

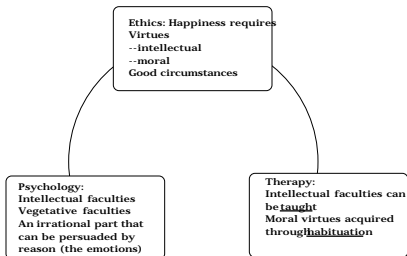
Moral Psychology

Session 4b
Aristotle's *Ethics* 3-5

In our last episode....

- Good Consists in Happiness
- Happiness requires
 - Virtue
 - Intellectual
 - Moral
 - Good fortune -- one cannot be truly happy if one is, say, poor or ugly!

Aristotle's Moral Psychology



Virtuous Actions and Virtuous People

- An action is called virtuous when it is the sort of thing a virtuous person would do.
- But a person who is not virtuous can perform the same action: e.g., by accident, by imitation, through self control.
- A person is only considered virtuous if they do the right things
 - Out of knowledge
 - By choice
 - Out of a stable character trait

Moral Virtues

- Dispositions to feel emotions
 - in the right amount,
 - in response to the right things,
 - for the right reasons.
- Cultivated through habituation rather than (intellectual) learning.

Aristotelian Therapy -- An Extrapolation

- Theoretical premise: one's inward dispositions can be shaped by conduct, even when that conduct is first carried out in the absence of the disposition.
 - E.g., the timid person can force himself to do brave acts, and as a result, his courage will increase.
- Applications
 - Developmental (I.e., applied to children)
 - Clinical therapeutic

Aristotelian Therapy--Child Rearing

- Moral habits are most strongly formed when one is young, so early shaping of conduct is important, even essential
- Train children in how to act and the character traits will be cultivated in the process.
 - Saying “thank you” a way to cultivate genuine gratitude
 - Standing up to bullies a way to cultivate courage

Aristotelian Therapy -- Adults

- Adults can know what is right on the basis of reasoning (the intellectual virtues)
 - You know what rules to follow
 - You can spot situations as falling under a rule
- Can force yourself to do what you know to be right even if you don’t have the virtue that would make you want to do it. Aristotle calls this state continence.

Aristotelian Therapy -- Adults

- Exercising continent behavior might, even in adults, adjust the emotional response.
- Example -- someone with a bad temper
 - Knows she shows anger inappropriately
 - Disciplines herself to not show anger (or encourage it inwardly by grumbling?)
 - In the process, her anger
 - Becomes easier to control
 - Is less likely to flare up inappropriately

Aristotelian Therapy -- Adults

- Example 2 -- not enough anger
 - A person who does not feel righteous indignation in situations that merit it, or does not feel it very strongly.
 - Might force himself to express indignation when the situation merits it, even if the feeling is very weak
 - In the process, may come to feel indignation more strongly at the right times.

Applications of Therapy

- When the amount of the emotion is wrong
- When the emotion is felt in response to the wrong objects.
 - A person might be even-tempered in general, but go ballistic over some one issue.
 - A person might be temperate with respect to most pleasures, but have a special weakness for food or sex.
- Question: to what extent are there general virtues of temperance, etc.? (Or lots of specific ones?)

Aristotle's list of virtues

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Courage • Temperance • <i>Virtues concerned with money</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Liberality – Magnificence • <i>Virtues concerned with honor</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Pride – (Proper Ambition) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Virtues concerned with anger</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Good Temper • <i>Virtues concerned with sociability</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Truthfulness – Ready Wit
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Aristotle's Virtues

- Certainly not the only possible list
 - (As Hume points out, what is considered a virtue has a lot to do with a people's situation -- e.g., a warrior nation will stress different virtues than an overpopulated area of urban dwellers.)
- Not very systematic
 - Some organized by the emotion
 - Others by object

Alternative lists of virtues -- Christianity

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------|
| • Cardinal virtues | • Deadly sins |
| – Faith | – Pride |
| – Hope | – Avarice |
| – Love | – Sloth |
| – Mercy | – Anger |
| – Humility | – Lust |
| – Patience | – Gluttony |
| – Purity | – Envy |

Levels of Aristotelian Claims

- The general analysis of virtue as a disposition towards moderate and appropriate reactions.
 - The claim that these are achieved (solely?) through habituation
 - The particular list of virtues

Questions about the List

- Are there better lists?
- Is there one list for all people everywhere, or do some virtues depend on a wider context?
- Empirical questions:
 - What emotional faculties are there in humans that figure in character? (Theoretical psychology affects the list!)
 - Are there factors other than a taxonomy of the emotions that are relevant to classification?

Questions about the Therapy

- Are there really any cases in which (deliberate) habituation is effective in adults?
- Are there cases in which (deliberate) habituation is ineffective?
- If so, what is the theoretical cause of this, and are there other therapeutic methods that are effective here? (Segue to psychoanalysis)

Questions about the Model of Virtue

- Is the mean always best?
 - Might one be better off never to be angry or proud or desirous of material things?
 - Are there some emotions that are “poisonous” and need to be eliminated or resisted rather than experienced in moderation?
- Is Aristotelian virtue an ideal or something really attainable? How much should our practice be concerned with continence?

A final tension:
Public vs. Contemplative Life

- Plato
 - Advocates a kind of educational programme that seems to require withdrawal from political affairs
 - Yet morality developed in context of the city!
- Aristotle
 - Virtues are those of a public person
 - But also advocates contemplative life as the highest form of life!

Next time:
New unit on Christian Spirituality

- See background reading on website
- Follow the references to Biblical texts online
- Begin the assigned reading on Desert Fathers -- meditative browsing
