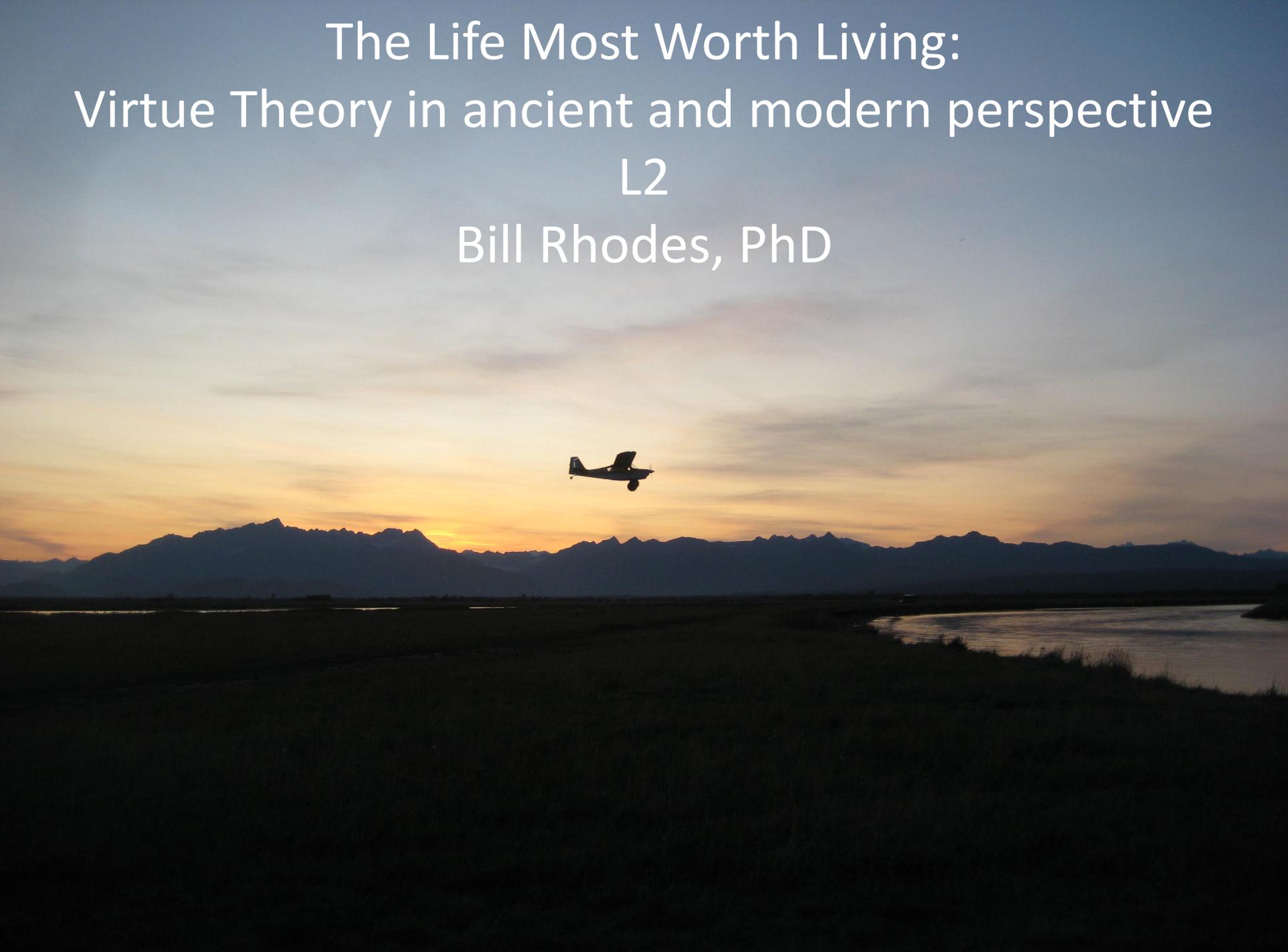


The Life Most Worth Living:
Virtue Theory in ancient and modern perspective
L2
Bill Rhodes, PhD



Contracts; Ring of Gyges

- Most who behave justly do so because they cannot do otherwise?
- Invisibility—would it change how we behave?
- “Get away” with breaching contract?
- Is it better to
 - Seem just and be unjust?
 - Or to seem unjust and be just?

Seeming unjust while being just

- Simple, noble; does no injustice
- But, is believed to be unjust
- Bad reputation; tough public life
- Punishments
- Continues over an entire life
- Cannot profit

Seeming just while being unjust

- Has no scruples
- Unjust acts are undetected
- Great reputation as just man; partners, customers
- Can speak persuasively if “slips”
- Can use strength if needed
- Can deploy friends too; and, with \$ the gods
- All of this leads to profits

Now,

- Can we honestly say that it is better to be just?
- “The way of the world” suggests otherwise
- One of the dialogue’s central (and most interesting) questions
- What to say to one’s kids? (When parents praise justice, they usually refer to the benefits it brings, not to justice itself).

Is justice intrinsically good?

- If it were obviously intrinsically good, we'd trust others much more than we do
- Need to defend justice without relying on reputation/image
- (But, we aren't clever; our "eyesight" is not so good)
- So, let's magnify justice
 - Enlarge it from individual person
 - To an entire polis

The Polis

- Exists because “none of us is self-sufficient”
 - A descriptive assertion
 - With normative implications
- We interact because we believe doing so is advantageous to all
 - Need for food, shelter, clothes
 - Specialization and crafts
 - “Comparative advantage” and native talents

Interaction with others

- Trade
 - Need for “surplus” goods
 - Merchants, sailors
 - Exchange agents
 - Laborers
- Add luxuries (will make justice easier to find)
 - Meat, barbers, musicians, beauticians
 - Doctors

With Luxuries, though

- Will need more land; may want to annex
- And defense against others
- (And now we've discovered the origin of war:
 - “It comes from those same desires that are most of all responsible for the bad things that happen to cities and the individuals in them” 373e1-e7)
- Accordingly, a professional military
 - NOT citizen-soldiers – remember specialization

But who for this profession?

- Natural aptitude for military
 - Physical -- keen senses, strong
 - Psychological -- guarding, courageous
 - “Lifelong” training
 - “Spirited” people
- Civil – military relations?
 - How to ensure the soldiers don’t turn on each other or on the polis?
 - Gentle to friends; harsh to enemy, but how can both natures be in one psyche?



Opposites in the same nature?

- Philosophical in some aspects
- Loves what it knows; suspicious of the unknown
- Will guard what it knows
- More on this later
- (But it is critical to Plato's notion of self-rule)
- For now, a very brief excursion into . . .

“Stories” and education

- Music, poetry, and “Narratives”
 - Tales can be true or false
 - The very young are most impressionable
 - And first impressions are hard to erase
 - Tell false ones that have some truth in them,
 - But carefully, under supervision, like drugs
 - And “censor” others
 - *E. g.* Those that inspire war or hatred, or fear of death
 - Beware of the “true falsehood” – sincerely held but false belief – Ignorance of the psyche

“Pure” Narratives; “Pure” Polis?

- Harmony—not just in music
 - Resonates with math (formulae)
 - Reasonable
 - Graceful
 - Can detect missing notes or incompleteness
- Essential to a pure (just?) polis
- Harmony within harmony (and between souls)
- Discourage ordinary folk’s telling falsehoods

Metals and natures

- General classes in the polis
- Ordinary folk (workers) – most “changeable”
- Auxiliaries (soldiers)
- Guardians (rulers; typically selected from the soldiers)
- Gold – silver – bronze/iron

The complete polis (427d)

- Will we finally find justice here?
- If the city is good, it will be
 - Wise
 - Courageous
 - Temperate
 - Just

Wisdom

- In many craftsmen
 - (And this is a good a place as any to think about crafts, functions, and concrete goods)
- Generally fairly tightly focused
 - Consider a doctor when ill; mechanic for car
- Wisdom regarding the city itself?
 - “Guardianship”

Courage

- A kind of preserving
 - Through “everything”
 - Of the things the rulers inculcated (“absorbed” the laws”; “dyed in the wool”)
- And therefore a sort of wisdom
 - Of what is to be feared
- “Civic” courage

Temperance

- Or Moderation
- Seems to suggest that there are two selves
 - Smaller, better self controls a larger, worse self
 - We praise someone as “master of himself”
 - We judge others as licentious
 - But how can this (opposites) be?
- Look back to our ideal city
 - Better and worse agree that better should rule

Moderation, cont.

- Agreement of who rules and is ruled
 - Establishes harmony (beauty)
 - Permeates the city (consent of the governed?)
- So, we've found Wisdom, Courage, and Temperance
- The remaining excellence is justice

Justice

- Everyone functioning in their own lane
- Having (distributive) one's own
- Doing one's own thing within one's class
- Meddling with other classes is injustice
 - Money-makers, or auxiliaries, for example, trying to rule
 - Money in politics?
 - Military coup?

Now we're in a position to revisit the individual and the life well-lived

- Isomorphic hypothesis
- Well, “Everything fine is difficult” (435c5)
- Back to the consideration of opposites
 - In one psyche
 - Wanting and not wanting
 - Thirsty, but refusing to drink due to calculation
 - Psyche must have “parts” that can oppose

Psyche and “parts”

- Thirsty, but the only water available is suspect
 - Thirsting “part” does not “know” anything beyond an appetite for liquid
 - Thinking part knows about foul water and about the thirsting part
- Some moderns use “orders” to describe the phenomenon (for example, Frankfurt)

Another “part”

- What gets us angry – “spirit”
- Leontius at the Piraeus
- “Look for yourselves, you evil wretches, take your fill of the beautiful sight!” (440e1)
- Spirit can ally with one part against others
 - Upbringing is important here
 - Spirit can naturally side with reason
 - Indeed, it has something rational in it

Harmony in the self and polis

- Appetites ruled by reason with the help of spirit
- Money makers ruled by guardians with the help of soldiers
- Moderation and justice are natural in the ideal
- Analogous to health
 - Proper functioning
 - “Parts” as ASPECTS of a person
 - Interactive and dynamic
 - Susceptible to corruption

Virtue and vice

- Healthy ways of living lead to health
- Unhealthy eating leads to disease
- Generalized to life itself
- Health – functioning according to nature
- Living – functioning according to human nature (self-actualization)
- *Aristokratia*

Next time

On learning and what is true

