

VIRTUE: AND SOCIAL CLASS

Aristotle believed that slaves and barbarians could not possibly become virtuous: the former for lack of economic means, the latter for being politically marginal. Consider: a slave, having no property, cannot be generous; and a barbarian, having no political rights, cannot be public-spirited. Aristotle was of course partly right, but he was wrong in part, for the destitute and the marginal can have some virtues, e.g. truthfulness and fairness. However, it is obvious that it is much harder for the poor and the marginal to be virtuous than for the affluent citizen. Likewise it is easier for the poor and the marginal to be temperate and humble than it is for the rich man.

The acquisition and exercise of the various virtues is facilitated in certain societies and hindered in others. For example, honesty is

easier in egalitarian societies than in extremely competitive ones.