

PPT1 Model Paper 2 (2018)

Assigned model paper topic

Following the style (font size, citation style, etc.) of the paper model distributed to you, please respond to one of the following prompts. For all of them, you will probably need to refer to other parts of the text—but do so judiciously as your main goal is to carefully explain the small section that is your focus. Total: 900 to 1200 words.

- (1) Explain the argument which leads Aristotle to conclude at 1105b of the *Nicomachean Ethics* that “it is by doing just acts that the just man is produced.”

When reading the model:

Look for evidence that the writer has met the requirements below:

- Thesis statement.* Succinctly state your interpretation and supporting evidence. Make sure the essay's parts all support or develop your thesis, and no parts of the paper are unconnected.
- Claim/evidence identification.* Demonstrate understanding of which claims act as evidence for other claims, on the basis of cogent textual interpretation.
- Argument structures.* Demonstrate understanding of the precise structure of the argument you are reconstructing: for instance, is it reasoning with conditionals, argument by analogy, etc.?
- Argument features.* Demonstrate understanding of features which make an argument good or bad, for instance by identifying claims which are susceptible to objections or identifying poor reasoning patterns.
- Analysis.* Demonstrate understanding of how individual components of the text relate together as a whole
- Interpretation.* Recognize where the text admits of multiple readings and present a preferred reading appealing to reasons for your interpretation.
- Quotations.* Use textual evidence appropriately to support your interpretation, being sure to explain the quotation and its context.

Becoming Just by Doing Just Things
Student 123456

At Book II.4 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle has already argued for an account of virtue on which so-called “moral virtues” such as temperance, courage, and other ways of acting, are acquired by habit. Further, he has argued that a person becomes virtuous by doing virtuous things (NE II.1, 1103a32-1103b2). However, this claim seems subject to an immediate objection, which is that it has the causal order reversed: shouldn’t we say instead that if someone does virtuous things, people are already virtuous? In what follows, I show how Aristotle’s answer to this question relies on the distinction between an action being virtuous and an agent being virtuous. Aristotle argues that in order for a person to be characterized as virtuous, they must perform virtuous actions in a certain way, which requires three necessary conditions.

We can say that Aristotle’s argument aims at identifying the necessary and sufficient conditions for a person to be virtuous. While it is necessary to be virtuous that some performs virtuous acts, this is not sufficient. If this were sufficient to be virtuous, then someone who does something virtuous merely by accident would be a virtuous person. However, this is not the case. Take, for example, the virtue of courage, which is displayed especially in fearful situations (II.1, 1104a). Rescuing a helpless child who has fallen onto railway tracks in the path of a rapidly approaching train seems to constitute an act of courage. However, if the person who performs this action is wearing headphones and is unaware that the train is coming, then we would not call the person courageous. This example illustrates why Aristotle thinks further conditions must be met for a person to be called virtuous.

To identify which conditions must be in place for a person, and not just the act, to be virtuous, Aristotle explores a proposed analogy with arts such as language

Commented [CMK1]: Notice how the first sentence introduces the text and context.

What do the next few sentences do? Why are they important?

Commented [CMK2]: This is a Bekker number. Rather than using page numbers, you should cite Greek texts with Stephanus numbers (for Plato) and Bekker numbers (for Aristotle).

Can you find this citation in your book? What do the numbers and letters mean?

Commented [CMK3]: Here is an example of a thesis statement split into two sentences. Notice that the author has explained why Aristotle is making the argument he does.

Commented [CMK4]: What is the author doing here? This is a counterexample—to what?

Try to find your own examples to illustrate the points you are making in the paper. This helps the reader and it helps you understand, too.

Commented [CMK5]: What is the connection between this sentence and the last sentence of the previous paragraph?

Check your papers to make sure each paragraph is connected to the next.

and music. The objection has stated that people who do grammatical or musical things count as grammarians and musicians, and so, by analogy, someone who does virtuous things counts as a virtuous person. In what follows, Aristotle will show that even on this analogy, doing virtuous acts does not alone guarantee being a virtuous person. Further, he will show that the analogy fails to hold at a crucial point.

Aristotle considers different ways that a person can perform a grammatical action. First, one could do so “by chance,” that is, by accidentally happening upon a grammatical construction (1105a22). Suppose a very young child, uttering different syllables in a playful manner, accidentally utters a correct Mandarin word. She has performed a grammatical action, but we would not call her a grammarian. Likewise, a person who accidentally moves a person in danger—perhaps they were simply in their way—would not count as being a virtuous person. By analogy, this shows that an additional necessary condition for being virtuous is choosing the virtuous action (1105a30).

Still, acting virtuously and choosing the virtuous action are not together sufficient for being a virtuous person. This is because, on analogy with speaking grammatically, one could simply follow instructions and succeed in performing a grammatical action. For instance, the child learning Mandarin could repeat a sentence her instructor gave her. Although she has spoken a grammatical sentence and chosen to utter the sentence, we still would not call her a grammarian. In the domain of virtue, a child who is told to return a toy stolen from a playmate has performed a virtuous action, and does so by choice. However, she is not yet virtuous. What is required is for to choose the act on her own, without additional reasons such as that someone has told her. Virtuous actions must be things she chooses “for their own sakes,” that is, that she finds intrinsically valuable (1105a32).

Commented [CMK6]: Notice how the author is quoting the text. How much are the quoting directly? How are they explaining the text?

Commented [CMK7]: Notice that the author is careful to support their claims. Do you see a general patten of how they are proceeding? Try to identify the conversational moves in this paragraph.

The third and final necessary condition Aristotle identifies is for the virtuous action to “proceed from a firm and unchangeable character” (1105a33). At this point, however, he observes that the analogy between the domain of the arts and the domain of virtue fails. This is because what constitutes a grammatically good sentence or a musically good composition is the result (1105a26-29). In contrast, Aristotle has already argued that the goodness of virtue is in the manner of performance of the virtuous action (I.8, 1097a14-18). The manner of acting is an essential part of the action’s being virtuous. This is why Aristotle says that the person who does virtuous actions “as just and temperate men do them” counts as virtuous (I.8, 1105b5-11). In other words, if someone is performing a virtuous action which is characteristic for them, they are acting virtuously.

Even though Aristotle argues that the analogy with music is not complete, since in music, the focus is on the musical composition or its performance, and not the musician’s character, we can illustrate his point about habitual character with musicians. In fact, he makes this point earlier (II.1, 1103b8-10). To be a good lyre-player, one must practice. On one’s first day of lyre-lessons, the resulting music will not be very good. Perhaps after one or two years of constant performances, a lyre-player becomes good. When she performs a piece of music with a musical ear and dexterity, she is not a good lyre-player because of that single performance. Rather, she performs that piece of music in a way that a good lyre-player does: with skills which have become part of her ordinary way of playing the lyre. On this analogy, then, a virtuous person who saves a child on railroad tracks is not a virtuous person because of that single action. Rather, she saves the child in the way that a virtuous person does: with knowledge, because she intends to do a virtuous thing and not

Commented [CMK8]: Take a moment to see how many quotes are from beyond the immediate section (II.4). Why has the author chosen those places to go to?

because of external pressure, and out of a habitual reflex. Like the lyre-player, she might not even think about her action as she leaps onto the tracks.

In conclusion, although we might be tempted to say that if someone does a virtuous action, then they are a virtuous person, Aristotle argues that virtuous action alone is insufficient for being a virtuous person. Reasoning by partial analogy with artistic actions, he shows that there are three additional necessary and together sufficient conditions for a virtuous action. Finally, even though the analogy with art is partial, when we focus on the habitual nature of musical training, we can see that, on Aristotle's account, the virtuous person, becomes this way after habituation, which is what makes their actions virtuous—that is with knowledge, correct intention, and from habitual nature.

[1095 words]

Works Cited

Aristotle (2009). *Nicomachean Ethics*, revised edition (Oxford World Classics). Tr. D. Ross, rev. L. Brown. Oxford University Press.

Commented [CMK9]: What has this paragraph done? What does it contribute to the paper as a whole, given the paper's main thesis?

Commented [CMK10]: How does this conclusion differ from the introduction? Where does it overlap?

Your conclusion can be brief, but notice that this paragraph includes no new ideas, only what has already been discussed.