single real goal which it would be ultimately harmful for him to pursue. There must at all times be at least one other goal, equally real, demanding a course of action which is (in practice) incompatible with the first. Thus, if it is to a man's ultimate harm to run away from battle to save his skin, we must assume that there is another goal, however weakly he is aware of it, which bids him run head-long into fire. We need not picture these conflicting pulls as arranged horizontally, as it were, pulling a man simultaneously this way and that. All that we need assume is that for every immediate goal which must be rejected, there is another goal or set of goals, however remote or general, which demand the opposite action of us at that moment. This, after all, is the only scheme possible for a man who believes that the goals of all motion are real, embedded in nature, and arranged in a hierarchy which is itself the best possible order. The man, no less than the hen, inevitably follows the most compelling course, the one that seems at the moment to lead to his fulfillment. The passion which a man follows may not be the strongest in the sense that it is the most clamorous and painful, but it is the most compelling in some sense or he would not obey it.

We are not finished yet. Aristotle was obviously impressed by Plato's discovery that any appetite, when often indulged, grows more and more demanding. There is a kind of autonomy in an appetite, once a habit is formed. In Plato's system, this presented no special problem. A depraved desire was merely a senseless activity of the irrational psyche. In Aristotle's system, however, this phenomenon offered a threat to his analysis of the nature of all motion as inevitably aimed toward a true good. Even in the case of the philosophic man who sees that he must sacrifice a real immediate gain for an ultimately greater gain of the whole man, there is something unsatisfactory about calling his rejected appetite good-directed while yet maintaining that he was right not to follow it. And what about the child or the non-philosophic man? It is obviously not true that a man can never learn to make good decisions unless he perceives correctly the true end of Man. A man with little philosophic insight may still come to be consistently good in all his decisions. Here Aristotle falls back on his criterion for distinguishing the man from the stone: the existence of any tendency in a man, he apparently assumes, is in itself proof that the opposite tendency could be trained into him. If we translate that into the terms of Aristotle's metaphysics, whenever we find that a man unthinkingly pursue one Form, that means that there is another Form or combination of Forms which, if he were properly aware of them, would pull him in the opposite direction at that moment. But since both Forms or sets of Forms are equally good, the man cannot ignore either. Neither, then, can represent his most efficient course of action. The right course, the course directly toward his true fulfillment, whenever that is opposed by any other tendency within him, must invariably be a mean between extremes.
The main features of Aristotle's ethics should become clear: 1) his preference for intellectual excellence as more ultimate than moral excellence, and 2) his particular description of moral excellence as the habit of choosing the correct mean path between tendencies toward extremes. The human psyche is aware of things which it needs on several levels simultaneously. All of the objects pursued by all of the functions of the psyches are genuine goods -- Forms or combinations of Forms. Unfortunately, however, repeated satisfaction of any particular desire always has the effect of making that desire grow, and upsetting its balance with the opposite desire. This imbalance in turn leads to failure and pain. Man needs his intelligence, then, to infer from his past experiences which of his tendencies are inefficient and which of his weaker drives must be strengthened. If he is not the philosophic type himself, he may borrow intelligence from his elders or from the laws of a well-ordered state. Aristotle assumes that a case can be made for the supremacy of the life of action which is not dependent on the man's own intellectual activities for its success. Nevertheless, since intelligence -- somebody's intelligence -- is the key to man's natural fulfillments, it is hardly surprising that Aristotle decides, after careful consideration, that that man is happiest who spends a large part of his time in this crucial and most typical activity -- rational investigation. Furthermore, intelligent activity for Aristotle, as for most Greeks, meant uncovering causes, and, as for Plato, for Aristotle this meant discovering the Forms which are striven for. Ultimately this meant the investigation of how things are caused at all, that is, how all Forms cause motions by being goods striven for -- how some particular Forms are more powerful, therefore better, than others, with one ultimately good Form which causes motion everywhere. Intelligence, then, should eventually take a man beyond any immediate training of his appetites to a contemplation of excellence and beauty in the universe as a whole. Since the good life, even for the unthinking, is based on this vision, then this contemplation is obviously not unnatural for man, as it might be for a tree or a cat; thus the peculiar pleasure of contemplation, although open only to a few, is nevertheless the highest kind of human success, Aristotle decides.

The more closely one reads Aristotle, the more difficult it is to find judgments which are truly independent of, and contrary to Plato's. In Aristotle's Ethics, the role of intelligence, the necessity to starve some appetites and nourish others, the supremacy of intellectual pleasure, the dependence of human success on the discovery of the hierarchy of Forms revealed in nature, and the role of the wise man and the well-run state in supplying the intelligence for defective men, all come directly from Plato, with surprisingly little change. There are only two important features which strike the reader as new departures from the master: the description of the excellent act as invariably a mean between extremes, and the refusal to investigate the Form of the Good in order to find the morally good thing for man. Both of these departures can be traced, as we should have known, to the most important differences between Plato and Aristotle in their metaphysics: for Plato, the Forms, being separate, are sometimes striven for, sometimes not, there being that within us and within nature which wants to strive for good, but that also which distracts us; while for Aristotle, the Forms being (for the most part) immanent, are always striven for, the only thing which prevents fulfillment being the influence of yet other Forms being striven for at the same time. That is, for Plato, the Forms are patterns but not independent causes of actions in this world; Plato needed self-generating motion, both Form-directed and random, to explain the events within and around us. Aristotle, on the other hand, eliminated the need for self-generating motion, by making the Forms by their nature causes -- invariably goods, or goals striven for -- and denying that the other element in the universe, the substratum, either hindered or distracted fulfillment of these goals. Neither psyche nor Demiurge was needed any more to bring the perfection of the Form patterns to the substratum. The only thing which we know about the substratum is that it desires Forms. The Forms are thus made true causes; but only at the cost of eliminating any other kinds of causes. Let us see again, more precisely than we did before, how this basic innovation in Aristotle's metaphysics dictates the two basic innovations in his ethics.
First of all, as we have seen, the effect of describing moral excellence as invariably a mean between two extremes is to reduce human actions to the same pattern as non-human actions. That is, man, no less than rock or flame or tree, no matter what happens, presses steadily toward his fulfillment. He can deliberate about his means, but never about his ultimate end. If he does something stupid, he has nevertheless indulged a real appetite which was called forth by a real goal. And if he does something intelligent, he has taken a course determined by two mutually exclusive appetites, both, however, called forth by real goals. But neither for man nor for any other entity in the universe, could an action take place which was not caused by the desire for a real Form. The only thing which can make an action 'irrational' is repeated indulgence of one of a pair of desires, resulting eventually in too dim a cognizance of a goal which is practically incompatible with it, and it is 'irrational' only in the sense that it is inefficient, not that it is caused by random energy. And since all desires which ought for our good to be rejected invariably come in pairs which are in practice mutually exclusive, we are in effect never presented with a 'good' which is bad.

As for the Form of the Good, Aristotle admits that there is one thing the reality of which is its excellence referring surely to his ultimate unmoved mover which turns the universe by being a good which all things desire. What he objects to is the confusion of metaphysics and politics in the Republic. That is not the way we get anywhere, he says. The botanist looks for the excellence peculiar to the oak tree or the elm, the shoemaker for the excellence peculiar to shoes, and the political philosopher for the excellence peculiar to man. Now it is a little difficult to see how Plato could object to this, and we begin to wonder if Aristotle isn't knocking at a straw man. But once more we must remember Aristotle's metaphysical program. The excellence of the ultimate mover which inspires the whole universe, is, according to Aristotle, the assurance of a perpetual survival of the Forms from parent to off-spring -- a great work, inasmuch as the cessation of motion in the sensible world would also mean the disappearance of the immanent Form. But we cannot really learn anything about the excellence which makes the lesser Forms goals striven for by us and by nature merely by contemplating the ultimate mover. For Plato, the excellence of all Forms was due to their participation in the highest Form. Aristotle, on the other hand, emphasized the fact that the Forms pulled substratum in various directions, sometimes at cross-purposes, although on the whole "toward one," That is, the Forms were organized in a hierarchy, and that accounted for order in the universe; but one had to investigate the Forms separately, and could not learn much about the good which pulls man or oak tree by investigating the good which turns the world. Aristotle had a new role for the ultimate mover. It was the good par excellence only because without it the lesser Forms, being immanent, would cease to exist. Thus, while the Form of the Good might provide an inspiring object for the contemplative life, it could provide little insight for the investigation of the morally good in daily life.

The problems which remain concern Aristotle's specific theory of the morally good in daily life. First, there is the factual question, did Aristotle actually maintain that every human urge was called forth by a Form? Secondly, if he did, why does he not talk in these terms more clearly? Why is it that this all important fact escapes the notice of most readers of the Nicomachean Ethics? What may be said for the more usual accounts of the genesis of the theory of excellence as the mean between extremes?

In answer to the first question we may reply: (1) that Aristotle never denies what he works out in the Physics and the Metaphysics, that all of the motions of the world can be reduced to formal-final causes, (2) that he frequently uses such things as Ball, House, and Health as examples of Forms which cause activities as ends pursued, and (3) that the only difference which he specifies between Forms in nature and Forms which cause human activity is that the former are from the first embedded in the particular substratum which
will eventually display them while the latter cause motion first of all in a separate agent. But he never for a minute contemplates the possibility that the carpenter himself creates the Form House or the doctor the Form Health. How could he? These Forms presumably have the same kind of sequential immortality guaranteed to Cak T'ree and Man. The only difference is that instead of a house automatically informing a new piece of substratum with its Form, some man, presumably by seeing another house (in nature or built by another man), becomes informed temporarily by the Form House -- that is, he is inspired by the 'good' of a house. But what about the more basic moral and intellectual activities of man, are they also, like these more trivial manual activities, called forth by Forms? That this is so is proved, I believe, by the assumption in the Politics that there is one best constitution which all men are fumbling for, in the Rhetoric that there are a few basic patterns for speakers, which all orators are striving toward, and in the Poetics that there is an ideal tragedy which all serious poets have tried to produce. This last is particularly illuminating. It would be ridiculous to suppose that while Plato found poetry uninspiring, Aristotle was utterly seduced by its charms. This simply seems monstrous in the light of all that we know about these two men. Yet Plato regretfully rejected tragedy from the well-run state, while Aristotle defended its inclusion. Their respective analyses of what poetry is and how it effects listeners are surprisingly similar. But Aristotle thought it was urgent to prove that tragedy (1) was a permanent activity of all mankind, and not merely a recent and an Athenian occupation, and (2) that men pursued it because there was a genuine good achieved by it. Why did he feel this was necessary? Presumably in order to prove that this, like all activities, was caused by a genuine Form.

Our second problem was this: why is Aristotle so reticent about telling us what he is doing -- so reticent, indeed, that most readers quite miss the point? In the first place, Aristotle was an honest man. He would hardly be satisfied with an explanation of moral activity which, however closely it followed from his metaphysical program, did not make good sense when applied to our ordinary experiences. It is no wonder, then, that the great bulk of the Ethics is devoted to more or less common sense analyses of universal human problems. Aristotle's ethics seem more compelling to us than, say, Aquinas' or Spinoza's, largely because he refuses to present it as a logical deduction from his metaphysics, but rather as an honest appraisal of what we all feel. Nevertheless, the metaphysical foundation is never very far to seek. Secondly, the problems of moral excellence are as a matter of fact enormously complex, and it is just a further measure of Aristotle's honesty that he refused to simplify these problems very much. And third, one of the obvious ways for a philosopher to check and support his theory is to show how it coincides with what has always been thought about the subject. This is particularly important for Aristotle, for philosophy like all other activities, must be inspired ultimately by a single Reality. (Is not Aristotle forever arguing that all his predecessors were groping in their inadequate way for a single truth, discovered at last by himself?) And so it is neither surprising nor upsetting to find that Aristotle clearly recalls general Greek truisms, the medical writers, Plato, and his own physics and psychology in the language and arguments he uses in discussing moral excellence as invariably a mean between extremes. We may go further: it is reasonable to suppose that Aristotle would not so readily have found this particular solution to his metaphysical problem had there not already been this habit of mind among his predecessors. But to suppose that we have adequately understood Aristotle's moral philosophy when we have traced it to these older features in Greek thought is surely a mistake.

In Chapter three of the first book of the Nicomachean Ethics Aristotle warns us that ethical enquiry is not a precise deductive science at all. We should be naive indeed, however, if we took this to mean that Aristotle never does as a matter of fact make observations in his ethical writings which were in the main deductions from his analysis of reality as a whole. The Ethics begins with the statement: "It is assumed that every act and every
inquiry, likewise every action and every choice, is aimed at some good." This is as 'metaphysical' as it is possible for an ethical treatise to be. Indeed, it would be very surprising if Aristotle, a Greek and a companion of Plato, could have written a moral theory which paid no attention to his analysis of reality as a whole. If his procedure sometimes reminds us of modern Linguistic Analysis, that does not mean that all of his decisions were arrived at solely on the basis of considerations which a modern Analyst would find valid and appropriate. Even if Aristotle regularly began (as Socrates and Plato did also) with an analysis of ordinary language and attitudes, that does not mean that his ethical theory as a whole does not bear the stamp of his conclusions in metaphysics. Indeed, if our analysis of the Ethics is correct, one of Aristotle's main interests in ethics must have been the challenge which it offered to his analysis of process and reality in the universe. The proof of this is that his most original theory, the description of excellence as invariably a mean between extremes, remains unaccountable unless it is explained as an attempt to solve a metaphysical problem.

In the end, I suppose, the definition of excellence as a mean seems no more convincing as a solution to a metaphysical puzzle than it does as a description of our daily experience. That is, although we can understand how Aristotle came to offer this theory as a solution to his problem, we are no more tempted than we were before to believe that this is a sound theory. Furthermore, the parts of the Ethics which were right before are still right, and those which were wrong are still wrong. The metaphysical foundations for Aristotle's ethics are not foundations in the sense that the ethical judgments stand or fall with the validity of the metaphysics. They are foundations only in the sense that Aristotle consciously constructed the one upon the other: he treated moral phenomena as a special case of phenomena in general, and tried to find formal-final causes here just as he did everywhere else. If it seems fruitful, therefore, to treat Aristotle as though he were an ancient Hare or Nowell-Smith, then there is no harm in doing so. But if the question is raised, how did Aristotle arrive at this analysis of human excellence, then his metaphysical program must surely be brought in. Furthermore, we should do well to bring it in whenever we attempt to evaluate Aristotle's understanding of man as a whole and compare it to Plato's understanding. And, of course, we must not neglect the Ethics if we are interested in understanding the Metaphysics,

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1. The elements of reality are reduced to Form and substratum in Physics, Book I. This is followed immediately in Book II by an attempt to show that an exhaustive list of the legitimate kinds of explanation would include these four.

2. De part. an. II ch. 1, De gen. an. I ch. 1, De mot. an. 703a28-b2, Met. Z 1040 b5-16, Met. ch. 3, Met. ch. 4-5, De gen. et corr. II ch. 10, Phys. II 194b13, De caelo II 286 b 2-9, Meteor. I 346 b 22-32, etc. Not all of these passages describe the same kind of \textit{secula naturae}, but put together they show beyond the shadow of a doubt that Aristotle conceived of a complex hierarchy of overlapping Forms simultaneously influencing a given stretch of substratum. 'Material causes' never refer to absolutely undifferentiated substratum, but to Forms informing the substratum at a lower level than the main unifying Forms. E.g.: Met. \textbullet 1071 a 14, Met. Z 1034 a 6, Met. \textbullet 1070 a 19, De gen. an. II 735 a 4-9, Met. Z 1035 b 14-27, Phys. II 194 b 9-15, Met. H ch. 4. See also De gen. an. IV ch. 3-4 and 6.

3. Random motion in Plato includes: 1) the distracting passions in the lower functions of the human \textit{psyche}, 2) the 'Wandering Chuse' in the Timaeus, and 3) the 'bad kind of \textit{psyche}' in \textit{Laws} X, which is probably meant to include both 1) and 2).

4. Three times Aristotle specifically opposes his monism to Plato's dualism in these terms: Phys I, ch. 9, Met. ch. 10 and Met. N ch. 4. Cf. also Met. \Theta ch. 9.

5. Nic. eth. II ch. 1. I shall, for purposes of simplicity, refer only to the Nicomachean ethics, but I shall try to avoid drawing any conclusions which would not also be valid for the Eudemian ethics.

6. The nature of the crucial difference between an intelligent and a non-intelligent reaction to a situation is most acutely worked out in De memoria et reminiscencia. A steel spring might in a sense 'learn' from its past experiences, but it cannot infer from a mechanical 'memory' that it has experienced something similar before and then deliberately revive that memory.

7. Met. \textbullet 12 ch. 2, ch. 5.

8. This definition of 'rational' which underlies all of Plato's as well as all of Aristotle's discussions, appears for the first time in Socrates' 'autobiography,' \textit{Phaedo} 97-8. Cf. also Diogenes of Apollonia, fr. 3 (Diels-Kranz\textsuperscript{2}, 64 B 3).


10. Sometimes Plato, too, speaks as though each of the three functions of the human \textit{psyche} had a legitimate goal, but he more typically treats the lower appetites as always dangerous, even in the good man. Cf. Republic IX on the savage element which sometimes awakens only during sleep, or the \textit{Phaedrus} myth, where the black horse is depicted as incorrigible, even when in view of heaven. On the other hand cf. passages such as Republic IX 586 e-587 a.

11. At Nic. eth. II 1107 a 7-27 Aristotle points out 1) that human excellence is an extreme in goodness and 2) that there is, of course, no virtuous mean with regard to a vice like envy (\textit{phagia}). Read carefully, this passage is seen to be in no way contradictory to the definition, \textit{Kata\ 'mev t\overline{n}n h\overline{o}t\overline{i}an kai\ t\overline{o}n h\overline{o}gyon t\overline{o}n to\ t\overline{i}\ 'h\overline{n} e\overline{i}\overline{t}ai l\overline{e}gy\overline{m}a\ me\overline{g}o\ 'th\overline{e} t\overline{e}n e\overline{o}\ 'ti\overline{n}i\ 'h\ 'a\ 'mu\ 'et\ 'h} (1107 a 6-7). A bad passion or action will still inevitably be caused by an excess or
deficiency; it is just that while some words refer to passions or actions which are sometimes good, sometimes bad, others are already defined as passions felt under conditions which make them wrong. Incidentally, this passage shows fairly clearly that Aristotle did not arrive at his doctrine of the mean by examining ordinary language.


13. Nature in Aristotle works blindly toward the same universal harmony that the speculative philosopher discovers and is drawn toward. Aristotle no less than Plato was impressed by the essential identity between the procedure of an artist and the process manifested in rocks and trees and animals. But whereas Plato concluded that nature was intelligent (possessed conscious forethought) Aristotle concluded that even the artist was drawn on blindly. *Cf. Phys.* II ch. 8 and **Nic. eth.** III 4-5.


15. Contrast the Platonic *Epinomis* 982 c with the passages from Aristotle cited above.

16. **Nic. eth.** III 1112 b 11-12, 1113 b 3-5.

17. As he puts it, there is such a thing as 'good' in the category of substance, namely God or Intelligence:

\[
\text{καὶ γὰρ ἐν τῷ πνεύμα τῷ θεῷ ἀλήθειαν, ὃ ἐγείραθε ὁ ἀνθρώπος καὶ ὁ θεός,}
\]

**Nic. eth.** I 1096 a 24-5.

18. **Met.** A ch. 7-10, also the conclusion of *Phys.* VIII.


22. **Met.** A ch. 10.

23. Above all in **Met.** Z.

24. *Phys.* II ch. 1, *De part. an.* I ch. 1, **Met.** Z ch. 8. In the latter chapter it is made clear that the artist does not create the form: 1033 b 5, *ff.*


26. Both conclude that its essential nature is to imitate, and that its most important effect on the listener is to call up latent appetites, especially pity. See the first half of *Republic* X (Notice τὸ ἐν εἰναίναι, 606 b 8, c 5). Aristotle obviously did not make any attempt to investigate poetry all over again, starting from scratch. We should not allow our special interest in the Poetics to blind us to the probability that Aristotle thought of poetry as only one minor problem in his grand scheme.
27. This is obvious not only in his attempt to show that the function of the epic is identical with that of tragedy (Poetics 1462 b 13-14) but also in his attempt to show how every child automatically creates 'tragic' imitation for himself (Poetics ch. 4).

28. This, of course, is the true origin of the theory of katharsis. The question of whether it is primarily medical or religious katharsis which gave Aristotle the idea is of secondary importance.

29. That every προσκυνέω has a good embedded in nature is clearly implied in such passages as Politics 1282 b 15 and Nic. eth. I 1094 a 1.

30. Cf. Harold Cherniss' two works on Aristotle's criticism of his predecessors.

31. Thus Plato sums up the ethical insight of the whole Republic as follows (off-hand, and surely meant in no technical sense of τὸ μέγας):


33. See Gorgias 507-8, Republic I 349-50, Politicus 283-7, and Philebus 25-6 (et passim).