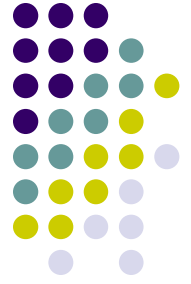


Transition: Back to virtue ethics

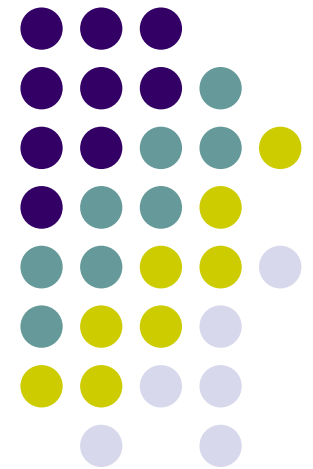


- A number of contemporary philosophers have turned away from the duty-based approach to ethics, harking back to the older, virtue-based approach that we'll see in Aristotle and Hume.
- They've been reacting in part to some of the specific problems we've noted with both utilitarian and Kantian ethics. More generally, many have thought that the modern approach ignores
 - problems in codifying ethics (formulating exceptionless moral rules)
 - the central role of moral feelings (cf. Williams on integrity),
 - important nonmoral aspects of virtue, and
 - morally significant relationships that aren't governed by clear-cut rules.

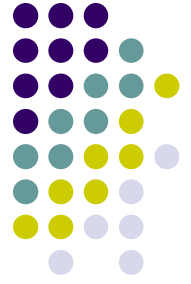
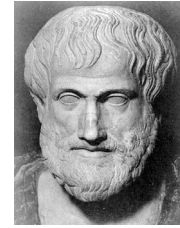


ARISTOTLE

The good for humans depends on using reason to find an appropriate point between extremes.

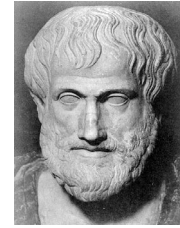


Happiness as the human good



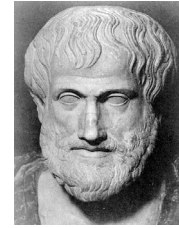
- Aristotle begins with the claim that all action aims at some good, and that it's widely accepted that happiness is the chief human good. However, he notes that this is just a platitude that needs explanation.
- [It's important that the Greek word translated as "happiness," *eudaimonia*, implies a life that goes well for the one living it.
 - ≠ a feeling, e.g. pleasure, though *accompanied by* pleasure
 - A more accurate translation that's sometimes used is "flourishing."]

Characteristics of happiness



- **Happiness is “final,” i.e. it comes last in the chain of ends that justifies action. We pursue other ends (e.g. pleasure, honor, intelligence) for its sake, whereas we pursue happiness only for its own sake.**
- **Happiness also is “self-sufficient,” in the sense that nothing further is needed to make life desirable. This doesn’t mean that the happy person doesn’t need others; humans are naturally social.**
- **Aristotle goes on to argue that only a life exhibiting virtue [= excellence] satisfies these two conditions.**

The function argument

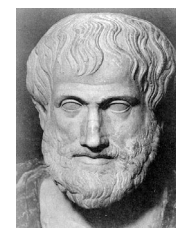


1. **The good of anything with a function [= *ergon*: work. task (distinctive role in the cosmos)] amounts to performing that function well.**

2. **The human function is rational activity (“activity of soul in accordance with, or implying, a rational principle”).**
 - **This is what’s proper to [= distinctive of] humans.**
 - **Other human activities are shared by other living beings: plants also exhibit growth and nutrition; animals, sensation.**

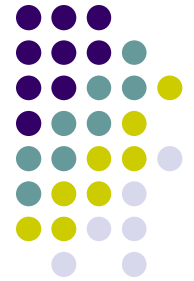
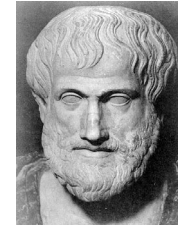
3. **So the human good [= happiness] amounts to rational activity in accordance with virtue [= excellence], i.e. performed well.**

Important qualifications



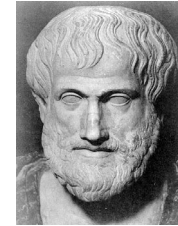
- **Aristotle immediately adds: “in a complete lifetime.” One can’t be said to be happy just for a while, in the Greek sense; and on Aristotle’s account children can’t yet be happy.**
- **Virtue naturally brings pleasure at virtuous acts, but its active exercise, as needed for happiness, depends to some extent on “external goods” [= goods outside the agent’s control]:**
 - **favorable upbringing and physical/mental endowment**
 - **fortunate circumstances, e.g. adequate wealth, trustworthy friends**
- **At the same time, virtue is learnable, and the capacity for happiness is widely shared. Nor is it easily undermined by reversals of fortune, though extreme changes can affect happiness (cf. his discussion of Priam, p. 11, p. 24).**

Aspects of soul



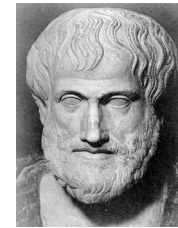
- **rational (= reason):**
 - limited to humans
 - can exhibit intellectual virtue (treated in VI)
- **appetitive/desiderative/sensitive:**
 - shared with animals
 - partakes of reason in humans when they bring desires under rational control, exhibiting “moral” virtues (II-V) = virtues of character
- **vegetative/nutritive:**
 - shared with both animals and plants
 - controls growth and nutrition

Levels of character



- Aristotle briefly brings up incontinence [= weakness of will] in discussing the desiderative soul. He's working from a fourfold classification of types of character (cf. VII, i-x). In descending order of goodness:
 - virtue, e.g. courage, temperance, justice, etc., without conflicting desires
 - contenance = strength of will, resisting temptation
 - incontinence = weakness of will, yielding to temptation
 - vice = wickedness, deliberate badness, without conflicting desires
- Among other things, the list illustrates how Aristotle rates *below* true virtue a successful internal struggle to act rightly, of the sort that Kant thought worthy of the highest esteem.
- In II he discusses how we attain virtue and what virtue entails. In the first part of III he defends his category of vice against Socrates's claim that no one does wrong voluntarily.

Learning virtue



- Habituation (= instilling a habit by repetition) results in virtuous (e.g. courageous, temperate, or just) acts. However, this is just a necessary initial stage of learning.
- *Being* virtuous (or courageous, moderate, just, etc.), or acting *virtuously*, also requires that the acts be:
 - accompanied by pleasure, not pain
 - done knowingly,
 - based on a choice, to do them *because* they're virtuous, and
 - done out of a firm disposition [= tendency], i.e. a trait of character.
- Which specific acts one should do has to be determined by reference to a personal model: the “prudent” person (in your translation), exhibiting excellence in practical reasoning = practical wisdom (VI).