EPS 291 (post mid-term notes)

Practical Wisdom

- The center-piece of all virutes
- Capacity that allows us to act well given the nature of the situation
- Aristotle- if you have PW, you have all the virtues
- We all have some practical wisdom- we got through things

- Alice in Wonderland example- if you don't have goals, it doesn't matter what you do

Goodness, Virtue, and Wisdom

- Human flourishing- you'll flourish if you are virtuous; virtues are strengths we have that make it possible to flourish
- Characteristically human goods
  - Meaning
  - Purpose
  - Belonging
  - Beauty
  - Justice
- These goods are what we are made to do

Context in deciding how to act

Important b/c we have to figure out how to apply the rules/principles we live by

Goods and Character Strengths in Context

- Goods and character strengths
- Goods in context
  - Social and historical context- ex. knowledge used to have different value many years ago (we used to value black-smith knowledge, etc more); helps us to interpret what is good; people around the world have different views of justice
    - What is universal is that all humans NEED characteristically human goods
  - Immediate context
- Character strengths in context
  - See chart about situations and strengths (i.e. risk requires courage)

The Golden Mean Revisited (GM=virtue)

- Virtue as a mean- but not exactly in middle of deficiency and excess
- The context defines the mean
  - Ex. diamond necklace on the third date- generosity
- The key is to act fittingly and nobly

Practical Wisdom Components (they always go together)

- **Moral perception**
  - How do we recognize the situation we are in?
  - Situations do not come pre-labeled
  - Moral perception- we want to develop it so we can identify what is important/central
  - How do we know what is most important?
    - Intuitive grasp of what situations are about- very natural
    - Our socialization- ex. years of school taught us how to be in class
    - Our emotions- ex. sadness is an empathic response, anger tells us there is an injustice going on
    - Our grasp of basic human concerns
    - Our specific goals- how we want things to go determines how we act
    - Our ability to listen to others- what other ppl tell or show us
  - There is no algorithm for life!- Aristotle says there are no set rules, just guidelines
  - Query the situation
    - What is most important right now?
    - How do I feel about this situation?
    - What is most central at this moment?
    - What is at stake for me, group, others?
    - How do others' actions make sense?
    - What goals am I (are we) trying to achieve?
    - What would be the best outcome I can hope for?
- **Deliberation**
  - Often the appropriate action is obvious
  - General rules are helpful but particulars trump- ultimate reasons are the particulars of the situation
  - Appropriateness and nobility are key factors- helps us bring about most good
  - With the goal in mind, what is possible right now to pursue the goal?
  - Reflect on how an action is likely to play out
  - All things considered
  - Thrasybulus
- **Reasoned choice**
  - Prohairesis (Aristotle's word- don't need to know)- choosing over or choosing before
    - We want to make these choices well- we should choose the best things and have good reason for it
  - Keen sense of the possible- line and dot puzzle
  - Timing
  - Flexibility
  - Self-reflect on your actions- humans can evaluate what we have done, if things don't go well this is how we fix things

Practical Wisdom

- The ability to recognize what is most important in present circumstances (moral perception)
    - in relation to important goals (MP)
    - so we can choose an action (reasoned choice)
    - that is appropriate to the circumstances (del)
    - and helps to attain the goals (deliberation)
    - all things considered (MP and deliberation)
- Contrast with cleverness- bestial people can be clever but not show PW; cleverness- you can get what you want but it might not be the good thing to do- pursue the good!
- Contrast with "cosmic" wisdom- knowing about what is important for eternity, the soul, etc; we are focusing on THIS world with practical wisdom
- Differs from "situational ethics"- the situation guides us but there is no over-arching good that guides us (in SE), in PW we are searching for the good to follow in the situation
- Sometimes we question our desires and goals
- Humans make judgments about our judgments
- Second order evaluation

Knowing how to do the right thing at the right time for the right reason toward the right people and in the right way

Practical Wisdom in Action- see chart on slide

Practical Wisdom is Social

- We learn about what is fitting culturally
- Friends naturally help with practical wisdom
- Consult with the wise
    - More experienced
    - Our heroes
- Most of our actions require coordination with others
- Individual good always linked to shared good