

# Aristotelian Development & Deduction

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A game system  
based on Aristotle's  
*Nicomachean Ethics*

Second Edition

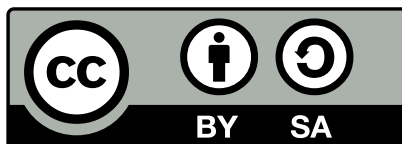
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# Aristotelian Development & Deduction



# **Table of Contents**

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Overview</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Game Mechanics</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Experience, Habits, and Practical Wisdom</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>Round Summary</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>Virtues of Character</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>Running the Game</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>Notes on Adaptation</b> .....	<b>33</b>
<b>Sources Used</b> .....	<b>34</b>
<b>Hacking the System</b> .....	<b>35</b>

## Introduction

A traveler from a distant land is slowly making their way south to trade their wares in the city of Athens. Nearing the outskirts of their destination, they hear some commotion around the bend. Not being able to see ahead due to a thicket of trees, the traveler, being a cautious individual, quietly makes their way into the cover of the trees to see what is happening down the road. From their hidden spot, the traveler sees a band of three robbers accosting another trader who is on the same path. The robbers are currently relieving the unfortunate trader of their money and goods.

The traveler pauses and carefully contemplates their next course of action. What is to be done? Standing idly by in the shadows would seem to be the cowardly option. While the group is only robbing the trader now, who knows if they have worse plans? How could one stand by and watch as a fellow traveler is killed? On the other hand, charging in directly and trying to fight the attackers would be foolhardy. The traveler is not only outnumbered, but unarmed as well. A direct assault would be an ill-fated endeavor.

The traveler continues to ponder the situation at hand with the time for action approaching. While neither of those options would be correct, surely the best course of action must be somewhere in between these two responses? "What should I do?" the traveler asks themselves, "what would a virtuous person do?"

## Overview

Traditionally, roleplaying games have built-in systems for character improvement. This may take the form of a leveling system where the character gains new abilities or they may improve their mastery of certain skills. Either way, the underlying commonality is character improvement. The development of one's character, in another sense, was also a concern of ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle talks about the highest good one can aim for in life, "eudaimonia," which is sometimes translated as happiness or human flourishing. Eudaimonia is the ultimate end that humans should strive to achieve in life. To achieve this state and live a good life, one must be virtuous. To do this, a person must act in accordance with virtue whilst being guided by the rational part of the soul. Aristotle identifies ten virtues of character that one must master in order to live one's best life.<sup>1</sup>

This game system is an attempt to blend these two concepts of character improvement. In the game, the player attempts to have their character achieve a virtuous state of character by establishing correct habits while gaining experience and practical wisdom from each scenario their character encounters.

The world is a complicated place, and every situation will always have its own unique circumstances. Because of this, Aristotle thought that there could not be a general outline or a derivable

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<sup>1</sup> Virtues of character are not the only thing needed to achieve eudaimonia. Nor are they the only virtues, as Aristotle also identifies intellectual virtues. But it is the virtues of character that pertain to one's moral character and are understood through the doctrine of the mean.



formula which one could use to determine what the proper course of action is for any given situation. He notes that the real world is messy and there cannot be a general schematic that can work for all occasions. Aristotle thought that the proper course of action can only be determined in the context of the situation in which the action is to occur.

“And so, since this is our subject and these are our premises, we shall be satisfied to indicate the truth roughly and in outline; since our subject and our premises are things that hold good usually [but not universally], we shall be satisfied to draw conclusions of the same sort ... For the educated person seeks exactness in each area to the extent that the nature of the subject allows; for apparently it is just as mistaken to demand demonstrations from a rhetorician as to accept [merely] persuasive arguments from a mathematician.”<sup>2</sup> I.3.4

For Aristotle, virtues of character are states that lie in the mean between excess and deficiency. To be virtuous in a given scenario, one must not feel and act too strongly or weakly, but somewhere in between. This is known as the doctrine of the mean. Given the circumstances of a certain situation, the mean between the two vices will be different. The correct course of action is always relative to the situation at hand.

“By virtue I mean virtue of character; for this is about feelings and actions, and these admit of excess, deficiency, and an intermediate condition. We can be afraid, for instance, or be confident, or have appetites, or get angry, or feel pity, and in general have pleasure or pain, both too much and too little, and in both ways not well. But having these feelings at the right times, about the right things, towards the right people, for the right end, and in the right way,

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<sup>2</sup> Quotations are from the second edition Irwin translation.

is the intermediate and best condition, and this is proper to virtue.”

II.6.10-11

Being virtuous is also an active process. It is not sufficient to merely know the correct course of action. One has to actually act in a virtuous manner to develop a virtuous character. It is also the case that acting virtuously once does not make one a virtuous person. To truly be virtuous an individual must continue to act virtuously consistently. Habits are developed from repeated like action. If an individual regularly acts in excess, then it is harder for that individual to act virtuously in the future. The more one acts in accordance with virtue, the easier it becomes to consistently do so.

**Example:** If one regularly overindulges when eating, it will be harder for them to eat the correct amount than it would be for someone who usually eats the correct amount. The relevant virtue here is temperance.

Before one reaches the age in which they can engage in the study of ethics, habits can be acquired based on how the individual is raised. While a youth may have correct habits, it is only after a person comes of age and is able to properly deliberate and aim towards the fine that they are able to truly be virtuous.

Unfortunately, acting virtuously is not a simple proposition. To act bravely in one situation may be different from a brave act in other circumstances. Because we must approach each moment in its proper context, only a rough guide for action can be given, and it must be supplemented by practical wisdom to get it right. Practical wisdom is gained through experience. Experience teaches us how to act at the proper time, to the proper degree, and in the proper company.

## Game Mechanics

*Aristotelean Development & Deduction* is a game for two or more players, with one player serving as the **Determiner of the Mean**.<sup>3</sup> The Determiner of the Mean runs the game and is responsible for describing the scenarios that the characters find themselves in and, as the name suggests, is responsible for rolling to determine the mean. Each round, the goal of the player is to have their roll match the **Determined Mean**. The player's overall goal is to have their character become virtuous.

### Character Creation

The players each roll one six-sided die to determine their character's level of **Wealth**. Next, the players roll the die again and divide the result by two (rounding up) for their character's level of **Honor**. These status levels are a pre-requisite for attaining certain virtues. One can be born into riches or poverty, limiting the extent of what a character is able to achieve. Being born into a noble family will garner higher esteem than the child of a known scoundrel, even if neither child has done anything yet to earn their reputations. But, once they do come of age, their actions will affect their esteem in the eyes of others.

The player again rolls a six-sided die for their level of **Health**. This is not required for any virtue but is something used to determine the length of the character's life. Finally, the player rolls one six-sided die for their character's starting practical wisdom. This number represents the way they were raised and the habits they gained during that time. The player

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<sup>3</sup> **Bold** words indicate a key term used in the game that will be explained in the section.

will be able to use this number to freely modify their action rolls. The character will add to their practical wisdom as the game goes on and the character encounters the different scenarios that lie ahead of them.

### Lifespan

At the end of each round, the player rolls a set of percentile dice.<sup>4</sup> If the result is equal to or over the current round number, then the character suffers no consequences. If the result is lower than the current round number, then the character loses a level of health. Once the character loses all their levels of health, then the character dies and their life is over. A player can prevent the character from losing health by electing to sacrifice some of their wealth. They can only do this three times. The cost for each time is displayed below:

First Time	1 Wealth
Second Time	2 Wealth
Third Time	4 Wealth

Alternatively, based on how long the Determiner of the Mean is wanting the game to last, they can simply pick a number arbitrarily.

### Round Overview

Each round starts with the Determiner of the Mean rolling two six-sided dice that are hidden from the other players. The summed total of the two dice will be referred to as the Determined Mean. The Determined Mean will be between two and twelve, with one and thirteen representing the vices between

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<sup>4</sup> Percentile dice consist of a pair of ten-sided dice where one die represents the tens place and the other the ones place. This will result in a number from one to one hundred.

which the mean lies, with one being the defect and thirteen being the excess. A Determined Mean that is a higher number would require a stronger response from the character, whereas a lower Determined Mean would require a weaker response from the character.

The Determiner of the Mean then decides which virtue that will be the basis of the scenario.<sup>5</sup> The players are not directly told what the relevant virtue is. Instead, they must be able to deduce what virtue is relevant from the scenario that is described to them by the Determiner of the Mean.

After the Determiner of the Mean describes the scenario, each player starts the round by stating which virtue they think is relevant and then making an **Action Roll** by rolling two six-sided dice. The action roll determines how the character acts in the scenario described by the Determiner of the Mean.

The player's goal for each round is to get their character's action roll to match the Determined Mean. To achieve this, not only does the action roll need to have the same sum as the Determined Mean, but it would also have to match the result of each die. For example, if the Determined Mean is seven with one die being a four and the other being a three, for their character to act in accordance with virtue, the action roll must also end up with a four and a three.

“But there is only one way to be correct. That is why error is easy and correctness is difficult, since it is easy to miss the target and difficult to hit it. And so for this reason also excess and deficiency are proper

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<sup>5</sup> The list of virtues can be found on pg. 17-27. Note that some virtues have pre-requisites, so the Determiner of the Mean should refrain from such scenarios until the characters meet these requirements.

to vice, the mean to virtue; for we are noble in only one way, but bad in all sorts of ways.” **II.6.14**

For any action roll, the player may substitute one or both of the dice in the action roll for one of their numbers that are amongst their practical wisdom.

The player’s overall goal is for their character to become virtuous. Having the action roll match the Determined Mean is not sufficient for being virtuous. A player may make a lucky roll and arrive at the Determined Mean by chance. Accidentally doing a virtuous action does not equate to one possessing that virtue of character. On this topic, Aristotle says:

“But for actions in accord with the virtues to be done temperately or justly it does not suffice that they themselves have the right qualities. Rather, he must know [that he is doing virtuous actions]; second, he must decide on them, and decide on them for themselves; and, third, he must also do them from a firm and unchanging state.” **II.4.3**

This means that for a character to truly possess a virtue, they must meet the following criteria:

1. They must identify the correct virtue.
2. They must have their action roll match the Determined Mean.
3. They must not arrive at this roll via chance. The player must, in some way, deduce the Determined Mean.<sup>6</sup>

In early rounds, the players will not have much control over their character’s actions, nor will they

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<sup>6</sup> If the player knows the Determined Mean to be a ten with a roll of six and four, and their unmodified action roll is a six and a four, then this still counts as acting virtuously.

have reliable knowledge on what the Determined Mean will be. All they have to start out with is the description from the Determiner of the Mean and the practical wisdom they started the game with. While this means that early on the characters will not have much hope for acting virtuously, they will at least be gathering experience that will help them in the future.

Each round, based on what the action roll was or how close the player's action roll is to the Determined Mean, the player's character may gain knowhow, form a habit, or gain practical wisdom. These are discussed in the next section. Once the results are determined, the round is completed.

The game continues like this until the characters become virtuous or die.<sup>7</sup> To become virtuous, the character must possess "mastery" of all the virtues. "Mastery" is discussed in the following section.

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<sup>7</sup> At some point, the game may break down into a philosophical debate. If this happens, just chalk it up as a win.

# Experience, Habits, and Practical Wisdom

There are three different areas in which a Determined Mean will fall into. They are demonstrated in the chart below.<sup>8</sup>

<b>Greater</b>	<b>12</b>						
	<b>11</b>						
	<b>10</b>						
	<b>9</b>						
<b>Moderate</b>	<b>8</b>						
	<b>7</b>						
	<b>6</b>						
<b>Lesser</b>	<b>5</b>						
	<b>4</b>						
	<b>3</b>						
	<b>2</b>						

<sup>8</sup> Note that Greater and Lesser are not used in an evaluative way. The Determined Mean for a given scenario may fall in either of these areas, and thus the virtuous act would lie in these areas.



## Experience

Even if an action roll does not match the Determined Mean, the character can still gain **Experience** that will help them in the future. Experience points are gained based on how close the action roll is to the Determined Mean. One experience point is awarded if an action roll that is in the correct area, if the action roll matches the sum of the Determined Mean, and for each die in the action roll that matches a die in the Determined Mean. This means that a character can gain up to four experience points in a round. If the player selected the wrong virtue, then the character does not gain any experience, even if their action roll matched the Determined Mean.

Experience points can be used to either gain more knowledge of the Determined Mean or to modify the action roll, which allows for greater control for the player. Experience points are not lost once they are spent. The total number of experience points represents how many points the player can use each round. The only time a character will lose experience points would be as a penalty for choosing the wrong virtue.

If a player chooses the wrong virtue, they must roll a six-sided die to see what consequence the character experiences from the table below.

<b>1</b>	Lose 1 honor level
<b>2</b>	Lose 1 wealth
<b>3</b>	Lose 1d6/2 (rounding up) experience points <sup>9</sup>
<b>4</b>	Next roll has a bias higher
<b>5</b>	Next roll has a bias lower
<b>6</b>	Learn from the mistake and earn 1xp

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<sup>9</sup> If the loss is higher than the amount of experience points the character has, the experience points are reset to zero.

	<b>Experience Point Uses</b>	<b>Experience Point Cost</b>
<b>Knowledge</b>	<b>Identify the virtue</b>	<b>5xp</b>
	<b>Identify the area</b>	<b>2xp</b>
	<b>Identify the sum</b>	<b>4xp</b>
	<b>Identify a die</b>	<b>5xp</b>
<b>Roll Modification</b>	<b>Re-roll a die</b>	<b>1xp</b>
	<b>Modify a die by one<sup>10</sup></b>	<b>1xp</b>
	<b>Exclude an area<sup>11</sup></b>	<b>3xp</b>

If a player modifies their roll to knowingly get further from the mean they do not get any positive benefits from the resulting action roll. A player can be risky by using a re-roll, but they cannot knowingly make their action roll worse and receive a benefit.

The Determiner of the Mean is given free rein to add or modify these benefits or consequences of an action roll as they see fit.

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<sup>10</sup> Example. If one of the dice the player rolls is a five, they can spend one experience point to move that number up or down one, to make it a six or a four.

<sup>11</sup> If the player's action roll falls into the designated area, they may re-roll one or both dice until the result is not in the eliminated area.

## Habits

**Habits** are formed through repeated like action. This means that the more often a character acts as virtue dictates, the easier it is for them to act virtuously in the future. This also means that if a character continually acts excessively or deficiently of the mean, then they are more likely to err in the same way in the future.

To capture the notion of forming a “bad habit,” if an action roll ends up in the incorrect area, then on the next round, the player must re-roll one or both dice with a bias towards the direction they erred. If the action roll was off by one area, then the player must re-roll the die that is higher or lower if the roll erred to the lower or higher area, respectively. This will give the results of the roll a bias towards the area in which the character erred. If the player is off by two areas, then they proceed as stated before. After the first re-roll, the player must then repeat the process with the new dice combination, regardless of which die was previously rolled.

**Example:** If the correct area was the Moderate area and the action roll landed in the Lesser area, on the next roll the player will re-roll the higher of the two dice after the initial action roll.

Alternatively, if the correct area was Lesser and the action roll landed in the greater area, then the player must re-roll the lower of the two dice. Once that result is determined, the player will once again re-roll the lower of the two dice.

## Practical Wisdom

**Practical Wisdom**, in terms of the game, refers to information and abilities the character possesses that the player can freely use to modify their action roll.

“What has been said is confirmed by the fact that while young men become geometricians and mathematicians and wise in matters like these, it is thought that a young man of practical wisdom cannot be found. The cause is that such wisdom is concerned not only with universals but with particulars, which become familiar from experience, but a young man has no experience, for it is length of time that gives experience; indeed one might ask this question too, why a boy may become a mathematician, but not a philosopher or a physicist.”  
 VI.8.6<sup>12</sup>

Every character starts with one number as their practical wisdom. The player can use this number to modify one or both dice without expending any experience points. Whenever a player rolls doubles the number rolled is added to their character's practical wisdom.

If an action roll ever matches the sum of the Determined Mean, the Determiner of the Mean will inform that player of any future Determined Means that match that sum. The Determiner of the Mean will inform the player before they make their action roll.

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<sup>12</sup> This is from the Ross translation. Irwin uses “prudence” instead of “practical wisdom”.

## Virtuous Action

For a character to act virtuously, the action roll must match the Determined Mean exactly and the player must arrive at that roll via knowledge and/or modifications of the roll. If this is achieved via luck, then it does not count as a truly virtuous act, but the character is still awarded experience points. Additionally, all future Determined Means that match that combination will be revealed to the player.

If a character succeeds in acting virtuously on a given virtue of character, the player marks that virtue as currently “mastered”. If, in a future round, the character does not act virtuously in a scenario concerning a “mastered” virtue, then they lose their “mastered” status. For every two “mastered” virtues, the character gains a level of honor. If a “mastered” virtue is lost, then the character loses a level of honor if it brings them down below an even number of “mastered” virtues.

When a character succeeds in acting generously, that character gains one wealth level, with a maximum of six. Likewise, when a character succeeds in a mild honorability roll, the character gains a level of honor, with a maximum of six.

## Round Summary

- I. The Determiner of the Mean chooses a virtue.
- II. The Determiner of the Mean rolls the Determined Mean (2d6).
- III. The Determiner of the Mean describes a scenario relevant to the virtue and where the mean lays in between the corresponding vices.

If the character has any practical wisdom about the Determined Mean, the Determiner of the Mean discloses this information to the player.

- IV. The player chooses the virtue they think is relevant to the scenario.
- V. The player may use their character's experience points to limit their rolls. This must be stated before the action roll is made.
- VI. The player makes the action roll (2d6).

The player may use any experience points their character has to modify the roll.

- VII. Once the player has completed modifying the action roll, the Determiner of the Mean reveals the Determined Mean and allots any experience points, practical wisdom, or consequences the character acquires or incurs.

## Virtues of Character

The following lists the virtues of character that Aristotle discusses along with a brief description of the virtue, the corresponding vices, as well as a citation for where you can find the discussion of each virtue in the text. Different translations sometimes use different words for these states. To accommodate this, the terms used in different translations have also been included.

For some of the virtues and vices, Aristotle identifies them as being nameless. This is due to the states of character being uncommon or not something often praised nor blamed, but such states become apparent when looking at the corresponding states through the lens of the doctrine of the mean. When these occur, they will be noted with an asterisk for the name Aristotle uses. A double asterisk identifies a name for a state that is supplied for the game for simplicity's sake.

**Bravery****III.6-9**

Courage

The virtue concerned with facing death, but not all death, and the pain associated with it. One is called brave who “is intrepid in facing a fine death and the immediate dangers that bring death.” **III.6.8**

A brave person will still have fear, but they are able to withstand it and persevere when facing what they fear.

“Hence whoever stands firm against the right things and fears the right things, for the right end, in the right way, at the right time, and is correspondingly confident, is the brave person; for the brave person’s actions and feelings accord with what something is worth, and follow what reason prescribes” **III.7.5**

**Excess: Confidence**

An overly confident individual may charge into battle unarmed against overwhelming forces, or be completely fearless, even in the face of natural disasters. Aristotle says that there is no name for such an individual.

**Deficiency: Fear**

The overly fearful individual is a coward. They drop arms and flee at any sign of a quarrel, even if the reason for fighting, and possibly dying, is worthwhile and fighting would be what reason dictates.



## **Temperance**

**III.10-12**

The virtue concerned with the gratification of the lower pleasures of touch and taste.

“[S]omeone is intemperate because he feels more pain than is right at failing to get pleasant things, and even this pain is produced by the pleasure [he takes from them]. And someone is temperate because he does not feel pain at the absence of what is pleasant, or at refraining from it.”

**III.11.5**

### **Excess: Intemperate, Profligacy, Self-indulgent**

The glutton overindulges in food and drink. The intemperate person will pursue these pleasures at the expense of others. They enjoy pleasures more than they are worth. They live by appetite and desire.

### **Deficiency: Unfeeling\*, Insensibility\***

The individual who does not derive much pleasure from things and enjoys them less than they ought to. Because this is very uncommon, there is no name for such an individual.

## Generosity Liberality

## IV.1

The virtue concerned with the giving and taking of wealth. A generous person uses their wealth for the proper reasons. They do not give for ulterior motives. The proper amount of generosity will also be a factor of the wealth of the individual. A person of lesser means who gives a small amount can still be more generous than a person of greater means who gives a larger amount.

Generosity is a pre-requisite for magnificence.

“It is not easy for a generous person to grow rich, since he is ready to spend, not to take or keep, and honors wealth for the sake of giving, not for itself. Indeed, that is why fortune is denounced, because those who most deserve to grow rich actually do so least. This is only to be expected, however, since someone cannot possess wealth, any more than other things, if he pays no attention to possessing it.”

IV.1.20-1

### Excess: Wastefulness, Prodigality

One who is wasteful causes the self-destruction of the property that living depends on. They may give wealth to any and all, meaning they will not have the wealth to give to the right person at the right time. The wasteful individual is also deficient in taking and take from the wrong sources.

### Deficiency: Ungenerosity, Meanness

One who is ungenerous takes wealth more seriously than is right. The ungenerous individual is also excessive in taking. This means to take money from any source and without scruples. This also includes the gambler and the robber.

## Magnificence

## IV.2

The virtue concerned with wealth in regard to heavy expenses. It is related to generosity, but on a much larger scale. This requires a large amount of expenditure towards a worthy result. Such expenses are honorable expenses for the gods, and expenses for the common good.

Pre-requisites: A “mastery” in generosity and a wealth level over five.

“Someone is called magnificent only if he spends the worthy amount on a large purpose, not on a trivial or an ordinary purpose like the one who gave to many a wanderer; for the magnificent person is generous, but generosity does not imply magnificence.”

IV.23

**Excess: Vulgarly, Lack of Taste**

A vulgar person is one who throws their wealth around as a means of flaunting it. They spend more than what is right. They over-spend in small expenses but will spend little when there is a large expense. (IV.2.20)

**Deficiency: Stinginess, Paltriness**

Despite their wealth, the stingy person will always be concerned about spending too much on something. They will try to get by with the smallest expenditure possible and will still complain about the expense.

## **Magnanimity** Greatness of Soul, Pride

## **IV.3**

The virtue concerned with great honor. The magnanimous person will know their worth and be worthy of greatness. They are concerned with honor, but in the right way.

Pre-requisite: "Mastery" of the other virtues and an honor level of six.

"Since the magnanimous person is worthy of the greatest things, he is the best person. For in every case the better person is worthy of something greater, and the best person is worthy of the greatest things, and hence the truly magnanimous person must be good." **IV.3.14**

"Magnanimity, then, would seem to be a sort of adornment of the virtues, for it makes them greater, and it does not arise without them. That is why it is difficult to be truly magnanimous, since it is not possible without being fine and good." **IV.3.16**

### **Excess: Vain**

The vain person believes themselves to be worth of more than they are. They "are foolish and do not know themselves, and they make this obvious." **IV.3.36**

### **Deficiency: Pusillanimous, Unduly Humble, Small-Souled**

The pusillanimous person thinks they are worthy of less than they are. They seem to not know themselves and their worth. They are hesitant.

**Mild Honorability\*\*****IV.4**

The virtue concerned with small honors. This virtue “forms the right attitude in us on medium and small matters.”<sup>13</sup> The relation of this virtue to magnanimity is the same as generosity is to magnificence.

“Since people desire honor both more and less than is right, it is also possible to desire it in the right way. This state, therefore, a nameless mean concerned with honor, is praised.” **IV.4.5**

**Excess: Ambitious, Love of Honor**

The ambitious person loves honor more than what is right. They would want to be praised for every small thing, regardless of how insignificant it may be or how little they contributed. They seek honor from any source.

**Deficiency: Unambitious, Indifference to Honor**

The unambitious person does not care about honors, even those that they rightfully deserve. They do not seek recognition for their actions in any way.

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<sup>13</sup> IV.4.1

**Mildness\*****IV.5**

Gentleness, Good tempered

The virtue concerned with anger. The mild individual is one who is not bothered by little things and led by their feelings. They are angry when the situation merits anger on their part.

“The person who is angry at the right things and toward the right people, and also in the right way, at the right time, and for the right length of time, is praised. This, then will be the mild person, if mildness is praised.” **IV.5.3**

**Excess: Irascibility**

There are several ways in which an individual may err to the excess. The hot-tempered<sup>14</sup> person is angered by the slightest provocation and when anger is not appropriate. While the irascible person angers quickly, they also stop being angry after they quickly pay back the person who angered them. A bitter person holds on to grudges and will not let things go until they exact some sort of penalty from the other party. An irritable person is not only irritated by the wrong things, but “more severely and for longer than is right, and are not reconciled until [the offender has suffered] a penalty and corrective treatment.” **IV.5.11**

**Deficiency: Inirascibility\*, Lack of Spirit\***

One who overlooks offenses, even when reason should dictate the appropriateness of anger. It is not praiseworthy to never be angered.

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<sup>14</sup> This is the term used in the Ross translation, whereas Irwin also translates this as irascible.

**Friendliness\*****IV.6**

The virtue concerned with common dealings in conversations and actions. The friendly individual will act suitably towards all they meet and will aim to be pleasant without any ulterior motives.

“[H]e will treat people in the right way when he meets them. [More exactly], he will aim to avoid causing pain or to share pleasure, but will always refer to the fine and the beneficial. For he would seem to be concerned with the pleasures and pains that arise in meeting people; and if it is not fine, or it is harmful, for him to share one of these pleasures, he will object and will decide to cause pain instead. Further, if the other person will suffer no slight disgrace or harm from doing an action, and only slight pain if he is crossed, the virtuous person will object to the action and not accept it.” **IV.6.6-7**

**Excess: Ingratiating, Obsequious**

An ingratiating individual is one who will praise anything and everything in order to please others and cause no pain.

**Deficiency: Cantankerous, Quarrelsome, Surly  
Churlish, Contentious**

A cantankerous individual is one who will take the contrary position on anything and will feel no worry about causing others pain in doing so.

**Truthfulness\*****IV.7**

The virtue concerned with presenting oneself in an honest way concerning one's abilities and qualities. The truthful individual is one who is honest about their talents.

"The intermediate person is straightforward, and therefore truthful in what he says and does, acknowledging the qualities he has without exaggerating or belittling" **IV.7.4**

**Excess: Boaster**

The boaster is an individual who makes claims about themselves that are untrue. This could either be for profit or to be seen in a higher regard.

**Deficiency: Self-Deprecator**

The self-deprecator is an individual who sells themselves short and presents themselves as lesser than they actually are. They belittle themselves about their abilities and qualities.



**Wit****IV.8**

Versatile, Ready-Witted

The virtue concerned with “raising up laughs” in times of relaxation and amusement. The witty individual knows how to read the room and make jokes that are pleasing to those who hear them and whose would not be objectionable or painful to those who they are intended.

“Those who joke in appropriate ways are called witty, or, in other words, agile-witted. For these sorts of jokes seem to be movements of someone’s character, and characters are judged, as bodies are, by their movements.” **IV.8.3**

**Excess: Buffoonish**

The buffoon is one who will go to great lengths to make others laugh. Making jokes at others’ expense, or even their own, is of no concern to them.

**Deficiency: Boorish, Stiff, Morose, Unpolished**

The boor is one with no sense of humor and will readily object to those who try to make jokes around them. They are a wet blanket.

## Running the Game

To give an idea of how the game is played, here is an example of a dialogue between the Determiner of the Mean and a player.

### **Determiner of the Mean:**

*The virtue of Wit is selected.*

*The Determiner of the Mean rolls 2d6.*

*Results: 4, 3, for a sum of 7.*

You are at the reception at your best friend's wedding. You've known them since you were both in kindergarten and, being such good friends for years, you are asked to give a speech toasting your friend and their new spouse at the wedding reception.

### **Player:**

*Currently at 5xp*

*Practical wisdom:*

*Numbers: 2, 6 Sums: 10*

How well do I know the families?

You know your friend's immediate family very well, but you don't know the extended family. This is the first time you are meeting any family members of your friend's new spouse.

What do my friend's parents think of me?

You have a good relationship with them. They never thought you were a bad influence, but perhaps too jokey at times.

How well do I know my friend's sense of humor?

You have an extremely good understanding of your friend's sense of humor. You two always joke with each other.

So, I don't know anything about the spouse's family. What kind of impression do I get from them?

They seem fairly conservatively dressed, but look happy and approving of the new union. They don't seem like sticks in the mud, but you get the feeling they wouldn't take kindly to any kind of mockery.

What is the proportion of the families in attendance?

About 50/50

Alright. Jokes and humor were mentioned a few times, so I'm thinking the relevant virtue is wit.

That is correct.

*The player rolls 2d6.*

*Results: 5, 6, for a sum of 11.*

Hmm. Well, it definitely doesn't seem like I'm aiming for anything in the Greater Area. Using my practical wisdom, I am going to modify the 6 to a 2, to make a new sum of 7 and drop the action roll to the Moderate Area. And I want to spend 4xp to identify the sum.

The sum of the Determined Mean is 7.

In that case, I'll stay with the 5 and the 2.

You were in the right area, and have the correct sum, earning your character 2xp. But the Determined Mean was made of a 4 and 3. But, since the action roll matched the sum, add 7 to your practical wisdom.

## Determiner of the Mean's Guide

On the table below are some scenario ideas for the Determiner of the Mean to utilize. For some of these, the degree can be modified by the magnitude of the offense/situation or who the other party is.

<b>Bravery</b>	<b>The character witnesses a mugging.</b>
	<b>The character is challenged to a fight.</b>
<b>Temperance</b>	<b>The character is at a wedding with an open bar.</b>
	<b>The character is at a work event with complementary food.</b>
<b>Generosity</b>	<b>The character is asked to donate to a charity.</b>
	<b>The character loans money to a friend/acquaintance.</b>
<b>Magnificence</b>	<b>The character is planning the wedding of their child.</b>
	<b>The character is constructing or having a major renovation of a home.</b>
<b>Magnanimity</b>	<b>The character wins a Nobel Prize</b>
	<b>The character is selected Person of the Year.</b>

## Reward Guide

Characters earn 1xp for each of the following:

- The action roll falls within the correct area.
- The action roll matches the sum of the Determined Mean.
- Each die in the action roll that matches a die in the Determined Mean.

<b>Mild Honorability</b>	The character wins “lawn of the month.”
	The character is selected as employee of the month.
<b>Mildness</b>	At a restaurant, the server accidentally spills an entire tray of food and drinks on the character.
	The character is mocked directly by someone.
<b>Friendliness</b>	The character is trying to get to know a new coworker or neighbor.
	The character attempts to make small talk with a ride share driver.
<b>Truthfulness</b>	The character is interviewing for a new job.
	The character is attending a high school reunion.
<b>Wit</b>	The character is asked to speak at a “roast” of a friend/colleague.
	The character tries to laugh off a misstep of faux pas.

## Optional Game Modes

These are mostly attempts at wit, but try them out if they sound appealing.

### Pre-Socratic Mode

When playing the game, neither the Determiner of the Mean nor the player will be able to refer to the rulebook. They must either play by recollection of the rules, a secondhand account from someone else, or, alternatively, they can only read every other page, paragraph, or line.

### Heraclitian Mode

The Determiner of the Mean sets a time limit on player deliberation. If the player does not finalize their action roll before this, then the Determiner of the Mean will re-roll the Determined Mean without acknowledging it to the player.

### Socratic Mode

The player cannot write anything down. Alternatively, they win if they ask too many questions, and the Determiner of the Mean gets frustrated and leaves.

### Platonic Mode

If the player correctly knows the Determined Mean, then they automatically act accordingly. They cannot, however, directly see the Determined Mean results. For that, they need to exit a cave.

### Fatalistic Mode

Before the game starts, the Determiner of the Mean rolls sixteen six-sided dice to determine the lifespan of each player character and keeps this number secret from the players. This will give the character a lifespan between sixteen and ninety-six years. The player can do nothing to modify this number.

## Notes on Adaptation

Some changes have been made in adapting Aristotle's ethical theory to a game format.

The chief difference is that possessing one virtue of character does not mean that one would be equally virtuous with the others. For example, while one might be brave, the capacity to be brave does not translate to being temperate. The ability to modify rolls generally was implemented as to not make a game extra-long. If one was interested in a marathon game, then feel free to lock experience, habit, and practical wisdom to the corresponding virtue that it was gained from.

Another change is that being virtuous does not guarantee monetary success, honor, recognition, or any external goods. But, attaining certain virtues are predicated on having these external goods. This is why one can gain in status as they become virtuous, as to make sure that characters are not locked out of being virtuous in the game.

Other than this, if you find any mistakes or misinterpretations on my part, please feel free to contact me and let me know so I can modify the system to better fit Aristotle's thought. Or, at least, add a disclaimer about the difference.

## Sources Used

The second edition of the Terence Irwin translation was used for reading and research. The introduction, headings, and notes were extremely helpful in the creation of this project. Unless otherwise noted, this is the translation used for quotations. Aside from brackets used to capitalize, the brackets indicate additions from Irwin.

Tufts University has a great version of the Rackham translation that allows viewing the text by book, chapter, and section.

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3atext%3a1999.01.0054>

The Ross translation is available in multiple places. A scan of the book that includes the Bekker pagination can be found on the Internet Archive. It lacks the section markers of the other translations.

<https://archive.org/details/plworkstranslat09aris/page/4/mode/2up>

MIT also has an HTML version of the Ross translation available, but this lacks the Bekker pagination as well as section markers.

<http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.html>

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy has an article on Aristotle's ethical theory that provides a great overview.

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-ethics/>



## Hacking the System

While the game system was built from the ground up in an attempt to model Aristotle's ethical theory, I do believe that it could be modified and built upon for a skill system in a more traditional TTRPG format.

The main notion that I think can be translated is instead of needing to hit an exact number, the players could aim for their roll to land within a certain range. Based on difficulty, that range could be large or the exact number/sum. How far off a successful roll is from the center of the range could determine the level of success. How far off the roll misses the range could dictate the level of failure and any corresponding complications.

Stripped of the theming, the core system seems like it could fit for social rolls or skills that require a degree of finesse. For example, if the character is trying to gain entry to a club and is being thwarted by a bouncer, they could try to talk their way in. The lesser range could represent an attempt to charm the other party, the moderate range could be an attempt at a persuasive argument, and the greater range could be an attempt to intimidate. With this, a "critical failure" would only happen at extreme contrasts. So, if the bouncer just needed to be sweet talked and the character tries to act tough, the failure might result in provoking the bouncer into attacking the character.

How exactly this could be translated and dropped into other systems, I haven't quite cracked yet. But, feel free to take the above suggestions and run with them. If anyone does end up making a hack of the system, please share it with me! If nothing else, it can be more dynamic than the standard bigger/smaller roll always being better.

Character \_\_\_\_\_ Player \_\_\_\_\_

## Practical Wisdom

### Sum

<b>2</b>		<b>8</b>	
<b>3</b>		<b>9</b>	
<b>4</b>		<b>10</b>	
<b>5</b>		<b>11</b>	
<b>6</b>		<b>12</b>	
<b>7</b>			

### Number

<b>1</b>	
<b>2</b>	
<b>3</b>	
<b>4</b>	
<b>5</b>	
<b>6</b>	

### Virtue List:

<b>Bravery</b>	<input type="text"/>
<b>Temperance</b>	<input type="text"/>
<b>Generosity</b>	<input type="text"/>
<b>Magnificence</b>	<input type="text"/>
<b>Magnanimity</b>	<input type="text"/>
<b>Mild Honorability</b>	<input type="text"/>
<b>Mildness</b>	<input type="text"/>
<b>Friendliness</b>	<input type="text"/>
<b>Truthfulness</b>	<input type="text"/>
<b>Wit</b>	<input type="text"/>

Health  
OOOOOO

Wealth  
OOOOOO

Honor  
OOOOOO



Round  
Number



Experience  
Points



## ***Progress to the Mean!***

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*Aristotelian Development & Deduction* is a tabletop game where players attempt to improve their characters by mastering the virtues of character.

Created for the Critical-Creative Philosophy game jam.