

what?!? Virtue Ethics - IB Problems and Theories of Ethics

- not about just consequences
- not about just intentions
- about who you are (or who you should be)
- "agent centred [whereas other theories] are action centred" - Annas
- the human *telos*
- eudaimonia - happiness (flourishing) *is* the good life not a result of living it
- hedonism leads to unhappiness

'Classical' Virtue Ethics

- arete (virtue) - being good at what you do is good for you **and** good for the community
- community is **essential** to humanity
- **friendship** as necessary for flourishing
- both Aristotle and Plato believed in the soul

argument:

would you choose a 'crap' life with one friend...or a 'super-rich' life without?

- moral virtues are learned through repetition
- others are taught more traditionally
- moral virtues fall between **two vices**
- **primary virtues:** knowledge; practical skill; wisdom; intelligence
- **secondary virtues:** judgement; cleverness; 'big picture' thinking; skill in deciding

criticism:

the 'grey man' criticism: surely being average all the time is not good!

reply:

that's not what he's advocating! correct response at the correct time, the more you do it the more you'll develop the virtues

evaluate:

this is the complete opposite of, say, Hobbes' competition for resources...

Aristotle says what's best for me is also best for you and for everyone else...

This move is allowed by believing humans have a telos...

criticism:

Plato's account obviously stands or falls with his forms...

or if we concede they may exist - our inability to access them...

reply:

Aristotle's account does not require the forms. He assumes that our distinctive feature (reason) will be our telos...

evaluate:

Darwin forces us to be careful... Reason is not distinct though, infused

MacIntyre's Virtue Ethics

- he traces the development of virtue ethics (see notes)
- though they change the is clearly a commonality, or a core, to human virtue, even in the later Christian or 'theological virtues' that were added (not substituted)
- around C18 something changes, morality becomes about prohibitions, and is so divorced from flourishing!
- **Vardy calls this a 'a matter of some wonder to MacIntyre! and everyone forgot...'**
- Hume - moral sentiments are just emotional...
- Kant - moral rules are the product of pure reason
- existentialism - morality is really about **choosing** (or not)
- Utilitarianism - it's all about pleasure...
- intuitionism...which lead to emotivism... where we are now...

argument:

emotivism as pervasive: he describes the manager, the aesthete and the therapist (see notes) as 'figures at the forefront of our society'

and we must choose...

argument:

to follow Aristotle or Nietzsche. Every other option has been tried. And each fails. Will to power or the virtues. Self-creation vs. self-fulfilment. Lone self vs. communal.

criticism:

MacIntyre uses history to solve a moral problem. Why should we assume that 'older is better'? (Burnstein)

criticism:

Scheffler: the great chess player, who is also vicious!
Wachbroit: virtue theory has no means with which to refute relativism...

criticism:

Stout :the entire history of virtue theory should be taken into account... Christian interpretations are significantly different due in no small part to a belief in God and scripture..MacIntyre actually concedes this, addressing it in his next book...

criticism:

but he still needs a reason for the human telos.... Aquinas adds God, but eyes can still be 'for' (in a different sense) seeing even if we respect Hume's is/ought distinction...

criticism:

other critics claim Aristotle is: elitist; racist; ageist; sexist; speciesist and ageist!!!

evaluate:

a serious reader has to, I think, admit that there is something in each of these claims... it is possible (at least for most - it is more than possible some jobs are contrary to eudaimonia) that one can drop the problematic elements whilst retaining virtue ethics

Anscombe

- Christian account differ significantly; Aristotle's naturalistic account - he has no concept of *guilt*, no polarisation of good people and bad, most people are in the middle and negative acts are deficiencies of character that can be worked on... life is a journey not a pass/fail/right/wrong test
- with the enlightenment reason was applied to action, not character - this is the mistake...

argument:

this is about *primacy*, the 'right' action can be done with immense hatred. Anscombe says we turned our back on flourishing to be rule-makers...

criticism:

the old one... there are plenty of things that we might think **virtuous** that can be used for great evil - the courageous and obedient nazi prison guard - I'd use Kant to voice this I guess...

reply:

Phillipa Foot - virtues are different to 'skills'. Though this is hard to see in Aristotle's language the distinction is clearly there... 'Virtue' involves a beneficial (telos attaining) goal. *Executive* virtues.

argument:

someone who intentionally write messily can still be a neat writer but a just judge who intentionally is unjust one day and puts a bloke in prison... is no longer just...

Geach: "it is possible to talk meaningfully of a human telos - not in a biological sense but in a social one..."

evaluate:

if we can come up with a notion of human essence then it is possible to get to a list of virtues... but can this be different enough for different societies...?

evaluate:

Slote: virtues are engendered... think about whether you agree... existentialism vs naturalism... (de Beauvoir) clearly reason was taught as masculine, but was this nature or power-play...?

BEAST criticism:

is what is good for me actually what is good for my society(others - contra Kant)? or do we need slaves and prosperity for that way of thinking? A does not quite think moral exactly =s happy (two sorts of virtues) need both

Util. & Kant agree!! moral often equals displeasure for me...

criticism:

the elitism in Aristotle actually cannot be removed, surely a poor man that it tempted to steal but doesn't is better that a rich one with no temptation....

strengths:

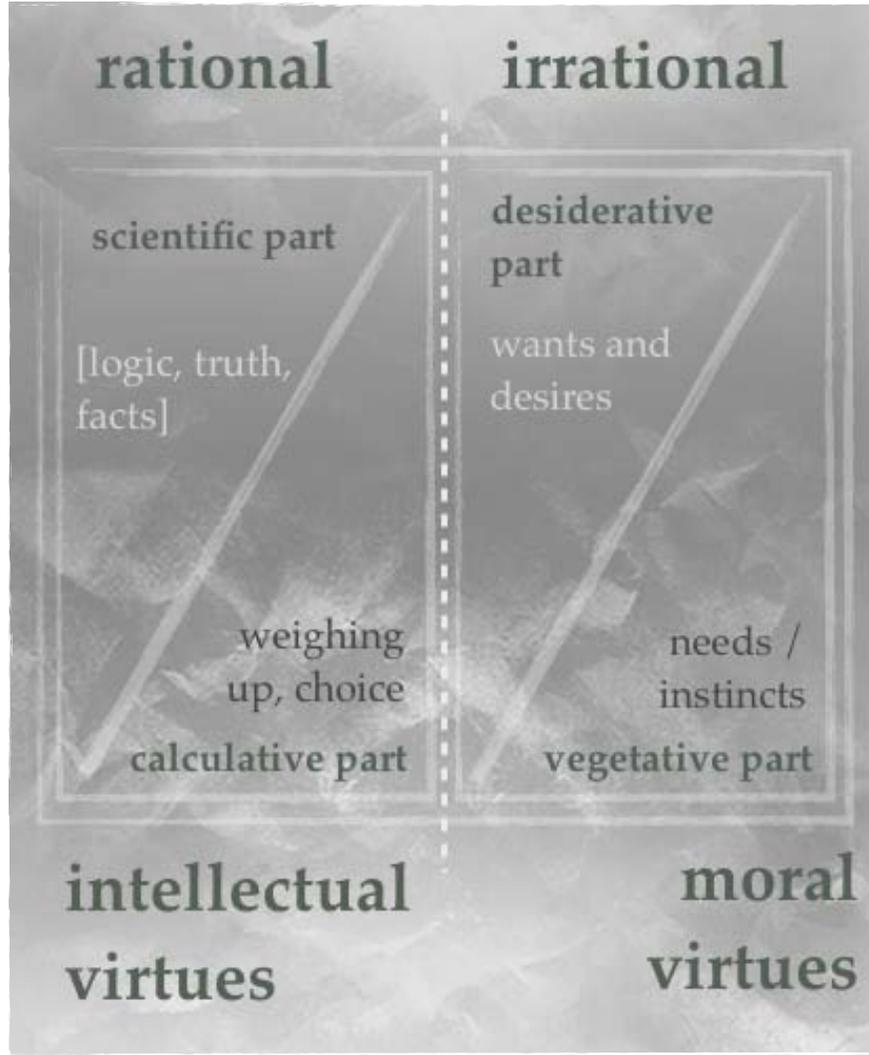
- 'virtue' words are undeniably part of our moral vocabulary - a solid account of virtue 'undivorses' intent and intended consequ
- VE seems to include a lot of the best bits of deontology and consequentialism - **and avoid** most of the pit falls... IF there is a human essence...
- a place is given to judgement, courage, efficacy, wisdom as well as intention... able to condemn '**fantasies of revenge**'

last criticisms:

VAGUENESS: VE's reply that this is really the point - moral philosophy has become removed from real life... what we call 'ethics' is a tiny part of human *EUDAIMONIA*

evaluate:

are we pushed back towards 'multi-aspect' theories? existential ethics? or do humans have an essence?



intellectual virtues

primary:

techné practical skill
epistēmē knowledge
phronēsis practical wisdom - self vs community
nóus intelligence - foundational to all 5
sophia the full package - all together

secondary:

eubolia practical skill in decision making
sunesis understanding the 'big picture'
gnome judgement including all in decision
deinotes cleverness - only good when connected to others