Throughout time people have been questioning the nature of good and evil. These questions have formed various religious beliefs while others answer in secular terms. Among the issues humans have discussed and written about on what they believe makes a good person. One such Greek philosopher, Aristotle, wrote the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which outlined his description of what makes a good person. In the treatise, he states that to be a good person one needs to have happiness, the highest good because it is noble, and this happiness is reached by virtue ethics. Two themes that are most relevant to being this type of person are moderation and friendship.

One of the key elements to have happiness is to have virtue because happiness is considered the highest good because it is noble and an end to all things. In order to be virtuous, actions must not be either too extreme or too passive in order for just decisions to be made. Aristotle believes that “moral virtue is a mean and in what sense it is mean; that it is a mean between two vices, one of which is marked by excess and the other by deficiency; and that it is a mean in the sense that it aims at the median in the emotions and in actions.” Having moderation in one’s actions you mean having control of one’s emotions, which permits one to react virtuously depending on the situation. To clarify, Aristotle provides examples such as the emotion of anger. A man deficient in anger is considered apathetic, if he is excessive he is considered short tempered, but if he is in the mean he has “gentleness.” The gentleness position is considered virtuous as good and just decisions can be made when one is not easily angered or showing lack of interest in what may happen around him. With these good deeds one is able to achieve the highest good, happiness, and the participant will know that he has done “good” because of his focus on the mean of his emotions.

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In addition Aristotle’s plea for moderation can also apply to our desires. While placing our emotions in the mean is one method of having virtue, controlling our desires and pleasures is another challenge. Philosopher Richard Kraut of Northwestern University states:

It might be asked why Aristotle thinks our enjoyment of physical pleasures should be kept within a certain limit. So long as one is eating, or drinking, or having sex, why not get as much pleasure as one can?... It is clear that a similar assumption lies behind Aristotle’s call for moderation in our enjoyment of physical pleasure... it is best to keep one’s desire for physical pleasures at a moderate level... ²

Kraut questions of the legitimacy of the happiness in human and material pleasures. While one can get pleasures out of food, sleep, exercise, sex, etc., there can still be a problem with having excess enjoyment in these activities which creates an obsessive desire for them which does not make a good person. Too much food and you become gluttonous, too much sleep and you become lazy, and too much sex makes one lose self-control.

One example of how obsession with physical pleasures does not make a good person is Don Giovanni from Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*. Based on the fictional figure Don Juan, Don Giovanni spends most of his time seducing women to fulfill his ever demanding desire for sex.³ In his lifetime he sleeps with over a thousand women. His ravishing ruins women’s lives, but he keeps on seducing to satisfy a pleasure that is so short in happiness. The word “don” in his name is supposed to symbolize his nobility, but Aristotle would completely disagree that there was any bit of nobility in Don Giovanni. Don Giovanni is considered a bad human being in Aristotelian ethics because there is absolutely no moderation in his pleasures and no self-control in his actions toward women. Excess in his pleasure prevents him from doing “good” as compared to a man who is able to restrain himself. There is no moderation, no virtue as a

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mean of actions, no happiness, and therefore, no good from such a man.

One can observe, however, that Kraut and Aristotle do not frown upon the pleasures of these activities and desires but rather promote their limitation. This is rational because while a man can become obsessed with food he cannot deprive himself of it or else he will be malnourished. Some actions that are rarely practiced are also not an issue because a person who does not have sex often or abstains from drinking causes no harm to himself or others. These activities can give pleasure, but none are essential for the sake of having a virtuous life.

Another theme presented by Aristotle that identifies the good apart from the bad is true friendships. What is unique about happiness is that it needs friendships to be true and good. To have friendships one must have justice and to have justice one needs the understanding of moral virtues. Aristotle elaborates on the benefits of friendships by explaining:

And the best works done and those which deserve the highest praise are those that are done to one’s friends... Friends help young men avoid error... friends enhance our ability to think and to act... Friendships also seem to hold states together... When people are friends, they have no need of justice, but when they are just they need friendship in addition. In fact, the just in the fullest sense is regarded as constituting an element of friendship. Friendship is noble as well as necessary: we praise those who love their friends and consider the possession of many friends a noble thing. And further, we believe of our friends that they are good men. (Aristotle 214-15)

What Aristotle means is that the happiness flowing from friendship provides uncountable benefits to the friends, society, and state by all the characteristics associated with a noble friendship. Friendship as the answer to long term happiness is rather brilliant, but the question arises of what makes a true friend.

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According to Aristotle, friends must have similar virtues in order to have a common ground of what justice is in order for the friendship to be good and noble. With this in mind, he emphasizes the significance of friendship above all other things and since happiness is the highest good and friendship requires happiness to exist in its truest form, Aristotle is able to offer true friendship as a long term source of happiness. This goes beyond all other actions, desires, and pleasures regardless of their moderation because their meaning only becomes important if they are able to establish friendships which will then provide that long term happiness and will then create good deeds and good men. The significance of his philosophy allows one to observe his fellow man to interpret which person is a true friend rather than one motivated by utility or pleasure. The man who befriends another out of utility will only be a friend until that person is of no use to him, so there is no virtue or good that comes out of such a friend or friendship. Likewise, a person who becomes a friend because the other gives him pleasure of some sort will abandon him if that pleasure ends. Any person that forms friendships for this reason is not considered a good person.

An example to illustrate a true friend is Sancho Panza from Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*. Sancho is presented initially as unvirtuous friend as he joins Don Quixote to escape the life of poverty and servitude that he had. This to Aristotle would make him a bad person as he demonstrates the friendship of utility but as the story progresses Sancho’s character changes. There is a scene when he and Don Quixote are in a cage due to a trick planned by a priest and a barber to get Don Quixote home. In a passionate rant Sancho condemns the actions against Don Quixote and talks against the religious authority saying

> I've said all this, Senor Priest, just to urge your fathership to take into account the bad treatment my master is receiving... and make you responsible for all the boons and mercies my master... can't do while he's in the cage.5

Sancho recognizes the agony of Don Quixote to the point he forgets his own

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place in the cage and speaks out against a religious leader. He speaks with the intention of shaming the priest’s and barber’s actions and condemning the lack of justice in the situation. Aristotle would interpret this as an example of true friendship for two reasons. First, Sancho shows care for his friend more than for himself, an ability that can be executed with certain knowledge of moral virtue and justice. Second, both Sancho and Don Quixote have the similar goal of administrating justice in a society where classes are very divided and unequal. By speaking against the priest and testifying to the injustice that has been done by him and the barber, Sancho makes a bold attempt for the sake of Don Quixote to see that justice be properly implemented. This pursuit of justice is a trait found in friends and since justice needs moral virtue to be identified one can conclude that the friendship between Don Quixote and Sancho is true and thus Sancho is a good person.

So, taking into consideration the different types of friendships, Aristotle believes that the truest of friendships exists when two individuals are able to share the same moderation of actions for the sake of virtue and in doing so are able to have similar ideas of what justice is, leading to productive collaboration for the two. We also know that these friends do good and just things because of their pursuit of virtue and moderation, so their friendship is good and genuine.

This concept of true friendship also conveys the idea of how civil society can benefit from friends that are leaders and politicians. Philosopher Suzanne Stern-Gillet notes:

… it [friendship] affords them a semi-theoretical insight into the nature of moral life. Through the process of making another self they gain not only an awareness of themselves qua morally actualized, but also a deeper insight into the nature and variety of moral experience… universal justice is complete virtue in relation to another; in a perfect state it will be co-extensive with law-abidingness… Aristotle describes justice as “the bond of men in states; for the administration of justice, which is the
determination of what is just, is the principle order of society.6

Stern-Gillet recognizes that Aristotle believes that without proper understanding and execution of justice, civil society cannot exist. By his reasoning, in order for civilization to form, there needs to be justice, like friendships, and also the knowledge of moral virtues. In order to have such knowledge one will need to be conversant on the subject and devote his life to pursue happiness, the highest good, which, in return, requires friendship. Everything is so beautifully connected to suggest that the best government that can perform justice appropriately will be one that has members of true friendships.

Such a government is shown perfectly in Jonathan Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels. When Gulliver travels to the land of the Houyhnhnms he finds that their society and government is heavily influenced by the philosophy of what makes a good person. Gulliver even comments that “Friendships and Benevolence are two principal virtues among the Houyhnhnms… universal to the whole race.”7 Establishing civil society that places heavy emphasis for all members to pursue friendship and benevolence would receive an official stamp of approval from Aristotle. Laws and way of life is based on virtue and with this norm everyone will have an equal sense of justice which will promote acts of good will, friendship, and in the end result in a society of good men.

Paul Schollmeier (University of Nevada) expands on this idea, writing that

… people who are unanimous are political friends of the good kind because they exhibit two marks of friendship. The arguments show that unanimous people exhibit the first mark of friendship—to act for the sake of happiness of another (see. Eth. 9.4.1166a2-4)—and that they exhibit the fourth mark—to have same tastes as another… Because they exhibit these marks of friendship… they would appear to act for the sake

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of happiness of one another. By Schollmeier’s interpretation, one can still claim that Aristotle will approve of the Houyhnhnms’ society; however they lack a great element to guarantee true friendships in government, democracy. Professor Schollmeier understands that if people are able to make unanimous decisions, they are able to demonstrate friendship by making laws in the name of justice for the sake of each other’s happiness. Since representatives are sent in the name of the people, the decisions made by them will also be for the happiness of society. Unanimous votes on laws also suggest that the politicians have similar moral values. This means that they will have a similar idea of what justice is and in result will be doing acts of friendship for the sake of happiness and, of course, doing the acts of good men.

In short, Aristotle’s discussion of moderation and friendships in life gives an explanation of what makes a good person. Both of these elements are connected to virtue and happiness which allow people to live happy lives and to be good persons. A good person is happy because he has friends and he has friends because he knows justice and virtue and shares these with others who have a similar pursuit of happiness.

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