

As a media professional, one can only truly gauge the moral mean found in inevitable ethical dilemmas by staying true to the ethical codes of the profession, and by minding the kind of moral compass found only in “correct” character. For Aristotle, the virtuous path lay between the extremes of excess and deficiency. In his *Doctrine of the Mean*, he lays out that character is built through action; one must not simply “know” which action is the most virtuous (“intellectual virtue”), one must also live a virtuous life by following through with said action (“moral virtue”). To not do so would indicate a deficit of character, which would hinder one’s ability to determine further virtuous courses of action.

Aristotle states that one must start with an agreed-upon code of conduct: “That we must act according to the right rule is a common principle and must be assumed... This must be agreed upon beforehand, that the whole account of matters of conduct must be given in outline.”¹ For example, journalists should be “honest, fair, and courageous in gathering, reporting, and interpreting information,” and “test the accuracy of information from all sources and exercise care to avoid inadvertent error. Deliberate distortion is never permissible.”² Aristotle would tell us that this requires journalists to pull from an inherent moral center, wherein one is raised to respect honesty and integrity, and utilize that virtue in all of one’s acts, both as a journalist and as a human being. Honesty, fairness, and courageousness must be present in all interactions, both personal and professional; one cannot claim to possess character and virtue if they pick and choose when to exercise those behaviors and when to disregard them. Only by living this moral virtuousness can one build the adequate character with which to analyze the mean between that which is excessive and that which is deficient, progressing from student to teacher, mentored to mentor, and thus furthering the respectability of the profession.

Basically, Aristotle demands that we walk the walk, not merely talk the talk. And he is absolutely correct. It isn’t enough to declare that one knows right from wrong, if one is not then prepared to live by those principles, even when it is challenging.

¹ From Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics, Book II*

² Per the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics, <http://ethicscodescollection.org/detail/431146b3-9c90-495d-b530-0f5d31b05cda>