

Addressing Limitations and Objections to Aristotle's Craft Analogy

1. The craft analogy, as Aristotle lays it out, has two central prongs. And it is, as we discussed in class, the second of these which is more controversial. Explain Aristotle's craft analogy, being sure to say for what purposes Aristotle invokes the craft analogy, and what are the two limitations Aristotle himself places on the craft analogy. Then discuss at least two objections one might have to the craft analogy (we went over several in class and you are welcome to focus on those objects if you'd like). Be sure to carefully explain the objections and to think about how Aristotle might respond to the objections.

According to Aristotle, one must obtain all virtues in due proportion with one another in order to pursue the chief good of Eudaimonia. Eudaimonia is the good of all goods in which all goods are held in due proportion with one another. Aristotle uses a craft analogy to explain how one must work toward the virtues in a way similar one practices a craft (such as violin-making) and reflects upon virtues. Aristotle acknowledged that the analogy had limitations, but there are still potential objections to which Aristotle would respond. The two objections are that (1) a virtuous act may be different from the way a virtuous person would act in a certain situation and that (2) virtuous acts may require certain conditions to be satisfied. In this paper, I will discuss the limitations Aristotle acknowledged, these objections to Aristotle's analogy, and how Aristotle might respond to those objections.

Aristotle's craft analogy can be described in two parts. The first part of his craft analogy is that virtue and crafts alike in that one learns both of them through practicing or doing them. One understands how to be courageous through acting the way a courageous person would act, and one learns how to make a violin through the act of making a violin. When a person acts the way a courageous person would act, then he or she establishes rules or criteria under which one should be courageous. The person might, for example, exercise a specific amount of courage in

certain situations, and, in other situations, not show courage at all. By exercising virtues in, no more and no less, the appropriate degree and in all and only the appropriate situations, the rules and criteria would form the person's practical understanding of when and in what ways he/she should be courageous (or exercise any other virtue). This allows one to master the virtue and learn how to be courageous. And, in order to learn how to make a violin, one must deliberately practice the act of violin-making. The second part is that virtue and crafts are alike in that mastering the virtue or craft requires an understanding not only of what to do, but why that action is the right one to perform. When a courageous person is courageous, there are various ways in which a person may understand the ways in which that courageous act is the right one to perform, as opposed to other acts. The courageous act has its value of being the courageous act intrinsically (as in, the value comes from the act), but, in these reflective dimensions of virtue, the courageous person must understand why that act is virtuous. For example, the act may be a courageous act because it is in accordance with a certain reason, such as choosing to take a stand against racism in a racist society. The agent may weigh attitudes of others in their perception of the agent as a courageous person or the agent may judge him/herself as courageous. Still, the person doesn't have to know the exact role of virtues in the most intricate, detailed sense in order to be a virtuous person, and the knowledge of the virtues itself doesn't make one a virtuous person. Rather, the person becomes a virtuous person by exercising the virtues in the appropriate amounts and appropriate situations based on his/her understanding of the virtues. Similarly, when one performs an action when making a violin, he or she must understand how that action is correct or necessary for making a violin. For example, there might be a certain tightness of the string that is necessary for a certain note or there might be a specific type of wood that produces

the unique sound of the violin. Those are reasons why certain actions are necessary for violin-making, just as there are reasons a virtuous act is virtuous. However, the analogy is not without limitations.

It might seem like virtues are exactly like crafts, but Aristotle recognized that the craft analogy does not hold in every way. For instance, the craft-maker's individual tasks can be completed with an end while the virtuous person's virtues are never "completed" in the same sense. The process of making a violin ends when one stops making a violin, but he or she is still a violin-maker. However, when a virtuous person stops acting courageously, the courageous act is over and the individual is no longer courageous (and, hence, no longer a virtuous person). In this sense (when we say a virtuous person stops acting courageously), we mean that the courageous act is over and the person no longer exercises the virtue in accordance with the way the virtue should be exercised. As such, in order to maintain the status of being a craft-maker, one does not have to be constantly performing the craft, but in order to maintain a certain virtue, one must keep performing that virtuous act in the ways that are appropriate. As another dissimilarity is that the actions and activities of making are craft are only instrumental toward the end goal of completing the craft while virtues are not only instrumental to achieving eudaemonia. Virtues have intrinsic value as well. When one carves wood to make a violin, one does so as a means to have the appropriate wood for the next step in the process of making a violin. When one performs a courageous act, the act is instrumental to bring about the end of achieving a chief good, but there it is also worthy to pursue that act in itself. In light of these limitations, one may also object to Aristotle's analogy of the craft.

One potential objection to the craft analogy is that a virtuous act may be seen either as an

act that has a virtuous value or an act that a virtuous person would do in that situation. A craft does not have this distinction. There might be a distinction between an act that has courageous value and an act that a courageous person would do in a certain situation. But it is not so clear how the act of making a violin would differ from what a violin-maker would do. However, Aristotle explains that there is a similar distinction in craft when he says “Just as a person acts artistically only if his production is guided by craft knowledge, so too a person acts virtuously only if his actions are the manifestation of his character.” (NE II.4). The actions that are manifestations of one's character would be the actions of a virtuous person in a similar way that craft-making actions are from the knowledge of the craft-maker himself. Craft-making may be seen as either an act that has the value of making a craft or an act that a craft-maker would do in that situation with Aristotle's similar distinction. In addition, since the act that has a virtuous value is the act that a virtuous person would do in a certain situation, then Aristotle might respond that the distinction is irrelevant in describing a virtue.

One may also object that virtue also differs from craft in that performing a virtuous act requires one to have satisfied certain conditions about one's intentions and character. When someone is performing a virtuous act, “he must choose the acts and choose them for their own sakes, and....his action must proceed from a firm and unchangeable character.” (NE II.4). Virtuous acts must be performed with these specific circumstances or occasions, and satisfying these conditions allows these acts to be performed in a just and temperate manner that would lead to eudaimonia. These conditions are not necessary for performing a craft. One does not need to choose acts for their own sake nor have acts proceed from a certain type of character to perform a craft. One might say that, since Aristotle already says that activities of virtue are

intrinsically valuable while activities of craft-making are only intrinsically valuable, then this difference between the virtue and the craft would already be evident. But, in carrying out virtues or crafts for these conditions, the virtuous person would always seek to satisfy them for their own ends themselves while the craft-maker does not seek any intrinsic value from performing a craft other than for the purpose of achieving some sort of end. In response to the objection, Aristotle would argue that a craft-maker would have to choose the acts of making a craft in a similar way that a virtuous person chooses to perform a virtuous act as both performing a virtuous act and a performing a craft. He would argue this similarity as both virtues and crafts require understanding why the act is the right thing to do. If one knows why the act (virtue or craft) is the right thing to do, then one knows it is the right thing to do. One has the capacity to choose the act, and one knows that he or she must do the act. It follows both virtues and crafts require a condition that one must choose the act. However, Aristotle would say that the condition of choosing an act for its intrinsic value is not necessary for craft-making. He would make this claim as he explained that a craft-maker does not require intrinsic value of the act of his or her craft while a virtuous person does require intrinsic value of a virtue. It's clear that a virtuous act is different from craft in that a virtuous act requires a firm and unchangeable character while a craft does not. Aristotle would make this claim because, when addressing the limitations of his craft analogy, he recognized that virtuous acts are limited in that one must keep performing them in order to maintain that virtue while crafts do not have this distinction. The distinction that virtues require conditions while crafts do not follows from the limitations of the analogy.

In class, we discussed an additional objection that, since Aristotle's criteria for virtue requires particular knowledge of why what we are doing is morally appropriate, one might say

begin to draw distinctions in the quality of each other's character in ways that might seem absurd. For example, a Kantian who does the same actions that an Aristotelian does would not be seen as virtuous as the Aristotelian is. When a Kantian does something in accordance with rational choice, then he/she is not doing it for the same reasons as an Aristotelian is, and we would say the Kantian is not as virtuous. But the way people reason is a decision they make and within our control, so we have the power to determine whatever factors of the person's character that we might find to be “absurd” for judgement of the virtuous value. We could avoid such statements about a person's “character,” and, instead, make statements about the person's actions themselves. When we determine what is appropriate in order to exercise virtues in due proportion with one another, we are making judgements about actions.

Aristotle's craft analogy provides several ways to understand the way virtue through similarities with crafts. There are there are limitations to the analogy, and one may raise objections to the analogy through differences in distinctions of virtues or crafts as well as differences in the conditions under which the virtue or craft must be performed. Aristotle would respond to these objections through counterarguments or acceptance, and one may continue explore Aristotle's ethics through various arguments.