



ARISTOTLE'S GOLDEN MEAN: ANCIENT WISDOM FOR CONTEMPORARY TIMES

Terzungwe Inja ¹

Desmond Iorliam Agernor ²

Department of Philosophy, Benue State University, Makurdi ^{1 & 2}

Corresponding Email: tinja@bsum.edu.ng ¹

Abstract

This work was intended to answer a simple question, "Is the Aristotelian golden mean still relevant today?" The question is based on the fact that today's society seems totally different from what was obtained when this classical theory was propounded over 5000 years ago. Again, interest in the question was derived from a desire to join forces with other pro-Aristotle scholars to conduct further tests on his notion of the golden mean. With that purpose in mind, the study examines Aristotle's golden mean in the light of contemporary ethical issues. It has been found capable of providing ethical guidance in several aspects of modern-day life. These include (but not limited to) such areas as artificial intelligence, environmental ethics, work-place ethics, politics, warfare, and psychotherapy. The paper concludes that the golden mean is still relevant, even in today's societal sophistication and complexities.

Keywords: Aristotle, Golden Mean, Applicability, Virtue Ethics, Applied Ethics.

Introduction

Just like its precursor, the 21st century has witnessed tremendous growth and development in diverse aspects of man's endeavours. Clearly, the contemporary era is in several ways different from the times of yore when Aristotle proposed his doctrine of the mean, which provided guidance on how to live a life of virtue and achieve *eudaimonia* (happiness, flourishing, and general wellbeing). The question making the rounds in scholarly circles these days is, "Are antique theories of morality still relevant today?" This question has led to several and various proposals of so-called modern-day theories of ethics; most of which have in turn been found wanting for sheer lack of depth and convincing guidance. Thus, a return to the theories of old has become inevitable. Scholars are going back to the roots to see whether ancient wisdom can still be relevant today. That is the motivation for this paper. It is founded on the thesis that Aristotelian virtue ethics still holds enough to provide mankind with a guide to virtuous life.

The first section of this paper contains the introduction. In the second section, attention has been focused on clarifying the concept of virtue ethics. Section three forms a background to the discussion by providing a brief biography of Aristotle, as well as factors which possibly influenced his thought. The fourth part deals with an exposition of the doctrine of the golden. This section is closely followed by the various criticisms levelled against the golden mean as well

as the defences of the doctrine from renowned scholars. Finally, the applicability of the golden mean in contemporary times is presented; and a conclusion drawn at the end.

The Concept of Virtue Ethics

Virtue ethics is considered as one of the three major aspects of normative ethics. It emphasizes the importance of character in the evaluation or judgment of human conduct (morality). Generally, the primary aim of virtue ethics is the cultivation of a balanced moral life which would guarantee happiness and personal wellbeing. Questions like: *What is the good life?*, *What are virtues?*, *How can we become virtuous?* and *How should we act?*, are central to virtue ethics. The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* notes that virtue ethics underscores the moral character of the moral agent whose action is under scrutiny; this attitude is quite unlike the one in deontological ethics (which stresses duties, rules, or responsibilities) and that of consequentialism (which focuses on results, effects, or the amount of pleasure derived therefrom) (Hursthouse and Pettigrove n.p.). The underlying argument of virtue ethics is that a virtuous person will effortlessly take moral decisions and exhibit proper behaviour because he possesses good character traits, or virtues (Hursthouse and Pettigrove n.p.). Similarly, a virtuous society is the one where citizens exhibit virtuous behaviour, uphold justice; and work harmoniously towards the common good (Vendemiati 111).

Virtue ethics has a long history that stretches back to the ancient times. In the East, Confucius, via his *Analects*, outlined a system of ethics that was based on five virtues: *Ren* (benevolence), *Vi* (righteousness), *Li* (ritual), *Zhi* (wisdom), and *Xin* (trustworthiness) (Santiago 24). At about the same time in the West, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle exhibited various thought on virtue ethics with a central emphasis on “overall character development, what one could think of as a global approach to morality” (Santiago 24). Like Confucius, the ancient Greeks listed virtues as: benevolence, compassion, courage, diligence, honesty, and justice (*inter alia*). Their polar opposites were considered as vices, respectively: meanness, heartlessness, cowardice, negligence, dishonesty, and injustice (*et cetera*).

In summary, virtue ethics is person-based rather than action-based. It is the perspective of ethics by which the virtue or moral character of the moral agent is in focus; rather than his ethical duties, rules, or the outcomes of specific actions. Thus, Santiago observes, “the *moral worth of persons* takes precedence over the *rightness of actions*” (Santiago 25). The point is in *being*, rather than *doing*. Virtue ethics upholds character and virtue, above all else, as the yardsticks for individual and corporate conduct.

Aristotle's Life and Times

Generally, the facts of Aristotle's life are not that well-known. The biographies written in primeval times are often notional and historiographers only agree on a limited salient points (Shields 3–16). The following are gleanings from the few agreeable historical facts about Aristotle's life. It is on record that Aristotle (also known as Aristoteles) was born in 384 B.C. at Stagira, Chalcidice, Greece. The *Suda*, a 10th century encyclopaedia, records that his father was a court physician known as “Nicomachus, son of Machaon, son of Asclepius” (*Suda*, “Nicomachus: The Father of Aristotle”, web). At age 17, he went to Athens and enrolled to study at Plato's Academy; where he became a student for the next twenty years.

After Plato's death (*circa* 343 B.C.), Aristotle, at about 37 years old, left the Academy to honour of an invitation by King Philip of Macedo; where he became a teacher to the latter's son, 13 year old Alexander. The boy would later become King Alexander the Great. Aristotle eventually founded his own school at the Lyceum, a temple in Athens dedicated to Apollo Lyceus; where he lectured there and carried out extensive scientific researches. He wrote many books on a wide

variety of subjects (logic, physics, metaphysics, ethics, politics, psychology, biology, aesthetics, and rhetoric). His famous works on ethics are *Nichomachean Ethics*, *Eudemian Ethics*, and *Magna Moralia* (Kenny and Amadio, *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*).

Influences on Aristotle's Thought: In spite of its abstract nature, every philosopher is influenced by his society and *vice versa*. The same can be said of Aristotle's virtue ethics. Hence, import of this section is to enhance the understanding of Aristotle's virtue ethics by outlining the key factors that influenced him. Aristotle's virtue ethics emerged during the classical period in Ancient Greece, a time of intellectual and cultural flourishing; a period characterized by a strong focus on public life and civic engagement. Debates on political, social, and cultural issues were common. Also, the pursuit of wisdom was highly valued. Malik notes that the reliance on reason rather than mythology or religion was the new paradigm introduced by the philosophers, especially beginning with Socrates (14). Thus, the intellectual climate of the time was a possible influence on Aristotle.

Another possible influence was Aristotle's father, Nicomachus, a Physician to King Amyntas III of Macedon. It is often inferred that that Nicomachus may have exposed his son to scientific methods of investigation from an early age, sparking his interest in natural philosophy and the empiricist style of investigation. Of course, Aristotle later pursued studies in fields like biology, zoology, and anatomy (Barnes 3 & 9). Further, Greek thinkers, including Aristotle's forerunners, Socrates, and Plato, wanted to understand and define the nature of the good life, frequently questioning traditional values, and beliefs. Socrates promoted a life of moral inquiry and self-scrutiny, stressing his point with the slogan, "the unexamined life is not worth living" (Plato, "Apology," in *The Trial and Death of Socrates*, §. 38a). Socrates's pupil and friend, Plato, furthered these ideas, among other things, rehashing the importance of a harmonious soul and an orderly society for a good life (Malik 27–28). In turn, Plato's approach to philosophy influenced Aristotle –though the latter took the opposite direction.

Aristotle built on Plato's concepts. But instead of following the latter's 'other-worldly' approach to issues, the Aristotle focused his energy on creating a comprehensive ethical system that would be grounded in practical wisdom (*phronesis*), virtue (*aretē*), and *eudaimonia* ('happiness' or 'human flourishing') (Malik 34–35). His theory was centred on the idea that attaining virtue, or excellence of character, was the path to a good life (Barnes 9; Hutchinson 7–8). The next section provides details of his interesting thoughts.

The Golden Mean

Aristotle believed ethics to be a practical rather than theoretical study, one aimed at becoming good and doing good rather than knowing good for its own sake. Thus, his approach was markedly different from the moral philosophy of his time, which primarily focused on actions and consequences. Instead, he stressed the importance of character and moral dispositions; arguing that virtues are character traits which can be acquired through practice and habituation. He wrote several treatises on ethics, the most notable being the *Nicomachean Ethics* (from the Greek *Êthika Nicomacheia* (hereinafter referred to as *NE*) (Kraut, "Aristotle's Ethics", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, web). The *NE* comprises of ten sections, referred to as books and is closely linked to Aristotle's other work, *Eudemian Ethics*; it is also crucial for the understanding of Aristotle's virtue ethics –often called the 'golden mean'.

Eudaimonia: The term *eudaimonia* is of Greek origin, usually translated as: (i) happiness or (ii) human flourishing, a state of wellbeing. In the *NE*, Aristotle dedicates Book I to explaining *eudaimonia* and its links to the golden mean. He argues that all human action is geared towards

some form of good. Some actions are ends in themselves, others are means to other ends; and still others merely contribute to a greater good. In the hierarchy of goods, Aristotle identifies that highest or greater good as eudaimonia (Aristotle 1094a22-1094b7). Eudaimonia may be described as a state of human flourishing, "happiness, contentment, and fulfilment; it's [sic] the name of the best kind of life, which is an end in itself and means to live and fare well" (Athanasoulis, "Virtue Ethics", *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*). Aristotle does not directly say that eudaimonia is a component of the golden mean, he suggests that the golden mean is a crucial aspect of achieving eudaimonia, particularly in the sense of moral virtue. He holds that by exercising practical wisdom (*phronesis*) in order to find the appropriate mean in our daily actions, we cultivate virtue (good character traits) and thereby contribute to our overall eudaimonia. Hence, the achievement of eudaimonia involves the "activity of the soul in accordance with complete virtue" (Aristotle 1102a5-6).

Identifying Virtue and Vice: Aristotle's doctrine of the golden mean holds that a virtuous act or character trait lies in a "mean" between two extremes, which are vices. This viewpoint is introduced in Book II (and runs all through) the *NE*, "Virtue, then, is a state that decides, consisting in a mean, the mean relative to us, which is defined by reference to reason, that is to say, to the reason by reference to which the prudent person would define it" (Aristotle 1106b36-1107a2). Thus, by the 'mean' Aristotle is not referring to some precise mathematical average. Rather, it is the mid-way between two extremes. Aristotle maintains that virtue is concerned with making the right choices and determining an appropriate balance, or mean, between two vices, which represent an excess or deficiency of a particular character trait. For instance, courage could be the virtue that lies between the vices of cowardice (a deficiency of courage) and recklessness (an excess of courage).

The Mean as Contextual: The mean is specific to each person and each situation. It is contextual, and not the same for everyone, as Aristotle explains, "the mean is not in the object but [is rather] relative to us" (Aristotle 1109b1-2). In other words, what may be the mean in one person's situation might not be in another person. For instance, let us consider the vice of gluttony. Supposing three people eat the same quantity of rice at the same occasion, one of them could be guilty of gluttony (the excess of eating); a second one may be guilty of self-starvation (the extreme of eating too little); and yet a third may be commended for eating in moderation (for neither eating too little nor too much). Furthermore, even for the same individual, the mean is not a fixed point but depends on the situation. For instance, the same person might be courageous in one situation and cowardly in another. Indeed, the mean is a slippery slope to glide on! And Aristotle himself does not deny that, he states:

It is difficult to attain the mean; for instance, not everyone, but only one who knows, finds the midpoint in a circle. So also getting angry, or giving and spending money, is easy and everyone can do it; but doing it to the right person, in the right amount, at the right time, with the right aim in view, and in the right way—that is no longer easy, nor can everyone do it. Hence doing these things well is rare, praiseworthy, and fine (Aristotle, *NE* II, 9, 1109a24-29).

Indubitably, the citation above lays bare the contextual nature of this intriguing ethos. This leads us to the question of, "How do we determine the mean in everyday situations?"

The Role of Reason: Aristotle's answer to how we can ascertain the mean is simple, he says we must apply what he calls practical wisdom, *phronesis*. It emphasizes the use of our rationality to ascertain what is the appropriate course of action at any given time:

[...] practical wisdom is concerned with action and deliberation (for it is the mark of a practically wise man to deliberate well), while one's understanding of the truth is not for the sake of action or deliberation, but rather the origin of every action lies in some sort of deliberation—[for] what is to be done and what is to be avoided are not evident except to someone who deliberates well. Hence practical wisdom is the excellence of the deliberating part of the soul (Aristotle, *NE* VI, 7, 1141b-15).

The above statement narrates a kind of relativism by which every situation determines its morality or otherwise. We shall return to this when considering the criticism of the golden mean. For now, we must move to the question of how we can master the art of virtuous living via the mean.

Practice Brings Perfection: Aristotle categorized virtue into two: “that of the intellectual [*êthikê*] and that of character [*êthos*]” (Aristotle, *NE* II, 11103a14-15). Intellectual virtue is acquired mainly by education and takes a lot of experience and time. The virtue of character, he avers, is imbibed as a result of habituation (that is, practice). As we practice the mean, we get to know more (Aristotle, *NE* II, 1103a14-18). None of the two virtues comes to us by nature. Aristotle holds that virtues are best acquired by habituation; that is by consistently making choices and taking actions that flow in tandem with the golden mean. This implies that individuals can develop character, not by simply knowing what is right, but by doing it.

Handling Moral Dilemmas: A moral dilemma occurs when a moral agent is confronted with a difficult choice between two bad courses of action; where each choice will contravene or transgress a moral principle. “Thus, the individual will violate at least one important moral concern, regardless of the decision” (Kvalnes 11). Even though Aristotle did not specifically set out to discuss moral dilemmas, his elucidation of the golden mean contains an insight into what to do in such situations:

For the lesser of two evils is in a way a good; so even if both are bad, one is still more choiceworthy. Hence the one will be called simply bad, but the other will be bad relative to the good, since it is less choiceworthy than certain other things; and the one which is bad in this way will be called more choiceworthy than the one which is bad simply (Aristotle, *NE*, 1110a4-10).

In the light of this passage, it is clear that Aristotle admonishes us to take the path leading to the lesser evil when confronted with moral dilemmas. For instance, if a car driver is face with situation where he has to choose between hitting a single person or killing three others; such a driver should choose the lesser evil. This amounts practical wisdom in the light of Aristotle's thought.

Balancing Virtue and the Emotions: While Aristotle's concept of the golden mean primarily focuses on finding the balance between two extremes in actions and character traits, he also acknowledges the role of emotions in decision-making. Aristotle discusses the importance of having the right emotional dispositions for achieving virtue. He argues that virtues are concerned, not only with actions, but also with feelings, “Virtue is concerned with feelings and actions, in which excess and deficiency constitute misses off the mark [of the mean]...” (Aristotle,

NE, 1106b16-17). Aristotle believes that a virtuous person should be capable of exercising emotions “at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right aim, and in the right way” (Aristotle, NE, 1106b20-23). This shows that a virtuous person’s emotions are seamlessly aligned with their rational judgement, thereby enabling them to achieve the golden mean. Hence, Aristotle expresses the possibility of striking a balance between one’s emotions, guided by practical wisdom, to achieve virtue and a life of well-being (*eudaimonia*).

Criticism of the Golden Mean: Aristotle’s doctrine of the golden mean has attracted a lot of criticisms over the ages. But here we shall consider a few major ones, both from those who defend his viewpoint and those who oppose it. In summary, Aristotle’s golden mean has been criticised for being: (i) ambiguous and lacking clear guidelines on how to act; (ii) relativist and dependent on individual or subjectivist viewpoints; (iii) inconsistent and subject to various interpretations; (iv) full of grounds for exceptions (for instance there is no middle-way in justice, honesty, charity, etc); and (v) inapplicable because it is too abstract and theoretical.

Additionally, even Rosalind Hursthouse, a prominent contemporary virtue ethicist, has described the golden mean as “not merely false but extremely silly” (60). Similarly, Bernard Williams is disdainful of the doctrine. He writes:

[...] the most celebrated and least useful parts of his system, the doctrine of the Mean [...] oscillates between an unhelpful analytical model (which Aristotle does not consistently follow) and a substantively depressing doctrine in favor [sic] of moderation. The doctrine of the Mean is better forgotten (Williams 36).

On the contrary, Fisher disagrees with this criticism of the golden mean. He thinks the mean has been misunderstood due to misinterpretation and misrepresentation in academic circles over time. He notes that most prevalent interpretations of the mean rely on parameters that, in themselves, constitute an “implausible interpretation of Aristotle” (54). He maintains that Aristotle’s “virtues are mean-states only in the sense that they are states that dispose one to aim at and achieve the mean in passion and action; virtues do not themselves lie at the mean in some continuum” (Fisher 54). In agreement, Curzer argues that there has been a deliberate twist in interpreting Aristotle. To him, translators and commentators have chosen to portray Aristotle as speaking metaphorically, while in fact, the ancient philosopher has been clearly quantitative all along (Curzer 129). He suggests that scholars should rather stick to J.O. Urmson’s quantitative interpretation of Aristotle in which the latter argues that the doctrine is plausible when correctly interpreted (223). All the pro-Aristotelian scholars mentioned above have produced elaborate and robust defences of the doctrine. However, those issues are not within the ambit of this paper. As such, they have been merely highlighted for the purpose of argument. That is, to show that in spite of perceived defects in Aristotle’s golden mean, there are still those who believe that it holds useful applications in our everyday lives. And that is has been demonstrated in the next section.

Modern-Day Applicability of the Golden Mean

Rapp has observed that current interest in Aristotelian ethics is hinged on its outstanding qualities which make it:

Attractive for modern ethical theory: his [Aristotle’s] account of virtue does not seem to carry the burden of Socratic intellectualism; it seems to be less dependent on metaphysical background theories than, e. g., Plato’s ethics; it

does not display the same hostile attitude towards emotions as the Stoic account of virtue; and it seems to be closer to some important common-sense convictions, e.g., that the good life must be a pleasant one and that not even virtue immunizes us against the effects of great misfortunes (102).

In the light of the above, let us examine the different areas in which the golden mean could be of help in our daily lives in contemporary times. It is noteworthy that there is hardly any area of human endeavour where Aristotle's golden mean may not be found applicable. In any case, only a few areas have been highlighted here for the purpose of demonstration. These areas are, (i) applied philosophy, (ii) politics, (iii) warfare, and (iv) psychotherapy.

Applied Philosophy

Aristotle's golden mean may provide guidance in aspects of applied philosophy like the ethics of artificial intelligence, environmental ethics, and work-place ethics.

Artificial Intelligence (AI): Artificial intelligence (AI) has advanced to a stage where humans are beginning to feel threatened by its power. But Mchia has demonstrated that Aristotle's golden mean could be useful in answering crucial ethical questions bordering on the use of AI and its ancillary products. Particularly he argues that the moderation component of the golden mean can be useful in handling issues like safety, human dignity, the question of personhood, fairness and justice, privacy, copyright protection, and human rights (331–32).

Environmental Ethics: In the area of environmental ethics, Foster has also shown that in spite of earlier misgivings about the suitability of the golden mean in tackling environmental issues, it still holds sway if examined carefully. She begins by identifying three of such arguments against the golden mean:

First, Aristotelian virtue theory is ratiocentric. Later philosophers have objected that Aristotle's preference for reason creates a distorted picture of the human good. Overvaluing reason might well bias virtue theory against the value of non-rational beings. Second, virtue theory is egocentric. Hence, it is suited to developing a conception of the good life, but it is not suited to considering obligations to others. Third, virtue theory is notoriously bad at providing rules and procedures for resolving ethical questions about particular circumstances. But environmentalists need procedures for determining which of several conflicting values is most important. Virtue theory is not action guiding (409).

Then she proceeds to debunk the arguments one by one, arriving at the conclusion that the theory is "uniquely suited to answering ethical questions about nonhuman animals and the environment" (409).

Biomedical Ethics: The field of bioethics is generally concerned with the ethical, legal, and social ramifications of problems that emerge in the life sciences, medicine, healthcare, technology, and associated policies. It aims at defining the values at play, comprehend the opportunities and challenges brought about by advancements in these fields, and provides rules, suggestions, and regulations to deal with moral conundrums (Shannon and Kockler 10). One issue of growing ethical concern is cosmetic surgery. While a cursory glance might present the practice as amoral, a deeper reflection using Jean Baudrillard's thought exposes the ethical concern. In his *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard employs the concepts of the simulacrum (the copy without an

original) and simulation, crucial to an understanding of postmodern life as a replacement of the real with signs and symbols (Baudrillard 6). While recognizing the person's right to autonomy of their body (which is also debatable), there is a growing culture where: the distinction between the real and the artificial is blurred out; the authenticity and individuality are exchanged in conformity to ideals of superficiality; the natural body and its natural changes are rejected in favour of an infinite pursuit of artificial and even unreachable perfection. All these smack of the modern society's obsession with hyper-reality as described by Baudrillard. Further, cosmetic surgery has become a symptom of a society that is obsessed with hyper-reality, in which people are living in a simulation where idealized images of the body lead to the shaming of others and a detachment from genuine self-acceptance. Its glorification of body modification by social media often leads to psychological and mental health issues (such as low self-esteem, depression, and shame) by those who are considered to have fallen below the 'acceptable' standards of beauty. Shelia Jeffreys argues that "western beauty practices from makeup to labiaplasty" fit the UN definition of harmful cultural practices and should be prohibited (3).

Yet others consider cosmetic surgery as an amoral act that should be accepted, provided the patient gives their consent on the procedure. Without necessarily dabbling into the controversial ethics of cosmetic surgery, we would argue that while it might be justifiable to employ it as a fix to deformed bodies; it could be condemnable if engaged mainly to satisfy vanity and or pursue the modern-day "simulacra" (Baudrillard 12).

The solution to this extreme use of cosmetic surgery would naturally fall on the golden mean. Moderation in this case, refers to the use of cosmetic surgery to handle health issues such as birth defects, deformities occasioned by physical injuries, and the restoration of functionality to hitherto dysfunctional parts of the body.

Work-Place Ethics: Today's work-place has become highly sophisticated and at the same time morally complicated. With new kinds of companies and modes of labour, ethical issues such as moral dilemmas, privacy, confidentiality, safety, wage (in)security and equity, human relations, work ethics (codes of conduct), are a few of the challenges that require urgent ethical intervention. On the issue of moral dilemmas particularly, Aristotle provides a way out by stating clearly that one should choose "the lesser evil" when confronted with such situations (Aristotle, *NE*, 1106b16-17). Again, moderation, as suggested by Aristotle could be useful in handling most work-place-related conflicts or challenges. For instance, a boss who is extreme in his/her criticism of junior colleagues will need to tone down and tell the truth without the use of harsh language. That would produce better results than a bossy attitude. When people feel valued, they are more productive, but when they feel treated as *means to an end*, they may lose morale.

Politics

One notable personality who has applied Aristotle's golden mean specifically in the context of political ethics is Alasdair MacIntyre, a moral and political philosopher of Scottish origin. In his *After Virtue*, MacIntyre draws on Aristotle's virtue ethics and the concept of the golden mean to critique modern liberal politics and suggest an alternative, approach which is essentially communitarian. He argues that modern politics has neglected the importance of virtue and the common good by over amplifying issues of individual rights and procedural justice (MacIntyre 191). In the light of the above, MacIntyre's proposal is plausible in the sense that liberal politics seems to have gone to the very extreme which it accuses the conservatives. Back home in Nigeria, it is no longer news that our so-called democratic rule has fallen short on all principles of democracy. For instance, the principles of inclusive suffrage (inclusive participation) and that of free and fair elections have been violated over and over with impunity. Through blatant

violations, the will of the people at the ballot has been mortgaged to satisfy the whims and caprices of a select few (Anyam and Inja 183–85). These things happen in the country because the political elite (and even the citizenry) has abandoned virtue and upheld selfishness, greediness, corruption, and callousness. Hence, once again, the golden mean could come in to the rescue by directing all parties to discard the garb of excess and toll the line of moderation – which is virtue.

Warfare

War and civil strife have become an increasing problem in today's society. Particularly, the ethical conduct of belligerent parties before, during, and even after combat, leaves a lot to be desired these days. War crimes and violations of human rights seem to have become the norm. To solve this problem, ethicists have fallen back on the Just War theory, and most importantly, Aristotle's doctrine of the mean. One scholar who has notably applied Aristotle's golden mean to the problem of war in modern times is Michael Walzer, an American political philosopher. In his work *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, Walzer employs Aristotelian concepts, including the golden mean, to discuss the ethics of war. Walzer explores the concept of the "moral mean" in the context of warfare, advocating for a balanced approach between the extremes of pacifism and bellicism. He argues that while war may sometimes be necessary, it must be regulated by ethical considerations. In particular, Walzer discusses the concept of "proportionality" in war, which can be seen as an application of moderation as contained in the golden mean. He argues that military actions must be proportional to the ends they are intended to achieve, neither excessive nor deficient (129). Again, the modern relevance of the golden mean is self-evident.

Psychotherapy

Psychotherapy (also referred to as talk therapy) is a variety of treatments that are meant to help a person identify and change troubling emotions, thoughts, and behaviours ("What Is Psychotherapy?", web). Several psychotherapists and mental health professionals have relied on Aristotle's concept of the golden mean in their work. One example is Aaron Beck, a prominent figure in the field of cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT). Vasconcelles reports that Beck's approach to CBT, emphasizes the importance of balance in thoughts and behaviours, which can be seen as an application of the golden mean. Beck believes that cognitive distortions (extreme and unbalanced thoughts) often contribute to mental health issues, and that finding a middle ground between these distortions and more balanced thoughts can help improve psychological well-being (227). While Beck does not reference Aristotle's golden mean directly, his emphasis on balance and moderation in thoughts and behaviours reflects the spirit of Aristotelian virtue ethics. Beyond Beck's work, it may be inferred that the golden mean could serve a good purpose in behavioural modification via psychotherapy. For example, in the prevention of alcohol dependency syndrome, patients may be advised to quit excessive drinking and take to moderate intake habits.

Conclusion

The above exercise was concerned with finding how Aristotle's golden mean could be applied in contemporary society. In the course of the discussion, the concept of virtue ethics was clarified. Also, a background to the discussion was initiated by providing a brief biography of Aristotle, as well as factors which influenced his thought pattern. Further, details of the doctrine of the golden mean were outlined. This was followed by the various criticisms levelled against Aristotle's theory of the golden mean as well as the defences of the doctrine from renowned

scholars. Finally, the applicability of the golden mean in contemporary times was demonstrated. In the light of the above, it may be concluded that in spite of its so-called shortcomings, the golden mean still holds enough to provide guidance to us in the current era.

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