

ARISTOTLE

Virtues of Character
 (“moral virtues”)

Today

- Announcements
 - Short Paper topic released by tomorrow
- Aristotle
 - The function argument
 - Rehearse and finish
 - The human soul
 - Virtues of character (‘moral’ virtues)
 - The doctrine of the mean
 - Being ‘moral’
- Next time
 - Aristotle
 - Virtues of thought (‘intellectual’ virtues)
 - Human flourishing

The function argument

- What does happiness, flourishing, or well-being *consist in*?
 - “The function argument” resolves the issue.
 - *Natural* things in the world and *artifacts* seem to have an *ergon*.
 - ***Ergon***: “function” “task” “work” “purpose”
 - Such things in the world have a functional nature *in virtue of which* they are the *kinds* of things they are. (*Teleology*)
 - A “good” X is an X that performs its function well
 - What function do all harpists have in virtue of which they are harpists?
 - » To play the harp
 - So what makes a harpist a good or excellent harpist?
 - » Playing the harp *well*

(c) The same true unconditionally in every case, when we add to the function the superior achievement that expresses the virtue; for a harpist's function, e.g. is to play the harp, and a good harpist's is to do it well. (d)

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 - Question: What do a hammer, screwdriver, and a wrench have in common?
 - They are all *tools*. That is, they share *a more general function* in virtue of which they counts as a certain *kind* of thing—a tool.
 - » To perform some operation on things to alter them somehow
 - Notice: In order to distinguish between different sorts of tools, we must specify *some distinctive function for each tool*
 - Otherwise we *could not recognize them as different* kinds of tools.

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 - Question: What do the lecturer before you, the harpist in the orchestra, the mailman, and the president all have in common?
 - They are *humans*. But to establish a distinct kind here, there must be some distinctive function of *humanity in general*, in virtue of which humans are distinct from, say, apes, chimpanzees, dolphins, canines, etc.
 - * If there was no distinctive function of humans in general, how could we recognize humans as a distinct kind in nature at all?
 - * If we are able to specify or identify what *ergon* or function is distinctive of humans in general, then we can say that a good human or human life is one in which that distinctive function is exercised or performed *well*

The function argument

- What is the ergon or function of a human being?
 - It must be something that is *distinctive* of humanity in particular.
 - Not merely living (e.g. sunflower)
 - Not merely having biological functions (e.g. circulatory system)
 - Not merely engaging in “brute” activities (e.g. eating food, reproducing)
 - What sets human beings apart from other species?

Now we take the human function to be a certain kind of life, and take this life to be the soul's activity and actions that express reason. (e) <Hence by (c) and (d)> the excellent man's function is to do this finely and well. (f) Each function is completed well when its completion expresses the proper virtue. (g) Therefore <by (d), (e) and (f)> the human good turns out to be the soul's activity that expresses virtue.

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 - What sets human beings apart from other species?
 - A life guided by rational faculty:
 - An ability to understand things in the world and guide ourselves by way of exercising our reasoning capacity.
 - *Using* a capacity to reason *well* is what a good life (or living well) *consists in*.
- * For us to do anything *well* requires “virtue” (aretê) or “excellence.”
 - And so, living well consists in engaging in activities caused by the “rational part of the soul” in accordance with virtue or excellence.
 - Virtues are acquired by *habituation* (as opposed to learning)

“Happiness is an activity of the soul expressing complete virtue”

The human soul

Non-rational part

Rational part

- *Biological*
 - “Nutrition and growth”
 - e.g. circulatory, bone growth, etc.
 - Cannot “struggle or conflict with” reason. Unresponsive to reason.
 - *No virtue here*

- *Scientific reasoning*
 - Understanding things in the world we cannot change—the *invariable*.
 - e.g. physics, biology, chemistry**Intellectual virtues – Theoretical wisdom** (“sophia”)

- *Psychological*
 - Emotions, mental states, desires
 - e.g. fear, anger, joy, etc.
 - Can “struggle or conflict with” reason. Responsive to reason.**Virtues of character** (moral virtues)

- *Calculative reasoning*
 - About what we can change in the world—the *variable*.
 - e.g. skills, crafts, action, character**Intellectual virtues – Practical wisdom** (“phronêsis”)

Virtues of character

- Dispositions
 - “States of character”
 - What philosophers sometime describe as qualities of mind and character.
 - Having the *tendency* to feel and behave in certain ways in certain contexts.
 - Not a feeling, not a capacity, but a *state* or *condition*.
 - e.g. to be calm or nervous, to be content or sad, to be angry or elated, to be timid or courageous, etc., in the relevant contexts.
- *Virtuous* dispositions
 - *Excellent* “states of character”
 - (1) *Settled* dispositions (or “states of character”)
 - Stable non-volatile states: not fluctuating or easily changed.
 - (2) In sense some “appropriate”
 - To do the right thing, to the right person, with the right feeling, etc., in any given context or circumstance.
 - “The doctrine of the mean” helps us determine appropriateness.

The doctrine of the mean

- A way of specifying when our dispositions are “appropriate.”
 → A “mean” (i.e. virtue) between “extremes” (i.e. vices)

Deficiency (vice)	Mean (virtue)	Excess (vice)
Cowardice	Courage	Foolhardiness
Stoic	Temperance	Irascible
Stingy	Generous	Wasteful

- *Not* a middle point (i.e. median)
- The virtue (i.e. mean) depends on life particular circumstances

Life 1 (low income): **stingy**---**generous**-----**wasteful**

Life 2 (high income): **stingy**-----**generous**-----**wasteful**

Virtues of character

- How do we figure out the mean?
 - This is what *practical wisdom* (“*phronêsis*”) is for.
 - The person who has practical wisdom will know what the mean is for any given sort of possible character traits.
 - Know through experience.
- How do we acquire virtues of character?
 - By way of *habituation*
 - The *continued exercise* of right action, for the right reason, with the right feeling, and so forth.
 - A process of getting better at behaving in appropriate ways, of establishing and maintaining a certain pattern of responses to a given type of context
 - Guard against *akrasia* (i.e. weakness of the will).
 - Habituation begins in childhood
 - Early habits can lead to acquiring virtues.
 - Early habits can lead to acquiring vices.