Ethics and Business Ethics

1. Rorty on the contrast between ancients and moderns: some doubts.

> 'The historicism that Marx took over from Hegel was the first radical break with Platonic essentialism. Marx's thesis that philosophers should stop trying to understand the world and start trying to change it epitomized the intellectuals' new-found willingness to turn away from metaphysics in favor of politics.' ('Is Philosophy Relevant to Applied Ethics, p. 370)

2. Aristotle as the founder of philosophical ethics (as we understand it).

3. Aristotle on becoming good.

> Virtues, however, we acquire by first exercising them. The same is true with skills, since what we need to learn before doing, we learn by doing; for example, we become builders by building, and lyre-players by playing the lyre. So too we become just by doing just actions, temperate by temperate actions, and courageous by courageous actions. (*Nicomachean Ethics*, II.1)

4. The doctrine of the mean.

> [S]tates like this are naturally corrupted by deficiency and excess, as we see in the cases of strength and health ...; for both too much exercise and too little ruin one's strength, and likewise too much food and drink and too little ruin one's health, while the right amount produces, increases and preserves it. The same goes, then, for temperance, courage and the other virtues: the person who avoids and fears everything, never standing his ground, becomes cowardly, while he who fears nothing, but confronts every danger, becomes rash. In the same way, the person who enjoys every pleasure and never restrains himself becomes intemperate, while he who avoids all pleasure – as boors do – becomes, as it were, insensible. Temperance and courage, then, are ruined by excess and deficiency, and preserved by the mean. (*NE*, II.2)
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> I am talking here about virtue of character, since it is this that is concerned with feelings and actions, and it is in these that we find excess, deficiency and the mean. For example, fear, confidence, appetite, anger, pity, and in general pleasure and pain can be experienced too much or too little, and in both ways not well. But to have them at the right time, about the right things, towards the right people, for the right end, and in the right way, is the mean and best; and this is the business of virtue. Similarly, there is an excess, a deficiency and a mean in actions. Virtue is concerned with feelings and actions, in which excess and deficiency constitute misses of the mark, while the mean is praised and on target, both of which are

characteristics of virtue. Virtue, then, is a kind of mean, at least in the sense that it is the sort of thing that is able to hit a mean. (*NE*, II.6)

Justice as an exception.

5. A table of Aristotelian virtues:

Virtue	***Sphere***	***Discussion in NE***
Courage	Fear and confidence	III.6–9
Temperance	Bodily pleasure and pain	III.10–12
Generosity	Giving and retaining money	IV.1
Magnificence	Giving and retaining money on a large scale	IV.2
Greatness of soul	Honour on a large scale	IV.3
[Nameless]	Honour on a small scale	IV.4
Even temper	Anger	IV.5
Friendliness	Social relations	IV.6
Truthfulness	Honesty about oneself	IV.7
Wit	Conversation	IV.8
Justice	Distribution	V
Friendship	Personal relations	VIII–IX

W.D. Ross's virtues (*The Right and the Good*, 21-2):

> Fidelity (concerning promising and reparation).
> Gratitude.
> Justice.
> Beneficence.
> Self-improvement.
> Non-maleficence.

Aristotle on universal human friendship:

> '[Friendship] seems to exist naturally among members of the same species in relation to one another, particularly among human beings, which is why we praise people who are lovers of humanity' (*NE*, 8.1)

6. The doctrine of the mean applied to businesses: integrity, respect, loyalty, compassion.

7. 'Virtue ethics' is 'deontology'. So, in a sense, is utilitarianism (it is like standard deontology with every principle except impartial beneficence removed). Each theory provides a list of right and wrong actions.

8. Aristotelian deontology compared with views in business ethics: the market failure approach; stakeholder theory; corporate social responsibility accounts; social contract theory; virtue or 'care ethics'. Start with people, then move to businesses.

9. Moral epistemology. Rorty again:

> Anti-Platonists like myself, the people sometimes described as 'post-modern relativists', do not accept the correspondence theory of truth. So we have no use for the notion of a belief being made true by the world. ... Philosophers' claims to have Truth and Reason on their side resemble theologicans' claims to know the will of God . Such claims are advertising slogans rather than arguments. … Urging that there is something that *makes* actions wrong or moral beliefs true is an empty gesture. For we have no way of getting in touch with this purported truth-maker save to seek coherence among our own moral intuitions. (371)

The Aristotelian alternative to imagining ethics: aim at (necessary, a priori) truth. Practical wisdom (*phronēsis*), and moral intuition (*nous*).

10. The problem of widespread disagreement. Sidgwick on suspending judgement:

> Since it is implied in the very notion of Truth that it is essentially the same for all minds, the denial by another of a proposition that I have affirmed has a tendency to impair my confidence in its validity.... And it will be easily seen that the absence of such disagreement must remain an indispensable negative condition of the certainty of our beliefs. For if I find any of my judgments, intuitive or inferential, in direct conflict with a judgment of some other mind, there must be error somewhere: and if I have no more reason to suspect error in the other mind than in my own, reflective comparison between the two judgments necessarily reduces me temporarily to a state of neutrality. (*Methods of Ethics*, 7th edn., 341-2)

How to find your way out of the cave: philosophy as a non-adversarial, collaborative enterprise.

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