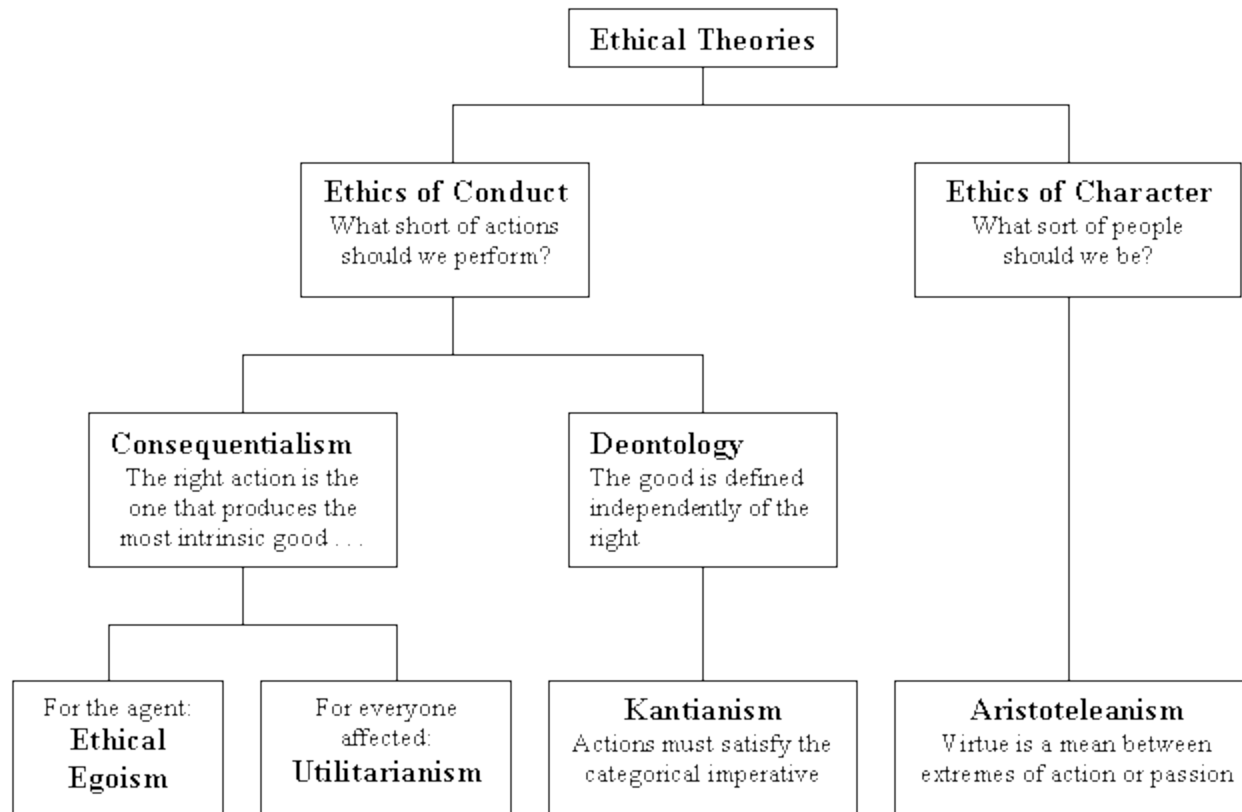


Virtue theory vs. Globalism

Normative Ethics

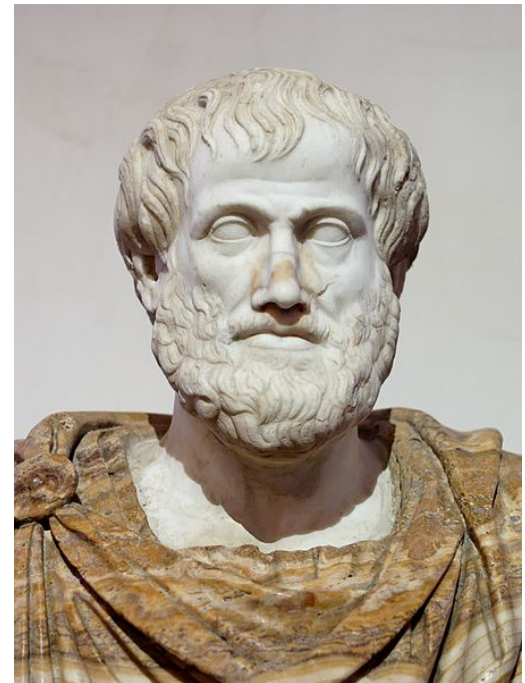


Central Question

- What are the core commitments of virtue theory – as articulated by Aristotle?
- Are these consistent with contemporary psychological theory?

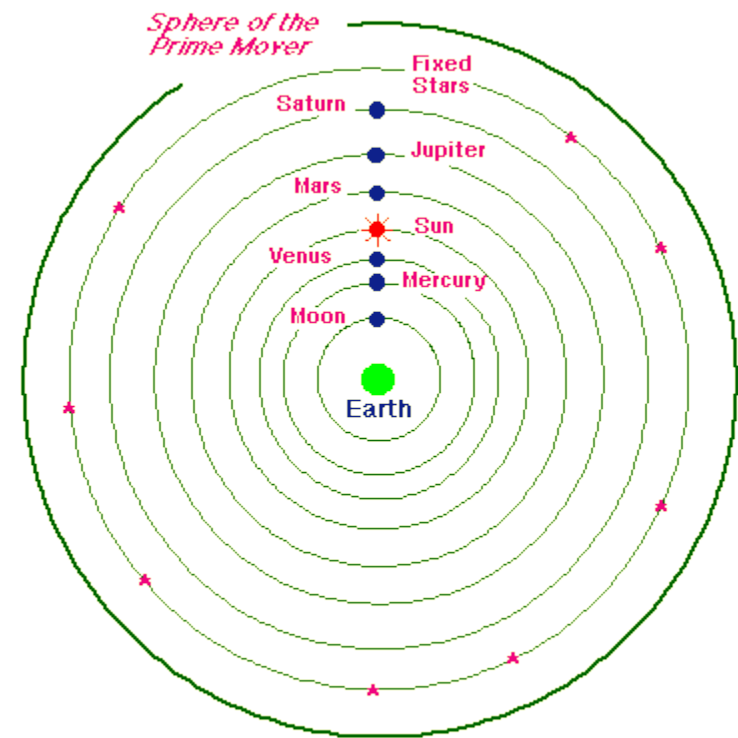
Aristotle

- Greek philosopher (384 BC – 322 BC)
- Plato's student; Alexander the Great's tutor.
- Arguably, the most influential thinker in Western thought.
- Remaining works largely compilation of edited notes



Aristotle's contributions

- Pioneered formal logic, zoological classification, experimental biology (dissection), physics.
- Medieval philosophy (Aquinas) synthesis of Aristotle and Christianity



Aristotle's Universe

Nicomachean Ethics

- Every human activity aims at some end:
 - Medicine → health
 - Economics → wealth
- *Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim.*

Instrumental vs. ultimate ends

- Some actions desired for their results (instrumental ends); e.g., problem sets, but do all human actions aim toward some ultimate end or goal?
- *If, then, there is some end of the things we do, which we desire for its own sake (everything else being desired for the sake of this), and if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else (for at that rate the process would go on to infinity, so that our desire would be empty and vain), clearly this must be the good and the chief good.*

Happiness, the final good

- The highest good will be the final goal of purposeful striving, something good for its own sake.
- The final good for human beings is happiness (flourishing, excellence of living). NOT subjective well-being

What is happiness?

- pleasure, wealth, honor?
- *to say that happiness is the chief good seems a platitude, and a clearer account of what it is still desired. This might perhaps be given, if we could first ascertain the function of man.*
- Analogy: what marks a 'good' flute? Its excellence in carrying out its function.

The function argument

- the function of man to live a certain kind of life
 - Function to grow (shared with plants); to sense (shared with animals)
- The function of human beings is to act rationally
- The final good for human beings is an activity of the soul [mind] in conformity with rational excellence (virtue)

The Virtues

- Virtue (*arete*) denotes certain quality, skill or excellence (to be virtuous = to be good at something). For Aristotle, that something is the obedience to reason.
- Virtues are those good character qualities that enable an individual to achieve happiness while obeying to the commands of reason.
- they are not just instrumental for happiness. The exercise of virtues as constitutive for the good character constitutes the good life that we call happiness.

2 kinds of virtues

- Intellectual Virtues: philosophical wisdom acquired by teaching
- Moral virtues: practical, acquired through habit.

How are Moral Virtues acquired?

- *we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit.*
- *we learn by doing them, e.g. men become builders by building and lyreplayers by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts.*
- *Action must proceed from a firm and unchangeable character.*

Society and Virtue

- to behave or act morally one needs to:
 - (a) interact with others (it is not possible to be an isolated moral individual);
 - (b) interact in a well-organized and civilized community (human potentials could not be realized without the security, the economic resources and educational institutions of a politically organized society);

Virtues and the mean

- *Excellence, then, is a state concerned with choice, lying in a mean relative to us [not akin to arithmetic proportion]*
- Acting in accordance with right reason (proportion) is a common general principle. To judge according to the right reason is to judge about the more or the less and the ways how to avoid both.

An example

- Foolhardiness = too little fear
- Cowardice = too much fear
- Courage = mean between foolhardiness and cowardice

Some Virtues

Table I

The virtues as discussed in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (NE)

Virtue	Sphere of exercise	Discussion in NE
Courage	Fear and confidence	III.6-9
Temperance	Bodily pleasure and pain	III.10-12
Generosity	Giving and retaining money	IV.1
Magnificence	Giving and retaining money on a large scale	IV.2
Greatness of soul	Honour on a large scale	IV.3
(Nameless)	Honour on a small scale	IV.4
Even temper	Anger	IV.5
Friendliness	Social relations	IV.6
Truthfulness	Honesty about oneself	IV.7
Wit	Conversation	IV.8
Justice	Distribution	V
Friendship	Personal relations	VIII-IX

Conclusions

- Habituation leads to formation of virtues, which can be regarded as character traits or habits (dispositions) to act relative to a mean

The modern challenge

- Aristotle supposes individuals possess character traits:
- Relatively long-term stable dispositions to act in distinctive ways
- Do we commit a fallacy (fundamental attribution error) by inferring character from action?

Globalism vs. situationism

- Globalism (character traits, virtues):
 - Consistency – character and personality traits are reliably manifested in trait-relevant behavior across a diversity of trait-relevant eliciting conditions;
 - Stability – traits are manifested in similar conditions over time.
 - Evaluative integration. Honest people also kind etc

Situationism

- Morally significant behavior is affected by features of the immediate situation which:
 1. are not in themselves of moral significance.
 2. Are not of great motivational significance.
 3. Are not well known either to laypeople or to the philosophical literature.
 4. Are numerous
 5. Do not form a coherent class from the point of view of folk psychology

4 kinds of evidence against globalism

- 1. trans-situational correlations
- 2. social influences
- 3. mood effects
- 4. fundamental attribution error.

Sources of Evidence

- Milgram
- Darley & Batson
- Zimbardo
- Asch
- Diffusion of responsibility
- McDonalds case