

Workout 2 ▪ Determining & Practicing My Roles-Functions-Virtues

Prompt, Exercise & Practice for *Aretē* (Excellence or Virtue)

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"Virtue is a kind of health and beauty and good condition of the soul." —Plato

"Virtue is a weapon that cannot be taken away." —Antisthenes

"Happiness is an activity of the soul that accords with perfect virtue." —Aristotle

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RECALL PLATO'S (AND Socrates')* key idea regarding *aretē*: that "virtue is the means by which a thing performs its function well," where the "function of a thing is that which it alone can do, or what it does better, than anything else."

Take a knife. A knife cuts (its function) well by means of sharpness (its virtue).

Or take the human soul. The rational part of the soul—reason—rules (its function) well by means of wisdom (its virtue). The spirited part (call it heart) enforces the rule of the rational part by means of courage. The desiring part nourishes and (re)produces by means of listening to and obeying the rule of the rational part (and so it goes along with the spirited part)—which is to say, by means of moderation.

In general, these three virtues (wisdom, courage, moderation) apply to all of us, all human beings. But what about other virtues or excellences that uniquely apply to us, to our individual, specific life roles or functions?

Before getting to our own roles or functions and their corresponding virtues or excellences, let's explore the roles or functions and virtues or excellences of a car and one person.

*To learn about what Plato (and Socrates) said about *aretē*,
read Plato (and Socrates) on *Aretē* (Excellence or Virtue) in the Cave Library.

Greek & English ▪ The Greek word for "function" is *ergon*. "Virtue" is *aretē*.

PROMPT ▪ Think about a **car**. What is the **role** or **function** (purpose) of a car? That is, what is it meant to do? Does a car have one or many roles-functions? Is the car's role-function as a whole car the same as the role-function of its parts (say its engine or tires or seats or steering wheel)? Once you've identified the role(s) or function(s) of a car, describe the corresponding **virtue(s)** or **excellence(s)**. What allows a car to perform its role-function well?

Now, move on to a **person's job** (role-function). Take a nurse, policeman, software engineer, photographer, lifeguard, store manager, or some other job. What is the role-function of the job? Is it one or many? What are the particular virtues or excellences that allow the person to perform their role-function well?

Role(s)-function(s) (purpose) of a car (and its parts) _____

WORKOUT 1 ▪ DETERMINING & PRACTICING MY ROLES-FUNCTIONS-VIRTUES

Virtues or excellences of a car (and its parts) _____

Role(s)-function(s) (purpose) of a job _____

Virtues or excellences of a job _____

“Virtue is the means by which a thing performs its function well. . . .
The function of a thing is that which it alone can do, or what it does
better, than anything else.” —Socrates (from Plato’s *Republic*)

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EXERCISE ▪ MY ROLES-FUNCTIONS-VIRTUES ▪ Consider yourself in terms of the **roles** you play (in your various relationships—with family, friends, coworkers, and others; at school, if you are in school; at work; at play; in your duty as a citizen; in the job you have; and so on). What are these **roles** (think of **three**)? What is the **function** of each role? What is the corresponding *aretē* (**virtue** or **excellence**) of each? That is, how can you perform your roles well? Or if more than one, what are the corresponding virtues or excellences?

1. Role-function(s)-virtue(s) _____

2. Role-function(s)-virtue(s) _____

3. Role-function(s)-virtue(s) _____

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PRACTICE ▪ Describe one concrete, specific, realistic way you can **practice** one of the above virtues over the course of the next week. Then practice daily.

One concrete, specific, realistic way I can practice _____

PRACTICE . . . PRACTICE . . . PRACTICE

EVALUATION ▪ After practicing for a week, **evaluate** your practice. How is it going? What is going well? What should I continue? What should I add? What is not going well? What should I stop (if anything)?

How is my virtue-excellence practice going? _____

ONGOING PRACTICE ▪ If beneficial, **keep practicing** the virtues or excellences that help you perform your role(s)-function(s) well. In time, after your first virtue practice has become a habit—part of who you are and what you regularly do—**practice other virtues** related to other roles-functions. Good luck!

“Absolutely nothing in life is successful without training.
... Training has the power to conquer anything.”

—Diogenes of Sinope

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