The Life Most Worth Living: Virtue Theory in ancient and modern perspective
L4-L5
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LMWL (Republic)

- Republic as a work in psychology
- Psychology as self-rule
- Chariot analogy
- Be very, very careful about who gets in charge
- Be very, very careful about what is regarded as true
- Connection of what is enduring to truth
- Being vs. becoming
And so, to Aristotle

• No more precision than the subject matter allows

• Organizational issues “Plato is dear . . .”

• From a world of being to one of becoming

• Biological perspective (ecology and individual)

• Relationship of ethics and poli-sci.

• Four accounts of causes
  – Material
  – Formal
  – Efficient
  – Final
Material Cause

• What’s this “of”
  – Substance
  – Does a regress loom?
  – Is material enduring?
Formal Cause

• Yes, Forms
  – And the Problem of Universals
  – The one and the many
  – A recipe, or a blueprint
    • Need these be instantiated?

• If what we “know” changes constantly, how is knowing possible?
Efficient Cause

• What brought this to be?
  – Craftsman?
  – Etiology?
  – Parents?
  – Another regress?
  – Variable accounts (INUS conditions?)

• Where is the uncaused cause?
  – The unmoved mover?
Final Cause

• What is the purpose?
  – What is this *for*?

• Could we have the unmoved mover here?
  – Examine purposes for other purposes
  – Why study?
  – Why “delay gratification”?
  – Why save $ or pay for periodic MX?
Instrumental Goals

• Held for the purpose of achieving another goal
• And yet, they themselves do not “move”
• Instead, we move to accomplish them
  – And the instruments to them
  – Regress?
  – Possibly, depending on where one looks for an answer
• Is there anything to explain all of this activity?
The Good: “Happiness”

• (This is not Aristotle’s reply, but rather a crude way of approaching it)
• The LMWL is better, but that’s complicated
• So, for now, conceive of happiness as a discrete end-point and we’ll correct later
• And, for now, think about tails and dogs
• Powerpoint is limited, so . . .
  – “Aim straight”
Thinking of one’s obituary may illuminate
  – (The one not for publication)

Presuppositions
  – We can be mistaken about Happiness (more on this later)
  – The precise “aim point” will vary w/ individual
  – Not, however, a thoroughgoing relativism
  – Humans are political animals, and therefore . . .
Some ways of being . . .

• . . . Are objectively better than others
  – Some of the best – virtues
  – Some of the worst – vices
• SO what do I do with this?
• We need more than “philosophy in a library”
• Action is necessary for inculcation
• Because we become what we do
Habituation

• “If arguments were sufficient by themselves to make men decent . . .”
• Whatever knowing is, it is insufficient to inculcate virtue and eliminate vice in most of us
• But, practice can help
  – Approach self as a self-creating craftsman?
  – An aesthetic for life itself
Virtue – what?

• Feeling?
  – Nope; we don’t praise or blame feelings
  – And we’re not said to be “moved” by virtue – rather something like the opposite

• Capacity?
  – Nope; we have these by nature

• Must be a state
Virtue defined

• Function – happiness (sort of)
• “Mean” relative to individual (Milo)
  – Nothing should be added or subtracted
  – The target is hard to hit (bad in many ways; good in only one)
• Not every act or feeling admits of a mean
  – Some are simply base
• But many do . . .
Virtue is

- A state that decides
- Consisting in a mean
- Relative to us
- Defined by reason
- A mean between two vices
“Mean” Exemplified

- Cowardly -- Brave -- Rash
- Insensible -- Temperate -- Intemperate
- Ungenerous -- Generous -- Wasteful
- Pusillanimity -- Magnanimity -- Vanity
- Unpleasant -- Friendly -- Flattering
- And etc.
  - Best to think of these as illustrations
  - Keep focused on the forest
The Extremes

• Are in tension
• And can affect our perceptions
  – The foolhardy thinks the brave to be cowardly, etc.
• And therefore finding the mean can be hard
• More, we tend to deceive ourselves
  – Especially when pleasure is involved
Pleasure and Happiness

• Remember the advertisers and the experts
• First candidate: Pleasure (1152b1 ff.)
  – Many do seek this
  – Certainly nothing intrinsically wrong with it
  – But it is distinct from the good
    • (An idea that will engender substantial controversy, depending on how we conceive of pleasure)
  – And avoiding pain isn’t always best, either
Pleasure and habituation

- Steer the youth (1172)
- Closely allied to virtue in a well-lived life
- The virtuous take pleasure in the good
- A so-called “virtuous cycle”
  - “Forever will it dominate your destiny”
- Not always evident to the ignorant
- “Transformation”?