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Preface

What gives ethics its importance? And how is its importance to be understood? In recent years in Ireland, the need to ask these questions and try and answer them has become clearer. The need to explore the questions follows on from public criticism of much that has gone wrong in Irish society.

In 2008 the country suffered an economic collapse, due in part to negligent banking practices, which has led to austerity and much hardship for many. We have also seen the publication of reports into abuse of children. Notably, in 2009, the Ryan report found that in the past many children suffered physical, sexual and emotional abuse in residential institutions run by Catholic religious orders, while the Murphy report found that church and state authorities failed to handle properly allegations of child sexual abuse against clerics in the Dublin Archdiocese.

More recently, in 2011 and 2013, there have been filmed reports by RTÉ's Prime Time of lapses in basic standards of care in home help services for the elderly and in care of children in some private crèches. Also in 2013, the long-running tribunal of enquiry into planning matters and payments among some politicians and business people issued its final report, which included findings of corruption and improper behaviour.

These and other examples show that there is a wider ethical dimension to social care than directly helping people to meet their individual needs. They show that how people behave in general, and in particular in their work, has implications for the well-being of others, especially for those who are vulnerable. In social care, the main public response to ensure better care has been through policy and regulation. Examples have included the setting up a new child and family services agency, and a referendum to strengthen children's rights in the Constitution. There has also been an emphasis on setting care standards and providing for inspections to try to ensure compliance, notably through the work of the Health Information and Quality Authority. Also, the social professions are now regulated by the national Heath & Social Care Professionals Council, and it has developed a code of professional conduct and ethics for social workers.

Policy responses that include tighter regulation are necessary and essential to try to ensure better observance of ethical values and principles. However, there is a risk of ethics becoming associated with nothing more than requirements for compliance. Ethics is first and foremost about behaving in the right way for its own sake, and this is underpinned by knowledge and understanding of what gives

ethics its importance. In a speech in 2013, entitled 'Toward an Ethical Economy', President Michael D. Higgins called for philosophical understanding of ethical sources to inform ethical consciousness in public discourse and action, and for philosophy to be made a formal subject in secondary schools.

The President also made the point that codes of ethics are of limited use unless there is also understanding of their purpose, which is to give effect to human values. Values that are understood and shared can help to ensure a deeper human response to treating people who have need of care in contrast to a response based merely on following requirements in a code. Also, it is from understanding values that the best way can be found to respond to people whose need is set in complicated circumstances, such as where it might be met in different but conflicting ways and where a choice has to be made.

Philosophers regard ethics as a radical subject which explores ideas about how we should live, or how to have a fulfilling life, on the basis of understanding what is ultimately of value for the individual and society. As a subject, ethics is about ideas. But ideas have more influence on what happens in practice than they are often given credit for. Kant is an example of a philosopher whose ideas have had particular practical effect. Kant's arguments for the ideas that all people are equal in worth and deserving of respect contributed to these ideas having practical effect in society and legislation in the modern period. They can be seen, for example, as one of the influences behind the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. It is also in Kant's ideas that we find there is a duty of care.

Perhaps more than any other factor there is the need to see our sense of ethics as a core dimension of the person we are and would like to be for ourselves and others, and not merely something that arises for us on occasions of particular moral challenge. Ethics is not something we engage with only when a moral issue arises for us and then leave aside. Some sense of ethics is central to how we get on with our daily life; it is part of our prevailing outlook. We have what Taylor calls a 'moral orientation' or framework (1989: 99), which characterises our responses. We use our ethical sensibility to evaluate our way through situations and issues, but it is not always clear to us that our responses contain information about the place that values have in our lives. This is because values are so closely bound up with how we engage with our experiences. For Iris Murdoch, our values show in 'what we see things as, what we let, or make, ourselves think about'. Things, people, situations we encounter everyday have 'moral colour'; this may be black or white, but usually it is one of a large number of subtle shades of grey (1992: 215; 265). This makes it important to know what values are and how they are understood, along with the ways in which they are expressed, ignored or disregarded.

In one way or another we use moral language all the time, often investing it with strong emotional conviction, especially when we feel we have been wronged. However, what people mean by ethical and moral and related terms can sometimes come across as assertion which may, or may not, be well-founded. Whether done intentionally or not, moral language is sometimes used to manipulate others where it disguises self-interest, such as a need to exercise authority or for some material or

emotional gain. For example, we can notice when people and governments have double standards, that is, they criticise others for behaving in ways which they themselves behave. From experience we know, too, how our own sense of values can become clouded by the pressure of circumstances and that we fall short of standards we expect of ourselves.

Philosophers have provided an understanding of the gap between values that are held up for us to follow and our actual behaviour. Spinoza points to the power of underlying causes which affect our emotions and behaviour to an extent that means we are never fully in charge. Also, recent findings in neuroscience about how the brain works suggest we may not have the kind of freedom to control how we behave as we once thought.

Ethics arising from philosophical understanding is quite different from moralising or being judgmental – it is not about taking the high moral ground; it is about acquiring understanding as a basis for good living. Philosophical understanding also enables us to recognise a range of possible ethical standpoints, and that there are limits to human knowledge and understanding of ethics.

Asked what he thought of Western civilisation, Ghandi is reported to have said that 'it would be a good idea'. In other words, he appreciated the values on which Western civilisation is based but recognised that they existed more in theory than in practice. This book is about some of the values that Ghandi recognised. In light of them we can, in Montaigne's phrase, 'hope for the better and desire the better' (2003: 924). It is based on the belief that understanding sources for values can contribute to living up to them in practice.

More particularly, this book aims to enable people who work in social care to have confidence in knowing that there is a body of theory about values which can be considered to inform, support and provide justification for their work in caring for others. It is a book in which values and principles are explored to enable students to have a deeper understanding of the ethical basis of care work, and to draw from this understanding in solving problems and making decisions as part of their reflective practice.

I'm conscious that there is much more relevant material available for the understanding of values, principles and issues than I have included. The main aim has been to provide an introductory textbook which will give students an understanding of some of the basic insights that have proved influential, and from which they can take their direction for further study and exploration.

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1

Introduction

OVERALL AIM

To introduce ethics as a subject of study in relation to providing social care.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- Connect ethics with behaviour relating to values and principles.
- Distinguish ethics as a subject from its relation to religion, law and politics.
- Relate ethics to a professional code for guiding best practice.
- Begin to engage with the book's overall aim of exploring the understanding of values and principles to guide best social care practice.

BASIC TERMS

Values and Principles

Ethical and *unethical* are broad terms people use when discussing and judging desirable and undesirable behaviour or issues, such as poverty in the developing world. The terms imply that the behaviour or the response to an issue is either in accordance with, or breaches, a particular value or principle. More specifically, sentences containing the verbs *should* and *ought* to are used on the basis of some value or principle. For example, we might say to a friend with whom we are sharing accommodation, 'You should clean up the kitchen after you use it and not leave it for me to do.' Here we are appealing to a principle of fairness. Or, to take a social care example, we might say, 'Home help services for older people should not be reduced to save money.' In saying this, we are implying that it is not right morally to save money by reducing services for people who need help in meeting their basic needs, such as cooking or shopping. We are implying that ensuring

vulnerable older people have well-being is an important moral value which should be maintained. In addition, we may be appealing to a principle of social justice or fairness, by implying that older people deserve to benefit from a share of society's wealth in view of the contribution they have made to society over many years.

Other terms used to express moral approval or disapproval are *acceptable* and *unacceptable*. For example, we might say, 'It is morally unacceptable to live in a society in which some people are left homeless.' Here we are appealing to the view that everyone in society should have a comfortable and secure place to live for well-being as a human right. When they do not have one, a basic norm is breached. *Appropriate* and *inappropriate* are terms also used to express moral approval or disapproval. Like acceptable and unacceptable, they can be used as synonyms (words that have the same or similar meaning) for morally right and wrong, or morally good and bad. Depending on the context in which they are used, acceptable and appropriate, and their opposites, can convey different shades of meaning. For example, instead of unacceptable or inappropriate conveying that we think there is something essentially wrong about a particular behaviour or practice, we may be conveying that something in particular does not accord with our views, or with the kind of society we would like to live in, or with our estimation of the general view on the matter which people have in society.

Distinction between Values and Principles

A distinction is made between values and principles. Parekh describes values as 'things we consider worth cherishing and realising in our lives'. They are 'things we have good reason to cherish, which in our well-considered view deserve our allegiance and ought to form part of the good life' (Parekh 2000: 127). Values include human well-being in all its aspects – physical, material, social, and mental and emotional health.

Moral principles are general statements of basic ideas which are considered to indicate the right way to behave; respect for each other is an example. Principles are similar to values in that they are considered worth living up to. However, even if we do not value principles, they imply that we should try to abide by them. There is a general expectancy that we should try to follow them for the good of others and ourselves. General principles give rise to more specific ones, for example, the principle of respecting others gives rise to the principle of seeking a client's or service user's consent for his/her care plan or care support measure.

The main values and principles relevant to social care work are in this book as chapter headings.

Ethics and Morality

Ethics and *morality* are terms used interchangeably. At the same time, ethics tends

to be used more for the study or understanding of moral values and principles, whereas morality tends to be used more for the practice of values and principles. In this book, ethics as the study and understanding of values and principles is related to the ways in which they are applied in practice. We will see how values and principles are expressed through social care, and at how care standards can be improved by putting values and principles into practice to greater effect.

Philosophical ethics is called *normative*, i.e. it is the study of how people ought to behave towards each other. *Descriptive* ethics, on the other hand, is an account of social norms and standards and people's moral values, without questioning their justification and trying to establish why there should be values and principles for everybody.

APPLIED PHILOSOPHY

Rational Justification

From our upbringing, we learn about particular values and principles. We learn, for example, to be honest and kind and to treat people with respect. They are part of the means by which we are socialised into society. Philosophers go further than simply appealing to values and principles as social norms and standards. As a subject, ethics is also called 'moral philosophy', and philosophers provide reasons or rational arguments to explain why certain ideas should be considered values and principles: ones which we should use as guides for behaving in certain ways and for avoiding behaving in other ways.

Philosophical justification of values and principles provides evidence of their worth over and above the fact that they are simply there as part of culture. This is important because it gives values and principles a stronger foundation than if simply taken for granted. Also, in Ireland, and in other countries, certain practices were morally accepted as social norms but in time came to be understood as contrary to values and principles. For example, women were once legally paid less than men for the same work, and people with disabilities did not have their lives and their potential recognised to the same extent as people without a disability. By establishing rational evidence for values and principles, such as equality and respect, philosophical understanding provides a basis from which to assess whether certain practices that come to be the norm are justified or not.

Another reason why philosophical justification is important is that it strengthens the foundation of our ethical views. It adds to and can clarify more immediate sources we may have for our views, such as feelings or opinions, or beliefs we have been taught and accept. Also, where there is a shortfall in care services to meet needs, justification strengthens the case for the necessary resources to be made available to care organisations and agencies.

However, in practice social work and social care ethics is not about directly

applying philosophical arguments to issues and cases. It is more a matter of dealing with the many issues, problems and dilemmas which arise naturally in care work through discussion and assessment. But when viewpoints have been formed through philosophical understanding, it can bring more insight and confidence to care decisions based on values and principles. For example, during a case conference, a number of possible courses of action may come up in trying to provide for a client's well-being where his/her independence and safety are both an issue. So, in assessing the client's circumstances, to know the philosophical justification for the value of well-being, which relates to clients making their own decisions, as well as others providing them with practical assistance, can inform the discussion and influence the best course of action.

A further reason for exploring rational justification is that, both within philosophical ethics and among people generally, there is disagreement and debate about what certain values mean, such as social justice, and, as a result, on the kind of policies which provide for the values. By exploring the justifications that lie behind people's differing viewpoints, care practitioners can develop an informed viewpoint with which to contribute to the debate.

Reflective Practice

Reflective practice is an important part of social care work. Individually, with supervisors, or in teams, care workers reflect on how cases are being handled, or review how they were handled, in terms of both the skills and practices used, and the appropriateness of the care plans or care measures. Typical of its nature, philosophical thinking requires us to step back from immediate engagement with an issue and question it. In this way, it helps to develop the kind of thinking needed in reflective practice.

Ethics and Religion

Ethics has always been central to human living. There have always been requirements or expectancies about how to behave. Traditionally these have come from the community or culture, which in turn located the source of the requirements in a belief in the existence of an all-powerful God. Historically, ethics is associated with religious belief. This is still very much the case for billions of people who believe in a particular religion such as Christianity, Islam and Judaism. They get their ethics from belief in the teaching of their religion about the behaviour God expects from them if they are to lead good lives. A central element of religious morality is care for people in need. Before the state became involved in providing care, it was provided through voluntary, charitable work, mainly by people who saw it as one practical way of living their religious belief. Such work remains a part of care services today.

However, ethics is not confined to religion. Outside religious belief, people still need to know how they should act and what they should do. They need to know where the authority lies that holds them accountable for their actions, or if there is no such authority apart from law. Also, in a democratic society there is a separation between church and state. This means that the state cannot prescribe the moral teachings of a particular religion, or religions, on the basis that they are required because of religious belief. Nor can it prescribe views of any other moral or belief system, such as the humanist one, on the grounds that they are required because of that system. In a democracy, the state has to be guided by the values of the democratic system itself. These include individual freedoms and human rights, which form part of the basic laws of society and are included in the Irish Constitution. It also has to be guided by other provisions in the Constitution on moral questions, since they have been approved by majority vote of the people in a referendum. Nevertheless, a democracy is open to churches, humanist and other organisations, and individuals advocating their moral views in order to exert influence on government. This happens in particular when legislation or a constitutional amendment is being proposed on a moral issue, such as abortion, and these views contribute to the government's decisions and policies.

As a subject within philosophy, ethics is different from religion. It does not accept views on faith. As far as possible, it is based on rational thought. Ethics tries to establish the kind of behaviour appropriate for people through rational thinking. Faith-based and other moral systems also of course provide rational justification for their perspectives. However, it is specifically within philosophical ethics that the question of what constitutes good or right behaviour is examined in-depth and shown, in so far as possible, to have an underlying basis in rational thought. As we shall see, moral requirements from the main ethical theories also have care for others as a central element.

Ethics and Law: The Overlap

Ethical and legal requirements often overlap, particularly for behaviour that directly harms others. The law supports some ethical requirements by making non-compliance with them a punishable offence. For example, while it is morally wrong to harm another person physically, the law supports this in the case of domestic violence, by enabling the spouse who is a victim to obtain a court order barring the spouse who has been violent from access to the family home. The law reinforces many ethical requirements by imposing a penalty for non-compliance in the interests of the protection of citizens and for the good of society. One way of putting this is to see law as exerting an external force to make us comply with certain minimum acceptable moral standards for living with others in society.

Another feature of the overlap is legal provision of services, and of rights, on the basis that they are ethically required. For example, a particular issue in relation to

social care is legal entitlement for people with disabilities to special needs services as a right. We will look at this issue in Chapter 6.

At the same time, it is not the law's job to make us morally good. While ethics overlaps with law, it is distinct from it.

Ways in Which Ethics Is Distinct from Law

Freedom of Choice

In the interests of providing for personal freedom in a democracy, there has to be a large sphere of activity in which it is a matter for the individual to choose how to behave without undue legal restriction. People are free, for example, to end their marriage commitment if they so choose and to seek a divorce (under divorce legislation). This point about personal freedom, morals and the law was made in the Wolfenden Committee's report in Britain as far back as 1957 in recommending that homosexuality be decriminalised. The report stated, 'There must remain a realm of private morality and immorality which is, in brief and crude terms, not the law's business' (cited in Hart 1969: 14–15).

Self-regulation

Ethical behaviour can be characterised as complying with requirements where we have a certain freedom to comply or not. This highlights self-regulation as an important feature at the heart of ethics. Ethics is about regulating our own behaviour in particular ways, either because we want to or feel we have to even if we don't want to, rather than from fear of having to pay some penalty if we don't and are found out. For example, we don't have to be compassionate, speak out against injustice or always tell the truth. These are matters for us.

However, usually people behave in ethical ways because they believe they are *the right ways* to behave; they don't do so simply because they feel they have to conform or because the law requires them. Whether a law existed or not, they would still try to behave ethically. They see it as important to do the right thing for its own sake.

Ethical Basis of Law

If law is to command respect and obedience, it has to be based on what citizens in general consider ethical. For example, until the early 1990s in South Africa, successive governments of ruling white people enforced apartheid laws on black people, laws under which black people suffered from separate and unequal living conditions. Because these laws were judged morally wrong on the basis of the value of equality in particular, people felt justified in disobeying them and campaigning for their abolition. That a particular law might be considered unethical serves to highlight how law needs to be based on the understanding of what is ethical if it

is to be acceptable. It highlights how ethics can be considered a deeper court of appeal than law.

Ethics and Politics

Ethical Basis for Politics: Theory and Practice

In a democracy, the purpose of politics is to provide for *the good* of all citizens. This makes ethics a natural precursor to political activity. Aristotle, whose ideas we will be looking at, was a philosopher who followed up a work on ethics with a work on politics. Since he believed he had established how we should live for our own good, both personally and socially, he saw that politics should be about facilitating us to live a good life. However, this is not to suggest that the state should enforce a strict code of ethics for our good. The idea of personal freedom is present in his ethics and, as we have seen in the previous sections on religion and on law, personal freedom in a democracy is a key value that the state is obliged to ensure. Partly under the influence of philosophers, such as Hobbes and Rousseau, whose ideas we will look at in Chapter 10, personal freedom came to be accepted as the cornerstone human right which justifies and makes legitimate democratic politics. Since we live in a pluralist society in which people hold different views on moral questions, one of the difficulties in developing a common ethics for everyone is that people ask 'whose ethics should it be?' At the same time, the general idea of providing for the common good remains part of democratic societies. It gives purpose and direction to political rule. The Irish Constitution, for example, refers to 'seeking to promote the common good, with due observance of prudence, justice and charity so that the dignity and freedom of the individual may be assured'.

While individual politicians and their parties are motivated to a greater or lesser extent by the idealism of achieving the common good, as they see it the business of practical politics in which demands are made on government from all sections of society makes it difficult for politicians to give priority to ideas about the common good. One cause of the difficulty is that political parties need to win and retain power in order to implement their policies. This has led to an emphasis in politics on providing for the demands of particular groups whose support politicians seek in order to get voted into office. There is also the view that, in the absence of agreement among the public on what constitutes the common good, politics in practice is only, and should be, a process of catering for needs and wants of particular groups. In effect, groups compete with each other to be heard by government and to have their requests granted. This is the pragmatic or managerial view of politics. As Millar puts it, 'The normal political process for government is . . . one of conciliation and accommodation of competing interests, not the automatic registration of an existing general interest (1965: 57–8).'

However, appeals to fairness in particular, which are frequent, imply in practice

the notion of a common good in which all people can receive a deserved share of the benefits available from society. Also, politicians will sometimes admit that certain groups, which already do well from society, have too much influence over public policy and decisions. Such groups are often referred to as 'vested interests' because of the keen interest they take in how decisions are made in order to gain from them. There are many such groups. The main groups are the employer associations, professional associations and trade unions as well as particular industries, such as pharmaceutics, and services, such as banking. A consequence of the influence of vested interests on political decisions is that the public good of those who have social care needs may not be catered for as well as it deserves to be. At the same time, there are a number of organisations and groups who represent the interests of those in need of care, such as the Children's Rights Alliance, Age Action Ireland and Social Justice Ireland, as well as agencies set up by the government, such as the National Disability Authority.

Politics and Social Policy

Social policy in its different areas such as early childhood, custodial care, disability, and care of the elderly are developed in consultation with interested groups and decided upon by government. Politicians make the laws, and legal provision and regulation of care policies and services make them enforceable. This adds to and strengthens the moral requirement for improved services. For example, in 2013 the work of the state's Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) was extended to cover setting standards and providing inspections in residential centres for children and adults with disabilities. This was essential in view of the unethical conduct, poor practices and inadequate standards which HIQA inspections had found in some nursing homes for the elderly.

Social welfare (or 'social protection', as it is sometimes called) is a policy area of particular importance for many people who are likely to come in need of care services. The idea that the state should provide people with welfare arose from acceptance of the ethical argument that it was wrong to leave people who were unable to provide for their own needs to rely on charity. As a result, state provision of measures such as old age pensions and disability benefit were introduced. Utilitarian ethics, known by the *greatest happiness principle*, which was developed in the late nineteenth century, is said to have had a significant influence on Britain becoming known as a welfare state in the twentieth century. We will look at this theory in Chapter 7. Each year in Ireland the Finance Act gives legal force to the measures in the budget. From a care perspective the main measure in the budget is the amount of money by which benefits are increased or decreased. Conditions for eligibility for benefit may also be improved or made more restrictive. Also, the net overall effect of budgets on people's living standards can be judged in terms of social justice, i.e. in terms of the people who benefit the most from the

measures introduced, whether they are the middle- and high-income earners or low earners and those on social welfare. We will look at ideas about social justice in Chapter 11.

Ethics and Professional Codes of Conduct

Most professions have a code of conduct which their members are required to follow in practising their profession. Codes vary and can have a number of different purposes. One purpose is to provide a service ideal of values and aspirations for professionals to try to fulfil. Another is to set down the requirement for professionals to be trustworthy in their relations with service users. Respect for the client's liberty and independence is central. This is to help ensure that all service providers are clear that any exploitation of the client is professional misconduct. Abiding by a code is particularly important for those who work in social care because many clients are vulnerable.

Professional ethics can be regarded as 'an intensification of ordinary ethics', with particular reference to 'interpersonal trust' (Kohen cited in Banks 2004: 61). Both ordinary ethics and professional ethics can be seen ultimately to derive their requirements from ethical ideas about values and principles. Banks points out that while many of the ethical issues belong specifically within the nature of the profession and the professional's role, they nevertheless draw from moral philosophy. As she puts it, 'it is important to be able to locate professional ethics in the broader field of philosophical ethics and to use the insights and arguments of philosophy to illuminate and develop our thinking' (Banks 2004: 74).

The values and principles explored in the book have particular relevance to a code of conduct for those who work in social care, notably the principle of having respect for service users. In Ireland CORU is the umbrella body responsible for regulating health and social care professions. Among the professions it regulates are social workers and social care workers. It has developed a Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics for Social Workers, which can be viewed on its website at www.coru.ie. See also 'Ethical Guidelines' on the website for the Irish Association of Social Care Workers, www.iascw.ie.

APPLICATION OF VALUES AND PRINCIPLES TO CASES

A background in understanding ethical values and principles is not just informative for guiding social care provision, but also helpful for ethical reasoning in particular care cases. Ethical reasoning is often necessary due to the complexity of cases. For example, in the particular case of an older person who is unable to cope on his/her own, there can be a clash between supporting the values of both independent living, where s/he insists on it, and ensuring his/her health and safety. Also, difficult issues can arise in some cases where, for example, the rights of parents to rear their

children can be in conflict with their children's right to safety and protection. In such cases, a decision may have to be made about whether to leave the children in the care of their parents or relatives or to obtain a court order to take them into the care of the state. Such issues can take the form of an ethical dilemma, which make them particularly challenging. A dilemma in social care involves having to make a hard choice between two aspects of a client's welfare, such as his/her safety and continuing to live in the family home, when both cannot be provided for at the same time. Both aspects cannot be provided for at the same time, at least not in full, though it may be possible to decide on a compromise solution as the best outcome in the circumstances. Dilemmas may involve a care team making a risk assessment before taking a decision whether to trust people whose behaviour is a cause of legitimate concern.

Dilemmas highlight the fact that, apart from distinguishing right from wrong, ethics relates to the more challenging questions of deciding that one course of action is morally better than another, and in the client's best interest. Making ethical decisions often requires the ability to make distinctions between competing choices and to justify one choice over another. (In the next chapter, Case Study 2. 2 in particular presents a dilemma to consider in applying understanding of the value of well-being.)

In social care casework there is a growing accumulation of knowledge and experience, and there are established procedures for best practice in particular types of cases. However, each client's circumstances will be unique and this can make a case complex. Also, apart from new variations of familiar factors, complexity can arise from the emergence of new and unexpected ones. This means that in assessing a client's circumstances, there has to be a certain openness to according weight to particular factors and, as a result, to the balance between them in making the best decision. Central to this process is concern for the client's good – understood as his/her best interest. Factors to do with the good of others related to the client and the good of society can also come into consideration. In short, making good decisions involves being able to reason morally on the basis of knowledge and understanding of values and principles.

Ethics requires us to think carefully with an open and questioning mind. As Banks points out, it is not possible or desirable to produce an ethics rulebook. Instead, critical thinking and reflection are required (2006: 9). Philosophy provides the tools for this thinking and reflection.

ADVOCACY

Advocacy as a particular aspect of social care is underpinned by the moral case for improvements in care. It is based on the value of the advocate helping others to have their identified needs met by speaking on their behalf to the relevant service providers, or by the advocate empowering the service user to advocate on his/

her own behalf. The service providers are usually the staff in state or voluntary agencies that make the decisions on service provision.

At a broader level in society, groups that represent the interests of people in need of care, such as Social Justice Ireland and the Children's Rights Alliance, advocate and lobby politicians and government to make improvements in care services.

The need for advocacy is based on the recognition that different sections and groups in a democratic society have varying degrees of influence over public policy in having their interests satisfied. Some lose out because they have little or no influence on public policy. Advocacy is the means for them to have a voice in achieving their needs. It is seen as particularly necessary for members of certain groups, such as older people, those with a disability or the homeless, who may have limited ability or opportunity to speak on their own behalf and are therefore vulnerable to having their needs neglected. At the heart of social care advocacy lies values such as human rights and respect. Social fairness or justice are other broader ethical ideas that arise within advocacy in social care.

Advocates try to bridge the gap between what should happen to meet care needs and what happens in practice. It is the gap between the level and quality of care provided through public policy and the needs of service users. This attempt to bring about change or improvement in practice is the moral thrust that runs through their work. In effect, the advocate draws from values when s/he argues on behalf of a client whose needs are not being provided for that those needs *should be* provided for.

AIMS OF THE BOOK

From studying this book it is hoped that you will:

- Develop a deeper and more informed understanding of the ethical purpose and practice of social care through understanding the values and principles that guide it.
- Have a means of contributing to ethical decision-making, especially in cases for best social care practice.
- Be able to evaluate social care conditions and issues in the light of knowledge and understanding of values and principles.

GUIDE TO CHAPTER MATERIAL

Each chapter explores the reasons that establish a particular value or principle. It also gives examples of practical issues and problems which care workers encounter. Then it explains why the value or principle is relevant, whether to maintain best practice relations with service users or as a guide to decision-making in casework

or to advocate for improvements in care services. In each chapter there are also questions for consideration and discussion or there is an exercise or case study to provide a means of relating the value or principle to practice.

At the end of each chapter there is a section on critical evaluation of the value for those interested in exploring the philosophical aspects in more depth. One of the reasons for including this section is to show that there are limitations (as well as strengths) to our understanding of values. In general, this is one reason which can help care workers to understand why they work in an environment where values are not rationally compelling for everyone, where people differ in their moral views and where there can be moral uncertainty.

You will find that values and principles are connected and often arise together as different ways of looking at the same ethical requirement. As you go through the book you can then begin to look at a particular issue from the perspective of different values to see how informative they are for guiding the appropriate ethical response.

You could look on your exploration of the values in a similar way to how Wittgenstein is said to have looked upon philosophy, i.e. as taking you on different journeys in order to find your way about a strange town. On many of these journeys you pass the same place or close to it. No one journey is necessarily more important than another. Eventually you get to know your own way about (Drury, 'Wittgenstein': 5).

Exercise 1.1

From your knowledge and experience of social care, describe a case in which ethical issues arose in the provision of services to meet needs that had been identified for a client, and relate your response to your understanding so far of ethics and social care. Explain why you think the issues in the case are specifically ethical. (Note: If you draw from a case known to you rather than a hypothetical case, ensure you refer to the issues only and not to identifiable people. Confidentiality is an important ethical principle looked at in Chapter 4.)

REVIEW

Ethics is a distinct subject which tries to establish values and principles to guide behaviour. In practice for social care it is closely connected with law and politics. Political decisions and law-making are the main processes through which services (and their funding) come to be provided for those who are in need of care. Ethical requirements are used as justification for the need for improvements in the

provision of services. Ethical requirements are also central in formulating a code of practice for those working in social care.

FURTHER READING

Social Care Ethics

Banks, S. (2004) *Ethics, Accountability and the Social Professions*, Palgrave Macmillan.

Banks, S. (2006) *Ethics and Values in Social Work*, 3rd ed., Palgrave Macmillan ('Preface', 'Introduction', Chapter 1 'Ethical Issues in Social Work', Chapter 4 'Professionalism and Codes of Ethics' and Chapter 7 'Ethical Problems and Dilemmas in Practice').

Banks, S. and Nohr, K. (eds.) (2003) *Teaching Practical Ethics for the Social Professions*, FESET (European Social Educator Training/Formation d'Educateurs Sociaux Européens). (See www.feset.org)

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Slote, M. (2007) *The Ethics of Care and Empathy*, Routledge.

Ethics in General

Benn, P. (1998) *Ethics*, UCL Press ('Preface').

Blackburn, S. (2001) *Being Good: A Short Introduction to Ethics*, Oxford University Press.

Honderich, T. (ed.)(2005) *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 2nd ed., Oxford University Press (contains useful entries on ethics).

Norman, R. (1998) *The Moral Philosophers: An Introduction to Ethics*, 2nd ed., Oxford University Press ('Introduction: Ethics and its History').

Roth, J. (ed.) (1995) *International Encyclopaedia of Ethics*, Fitzroy Dearborn (a very useful synopsis of many aspects of ethics).

Thompson, M. (2003) *Teach Yourself Ethics*, Hodder Headline ('Introduction').

JOURNALS

Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics
Ethics and Social Welfare

SOME INTERNET SOURCES

Ethics

Ethics in Practice
www.stpt.usf.edu/hhl/eip

Ethics Updates (useful introductory site for students, particularly on the theoretical aspect of ethics)
http://ethics.acusd.edu/

General

Comhairle
(National Agency for information, advice and advocacy on social services)
www.comhairle.ie
FESET (European Social Educator Training/Formation d'Educateurs Sociaux Européens)
www.feset.org
Irish Association of Social Care Workers
www.iascw.ie
Irish Association of Social Workers
www.iasw.ie (see especially for their code of ethics)
Manus Charleton's site
www.manuscharleton.ie
Social Studies
www.socialstudies.ie

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2

Well-being

OVERALL AIM

To explore Aristotle's virtue theory for the understanding it offers in meeting people's needs for well-being.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- Give Aristotle's account of the relationship between satisfying desires and achieving overall well-being, understood as flourishing.
- Explain what he means by virtue and why he thinks the practice of virtues provides for well-being.
- Explain why he thinks our own well-being is bound up with the well-being of others.
- Understand that poverty and bad luck can restrict a person's chances of doing well.
- Describe the relationship between Aristotle's ethics and care practices in meeting needs for basic support, social inclusion and client self-empowerment.
- Explain why behaving according to particular virtues is beneficial for clients and for guiding care providers in complying with best practice.

INTRODUCTION

There are a number of aspects to well-being. They include physical health and fitness, mental and emotional health (feeling good about oneself and having the capacity to cope with challenges and adversity), and having the material means for living, such as money and housing. For Aristotle, as we shall see, a central aspect of well-being is making our own choices in directing our life for the good. The following are some examples of common needs which services users may require for their well-being.

- A family may have a need for support services where parents have difficulty coping because of poverty or lack of parenting skill.
- Elderly people in care and people with disabilities have needs for fulfilling activities.
- Residents in care homes have a need to exercise choice in their lives as much as possible, e.g. over the food they want and leisure activities.
- People who are homeless have needs for long-term secure accommodation.
- People with learning or other challenges who are capable of independent living have a need for support services.

VIRTUE

Aristotle's theory is known for being the prime example of ethics based on virtues. It is the practice of virtues, he claims, that will lead to well-being. So what are virtues? Virtues are qualities or character traits that a person has and puts into practice. By behaving in accordance with virtues we become a person with a certain type of character. Aristotle calls virtues dispositions to behave in particular ways. There are many virtues – they include honesty, loyalty, courage, compassion, and so on. It is important to realise that, for Aristotle, being virtuous is not about becoming 'a goody two-shoes', i.e. someone who is virtuous in a smug or sentimental manner. The original meaning of virtue comes from the Greek word *areté*, which means excellence or power. We will look at virtues more closely later on in the chapter, but it will help to see what Aristotle is getting at to keep them in mind from the start.

DESIRE TO FLOURISH

Desire to Satisfy Basic Needs

For Aristotle, everybody desires to flourish. (For an image of flourishing, think of a plant doing really well and transpose that image onto a person!) The desire to flourish is a central desire of human beings. Even though some people are not flourishing, maybe because of restrictive living conditions or because of behaving in misguided ways harmful to themselves and others, they still have a desire to flourish. It is what we all desire most.

The desire to flourish is evident first of all from the fact that we have natural desires to satisfy our physical and social needs. Much of our behaviour is directed toward achieving these desires. For example, we desire food, education, a job, friends, etc. Such things that we naturally desire are good, and they are the first step on the way to understanding moral goodness as the desire to flourish. In Aristotle's terms, in seeking to achieve our desires, we are seeking to achieve *our*

ends. This makes behaviour *teleological*, i.e. always directed toward achieving some end or goal.

Aristotle points out that when we examine our desires, we see that we usually desire something for the sake of something else. We desire food for the sake of satisfying hunger or for the pleasure of taste; we desire education for the sake of knowledge and qualifications (or, of course, for the love of learning!); we desire a job for the sake of money and the satisfaction of exercising our abilities; we desire money for the sake of all the things we can buy with it; and we desire friends for the sake of the enjoyment and fulfilment that comes from close relations with others. Desire, therefore, consists of wanting various means for various ends (Aristotle 1998: 1–2).

One Overall Desire: To Flourish

Aristotle maintains that human desire amounts to more than the satisfaction of particular desires which we find are for our good. He argues that it makes sense to conclude that in satisfying our particular desires, we are at the same time seeking some overall good. Otherwise, our lives would amount to no more that a continual process of trying to satisfy our desires for one thing after another, a process that for as long as we lived 'would go on to infinity, so that our desire would be empty and vain' (1998: 2). Apart from maintaining that it makes sense to conclude that there is some overall good being sought, he also maintains that implicit in satisfying our particular desires we feel ourselves to be seeking or looking for some overall good. The overall or 'chief good' is 'that which is in itself worthy of pursuit . . . [and] always desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else' (1998: 11–12). But what is it? For Aristotle, it is to have an overall feeling that we are flourishing in our lives. If we attend closely to our experience of seeking to satisfy our desire, we can notice that we are being drawn towards wanting to flourish. For, even if we could satisfy all our particular desires, he claims we would still feel something more desirable is missing. The person who 'has everything' is still left unsatisfied. S/he would still not be happy, and to be happy is what everyone wants the most. He uses the Greek word *eudemonia*, which translates as flourishing and is sometimes translated as happiness, though flourishing is thought to be the more accurate translation.

In our ordinary use of the word, happiness of course means different things to different people. For example, some will say they experience happiness in travelling to new places, others in playing their favourite music, and others again in socialising. We generally associate happiness with the good feeling received from certain experiences, such as having success in exams, or on the birth of a child, or being in the company of friends or someone we love. If we won the lotto, we might imagine we would he happy. But these are all examples of satisfying passing, particular desires, rather than happiness or flourishing itself as a 'self-

sufficient' good (1998: 12). If we are flourishing we are leading 'the good life'. Aristotle can be credited as the originator of this now much-used phrase, though somehow I do not think people see it as having the same meaning that Aristotle gives it!

So, what exactly is happiness or flourishing? It is not contentment, which suggests being in a pleasant, passive state of mind. Instead, it has the active meaning which applies to a person who feels he or she is thriving or 'living well or faring well' in relation to all aspects of life (1998: 5). But what should a person do in order to flourish? Aristotle's answer is that we should use reason to manage or regulate feelings and desires. Depending on how well we use our reason to regulate our desires, we will be flourishing. Not only that, but we will be behaving in an ethical way. Flourishing behaviour is ethical behaviour.

DEFINING FUNCTION OF REASON

Desires give rise to how we behave. We desire something and, as a result, our behaviour is directed toward achieving it. Feelings also give rise to our behaviour. For example, when we feel upset or frustrated, we will behave in some way as a reaction to such feelings. Perhaps more noticeable for us than our desires or feelings in giving rise to how we behave are the courses of action open to us from the situation we are in. But how we respond in practice to these courses of action, i.e. which one we opt for or otherwise comes to be the one we take, depends on the kind and degree of desire or feeling we have toward them. Desires and feelings are, then, the basic influences on our behaviour.

However, we are not solely under the influence of our desires and feelings. This is because we also have reason to guide our choice. We can reason about our desires and feelings in order to make the best choice of how to respond to them. For Aristotle, reason is central. Why is reason so important? It is because reasoning is something only humans can do. It distinguishes us from plant and animal life. It is our defining function. For Aristotle, man is a rational animal. We all have a function by virtue of our nature as human beings and that function is to reason well about how we should behave (1998: 13–14). He argues that if we fulfil our defining function, we are behaving as we ought to behave and will flourish. No more can be expected of us. We are living the life fit for a human being whose nature is made up of both desire and reason.

In identifying our human function with reasoning, Aristotle distinguishes it from a job function, or social function, or the function of exercising a particular talent. These functions are good. It is good that we perform these functions as well as we can. They contribute to human flourishing. For example, it is good that a builder builds a house as well as he can; it is good that a case worker uses his/her skills to the best effect; it is good that a parent performs the role of being a parent well in bringing up children; and it is good that a musician plays well. For the

individuals concerned, these are examples of their human potential being realised. These are good things, and we can admire the results.

However, Aristotle's key point is that exercising neither a particular job function, nor social function nor talent on *its own* fulfils our human desire for flourishing. Human flourishing comes about essentially through reasoning about our desires and feelings in the context of the particular circumstances that have aroused them – and then making a good decision as to our response. For example, what is important is how the builder handles being let down by workers who don't turn up; it is how the parent handles the moody assertiveness of their adolescent son or daughter as they undergo the transition from childhood to adulthood; it is how a care worker handles being verbally abused or lied to by a service user; it is how the musician handles an inattentive audience or bad review; it is a whole host of other feelings and desires that they or any person experiences in the course of any day.

Ethics, for Aristotle, is particularly about the nitty-gritty, day-to-day challenges to our response. For example, on any ordinary evening you may feel tired after a long day and want to relax and watch TV. Yet you may also feel like obliging a friend who phones and wants you to go out to a disco. In addition, you may have a niggling feeling that you should start writing an essay which is due shortly. Then there's your mother, whom you promised to phone, but you have been putting off phoning her because you are afraid she will have something to say to you about your behaviour that you don't want to hear. What Aristotle is saying is that you should become as clear as you can in your mind about your feelings in response to this situation, *with a view to making the rational decision which will enable you to flourish best in the circumstances*. The right rational decision here is difficult since you are pulled in different directions, which is often the case with moral decision-making. And Aristotle is not going to tell you what your right rational decision should be. He does offer general guidelines, as we shall see, but essentially what you decide will depend on your own judgment about what will best enable you to flourish in the particular circumstances.

In this way, ethics is about making good judgments around our desires and feelings in the context of practical matters that arouse them. We need to deliberate well about what is the best thing to do in the light of how we feel.

DOCTRINE OF THE MEAN

How do we reason well about our desires and feelings to make the right decisions? Aristotle's answer is contained in his famous doctrine of the mean. This doctrine provides guidelines for making a decision. But what is the *mean*? The mean is the midpoint between the two extremes of excess and deficiency of the particular desire or feeling. Excess is over-reacting; deficiency is under-responding. He uses the role of food and drink in relation to health as an example. Health is adversely

affected by eating and drinking either too much or too little. It is adversely affected by excess or deficiency. But it is produced, maintained and improved by choosing to take the right quantity (1998: 30–1).

He calls the mean between excess and deficiency a virtue. Here we meet again the word *virtue*, which we said at the beginning is central to Aristotle's understanding of ethics. But how do we find a virtue as the midpoint between an excess and deficiency? Aristotle's answer is that we find it through making a rational choice for the midpoint, which avoids both excess and deficiency. As he puts it, 'virtues are modes of choice or involve choice' (1998: 36); they are a choice of a midpoint or intermediate which we make or determine through our rational thinking (1998: 39). In choosing the mean as the midpoint between the excess and deficiency of a particular desire or feeling, we are choosing then the virtuous response. We will look next at some examples.

With regard to desire for food and drink, the midpoint, or mean, as the virtuous response is moderation. It is precisely through eating and drinking moderately in relation to our desires for food and drink that we can act best toward having good health. Moderation is also a virtue in responding to the desire for any physical pleasure. Aristotle is sometimes misrepresented as having the view that we should repress our physical desires for pleasure because they conflict with the rational side of our nature. For him it is a matter of *managing* our desires in our best interest. He claims moderation contributes toward enabling a person to flourish by keeping an edge to his appetite and preventing it from becoming dulled from either disinterest or overindulging (1998: 40). Moreover, it is up to each person to decide on and implement *moderation* for themselves in their circumstances; it is not a question of having to accept someone else's view of what moderation should mean. Though, of course, there are often recommended guidelines and measures from professionals and public bodies, for example for food and alcohol intake. Aristotle vests authority and responsibility with each individual person for deciding on where virtue as the mean lies in relation to their particular needs. One way of describing moderation as a virtue is to say that it lies between extremes of avoiding being 'a slave to our passion' on the one hand and being 'a cold fish', or passionless, on the other. So for Aristotle, a capacity to enjoy physical pleasure comes best from practising the virtue of moderation. (If true, it's not a bad incentive for being virtuous!)

Further examples of virtue as the mean between extremes of excess and deficiency include the following.

Patience

When we feel it hard to maintain hope or expectancy, then patience is the midpoint between the excess of annoyance and the deficiency of being disheartened.

Courage

When we feel challenged, courage is the rational way to respond as the midpoint between the excess of recklessness and the deficiency of fear or timidity.

Assertiveness

When we feel unsure of our self-worth or self-esteem, then Aristotle would no doubt identify with the modern-day quality known as assertiveness as the rational response. Assertiveness is the midpoint between the excess of aggression and the deficiency of submissiveness. It is emphasised today as a communication skill.

Honesty (Truthfulness)

When we feel fear or concern about the consequences for ourselves or others if certain information is known, then the deficiency is in saying or doing nothing about it and the excess is in denying the truth and perhaps telling further lies to try to protect ourselves from the consequences. Honesty also avoids the excess of desiring to succeed by misrepresenting the reality. The challenge we usually face in being honest is where the truth is inconvenient, awkward or hurts.

Self-restraint

When we feel frustrated, then restraint is the midpoint between lashing out and being indifferent to the cause of our frustration, which can linger and affect us emotionally in a negative way. Restraint is a much-needed social virtue. Many bad actions result from failure to control frustration through restraint, e.g. domestic violence, drunkenness, greed, road rage, verbal abuse or making hurtful comments.

Compassion

Compassion is feeling for others in the suffering that they are experiencing. It can be understood as the midpoint between the deficiency of being indifferent to their suffering and the excess of being self-indulgent by wallowing in pity for them. Excess could also lead to overpowering a client with care, which would not be good for the client. An example of compassion being exercised in public policy is where the Minister of Justice grants permission for an asylum seeker who has been judged not to meet the legal requirements to remain in the country on humanitarian grounds.

Due Anger

When we feel angry about some injustice done to us or to others, then, for Aristotle, due anger is the right response. It is the midpoint between losing our temper (excess) and feeling indifferent or not bothered (deficiency). Due anger is a powerful motive for social justice, especially where the lack of justice is causing suffering, as when people experience famine or abuse of their human rights.

Justice

Justice can be understood as the midpoint between the deficiency where people do not get what they are entitled to have and the excess of receiving more than they deserve. For Aristotle, a socially unjust society is one in which there is excessive wealth alongside the deficiency of poverty.

ACTION AS WELL AS THOUGHT

Of course, it is not enough to reason well and make rational decisions as to the virtuous response without doing anything. Ethics expresses itself in actions based on good decisions. Aristotle likens the good person to one who competes well in the Olympics (1998: 16). He calls the virtues, such as those listed above, the 'practical virtues'. This is because they show themselves in actions; they constitute what he calls 'practical wisdom' (1998: 39). He draws a distinction between practical or moral virtues and 'intellectual' virtues (1998: 27). Intellectual virtues enable a person to arrive at the truth and include understanding and deliberation.

BAD FEELINGS

Not every desire or feeling allows us to choose the mean as the virtuous response. Some desires or feelings are bad in themselves; it is not possible to relate to them by choosing their mean in order to respond to them in a good way. Instead we simply have to try to avoid having such feelings at all. They include feelings of hatred, malice and envy. Aristotle admits he cannot prove why they are wrong. He simply says they are self-evidently wrong (1998: 39).

However, it is easy to agree with him. We learn from experience that living a life in which we have these feelings will not lead to our own flourishing. For example, hatred eats us up emotionally, making it impossible to feel good. Envy takes our attention and energy away from making ourselves happy through its focus on the person we envy.

VIRTUE AS RATIONAL MANAGEMENT OF FEELING AND DESIRE

It is not so much a matter of applying reason to desire or feeling where they are two distinct aspects of our response. In practice, both are interfused. We respond emotionally in a way that can be rational or irrational. It is a matter of trying to ensure our feelings are appropriate to the situation whereby we don't overreact to something minor and underreact to something serious (Norman 1998: 38).

At the same time, we sometimes do need to exercise rational control in a distinctive way. We need to step back from strong emotions that have been aroused in us to gain rational control of them. We need to rein in our emotions in order to respond appropriately. The phrase 'blinded by emotion' is one Aristotle would well understand; indeed, our recognition of this state derives from his ethics. Being 'blinded by emotion' is to behave without the influence of rational control. Following the mean avoids the negative effects of acting on strong feelings without thought of the consequences for us or for others. One saying that captures Aristotle's ethics is when we say of ourselves that 'I let my feelings get the better of me.' Aristotle's doctrine of the mean has given rise to a number of sayings still much used today to point out appropriate behaviour. These include:

- 'The happy medium.'
- 'The golden mean.'
- 'The right proportion.'
- 'The well-balanced decision.'

VIRTUE AS POWER

As the mean, a virtue is not a safe middle course of action between responding too strongly or too weakly. It is not a compromise in which something is lost. As mentioned earlier, the original meaning of *virtue* is *power* or *excellence*, and that is how Aristotle understood it. The present-day term *self-empowerment* is perhaps close to the benefit Aristotle saw in practising the virtues. This term highlights the fact that it is up to each individual to achieve well-being by making good or virtuous decisions about how to relate to his/her feelings and desires in any circumstances.

In order not to misunderstand Aristotle it is important to point out that while the mean *is* the virtue, there is no mean *of* virtue (1998: 39–40). In other words, it is admirable to have an excess of virtue. People who have virtue to a high degree are described as having *heroic virtues*. Nelson Mandela, for example, would be said to have practised the virtues of courage and justice to a heroic level.

Also, being virtuous does not mean missing out on a good life for the sake of some more worthy moral ideal. It is precisely the way to behave that increases

a person's power of flourishing. Aristotle also makes clear that a virtuous life is meant to be pleasurable (1998: 42). Practising virtues enables us to feel pleasure or satisfaction from the fact that we are living a fulfilling life in accordance with our human nature: 'Pleasure in doing virtuous acts is a sign that the virtuous disposition has been acquired' (1998: 31).

DIFFICULTY FINDING THE MEAN

Finding the right or virtuous response in all circumstances is not easy. Aristotle accepts 'it is no easy task to be good' (1998: 45). As he puts it, 'to miss the mark [is] easy; to hit it difficult' (1998: 38). As the mean between extremes, virtue is a particular point on a scale. This makes it likely we will miss that mark. There are many ways in which the mean can be missed, but there is only one way in which it is found. Finding the mean is like hitting the bull's eye on a target. We should try to come as close to it as we can.

He accepts also that there is no exact way of choosing the mean. In particular, it cannot be the same prescribed choice for everyone (1998: 37). We can understand why when we consider that feelings and desires are subjective states that belong to individuals. No two people are exactly the same, either in their emotional states or in experiencing circumstances in exactly the same way. Therefore, the choice of the mean that expresses the virtue for one person is not necessarily the same choice for another person in the same situation. On a daily basis, each person finds themselves in many different situations unique to them requiring a specific appropriate response. It is, then, very much up to each person to work out how to behave in order to flourish.

HELPFUL ROLE OF HABIT

The desires and feelings we have are often the same ones that have arisen from being in similar situations before. This enables us to develop virtue as habit. Habits are a way of making it easy to behave in accordance with the mean for recurring feelings that arise from similar situations we encounter. They save us from having to think what our virtuous response should be on each occasion. Good habits help to confirm a person in virtue as a settled disposition (1998: 28–9).

Habits enable a relatively smooth continuity of flourishing behaviour. The common understanding of ethics as related to developing good habits comes from Aristotle.

DEVELOPING CHARACTER

By acting in accordance with virtues as a matter of habit, a person develops a good character as distinct from personality. Virtues are the marks of good character

1998: 35–6). In the end, it is from having a good character that a person gets a sense of flourishing.

OUR OWN WELL-BEING INCLUDES WELL-BEING OF OTHERS

So far we have been looking at Aristotle's understanding of how an individual person should flourish. However, the fact that, as we have seen, flourishing is a self-sufficient good does not mean that we seek our own flourishing in isolation from others. There is a close relationship between a person's own flourishing and that of other people. The reason for this is that people have an essential need for each other's company. Our social nature is evident to Aristotle from the natural existence of family, friendships and the state as a community: 'Now by self-sufficient we do not mean that which is sufficient for a man by himself, for one who lives a solitary life, but also for parents, children, wife, and in general for his friends and fellow citizens, since man is born for citizenship' (1998: 12). Our nature is 'to be with others' and to organise our affairs by engaging in political activity (1998: 233). This basic and natural connection we have with others is a philosophically important point because it explains why we should try to act in the interests of others as well as in our own interests. Acting in the interests of others is often a challenge when our own needs and desires get in the way. It also explains why much self-interested behaviour is wrong where it results in avoidable harm being caused to others. At the same time, it is important to emphasise that, for Aristotle, behaving in our own interest is part of behaving in a morally good way, in particular when we try to achieve our potential through realising our abilities and talents. A distinction is made between self-interested behaviour and selfish behaviour. This distinction is considered further when looking at Hutcheson's ethics in Chapter 5 on empathy.

From our social nature comes natural feelings and desires for others to do well. Thus, for society as a whole to have well-being, its members need to practise virtues that provide for the well-being of others, such as for people with disabilities, who have desires which they cannot realise for themselves without help.

In practice, having a social nature means that in making good decisions about our own flourishing in how we respond to our desires and feelings, we have to include the effects of our decisions on the flourishing of others. There is always a social context to be taken into account. Otherwise a person's own flourishing will in some way be diminished. At the same time, Aristotle does not suggest that relations with others should have to restrict our own flourishing. Both aspects come into consideration for the individual in judging behaviour appropriate to flourishing in any set of particular circumstances. Here again it is a matter of getting the balance right.

Friendship

In Aristotle's time and culture, friendship was rated highly as a value and he emphasises its role in providing social well-being. He says it is 'most necessary for living' and that no one would choose to be without friends, even if they are rich and have everything else which they want (1998: 192). He writes about friendship in detail, highlighting the good things that come from it, as he does about many of the virtues. Friendship provides for well-being in a number of ways. It provides a spontaneous and informal means of expressing our social nature. Friends enjoy being in each other's company. They connect with each other's personality and are likely to share many of the same interests and experiences. Also, the close attachment friends have enables them to support each other emotionally when, for example, one or the other may be going through a difficult time. Another benefit of friendship is that it enables us to learn more about ourselves and our options from engaging with the views of others who have had different experiences to us and whose understanding can vary from ours. Alternatively, their understanding may support ours when we have doubts. Friendship broadens our horizon, particularly in relation to intimate matters of concern to us. From friends we can get a different perspective on a problem which can release us from entrapment in our view (if it is holding us back) and contribute to providing us with a more balanced outlook to enable us to flourish. Friends can help us see and judge better our good in particular situations. 'Trusting the guidance of a friend and allowing one's feelings to be engaged with that other person's life and choices, one learns to see aspects of the world that one had previously missed' (Nussbaum 1990: 44).

Because of incapacity, or other reasons, some people who require care may not have opportunities to develop friends. Thus, it is a particularly good thing for care workers to provide opportunities for clients to develop friends where they desire them. Many of the benefits of friendship also come from the love that family members have for each other. This is one reason why family support services are important.

PRACTICAL IMPEDIMENTS

Aristotle recognises that for people to flourish they need 'the external goods' (1998: 17). They need an adequate level of material prosperity, which we can easily understand. Without adequate means of living, a person will struggle and suffer. In particular, time and attention, including worry and anxiety over lack of money, for example, goes into trying to cope, especially among parents who have the responsibility of children, so it is hard for them to feel that they are happy or flourishing.

Aristotle also recognises that great misfortune or bad luck can have a devastating effect on people's prospects of flourishing, as they 'both bring pain and hinder many activities' (1998: 21). Again, it is easy for us to understand the effects