


Virtue Ethics

Aristotelian Functionalism

1. Whether an x is good partly depends on what an x is. A good x fulfills its function well.
2. Rationality is the distinguishing characteristic of persons.
3. People must, therefore, exercise rationality in order to function well and live good lives.
4. Furthermore, a thing is happy if it fulfills its function.
5. Therefore, people who live good lives by functioning well will also live happy lives.




Aristotle (384 – 322 BC)

Virtues

The characteristics that allow things to function properly are called 'good-making features' or 'virtues'.

They depend on:

- (1) the thing's function
- (2) the thing's circumstances



The 4 Main Virtues of Character:
 Courage, Honesty, Temperance/Self Control, Justice/Fairness

Doctrine of the Mean

Question: How do you know how to act in any given situation?

Answer: Find the mean between the extremes: the 'just right' point, NOT living in moderation.

cowardice rashness

←—————→

courage

Note: The mean is relative to the situation


The 4 Primary Virtues

Courage

Honesty

Temperance

Justice



Learning to be Virtuous

Questions: What is the right thing to do in the situation?
 How do you become that type of person?

1. Model yourself after a virtuous person.
2. It will be hard at first! (Weakness of the Will)
3. Do it anyway, and it will become a habit (disposition).
4. Habit = Character Trait = Virtue (if it is a good habit)

The Distinguishing Characteristic of Humans

Aristotle: Humans are defined as rational animals.

Q: Humans have other unique characteristics; why not make those 'the distinguishing characteristics' of humanity?

"[If] finding characteristics which differentiate men from other animals, one could . . . end up with a morality which exhorted men to spend as much time as possible in making fire; or developing peculiarly human physical characteristics; or having sexual intercourse without regard to season; or despoiling the environment and upsetting the balance of nature; or killing things for fun." (Bernard Williams, Ethics, p. 59)

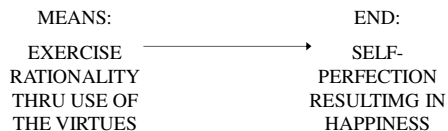
Rational Immorality?

We can exercise our rational capacities by doing really horrible things but doing them really well.

For example, we could murder, deceive, and connive with skill, like Iago.

Is Aristotle's theory committed to allowing this sort of intuitively immoral behavior, and perhaps even committed to making it a part of morality?

Aristotle and Ends



Act rationally

(Where rationality includes perfecting oneself).

This rule does not eliminate the specific ends toward which you can aim. As long as your actions allow you to function well, they are good.

Aristotle v. Nietzsche

<u>Virtues</u>	<u>Virtues</u>
"The Good Corporate Citizen"	"The Entrepreneur"
Courage	Independence
Justice/Fairness	Creativity
Temperance/Self-Control	Risk-Taking
Honesty	
Friendliness	

The Unity of the Virtues

The Discordance of the Virtues