

Aristotelian Philosophy

The Classical World: Spring 2010

I. Aristotle's Life and Works

II. Aristotle's Method

III. The Good, *Eudaimonia* and Happiness

IV. Ethics, Morality, and Virtue

References

Barnes, Jonathan, ed. *Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue*.

Nussbaum, Martha. *The Fragility of Goodness*.

Ross, David. *Aristotle*.

Aristotle's Life

- 384-362 born, raised in court of King of Macedon
- 362-347 at Plato's Academy — becomes leading student and teacher
- 347-342 at Assos and Mitylene with former students at the Academy
- 342-335 tutor to future Alexander the Great
- 335-322 founds Lykeum after Athens falls under Macedonian rule
writes various texts, including *Nicomachean Ethics*
- 322 death of Alexander; Athenians turns against Macedonian influences; Aristotle flees to Chalcis
- 321 dies at Chalcis

Aristotle's Works

Too many to list – Diogenes Laertus catalogs 550

About 30 authentic works survive

Some of the most notable:

Categories

Prior Analytics

Posterior Analytics

Physics

Metaphysics

On the Soul

Politics

Rhetoric

Poetics

Nicomachean Ethics

Eudemian Ethics

Method: Logic

Central works of logic:

Categories – “predicates”

Ways of talking about entities

Prior Analytics

Deductive logic

Posterior Analytics

Scientific method

Method: Logic

Categories: “predicates”

Substance

Quantity

Quality

Relation

Place

Date

Posture

Action

Passivity

Possession

Method: Logic

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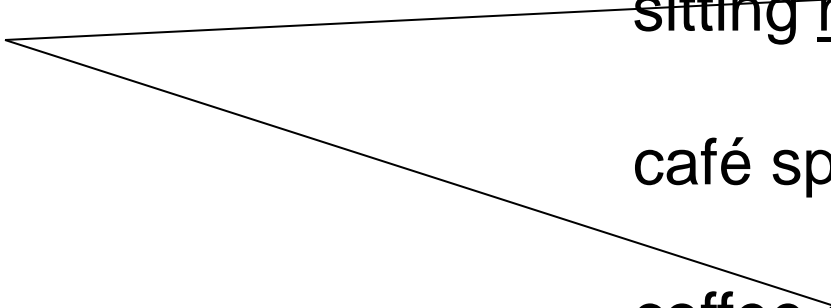
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Method: Logic

Prior Analytics: Deductive Logic

Terms are:

universal = “All men”

non-universal = “Some men”

or

particular. = “Socrates”

Method: Logic

Prior Analytics: Deductive Logic

Syllogisms

All animals are mortal.

All men are animals.

Therefore, all men are mortal.

Method: Logic

Prior Analytics: Deductive Logic

Syllogisms

All animals are mortal.

All men are animals.

Therefore, all men are mortal.

All men are mortal.

Socrates is a man.

Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

Method: Logic

Posterior Analytics = “scientific method”

One feature: Definition by division

Begin with the genus

Then, divide genus into various species

Example of Definition: Virtue

Virtue concerns the soul (1102a15-7)

“Since there are three conditions arising in the soul – feelings, capacities, and states – virtue must be one of these” (1105b20-1).

“If, then, the virtues are neither feelings nor capacities, the remaining possibility is that they are states. And so we have said what the genus of virtue is” (1106a13-4).

What State of the Soul Is Virtue?

“...every virtue causes its possessors to be in a good state and to perform their functions well...” (1106a17-8).

“Virtue, then, is a mean, insofar as it aims at what is intermediate” (1106b28-9).

“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. It is a mean between two vices, one of excess and one of deficiency” (1107a1-3).

Method: Knowledge

Starting points:

“...the difference between arguments from principles and arguments towards principles” (1095a32).

“...things are known in two ways, for some are known to us, some known without qualification. Presumably, then, we ought to begin from things known to us” (1095b2-4).

Method

“known to us” = held as common knowledge

Possibly false and not really known

Examples:

Men and women are of equal worth (Here, today)

Men are naturally better than women. (Athens, Lykeum)

“known without qualification” = really known

Implies that what is known is true

Method

We begin in ethics with what is “known to us” and work towards what is “known without qualification.”

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“That is why we need to have been brought up in fine habits if we are to be adequate students of fine and just things, and of political questions generally” (1095b5-7).

Good, Happiness, and *Eudaimonia*

“Since there are apparently many ends, and we choose some of them... because of something else, it is clear that not all ends are complete. And so, if only one end is complete, the good we are looking for will be this end...” (1097a26-9).

Good, Happiness, and *Eudaimonia*

“Now happiness, more than anything else, seems complete without qualification. For we always choose it because of itself, never because of something else” (1097a35-1097b2).

Good, Happiness, and *Eudaimonia*

“Moreover, we think happiness is most choiceworthy of all goods, since it is not counted as one good among many”
(1097b17-8).

Good, Happiness, and *Eudaimonia*

“Happiness, then, is apparently something complete and self-sufficient, since it is the end of the things achievable in action”
(1097b19-20).

Good, Happiness, and *Eudaimonia*

The argument:

1. The greatest good is the most choiceworthy, the most complete and self-sufficient.
2. Happiness is a complete good.
3. Happiness is a self-sufficient good.
4. Happiness is the most choiceworthy good.
5. Therefore, happiness is the greatest good.

Good, Happiness, and *Eudaimonia*

daimon = spirit (cf. demon)

Not the same as one's soul (*psyche*)

Something like your nature throughout life.

Eudaimonia usually translated as happiness.

“*living well and doing well*” (1095a20).

Success

Well-Being

Flourishing

Good, Happiness, and *Eudaimonia*

“living well and doing well”

Not to be understood moralistically
(not “doing good works”)

Living *excellently* and *finely*.

Ethics and (vs.) Morality

Ethics — character

(Greek — “*Ēthos*,” “*ēthikos*”)

Broad scope:

“How ought we to live?”

Focus: Human excellence, living a full and rich human life.

Ethics and (vs.) Morality

Morality — custom, customs

(Latin — *“moralis”*)

Narrower scope:

One way to answer “How ought we to live?”

Focus: Rules, Laws.

Derivative of Universal Law

Replaced Canon Law (Divine Law)

Ultimately from Roman Law

Ethics and (vs.) Morality

Morality is conceived to be...

... rationally decidable

For each action, we can deduce from a principle whether it is forbidden, permitted, or obligatory

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No action can be both forbidden and obligatory, or both forbidden and permitted

Ethics and (vs.) Morality

Morality is conceived to be...

... rationally decidable

For each action, we can deduce from a principle whether it is forbidden, permitted, or obligatory

... consistent

No action can be both forbidden and obligatory, or both forbidden and permitted

... complete

Every action is either forbidden, permitted or obligatory

Ethics and (vs.) Morality

Morality is conceived to be rationally decidable, consistent, and complete.

Ethics, in particular virtue ethics, isn't necessarily any of these.

Cf. Antigone

The Human Good and Virtue

The human function is “activity and actions of the soul that involve reason” (1098a14).

A function is performed well by being performed “in accord with the virtue proper” to it. (1098a16-7)

“And so the human good proves to be activity of the soul in accord with virtue” (1098a17-8)

Virtue Is Part of Human Good

Since the human good is happiness, happiness is activity of the soul in accord with virtue.

Consequence: Happiness is in part *constituted* by virtue.

Virtue is an *internal good*.

Internal and External Goods

Internal

- partly definitive of activity
- not comprehensible independent of activity

Example: a perfect game in baseball

Example: a masterpiece of oil painting

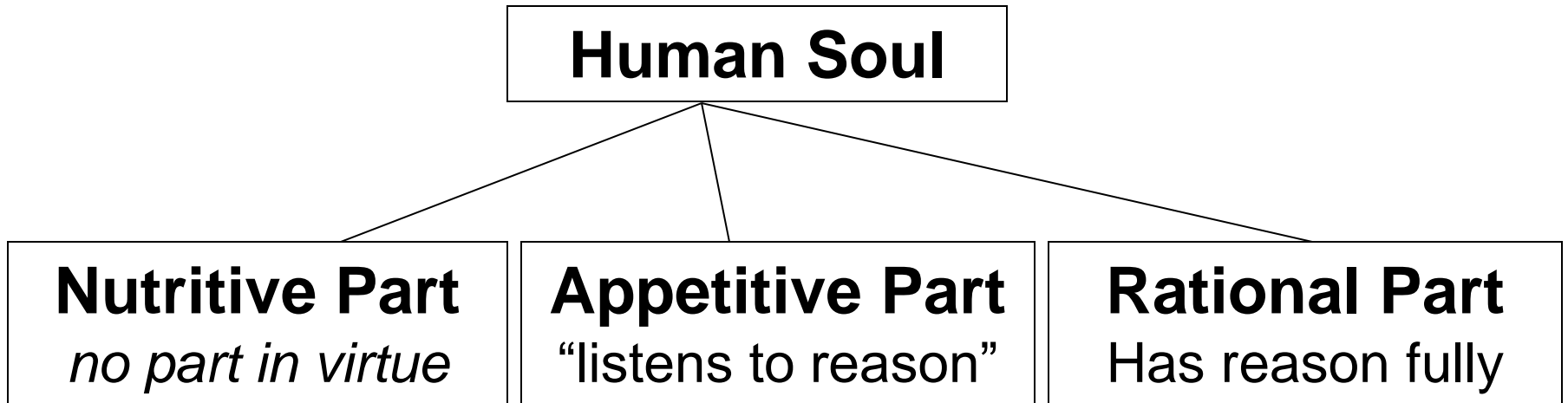
External

- contingently attached to activity
- can be separated from the activity

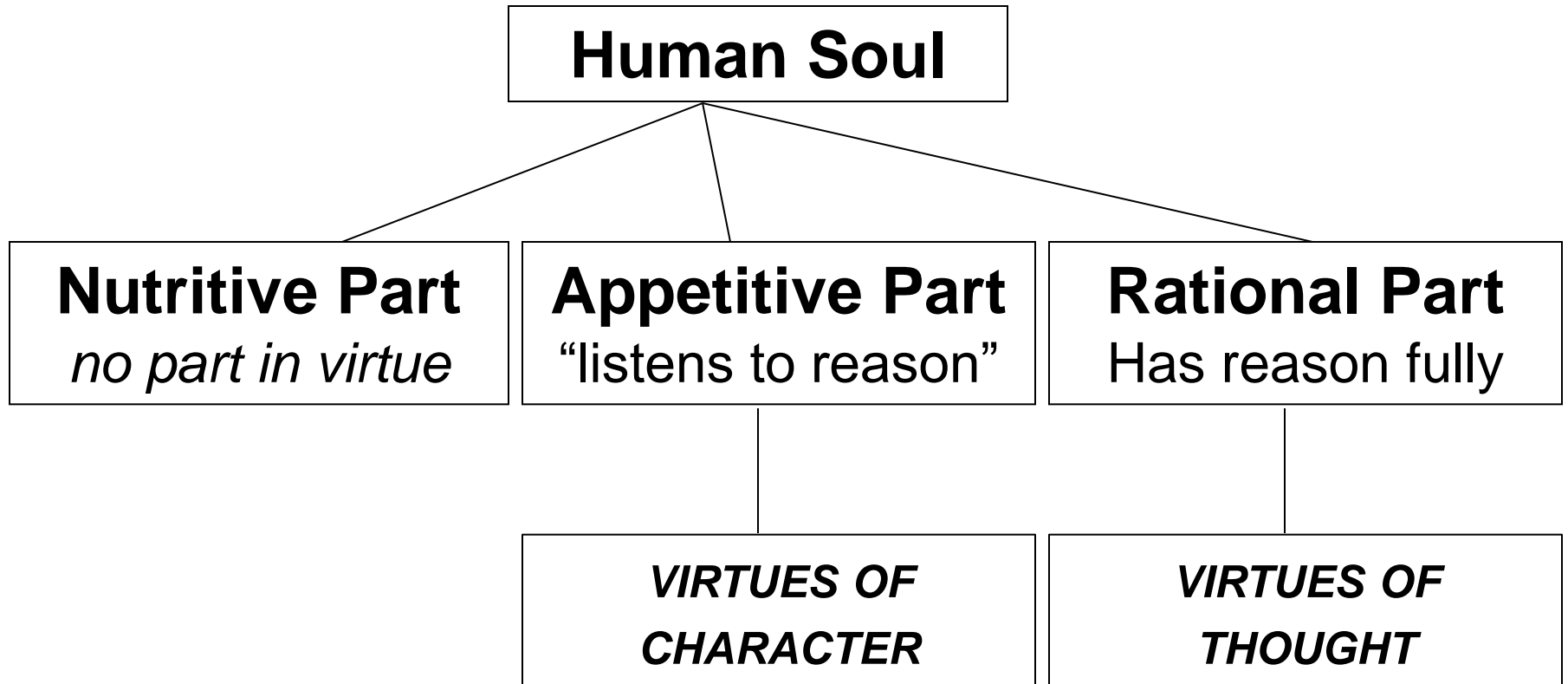
Example: the fame the pitcher enjoys

Example: the money the painting fetches at auction

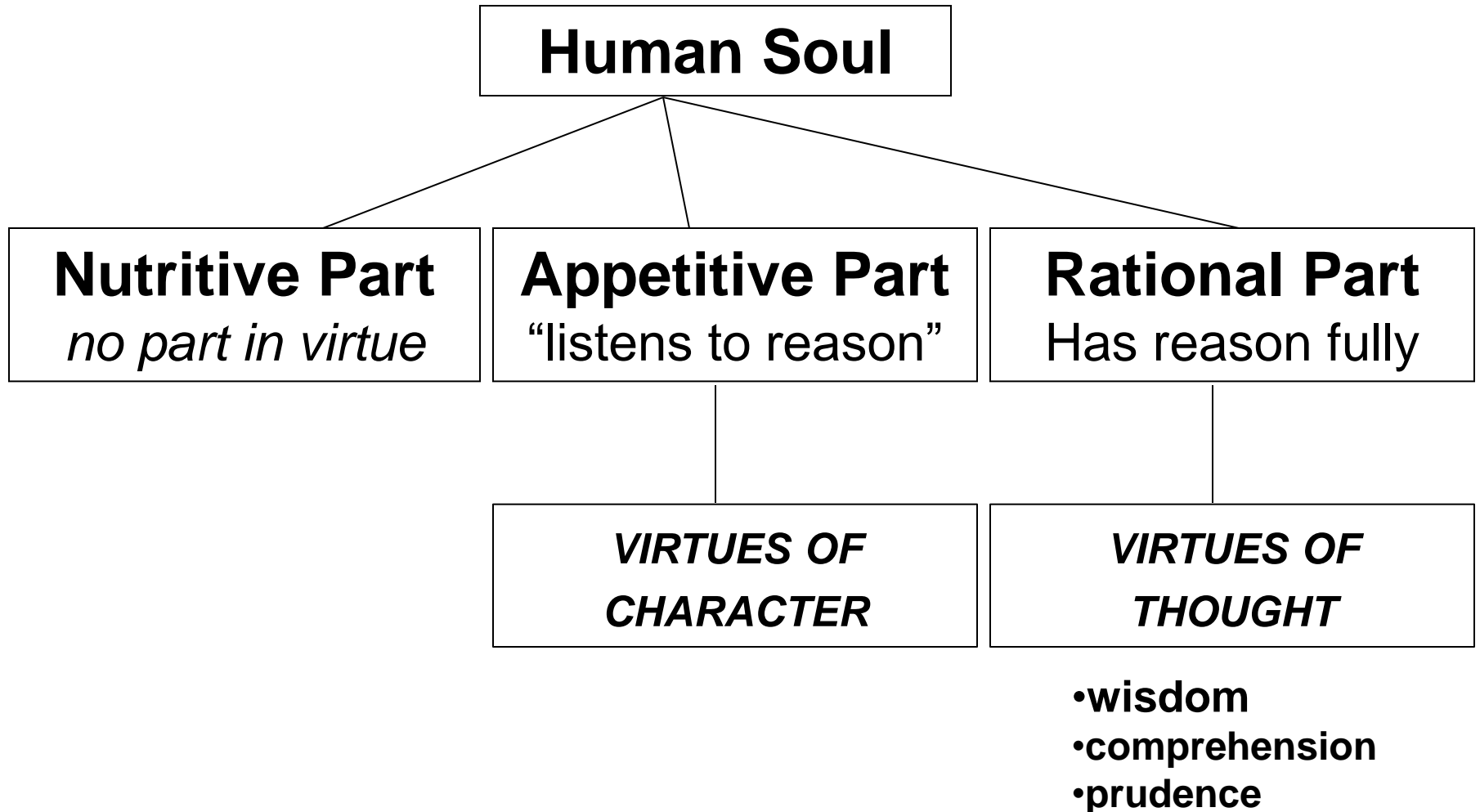
The Soul and Virtue



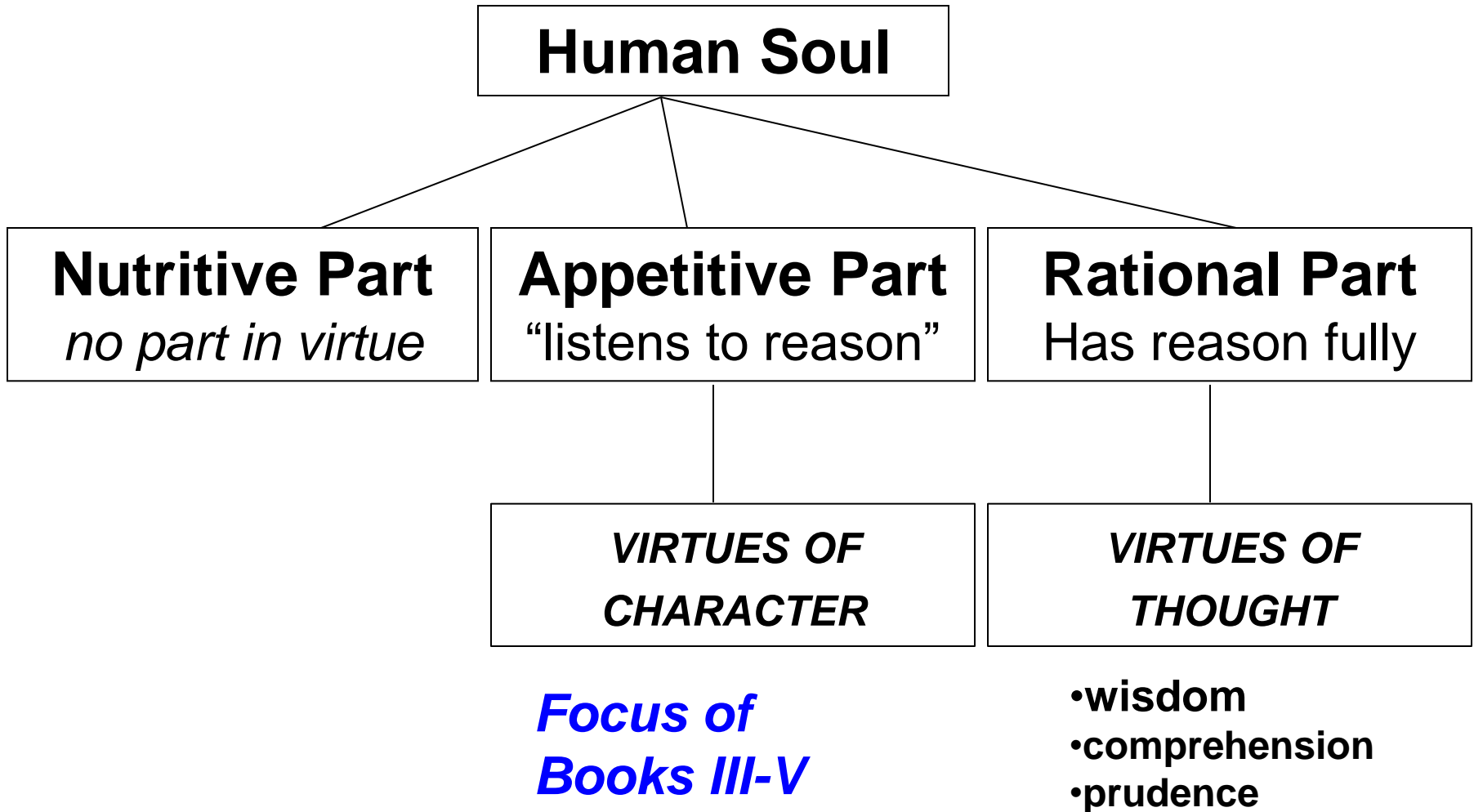
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Virtue and Action

A *virtue* is a state of character.

An *action* can be virtuous, or exhibit a virtue.

For S's action to be virtuous:

the action must accord with virtue,

S must know that the action is virtuous,

S must decide to act “for itself,” and

S must act from a “firm and unchanging state”

(1105a29-35)

The Doctrine of the Mean

Every virtue concerns a particular *feeling* or *kind of activity*.

Within its scope, the virtue is the state of the soul that is *the mean between two extremes* — *vices*.

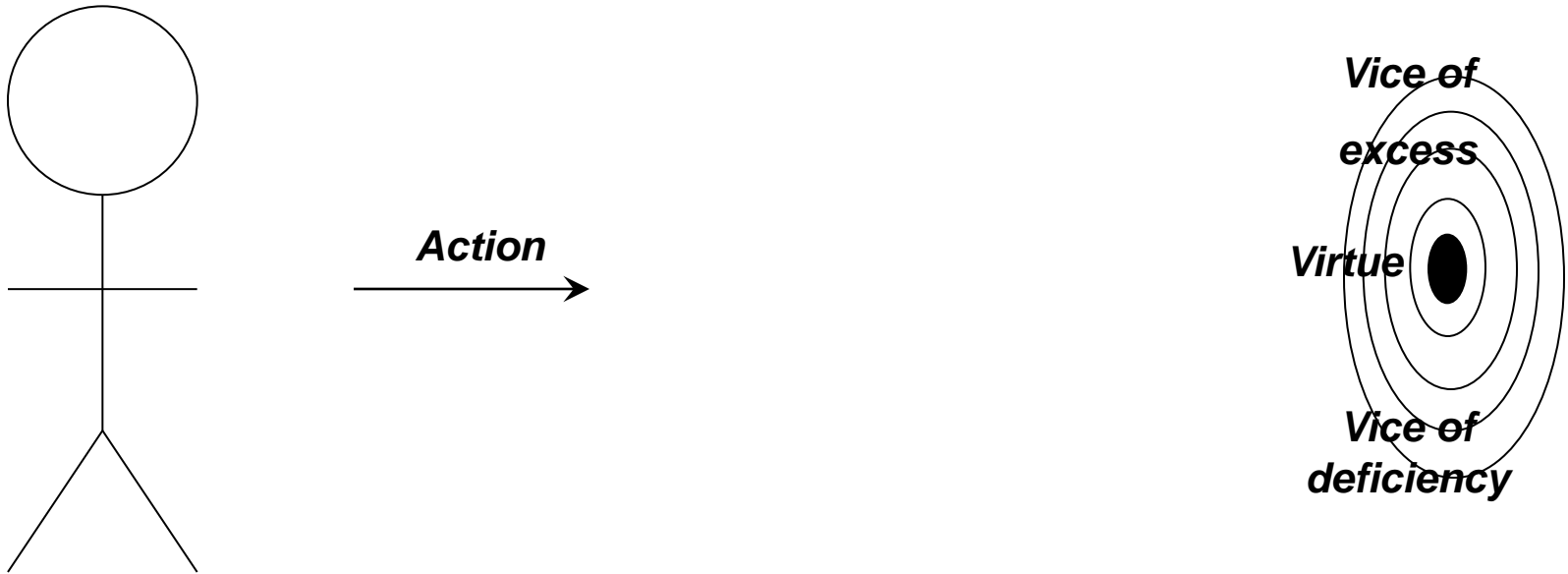
Mean is defined “relative to us” (1106a32) — not the exact middle between the extremes.

The mean is defined by how “the prudent person would define it” (1107a3).

Habituations, *or, Aristotelian Target Practice*

We become virtuous by performing virtuous actions.

Cf. 1105b10-12



How to Become Virtuous in Three Difficult Steps (II.9)

Aim away from the worse vice.

Generally, one vice is worse than the other.

Correct for your own natural tendencies toward one or the other vice.

We have to know ourselves and correct for our natural drift towards a vice.

Avoid the natural human bias towards pleasure.

Our bias towards what is pleasurable will lead us into vice unless we correct for it.

For Thursday...

We will have a workshop on Aristotelian virtue, and virtue more generally.

Prepare by attempting to recreate the “chart” referred to in II.7.

(Hint: The chart should have at least 5 columns.)