

THE VIRTUE OF FRIENDLINESS AND CIVILITY



This Chapter is based upon the interpretation set out in Curzer, H.J (2012), *Aristotle and the Virtues*, pp. 188-194 (OUP)

SECTION 1: VIRTUE KNOWLEDGE

Use the information below to complete the Virtue Knowledge Template

1. What can those who have this virtue do particularly well?

Those who have strengthened this virtue make for particularly sociable and personable companions.¹ They are able to accept and praise the right words and deeds of others, whilst rejecting and resisting those that are harmful to themselves or others. When called to oppose or criticise others, this is done with flair and gentleness. They are able to be open-minded and tolerant of others, but can challenge in non-confrontational or non-aggressive ways when words and deeds are morally unacceptable.

They are able to respond to people's words and deeds with a winning manner, except, of course,

when it is morally unacceptable to do so. The sorts of interactions that are covered by 'words' and 'deeds' include: conversational exchanges, debate and discussion, questioning, requests, gestures and more, all of which are employed to encourage stability. Those who have this virtue are particularly good in all social situations, responding sensitively and appropriately to the needs of those around them. Those with this virtue are able to 'oil the wheels' of social intercourse.

¹ Interestingly, the word 'companion' comes from the Spanish *con pañero* – the one with whom we share our bread.

2. What are the benefits of acting out this virtue?

The benefits to the person who has the virtue include the delight that comes from pleasing others and avoiding paining them through language or gesture, except when it is morally inappropriate to neglect such unpleasant tasks. Once in 'morally inappropriate' situations, those with the virtue of civility respond well.

Those who have this virtue can also benefit others by bringing an air of open-ness and agreeability to social discourse.

Without this virtue, social interaction could become crude, coarse, awkward, unsophisticated and deeply unpleasant – anti-social, in a word.

3. When might I practise this virtue?

Wherever it is not noble, or is harmful, for [the friendly person] to contribute pleasure, he will refuse, and will choose rather to give pain; also, if giving way to another's action would bring disgrace, and that in a high degree, or injury, on the agent, while his opposition brings a little pain, he will not give way, but will decline... For the sake of a great future pleasure, too, he will inflict small pains.

Aristotle, NE, (1126b31-1127a6)

Aristotle here sets out some guidelines about when we might have to practise this virtue.

The person with this virtue will exercise it in situations where:

- * the conversation is de-railing, or taking wrong and aggressive turns;
- * resistance to conversational 'wrong turns' or 'blind alleys' is required;
- * the conversation requires steering towards fruitful and more mutually thoughtful pathways, cutting a path through the thicket of barbed comments, crassness or venom;





4. Which desires, feelings or emotions may be alerting me to practise this virtue?

This virtue governs the emotion or desire to promote positive and friendly feelings amongst a group. It builds upon the basic desire to warm to others and to be accepted by them for good things – a very basic human desire. But it also moderates our more negative emotions, especially those related to the taking of offence. These include:

* **Anger:** *You have culpably offended in the important matter of X (action or omission) and is bad (is to some extent an enemy of what is good); I am in a moral position to condemn; you ought to be hurt/punished/shamed for X; may you be hurt for X!*

* **Resentment:** *P has culpably offended in the important matter of X (action or omission) that touches me quite personally and is bad (is to some extent my enemy); I am in a moral position to condemn; I wish I could hurt P for X, but I am impeded from doing so directly.*

* **Grievance appeasement:** *I/you have been victimized and injured by forces beyond my control, and so am entitled to succour in the form of compensation from the System: may I be so compensated.*

* **Indignation – sense of one’s own rightness; confidence of being in a moral position to condemn; need for retribution; judgemental or condemnatory form of anger:** *P has very culpably and shockingly offended in the important matter of X (action or*

omission) and is bad (is an enemy of what is good); I am very confident of being in a moral position to condemn; and P deserves (ought) to be hurt for X. (Note how this shades into self-righteousness.)

* **Rage:** Intense anger, marked by loud voice, red face, tensed muscles, perspiration, etc. This can border on the irrational, with the desire to destroy becoming detached from its anchor in the concern for justice.

* **Frustration:** *I strongly desire X and am meeting high resistance if not insuperable obstacles to achieving or acquiring X; if only I could achieve or acquire X! I perceive my situation as blocking my concerns; a significant, if not insuperable obstacles opposes my desire. What is the goal that is being frustrated?*

* **Annoyance/Irritation:** *X impinges unpleasantly on some concern of mine, either by contravening the standards implicit in that concern, or by distracting me from the activity that the concern moves me to, or by appealing to some other concern that is in competition with it, thus creating a motivational conflict; may such impingement cease.*

The above material is directly quoted from the very excellent *Emotions: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology*, Robert C. Roberts, 2003, CUP.

5. Some dilemmas to check understanding

Construct three scenarios that require individuals to practise the virtue of civility. Shape them around each of the situations that call for the exercise of the virtue, e.g.

* A conversation where things are getting too heated and argumentative;

* A conversation that is touching upon personally sensitive, or mutually irreconcilable issues;

* A conversation that is constrained by sarcasm, scoffing, or mockery.





SECTION 2: VIRTUE REASONING

1. What are my current basic dispositions and inclinations in relation to this virtue?

How do you handle the language and gestures of others when they are:

a. Injurious?

b. Not injurious, but constructive?

- * Do you praise the language and gestures of others, even when doing so is harmful and/or ignoble?
- * Do you oppose the language and gestures of others if they are disgraceful or degrading both to the person who makes them and/or to you?

- * Do you take pleasure in steering conversations away from rudeness and injuriousness – not stifling, or repressing the conversation, but rather panning out and sifting the barbed comments so that the real issues can be dealt with lucidly?
- * Are you not too pained at having to play a moderating moral role in the social discourse of others?

2. What are my options or choices for practising this virtue?

Here are some guidelines² for thinking through the notion of how to practise the virtue of civility:

Accept and praise the language and gestures of others unless doing so would be: discreditable; injurious; degrading to the agent.

How the virtue of friendliness and civility shows itself will vary from group to group. How, for instance, we show this virtue to teachers, will differ from how we show it to the friends in our class.

Thinking Back

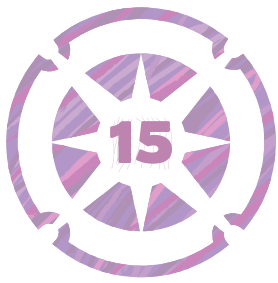
With these different groups in mind:

- * Teachers
- * Parents
- * Older children
- * Younger children
- * Children in my class

... think through your interactions with them over the past few weeks.

- * Where have you been able to show the virtue of friendliness and civility?
- * Where might you have failed to show it more fully?





3. Finding the Golden Mean for me

Remember to use the dictionary to define any words you don't understand!

In gatherings of men, in social life and the interchange of words and deeds, some men are thought to be obsequious, viz. those who to give pleasure praise everything and never oppose, but think they should give no pain to the people they meet; while those who, on the contrary, oppose everything and care not a whit about giving pain are called churlish and contentious ... Friendliness is that in virtue of which a man will put up with, and will resent, the right things and in the right way.

Aristotle, NE, (1126b11-19)

What does 'obsequious' mean?

What does 'churlish' mean?

What does 'contentious' mean?

Aristotle gives us some interesting words here. The 'obsequious' are those who flatter others and agree with everything they say, just to avoid the pain or challenge of not resisting. The 'churlish', or 'contentious' are argumentative types, confronting or opposing all that is said. They constantly insist that

others justify themselves; this can make for incredibly tiresome social interactions.

Thinking Forward

- * For each of the following groups, think through how you will practise the virtue of friendliness and civility over the coming weeks.
- * How will you avoid your basic inclination either to overdo or underdo it?
- * How will you give expression to being friendly – remember that friendliness will express itself in different ways to different people!

Here are the groups – make a resolution about how to be friendly to each one over the coming weeks:

- * Teachers
- * Parents
- * Older children
- * Younger children
- * Children in my class
- * Siblings

These prompts may help:

Deliberations

How have your past experiences helped you think about these situations?

- * Think through similar situations
- * Think through emotions
- * Think through reasons

How can you apply the 'lessons of life' and principles you have learned to this situation?

- * What have you learned about acting and thinking well, and how can you do this in his particular situation?

What kind of person do you hope to become in this situation?

- * Given a commitment to being a person who acts with friendliness and civility, how can you give expression to these aspirations in your circumstances?

Evaluation

What are the morally relevant features of the situation and how have you weighted them?

- * Of what (or whom) do you need to be aware, or sensitive to?
- * Which features are in competition?
- * Which features contradict?
- * How will you reconcile these tensions?

To whom have you looked for advice and/or inspiration, and why? Are they good sources?

What might the implications of your decision be, both positively and negatively?

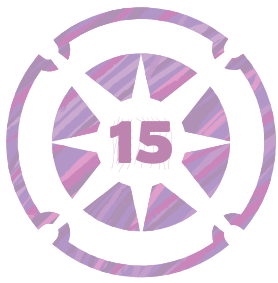




Use the Golden Mean Template (below) to think through which kind of attitudes and behaviours will best educate

your emotions and desires to promote friendly feelings amongst the groups of which you are part.

UNDERDOING IT	THE GOLDEN MEAN OF FRIENDLINESS AND CIVILITY	OVERDOING IT
<p>The following kinds of actions will show that I avoid challenging when it is appropriate to challenge:</p>	<p>I will accept and praise harmless words or deeds when/by:</p>	<p>The following kinds of actions will show that I accept too many things – including things that should not really be accepted:</p>
<p>The following kinds of actions will show that I do not care about giving offence to others:</p>	<p>I will challenge harmful words or deeds when/by:</p>	<p>The following kinds of actions will show that I am obsequious. I accept and praise too many things; or, accepting and praising things too much; opposing and criticising too few things and/or too little. Basically, I want a quiet life.</p>
<p>The following kinds of words and deeds will show that I am critical and confrontational; I oppose the suggestions of others, even when it is not morally relevant to do so.</p> <p>They show that I enjoy being tiresome to others in conversation:</p>	<p>I will oppose those who like to flatter simply because they are concerned with advancing their own position when/by:</p>	<p>The following kinds of actions will show that I am malleable. I am too prepared to go along with the views of others, even when they are harmful. I agree for the sake of harmony – but will be storing up greater problems for later on.</p> <p>I am too concerned to please others, even when it is wrong to do so.</p>



SECTION 3: VIRTUE PRACTICE

1. Identifying our basic dispositions and inclinations in relation to this virtue.

How did your resolutions go when you encountered situations that called for you to practise the virtue of civility?

STATES OF CHARACTER	DO I DESIRE TO PROMOTE THE UNITY AND FRIENDLINESS OF THOSE AROUND ME?	ARE MY CHOICES AND DECISIONS ABOUT HOW TO ACT OUT THE VIRTUE OF FRIENDLINESS AND CIVILITY?	HOW WELL DID I CARRY OUT THE DECISION TO ACT WITH GREATER FRIENDLINESS, NOT BEING HYPER CRITICAL AND ARGUMENTATIVE, NOR BEING A PUSH OVER?
VIRTUOUS: SPOT ON	I took delight in promoting the unity and friendliness of those around me; it pained me to have to challenge others, when necessary, but not too much.	I knew exactly how to give expression to the virtue of friendliness and civility in this context. I endorsed language and gestures that promoted the unity of the group and challenged language and gestures that undermined it, hurt, or degraded, others – including those who made the statements.	I took delight in steering language and gesture towards morally appropriate expressions; I praised the non-harmful language and gesture of others, and challenged those that were too critical, or too obsequious.
CONTINENT: GOT THERE THROUGH GRITTED TEETH	I was pained at the prospect of promoting the unity and friendliness of those around me; or, I was inclined to be too critical of those around me, or too eager to go along with what they said and to ‘fit-in’.	I knew exactly how to give expression to the virtue of friendliness and civility in this context. I endorsed language and gestures that promoted the unity of the group and challenged language and gestures that undermined it, hurt, or degraded, others – including those who made the statements.	I steered language and gesture towards morally appropriate expressions; I praised the non-harmful language and gesture of others, and challenged those that were too critical, or too obsequious. This was uncomfortable at times, though.
INCONTINENT: KNEW WHAT THE RIGHT THING TO DO WAS, BUT GOT CARRIED AWAY	I was pained at the prospect of promoting the unity and friendliness of those around me; or, I was inclined to be too critical of those around me, or too eager to go along with what they said and to ‘fit-in’.	I knew exactly how to give expression to the virtue of friendliness and civility in this context. I endorsed language and gestures that promoted the unity of the group and challenged language and gestures that undermined it, hurt, or degraded, others – including those who made the statements...	... BUT, I missed opportunities to steer language and gesture towards morally appropriate expressions – expressions that promoted the unity of the group. I was too critical, or confrontational, or too concerned to fit in with others; or, I didn’t challenge or praise others when I could have done.
UNWISE AT THIS STAGE: I NEED A RETHINK HERE	I was pained at the prospect of promoting the unity and friendliness of those around me; or, I was inclined to be too critical of those around me, or too eager to go along with what they said and to ‘fit-in’.	I still have some way to go in giving expression to the virtue of friendliness and civility. I was too harsh and critical of others, or I was too malleable and concerned to fit-in with words and gestures that I knew to be morally inappropriate and unhealthy.	I missed opportunities to steer language and gesture towards morally appropriate expressions – expressions that promoted the unity of the group. I was too critical, or confrontational, or too concerned to fit in with others; or, I didn’t challenge or praise others when I could have done.





A GOOD SENSE CHECKLIST

I understand the moral point and purpose called for by the activity – I know which virtues the situation, or activity is calling me to practise and promote.

I understand how to balance out, or prioritise the clashing virtues.

I understand how to apply the guidelines I have learnt from experience and reflection.

I understand how my actions will be perceived by others.

I can specify what my emotions are alerting me to do.

I know how to practise the appropriate virtues to express the moral point of this activity.

Now make some further precise and accurate resolutions about how and when to continue practising the virtue of friendliness and civility in the future. Where do you need to focus?

- * Your desires?
- * Your choices and decisions about how to act out the virtue of friendliness and civility?

- * Your practise of the virtue of friendliness and civility?

Remember to make full use of the Virtue Knowledge, Reasoning and Practice Tools, such as the Good Sense Guide, and the Golden Mean Guide to tackle the issues.

