

ARISTOTLE

Virtues of Thought
("intellectual virtues")
and
The Good Life

Today

- Announcements
 - Short Paper
 - Due Sunday, February 12 by 5pm (Canvas)
- Aristotle
 - The human soul
 - Recap virtues of character ('moral' virtues)
 - Virtues of thought ('intellectual' virtues)
 - Eudaimonia – human flourishing
- Next time
 - Writing workshop
 - Handouts on Canvas

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**Virtues of thought** (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)

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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**

The doctrine of the mean

Aristotle's Concept of the Golden Mean		
Deficiency (-)	BALANCE	Excess (+)
cowardice	COURAGE	rashness
stinginess/miserliness	GENEROSITY	extravagance
sloth	AMBITION	greed
humility	MODESTY	pride
secrecy	HONESTY	loquacity
moroseness	GOOD HUMOR	absurdity
quarrelsomeness	FRIENDSHIP	flattery
self-indulgence	TEMPERANCE	insensibility
apathy	COMPOSURE	irritability
indecisiveness	SELF CONTROL	impulsiveness

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.

Virtues of character

- On being ‘moral’
 - Minimally requires being *capable* of moral action.
 - That is, *having* moral virtues (i.e. settled, appropriate dispositions), which are the **virtues of character**.
 - * But, *having* the moral virtues or virtues of character is *not sufficient* for *being* a moral person.
 - Also requires being a person who *actualizes* moral action.
 - *Exercising* moral virtue—acting right, for the right reasons, with the right feeling, to the right people, in the right circumstance.
 - * You *are* a moral person *only if* you *exercise* moral virtues.
 - Moral virtuousness is a “state or condition” of *ongoing activity*.

“It matters quite a bit whether we suppose that the best good consists in possessing or in using, i.e. in a state or in an activity [that actualizes the state]. For while someone may be in a state that achieves no good, if, e.g., he is asleep or inactive in some other way, this cannot be true of the activity; for it will necessarily do actions and do well in them.” (I.8)

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Virtues of thought

Calculative reasoning (the variable)

- *Practical wisdom (phronêsis)*
 - Reasoning about moral virtues, how to acquire them, identifying what is the mean in action and feeling.
 - e.g. when to be courageous, when to stop eating dessert, etc.
 - Requires a **subsidiary** virtue...
- *Craft expertise (technê)*
 - Skill in producing and/or realizing ends.
 - e.g. how to make paper airplanes, how to build a structurally sound house, etc.
 - e.g. best way to get coffee, the fastest way to get to the movies, etc.

Scientific reasoning (the invariable)

- *Theoretical wisdom (sophia)*
 - Reasoning about things that are of the highest in all of nature.
 - e.g. of the necessary, the scientific, and the “first principles”
 - Requires **two subsidiary** virtues...
- *Scientific knowledge (epistêmê)*
 - Reasoning about the empirical world.
 - Truths with certainty.
 - e.g. physics, biology, geology.
- *Intuitive understanding (nous)*
 - The mind or the intellect.
 - Intellectual apprehension.
 - e.g. first principles of science and of logic.

Virtues of thought

- How do we acquire theoretical wisdom (*sophia*)?
 - Theoretical wisdom is the combination of two virtues of thought:
 - Scientific knowledge and intuitive understanding.
 - *Scientific knowledge (epistêmê)*:
 - By way of education.
 - Schooling in the sciences.
 - *Intuitive understanding (nous)*:
 - A natural talent or gift.
 - Schooling may allow it to emerge, or develop it.

The good life

- *Eudaimonia* is exercising the virtues

If P is desirable *for the sake of* Q, then Q is more desirable than P

- Virtues of character and virtues of thought
 - Exercising virtues of thought is *superior* to exercising virtues of character.
 - Virtues of character are *subordinate* to virtues of thought.
 - * We should exercise virtues of character to better exercise virtues of thought. Virtues of character *for the sake of* virtues of thought.
- Virtues of thought (intellectual virtues)
 - Practical wisdom (*phronêsis*) and theoretical wisdom (*sophia*)
 - Theoretical wisdom is *superior* to that of practical wisdom

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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- The good life

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

- The *best* kind of human life involves the exercise of *theoretical wisdom*—
the life of contemplation

Problems

- Consider some problems
 - The function of human beings
 - In contrast to artifacts and tools, do natural objects and living beings have a function?
 - Hierarchy
 - Do our activities have ends that are necessarily hierarchically ordered? Is contemplation really the highest virtue?
 - Doctrine of the mean
 - Is there really such a thing? Possible to determine what it is?
 - Decision procedure?
 - How do we figure out what to do?
 - Exclusivity
 - Doesn't the best life exclude most people?
 - Aristotle being Aristotle. Too "aristocratic"?