

Philosophy Bites Podcast

Function of the Human being

- Characteristic activity makes someone human
- What is it?
 - Function suggests that humans were designed for a purpose, but that wasn't what was intended by Aristotle.
 - Not talking about a deity
 - Not growth b/c plants grow, not perception b/c animals have perceptions
 - Rational activity = characteristic activity
 - Good humans excel in rationality
 - Virtuous actions = good human
 - Rational, virtuous activity makes a human's life good

Virtue -

- Is a feature of one's character
- A disposition to act in a certain way in relevant circumstances
- Not an intended moral connotation
 - Some people question whether or not Aristotle's Nichomachean ethics = moral philosophy
 - In the sense that we understand moral theory

Moral and Intellectual Virtues

- Moral
 - Can't be taught
 - Result of conditioning/habituation
 - Early training
 - Not conscious decision
 - Temperance
 - Shaped by the non-rational part of the human
- Intellectual
 - Can be taught
 - Shaped by the rational parts of the human

Virtues fall between the two extremes

- Golden mean not always arithmetical
- Not just saying that we should be moderate
 - Just b/c mean is between 'overreacting' and 'underreacting' it doesn't follow that the virtuous person always acts in a moderate way.
 - If you saw someone molesting a child a moderate response to this would be interesting.
 - The mean would lie between indifference and rashly rushing in.
 - Have to look at the circumstance/actors (mostly circumstances)
- Mean is found by doing what a "practically wise" person would choose.

The Contemplative Life

- Aristotle describes the most important aspect of a good life: theoretical/contemplative activity
 - Human excellence is achieved in rational activity

- Can't be everything or we'd just die
 - If human sat around and didn't gather food in order to think more
- Reflecting on what you know is the supreme activity possible for humans
 - Reasoning:
 - Since the characteristic activity of humans is rational activity
 - And because the excellence of anything arises from the fulfillment of its characteristic activity
 - Then human excellence is achieved in rational activity

Criticisms of NE (18:50ish)

1. Human nature
 - a.

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

Ethics is a practical question to Aristotle

- If we know what the good is, what the good life is, we will be able to achieve it better.
 - If we understand how to flourish, we will flourish more.

Aristotle asks what is good, but it is meant to mean the highest good

- A list of what is good would be easy to compile
- Aristotle is looking for the goodiest good

Highest Good Traits:

1. Intrinsically Desired
 - a. Desired for itself
2. It isn't desired for the sake of something else
3. All other goods are desired for its sake

Happiness depends on goods/position in life to some extent

- If you don't have friends/children/power/strength then you will have fewer opportunities to do virtuous actions
 - Happenstance can rob the happiest person of happiness

2 Kinds of virtue

1. Mind/Intellect
 - a. Those that pertain to the part of the soul that engages in reasoning
 - b. 2 Kinds
 - i. Theoretical reasoning
 - ii. Practical reasoning
2. Virtues of Character
 - a. Those that pertain to the part of the soul that can't reason, but can follow reason

2 steps to becoming ethically virtuous

- Gain good habits in their childhood
- Once reason is fully developed, gain practical wisdom

Aristotle has 3 categories for those who suffer from internal disorder about what to do

1. Continent
 - a. People who feel a counter-pressure b/c of appetite/desire
 - b. Continent - able to resist well
2. Incontinent
 - a. People who feel a counter-pressure b/c of appetite/desire
 - b. Unable to resist well
3. Vice/Vicious/Evil people
 - a. Person who doesn't think justice/temperance aren't actually good values

The Mean

- Every ethical virtue is a condition between excess and deficiency
 - Virtues are like technical skills
 - Skilled workers know where the mean is between excess/deficiency
- The mean will vary from situation to another
 - No universal rule about some things
 - EX: How much should an athlete eat?
 - Just b/c 10 is too much, and 2 is too little, doesn't mean the athlete should eat 6 pounds.
 - Finding the mean requires a full/detailed acquaintance with the circumstances
 - Take into account the situation's particular aspects
- Objection
 - It's not just what is between the excess and deficiency that goes into making a decision
 - You don't just say this is the mean so I'll do that, you consider lots of things

Akrasia - Two Forms of Akrasia

1. Impetuosity - proptia
 - a. Doesn't deliberate and doesn't make a reasoned choice, simply acts b/c a passion directs him to act
 - b. Regrets action later
2. Weakness - asthenia
 - a. The person who is weak is weak-willed
 - i. Can't maintain their decision that was made through reason

Akrasia - Focus on 2 Passions - Anger/Appetite

Can lead to impetuosity/weakness

1. Anger - akrasia with respect to anger
 2. Passion - unqualified akrasia
- Gives us a total of 4 types of Akrasia:
 - Impetuosity caused by pleasure
 - Impetuosity caused by anger
 - Weakness caused by pleasure
 - Weakness caused by anger

Pleasure

- Bad w/o qualification
 - Pleasure of recovering from being sick