

Discussion Guide, Beginner

Episode 10

Aristotle, one of the most important philosophers ever to write about justice lived in ancient Greece, some 2400 years ago. He thought that justice means giving each person his due, or what he deserves. But how do we know what people deserve? What goods and opportunities should go to which persons? Aristotle's answer is that we have to consider the *telos*—the end or the purpose—of the good in question. Let's see if you think he was right.

1.

Say we have some nice flutes. Who should get them? According to Aristotle, it's not the rich person, since playing flutes has nothing to do with money. Nor is it the person who will be made most happy, since making good music is different than being happy. The purpose of a flute is to be played, and to be played *well*. So, Aristotle thinks, the flutes should go to the best flute players. Do you agree? How else should we assign the flutes?

2.

Suppose there are some very good, public tennis courts in your town. Who should get priority to use the courts? Should priority be given to the tennis players who are willing to pay the most? Should court-time be assigned on a first-come, first-served basis? Should priority be given to the worst tennis players, who most need the practice? Should it be given to the best tennis players, who will play the best tennis? Which of these arrangements would be fair or just? What is the *purpose* of tennis, and does it help you to answer this question?

3.

Who should be admitted to colleges and universities? Should admission

decisions be made strictly on the basis of academic merit? Or should colleges and universities admit students with a variety of academic and other backgrounds, and to strive for diversity? What would be fair? What is the *purpose* of higher education, and does it help you to answer this question?

4.

For much of its history, the US military did not permit women to serve in its ranks. Was this unjust? What is the purpose of the military, and does it help you to answer this question?

5.

“Hooters,” a restaurant, hires only female waitresses who are willing to wear revealing clothing. However, some men want to work there as waiters, too. Is it unfair that “Hooters” hires only women? Consider the purpose of the restaurant. Is it merely to serve food? Or is it to entertain men? Who should get to decide the purpose?

6.

Aristotle thought that human beings were by nature meant to use their reason to deliberate about important moral questions, and to share in the political life of the community. He also thought that government should promote this purpose, by helping people to become better informed, and more virtuous. Do you agree?

7.

Think of a law designed to promote civic virtue. Does this law run the risk of unfairly imposing the majority’s values on everyone? Can you think of a law that promotes civic virtue but escapes this objection?

8.

“People should be free to choose for themselves what kind of life to live, even if they go on to make bad choices.” Do you agree? Is there a tension between Aristotle’s way of reasoning about justice and the modern emphasis on individual freedom? Or can Aristotle’s approach make adequate room for the value of

individual freedom?