



# CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP IN CRISIS II: VIRTUE ETHICS

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Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> August 2023

## Session 1 Recap:

- Prioritising the 6 Cs
- General reflections

The challenge is to put them in order of priority for:

Alphabetical:      Christian > Secular:      Christian > Christian:

Calling

Competence

Christian

Celebrity

Charisma

Calling

Character

Character

Character

Charisma

Christian

Charisma

Christian

Calling

Competence

Competence

Celebrity

Celebrity

Opening reflection  
and discussion:

- Summary of “The Ring of Gyges”  
(Plato, *Republic*, Bk 2)
- Discuss the story with a neighbour
- Plenary feedback

Opening reflection  
and discussion:

- Summary of “The Ring of Gyges”  
(Plato, *Republic*, Bk 2)
- “No man can be thought to be of such an iron nature [virtue / good character] that he would stand fast in justice.”
- WRONG! Say the Virtue ethicists

# Session Outline:

1. Introduction to Virtue Ethics and Good Leadership
  - a) The tradition in philosophy, theology and psychology
  - b) The mechanism of virtue development
  - c) The Christian tradition of virtue ethics
  - d) Case study: The Oxford Character Project
  
2. Challenges to this approach to good leadership
  - a) A challenge from psychology
  - b) A challenge from theology
  - c) A challenge from context: “Reel” Leadership Workshop
    - 12 Angry Men*
    - Eye in the Sky*

## PART I (9:00-10:15)

Introduction to Virtue Ethics  
and Good Leadership



Virtue ethics is currently one of three major approaches in normative ethics. It may, initially, be identified as the one that emphasizes the virtues, or moral character, in contrast to the approach that emphasizes duties or rules (deontology) or that emphasizes the consequences of actions (consequentialism).



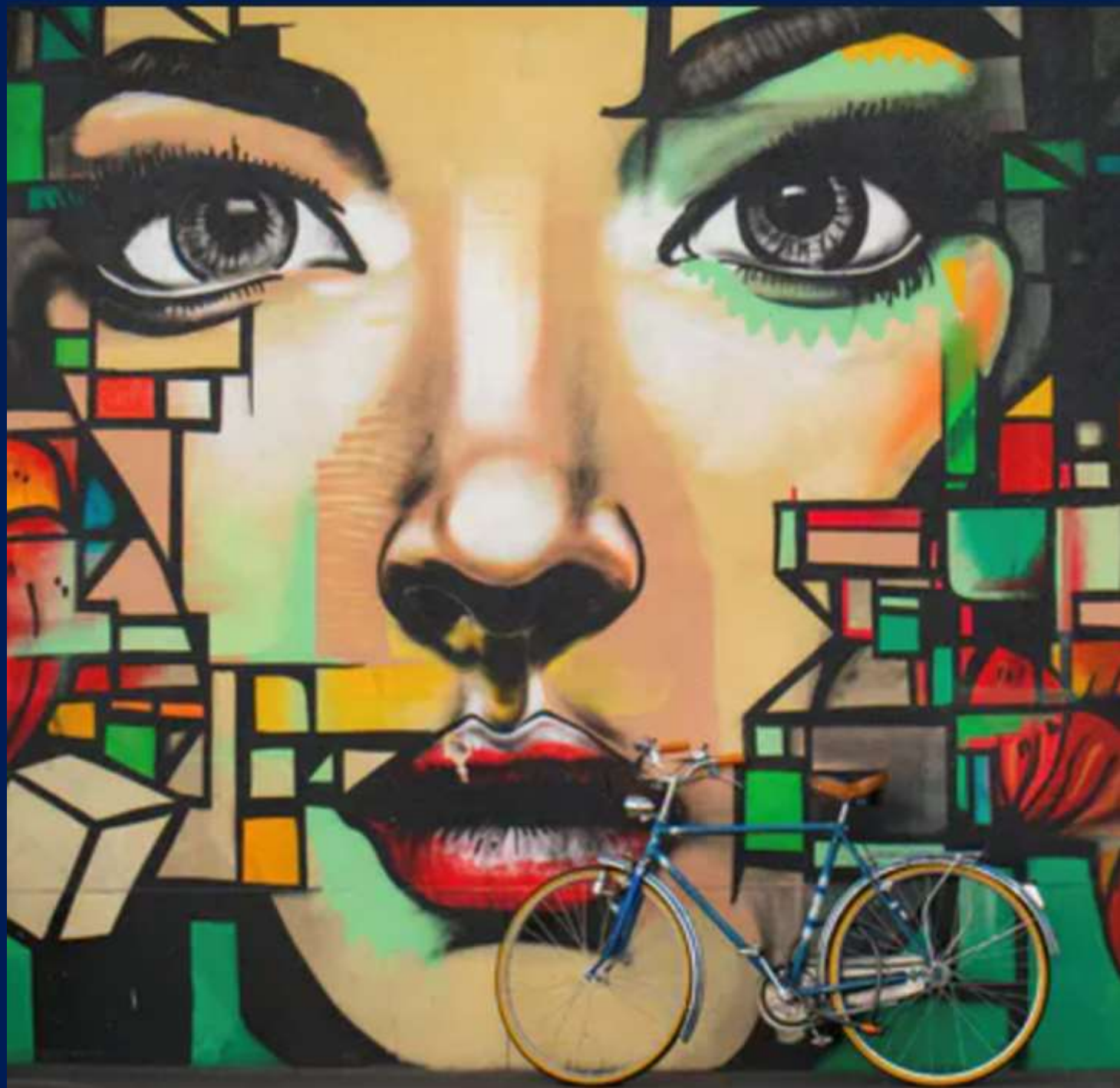


With respect to leadership,  
this approach suggests  
that what is of  
fundamental importance is  
the “character” of the  
leader



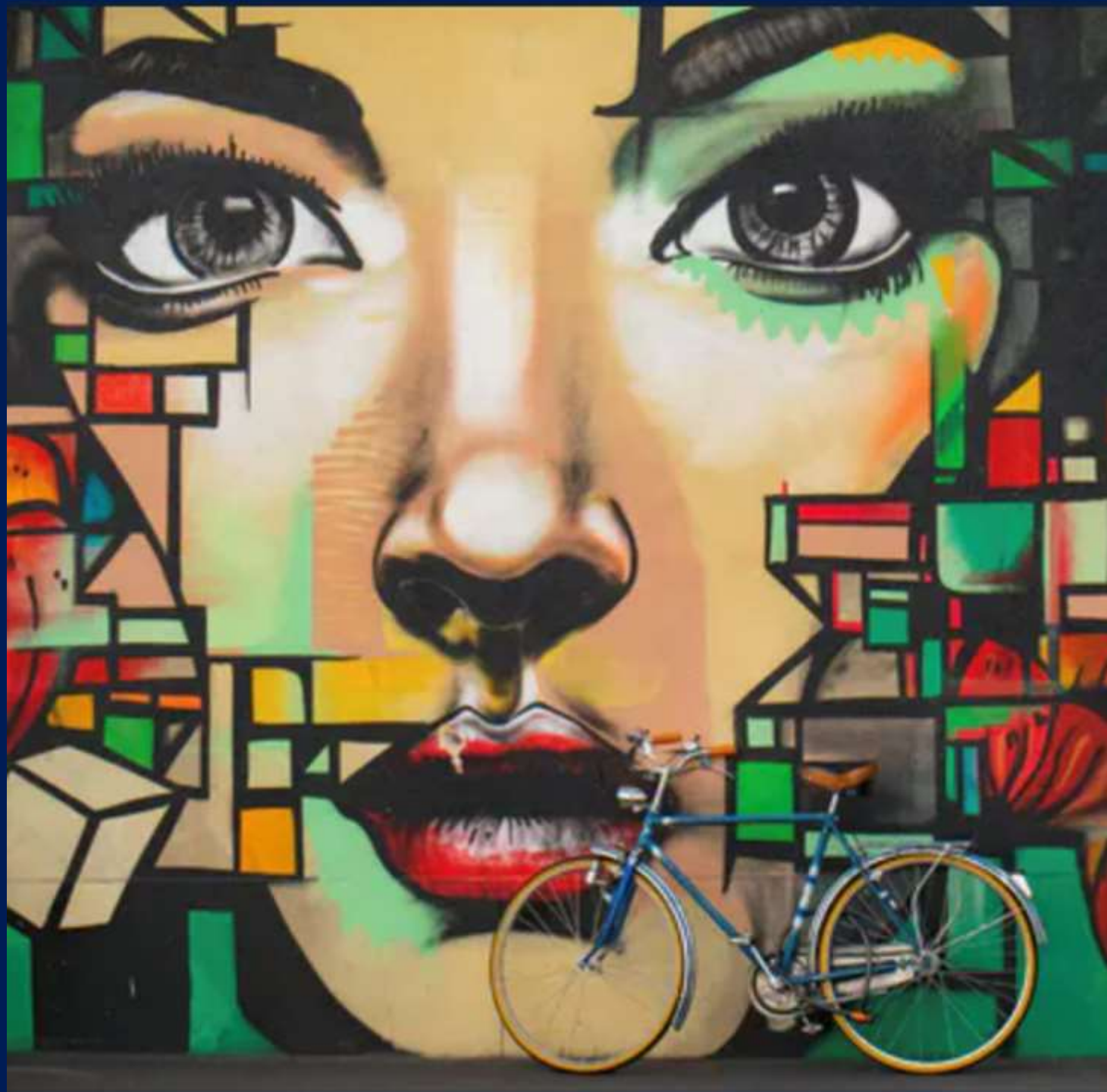
A virtue is an excellent trait of character. It is a disposition, well entrenched in its possessor—something that, as we say, goes all the way down, unlike a habit such as being a tea-drinker—to notice, expect, value, feel, desire, choose, act, and react in certain characteristic ways.

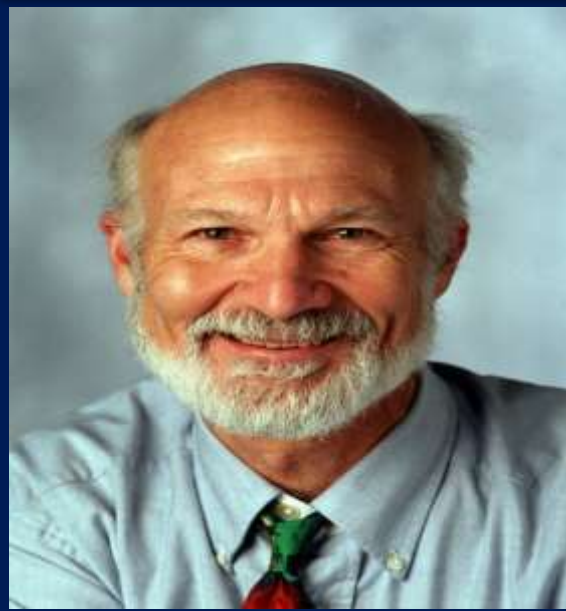
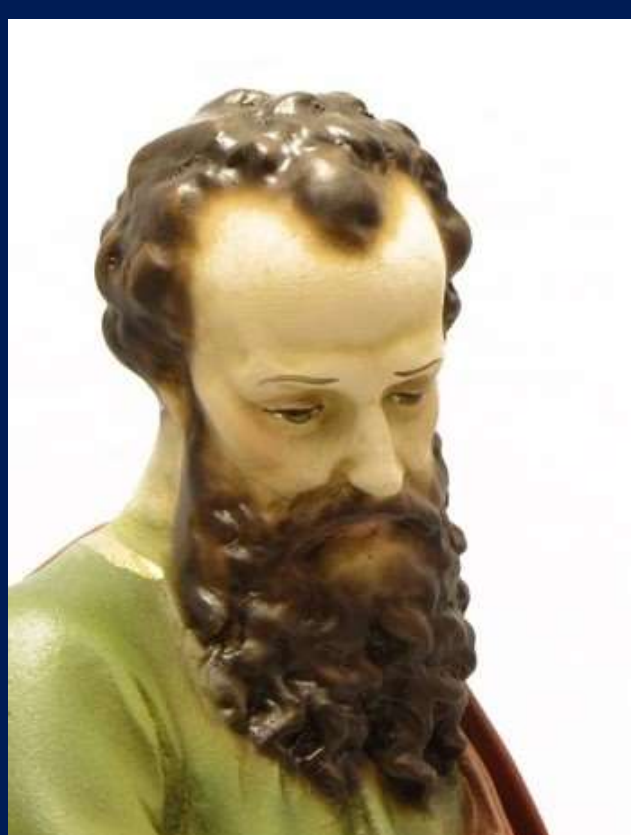
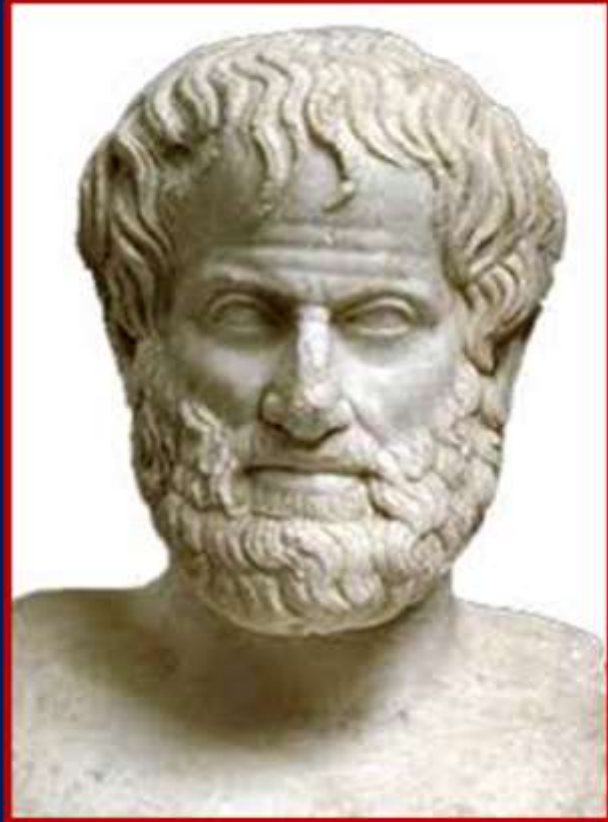
Stanford Encyclopaedia of  
Philosophy





With respect to leadership, this approach suggests that a leader of good character will have developed certain virtues / personal qualities that enable them to make the right decisions, relate well to others, correctly interpret the relevant facts of a given situation or challenge – practical wisdom; humility; empathy







Theology –

Augustine, Aquinas,  
Hauerwas, Herdt, Wright



Psychology –  
Seligman & Peterson

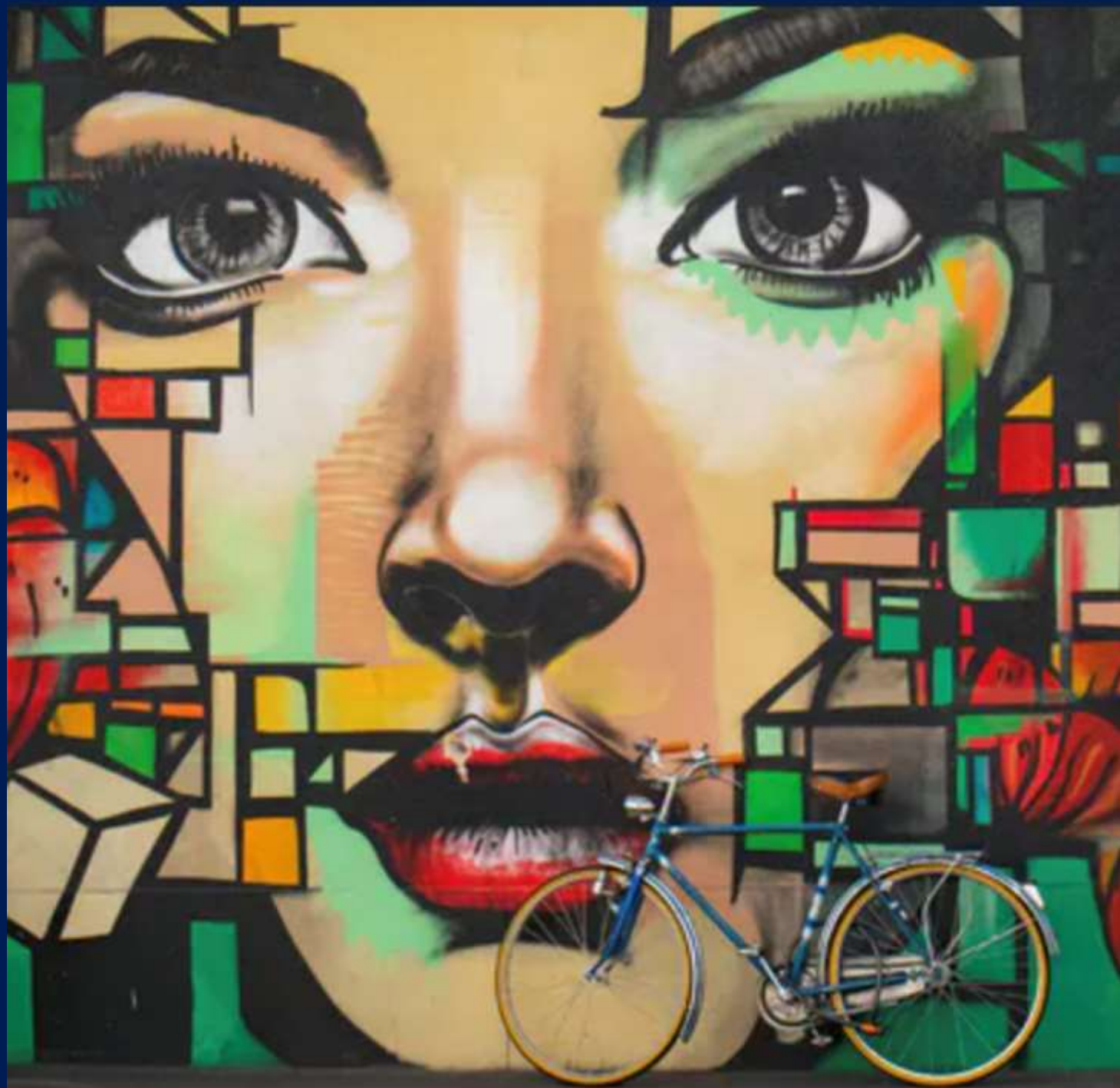
Philosophy –  
Plato, Aristotle,  
Anscombe, MacIntyre





Aristotle famously notes an important similarity between virtue and skill: both are practical and can be learned only by practice, by actually doing what needs to be done. Moreover, both involve learning. '[W]hat we need to learn to do, we learn by doing; for example, we become builders by building, lyre-players by playing the lyre. So too we become just by doing just actions, temperate by doing temperate actions and courageous by courageous actions.'

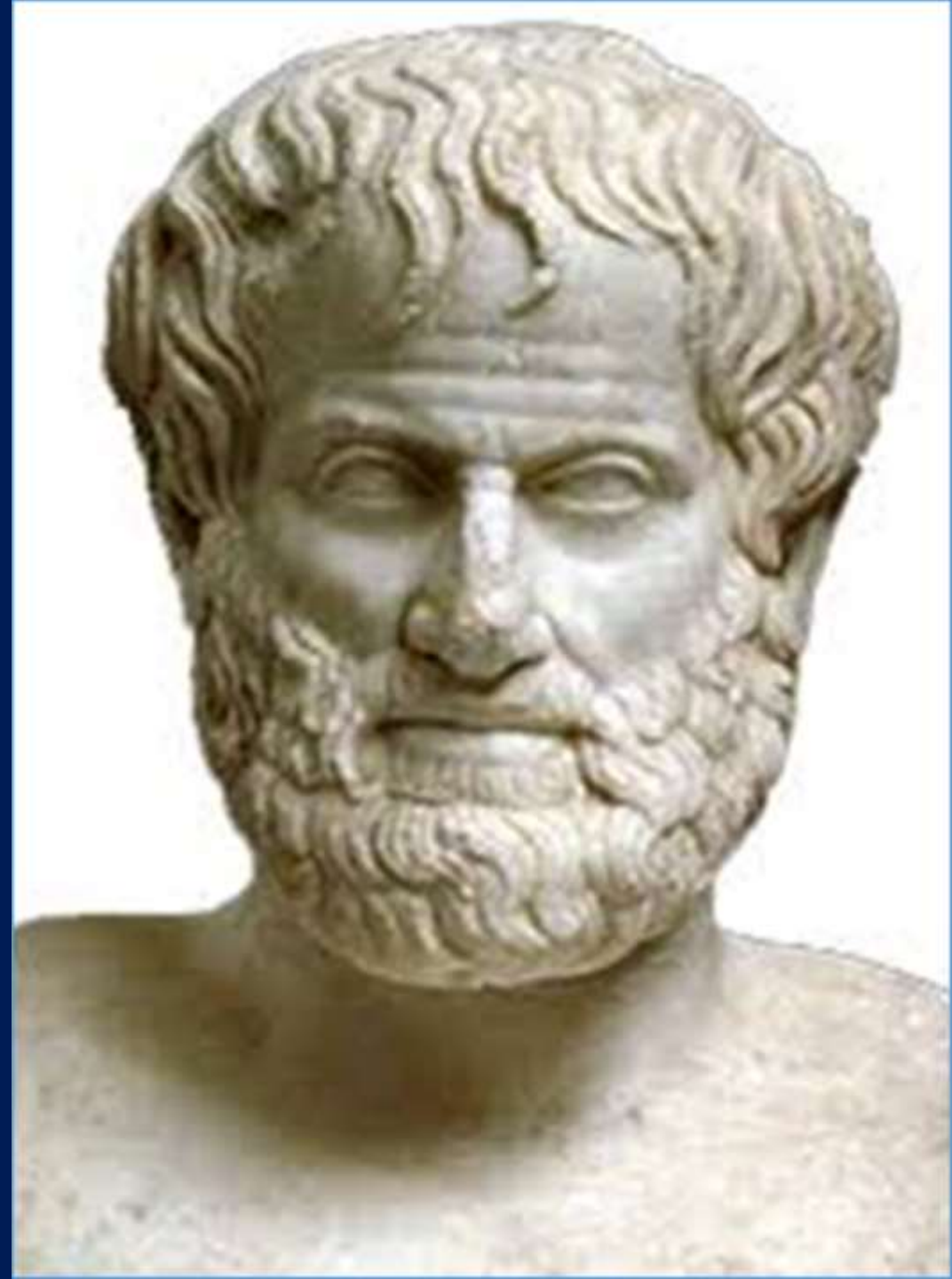
Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, 16-17



Aristotle understood virtue as being developed in the same ways as particular kinds of “skills”

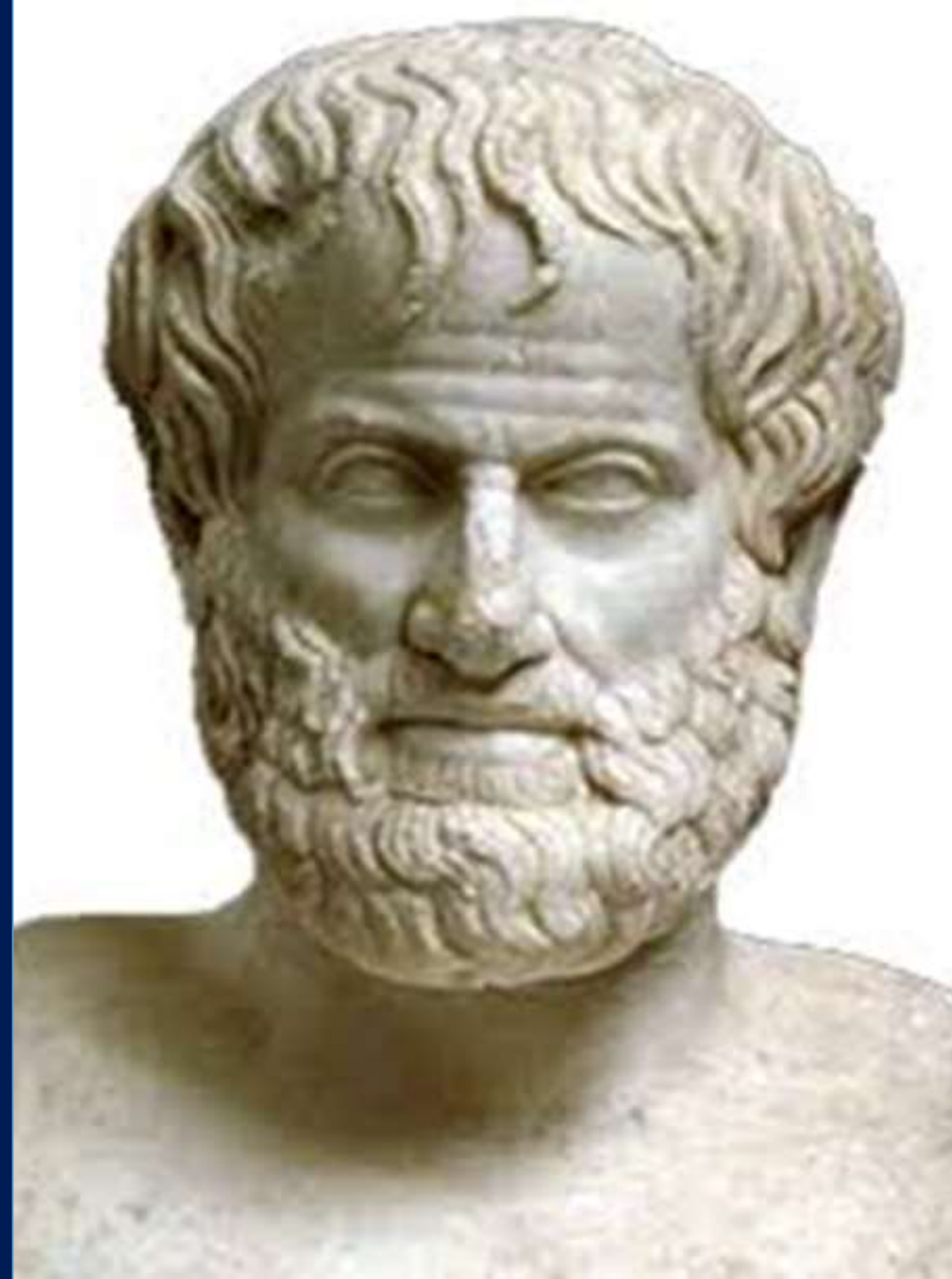
Specifically, skills that you learn by “doing” or “**practising**”

Sounds counterintuitive to say you become grateful by practising being grateful but that is exactly Aristotle’s contention ...



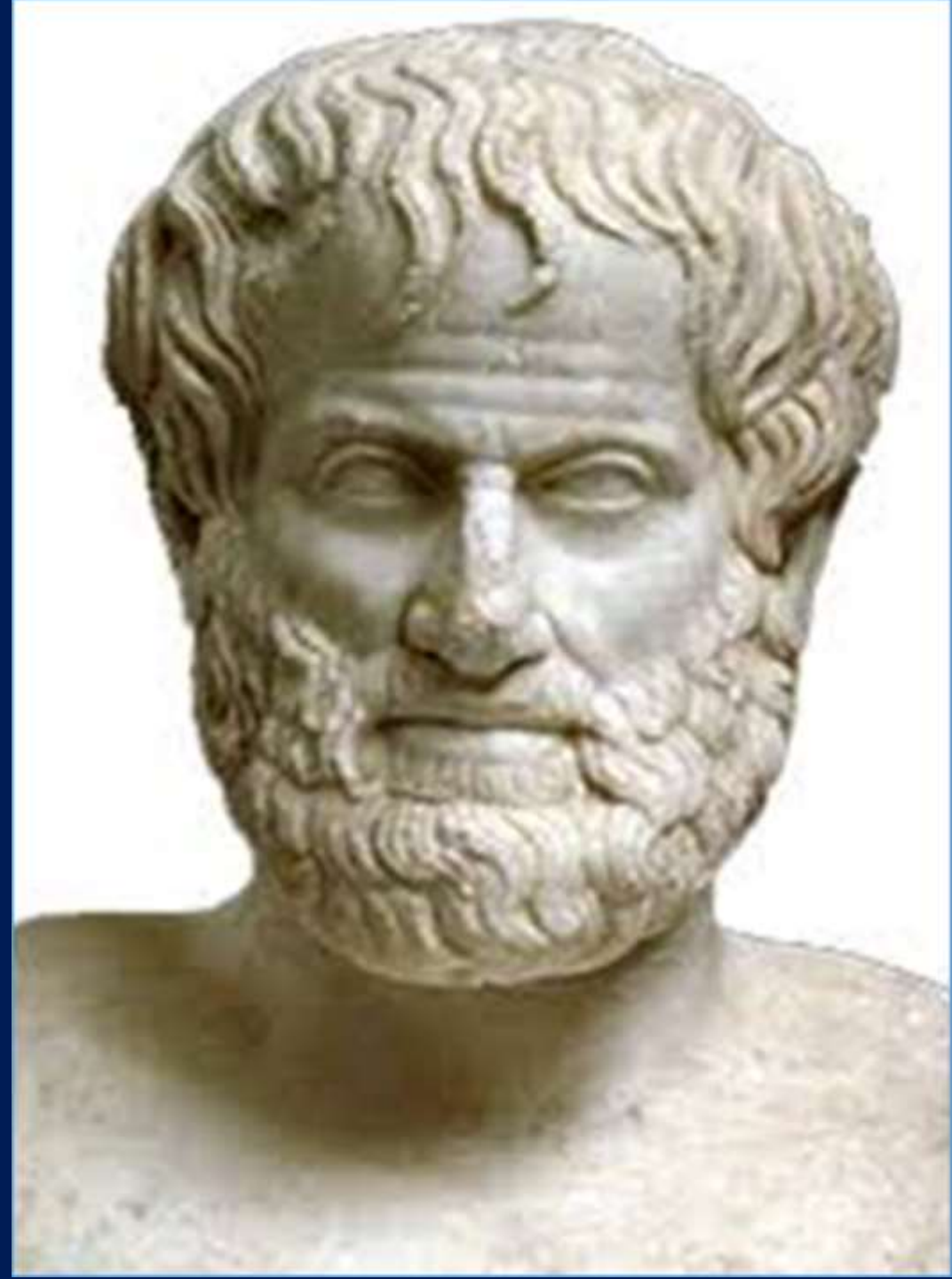


We can develop a collection of stable, deep, and enduring traits, qualities or habits that define who we are and characteristically shape how we think, feel, act – and lead – good character



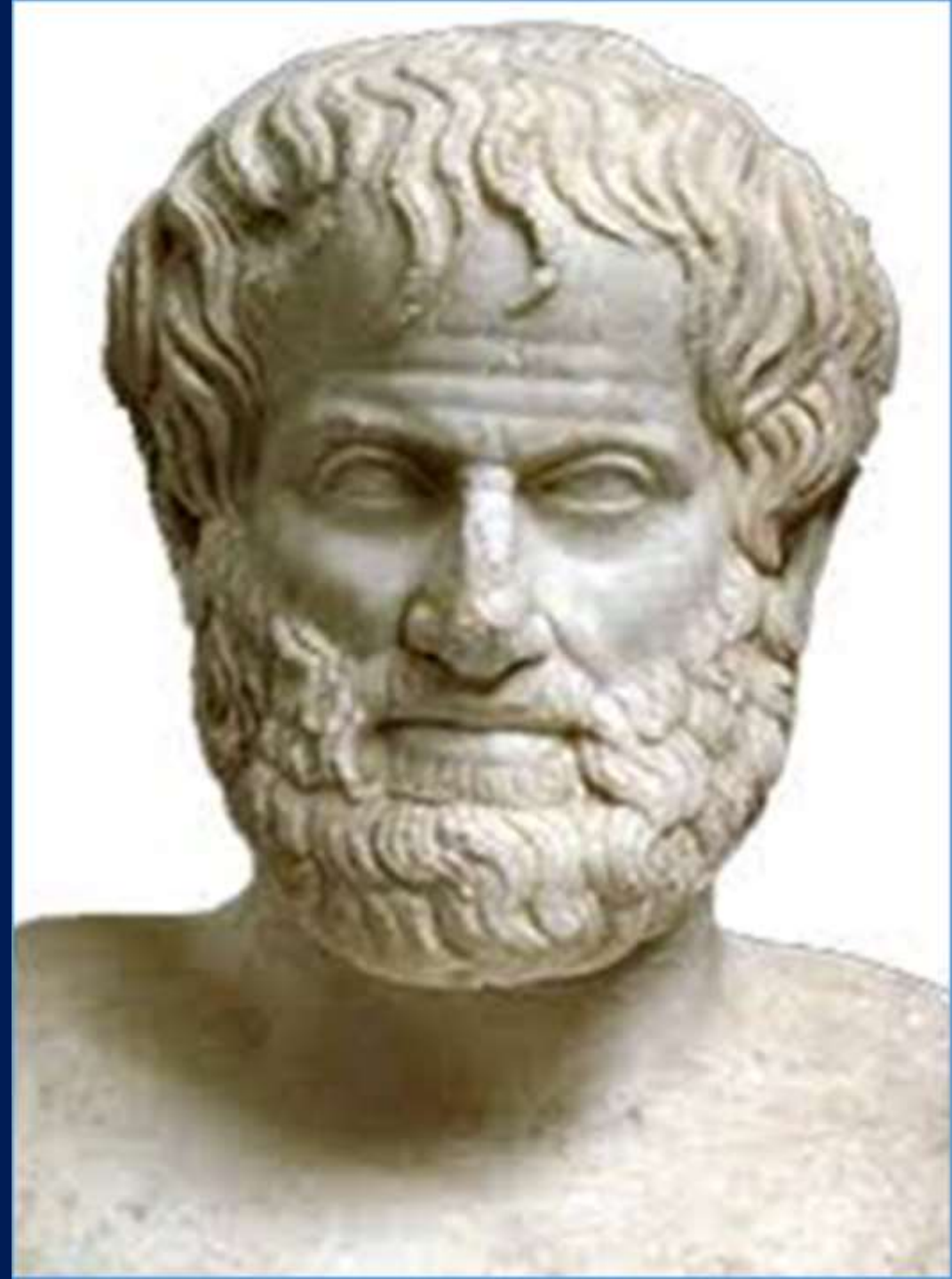
Good qualities / traits are 'virtues':

Dispose us to think, feel, or act 'at the right times, about the right things, toward the right people, for the right end, and in the right way'.



We need to distinguish virtues from:

- Natural capacities
- Academic knowledge
- Rote skills or “knacks”



Virtues are not natural capacities, therefore, we don't acquire them at birth or automatically

Virtues are not academic knowledge, therefore, we don't develop them by purely intellectual endeavour

Virtues are not rote skills, therefore, we don't learn them and then move on

Practising and developing virtue is a process that never stops.

It's analogous to a concert pianist or Olympic athlete, not like the child who's learnt to tie her shoelaces.





External guidance



Carefully copying



Consciously acting



Second nature (Aristotle)



Expert behavior



Christian  
accounts of  
virtue ethics:

Aquinas

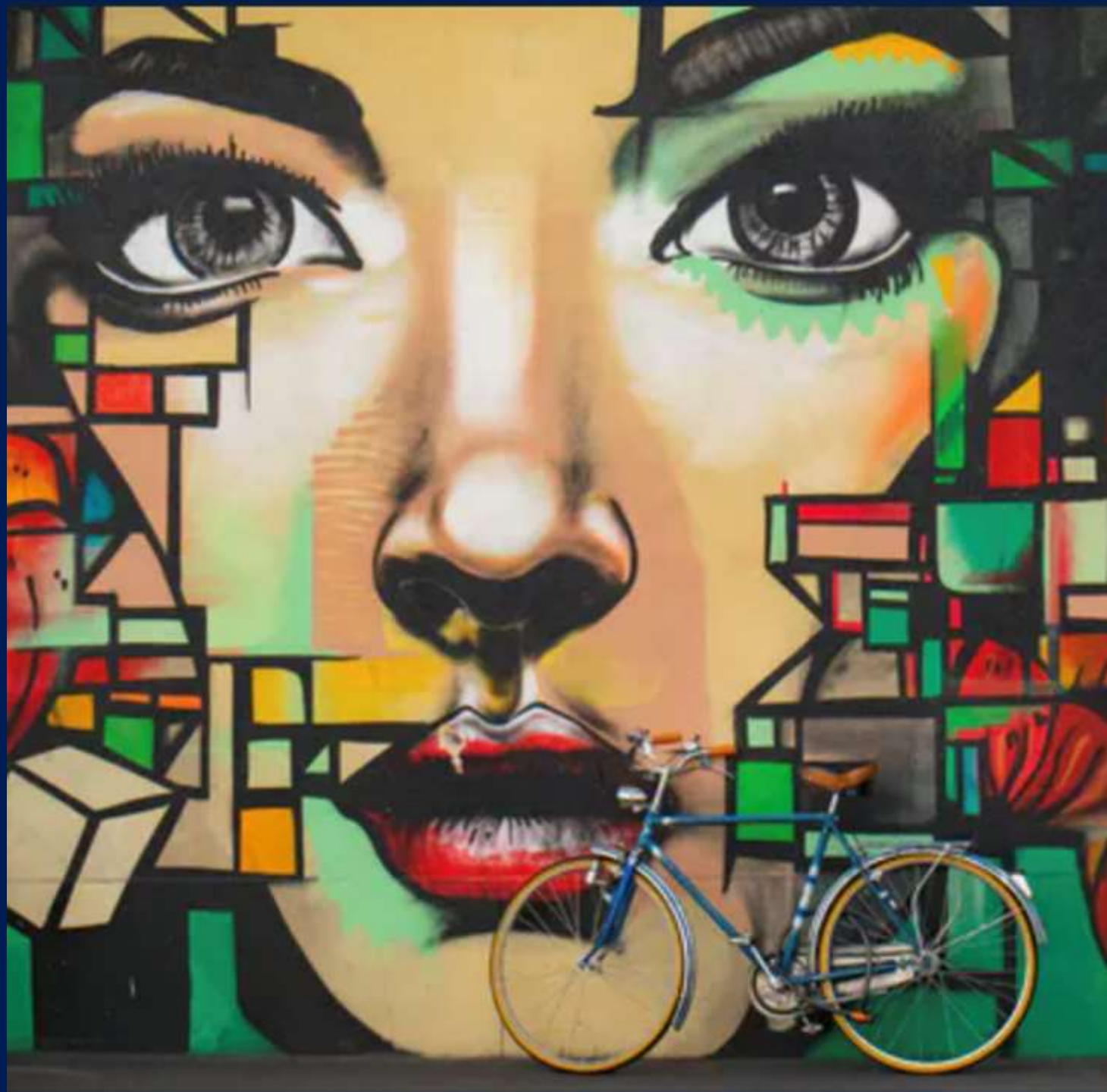
Wright

Hauerwas



‘The New Testament’s account of the virtues, even if it differs as much as it does in content from Aristotle’s – Aristotle would certainly not have admired Jesus Christ and he would have been horrified by St Paul – does have the same logical and conceptual structure as Aristotle’s account ... It is of course this parallelism which allows Aquinas to synthesise Aristotle and the New Testament’

(MacIntyre 215).



## St Thomas Aquinas



Classical Cardinal Virtues: Practical wisdom; Justice; Temperance; Courage

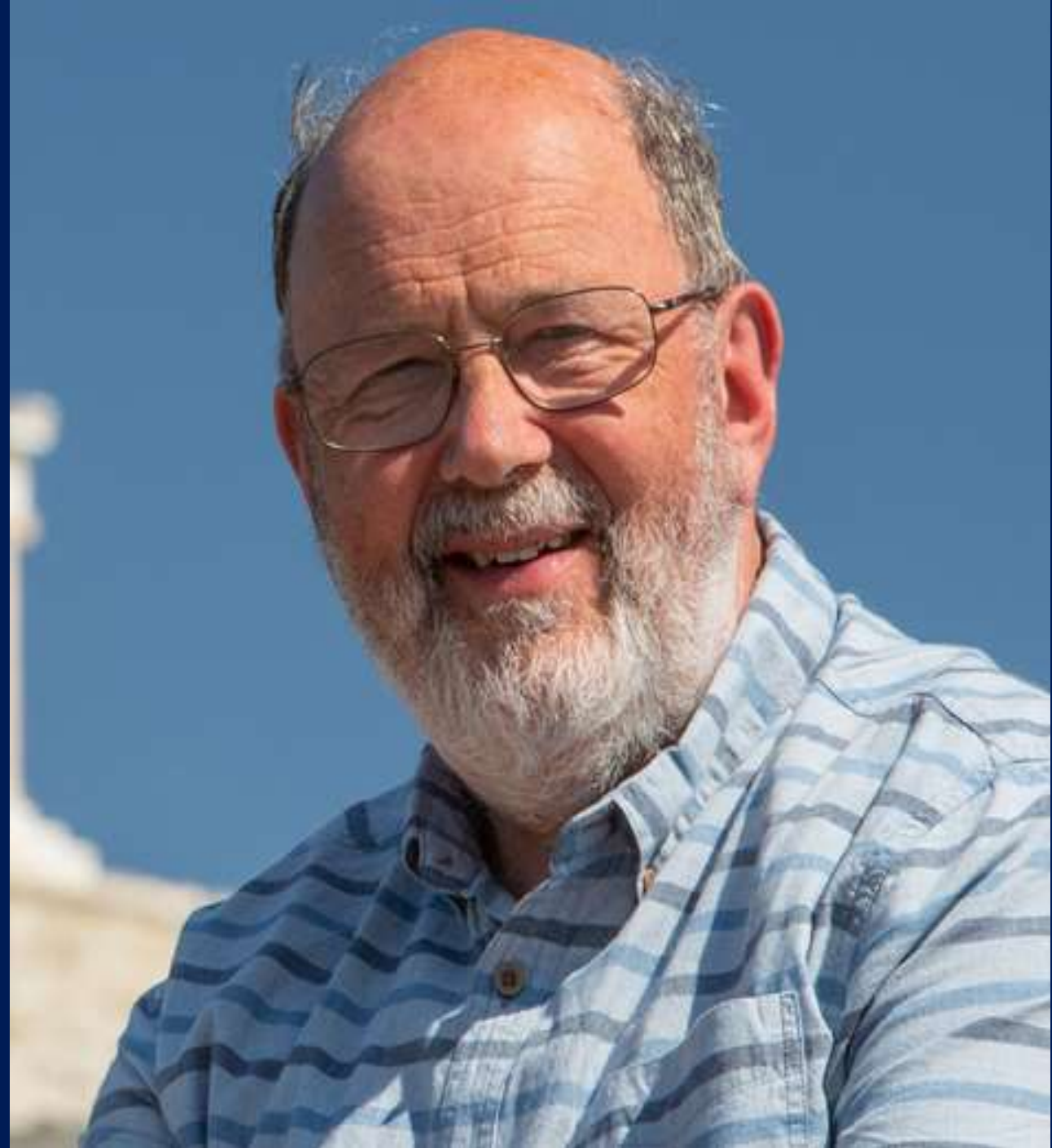
St Thomas (Aquinas): These natural virtues are aimed at earthly goods

Christian / Theological Virtues: Faith, Hope and Love are aimed at eternal, ultimate goods (beatitude)

Also, virtues may be acquired, naturally, by practice, or infused by divine action

‘When you go for the Christian goal you get everything that was worthwhile in Aristotle’s scheme thrown in as well, whereas it doesn’t work the other way around.’

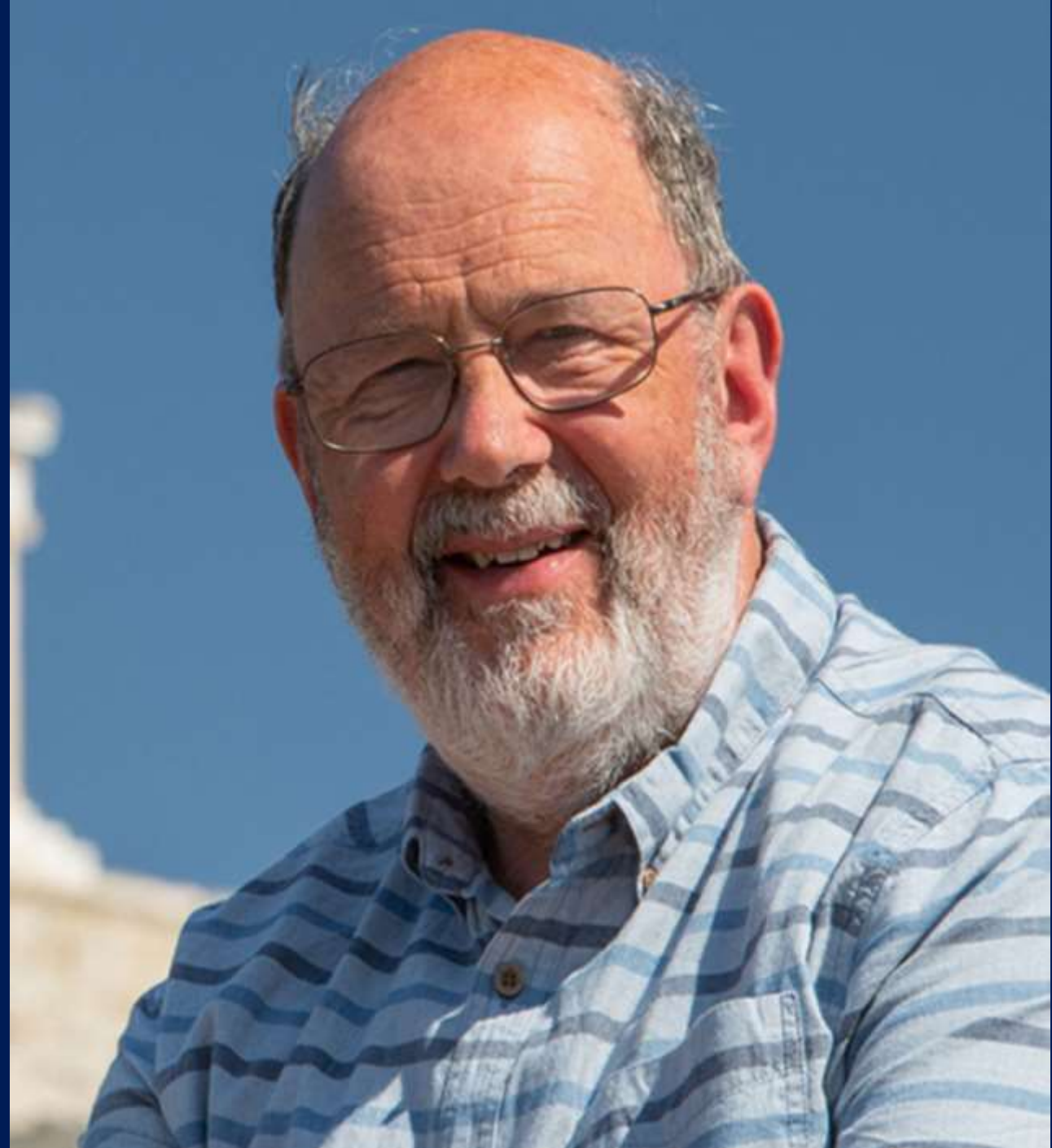
Wright, *Virtue Reborn*, 62.





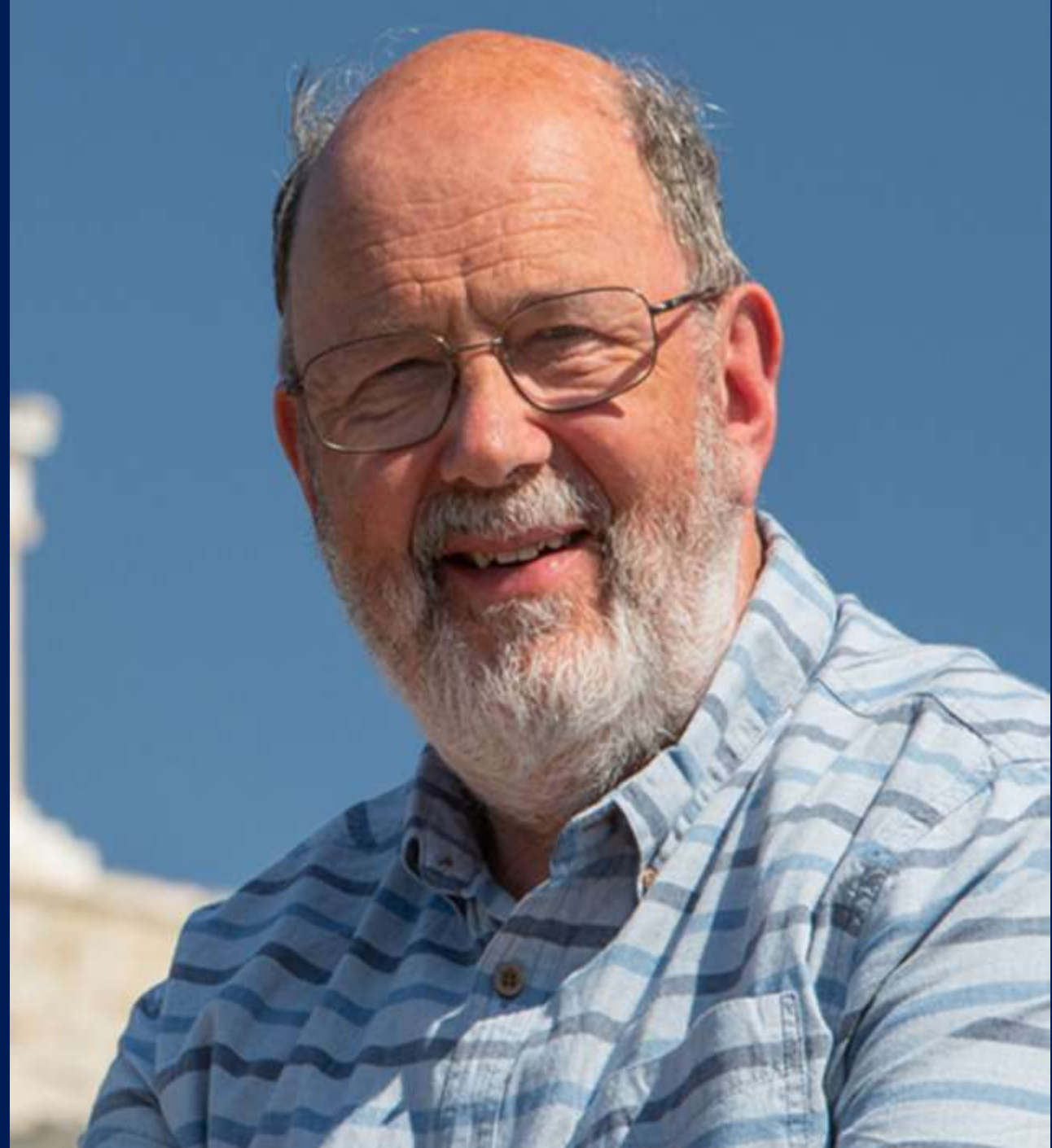
‘Contemporary culture tends to identify two paths to morality: live by rules and obligation or live authentically being true to yourself. There is a third way:

Character – the transforming, shaping and marking of a life and its habits – will generate the sort of behaviour that rules might have pointed toward but which a “rule-keeping” mentality can never achieve. And it will produce the sort of life which will in fact be true to itself – though the “self” to which it will at last be true is the redeemed self, the transformed self, not merely the “discovered” self of popular thought.’



‘All this from Romans, Philippians, Colossians, and Ephesians, ought to leave us in no doubt that Paul is thinking substantially in terms of an eschatologically driven virtue ethic which outdoes anything the pagan world can offer. He has glimpsed a fresh vision of the ultimate future, which has given him in turn a fresh vision of the habits of life by which humans can already live in the present as people shaped by that future. The goal is God’s new creation, and the full human maturity and dignity which will ultimately be celebrated in the resurrection.’

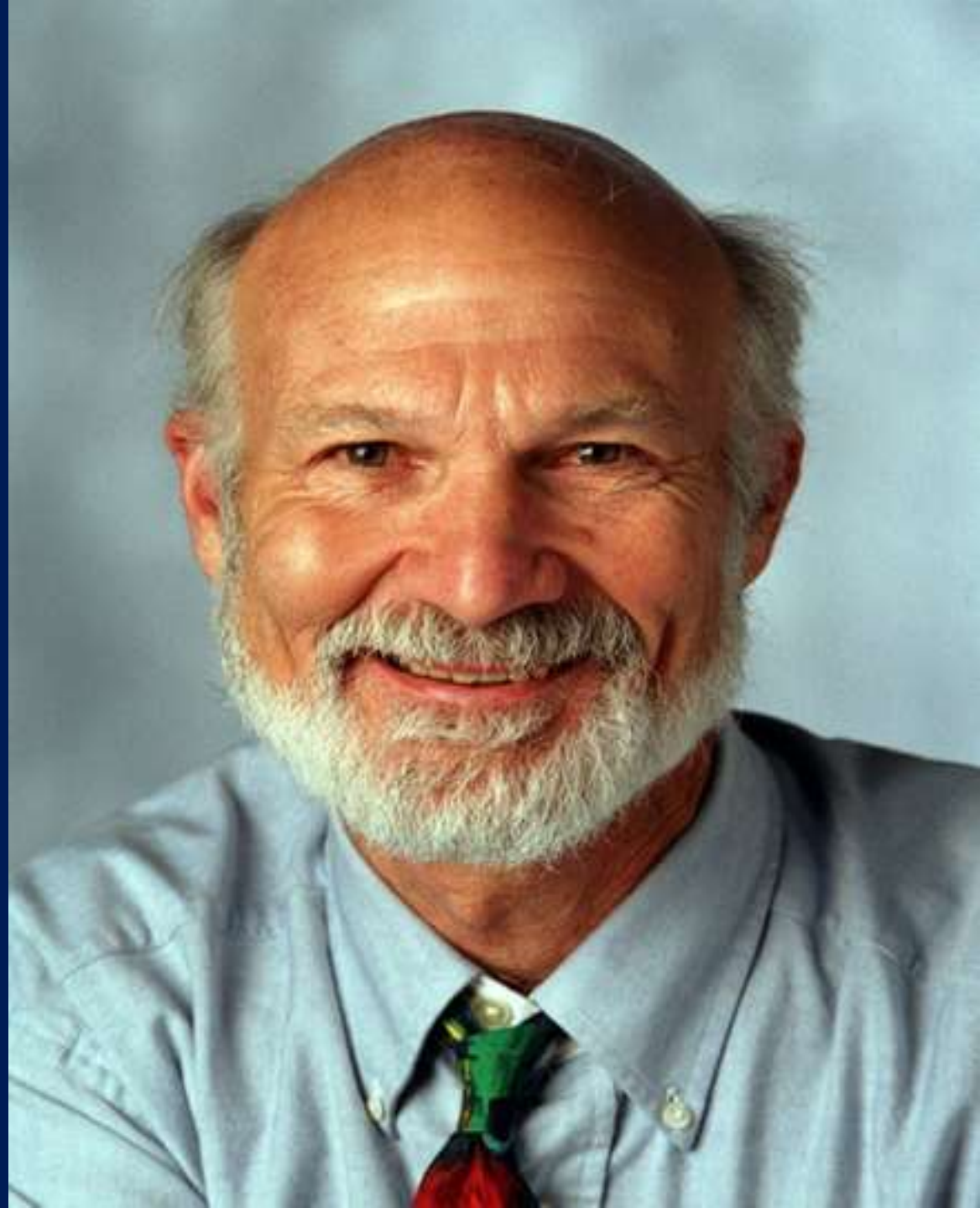
Wright, *Virtue Reborn*, 149





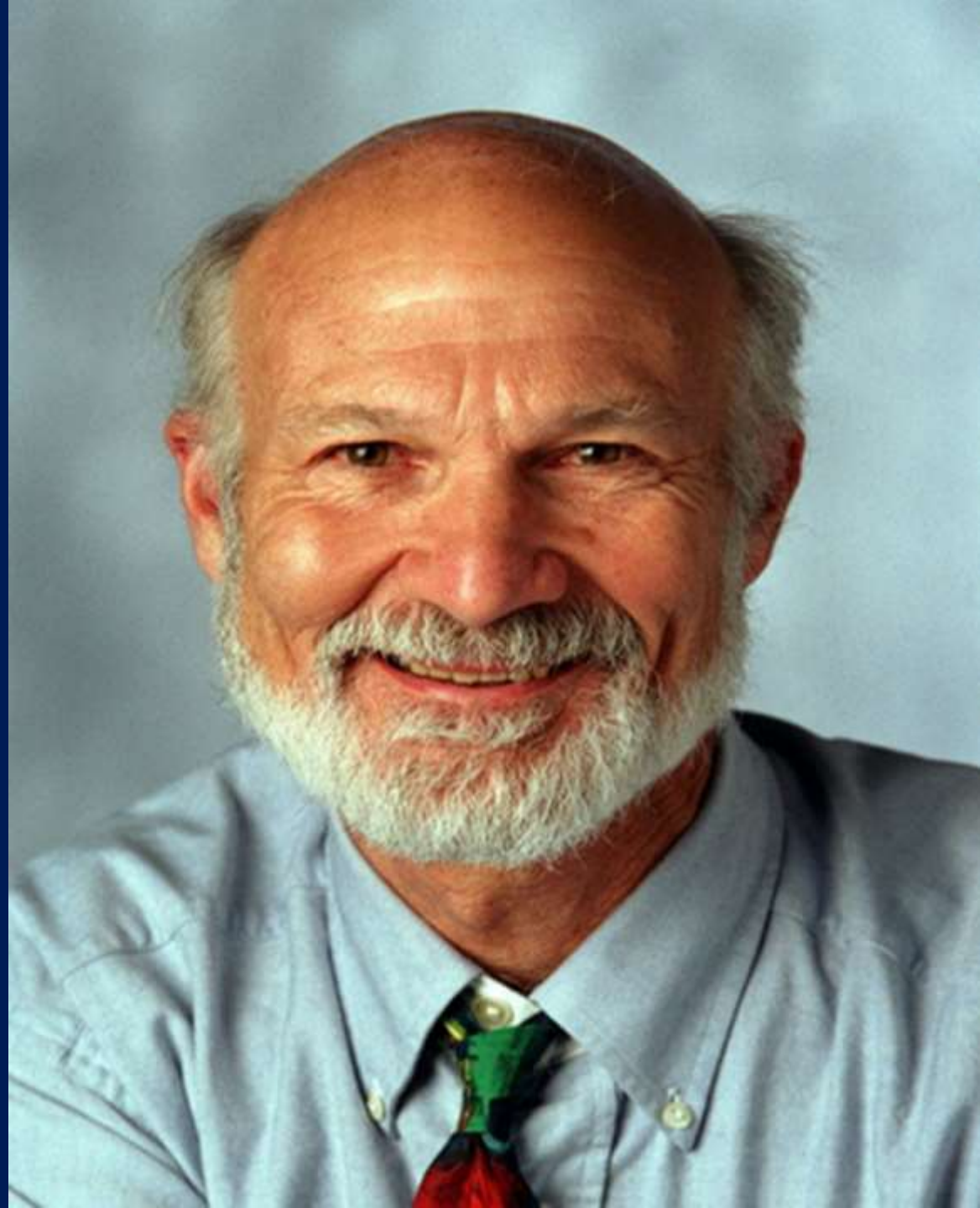
The proposal of the shape of the Christian life tends to be used as a substitute for him alone who can give substance to the proposal. The Christian life cannot be specified by a set of virtues to be achieved apart from their arising in response to Jesus Christ.

Hauerwas,  
*Character and the Christian Life*,  
182



To have one's character formed as a Christian is no different from having one's character formed as a non-believer. The difference is not in how one's character is formed, but rather in the actual orientation the Christian's character assumes because of the particular content of that which qualifies his agency. To be a Christian is to have one's character determined in accordance with God's action in Jesus Christ.

Hauerwas,  
*Character and the Christian Life*,  
227





Core to the theory / approach:

Agent-focused (leader); excellences of human character;  
development possible; human/divine non-competitive

Peripheral to the theory / approach (agree to differ):

*Eudaimonia* (virtue = happiness/flourishing); develop by  
practising virtue or by disciplines; full-“virtue” possible

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William Deresiewicz,  
'On Solitude and Leadership'

(Article based on his address  
to a class at West Point  
military academy)

'The time to start preparing yourself ... is now. Waiting until you have to confront [ethical dilemmas] would be like waiting for your first firefight to learn how to shoot your weapon. Once the situation is upon you, it's too late. You have to be prepared in advance.'

# What we focus on

## Practical Wisdom

We help participants develop the knowledge and experience to make appropriate judgements that contribute to flourishing and the common good.

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We inspire participants to be appropriately other-oriented, rather than merely self-focused in their career goals and actions.

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We encourage participants to behave in a truthful and sincere manner, giving others good reason to trust them as leaders.

## Purpose

We focus on leading with purpose and cultivating a sense of calling that integrates aspiration with action.

## Humility

We emphasise the power of humility – recognising one's true self and so being able to appreciate others, being open to new ideas, and being willing to revise one's own positions.

## Gratitude

We recognise that we are not solely responsible for all we have received and enjoyed, giving appropriate acknowledgment and recognition to others.





## Confessional (Christian) programmes:

- Shared vocabulary
- Wealth of practices
- Holy Spirit
- But also a bit jaded

## Open (Multiple traditions) programmes:

- Appreciation of pastoral, safe space
- Freshness and newness
- But also occasionally shallow

## PART 2 (10:45-12:00)

Reel (Christian) leadership



## 2. Challenges to this approach to good leadership

- a) A challenge from psychology
- b) A challenge from theology
- c) A challenge from context:

“Reel” Leadership Workshop

*12 Angry Men*

*Eye in the Sky*



# Lack of Character

Personality  
Moral Behavior

JOHN M. DORIS

CAMBRIDGE

Situationist challenge:

If there is widespread possession of the traditional virtues and vices understood as global character traits, then systematic empirical observation using appropriate psychological studies will reveal many people behaving in a certain kind of way.

However, systematic empirical observation using appropriate psychological studies fails to reveal that many people act in this kind of way [Milgram; Stanford; Princeton] . Therefore, there is not widespread possession of the traditional virtues and vices.

Miller, Beacon Project Summer Seminar

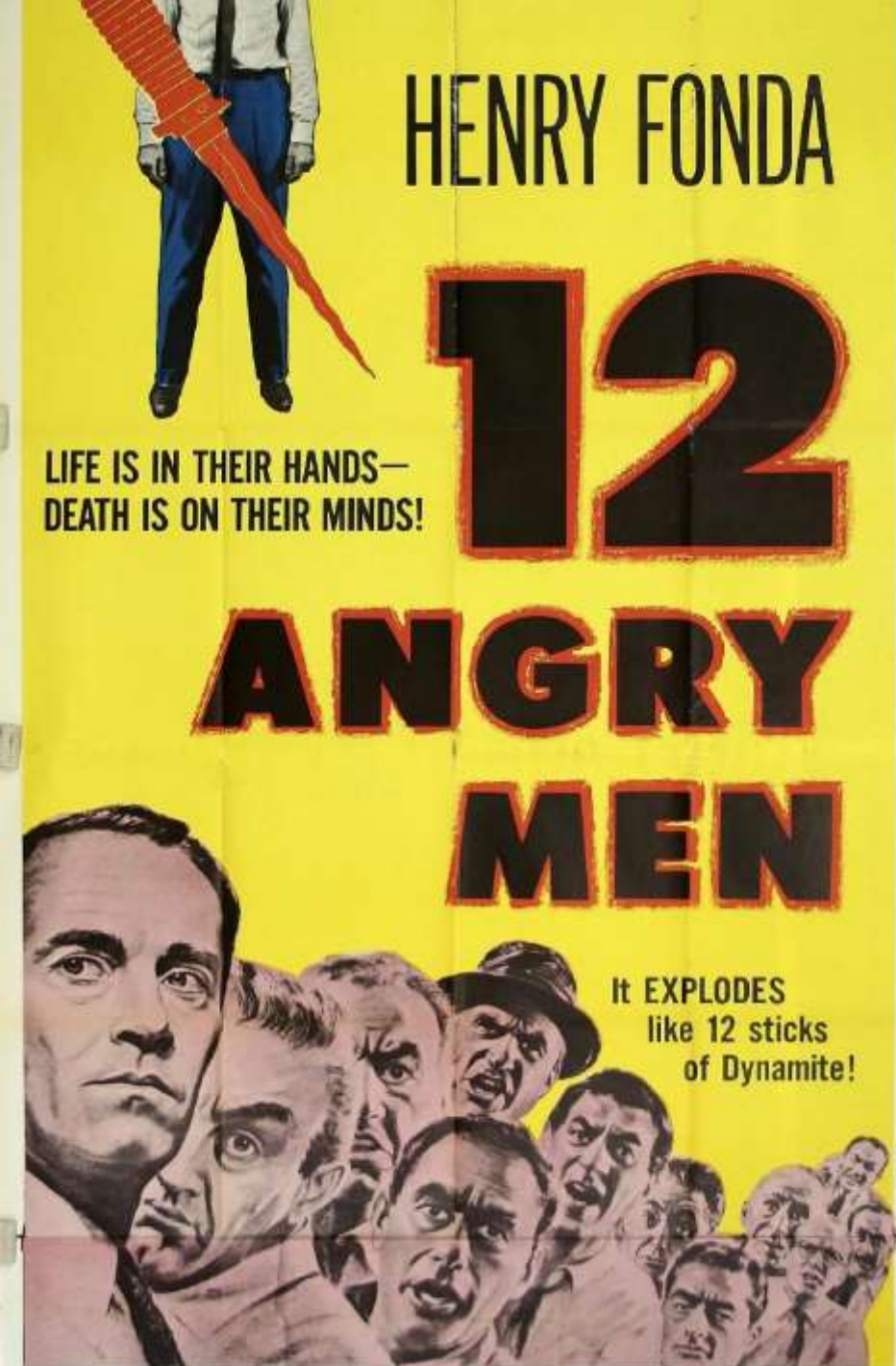
Simeon Zahl,  
'Non-Competitive  
Agency and  
Luther's  
Experiential  
Argument Against  
Virtue', 199.

'Luther understood this theology of passivity to entail a rejection of Aristotelian ethics. As he famously put it, it follows here that the righteousness that saves cannot come 'by means of acts frequently repeated, as Aristotle taught'. What Luther appears to be referring to is Aristotle's account in the Nicomachean Ethics of the necessity of action for the acquisition of virtue [Luther's personal and pastoral experience lead him to believe in the] unmasterability of sinful affections through discipline, habit, or effort of will'.

A challenge arising from context:

“Reel” Leadership Workshop





What do we learn about character and leadership in this film?

Who is leading here?

What is unusual about the leader's position?

How does the leader lead?

What are the key virtues deployed?

How does the leader relate to others?

What do we learn about the context in which this takes place?

How is this relevant to our thinking on leadership?



## What do we learn about character and leadership style in this clip?

- No 'authority' or 'power' (just one person sitting at the table)
- Willingness to stand alone but also develops allies over time (gives space)
- Empathy and compassion (particularly for the accused)
- Reason (putting two pieces of evidence together)
- Honesty (I don't know if he's innocent, just not certain he's guilty)
- Perseverance (let's just keep talking)
- Trust (if no-one joins me in 'not guilty' then I'll change my vote)

## CONTEXT:

- 12 Angry MEN – No women allowed on jury at the time
- Handsome, professional, white man is made the protagonist
- Race (and racism) is clearly present

How is this relevant to our thinking about Christian leadership today?

# [EYE IN THE SKY]



Found on CineMaterial.com

**What do we learn about character and leadership in this film?**

**Who is leading here?**

**What is unusual about the leader's position?**

**How does the leader lead?**

**What are the key virtues deployed?**

**How does the leader relate to others?**





## Perceptions of leadership:

- In this recent film, a woman is the most decisive, committed leader
- Is she too harsh, too callous to 'collateral damage'?
- Is she overbearing, a bully?
- Would we think / feel the same if that character was played by a man?

- How do sex and gender affect our perceptions of leaders?
- How do nationality and ethnicity affect our perceptions of leaders?
- How do age or physical beauty affect our perceptions of leaders?
- How does 'good leadership' change in different contexts and cultures?

A challenge arising from context:

Does the virtue ethics / character approach to leadership lead to us ignoring or, at least, underplaying the impact of systemic, justice issues – gender, race, class?





## Natural Capacities:

This paper studies the relationship between height and leadership. Using data from a representative sample of Swedish men, I document that tall men are significantly more likely to attain managerial positions.

*Eric Lindqvist, Review of  
Economics and Statistics*



Natural Capacities:

You can't control your talents or attributes. You can control your attitudes.

*John Brandon, Rules of Success at Apple  
(31/05/2018)*



Academic knowledge:

Does being a leader, I wondered,  
just mean being accomplished, being  
successful? Does getting straight As  
make you a leader?

*William Deresiewicz, 'On Solitude and  
Leadership'*





Rote skills or “knacks”:

We are sometimes prepared to count as a skill something like tying our shoelaces ... I feel fairly confident that few have that being loyal or beneficent [or humble] is much like tying shoelaces.

Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*

