

Nicomachean Ethics 2.5-2.9

2.5

One of Aristotle's methods of division is via *genus et differentiam*

Since virtue is clearly a *something* of the soul, we need to determine what kind of something it is; three options:

- Feelings, affections (*pathê*; noun connected to verb 'to undergo' or 'to suffer')
 - E.g.: appetite, anger, fear, confidence, envy, joy, love, hate, longing, jealousy, pity, whatever implies pleasure or pain
 - So, some things that are going to count as *pathê* are sense-perceptions (e.g. a visual or auditory impression); but, presumably those aren't relevant to the question of what virtue is)
- Capacities, powers (*dunamis*; noun connected to verb 'to be able')
 - That in virtue of which we are capable of having feelings: e.g. the capacity to feel anger, be afraid and so on
 - So, also here are going to be things like sight, hearing, and so on
- States, dispositions (*hexeis*; connected to verb 'to have', 'to hold')
 - 'What we have when we are well or badly off in relation to feelings'
 - This is a little confusing, but the idea seems to be, irritability is a state or disposition of our capacity or power to feel anger in that being irritable means that you are prone to feeling anger too much

Virtues and vices are states or dispositions: argument by elimination

- Not Feelings
 - We don't say that someone is a good or bad person in virtue of the feelings they have
 - Similarly, we don't praise or blame someone just in virtue of having a feeling; we are interested in why they have it, how it came about, the way they have it and so on
 - * That might sound wrong; if someone, say, longs for a young child in a sexual way, we are inclined to blame the person without mitigating factors; but, to some degree we do think that just the feeling itself isn't under someone's control
 - We don't decide to feel a certain way; but virtues and vices either are or require decisions

- Not capacities or powers
 - We aren't good or bad, praised or blamed, insofar as we are simply capable or able to feel things

2.6

So, the genus of virtue is state or disposition of the soul; what is its differentiae (i.e. what makes it different from the other states or dispositions of the soul)?

Well, the conceptual truth about virtue is that virtue *causes* its possessor to be in a good state and perform their *erga* well; so, the virtue of a human being is that state or disposition that makes a human being perform his *erga* well

Here we get one of the more famous, and confusing, elements of Aristotle's *Ethics*: the 'mean relative to us'

READ 1105A27-1106B7

So, he clearly wants to distinguish:

- The mean in the object
 - This seems to be an arithmetical notion; what seems to be distinctive of it is that *all* you take into consideration is the extremes and average them
- The mean relative to us
 - This seems to differ insofar as it takes into consideration facts about the agent

Some issues

- Who is the 'us' to whom this mean is supposed to be relative?
 - Human beings?
 - Philosophy students?
- Is there anything concrete to this notion?

So, virtue aims at what is intermediate

- VOC is a matter of feelings and actions; and F&A admit of excess, deficiency, and intermediates
 - E.g. we be afraid, confident, get angry, feel pity, have appetites, pleasures, and pains too much and too little
 - And, being disposed to have such things too much or too little is a bad thing
- So, having such feelings: at right time, about right things, toward right people, for right end, in right way is intermediate

READ 1106b28-29: remember what this means, virtue is a disposition of the capacity to feel; what dispositions, the disposition to feel in the ways just adumbrated (right time, etc.)

READ 1107a1-4

So, while virtue is a mean state, insofar as it is the best state to be in it is an extreme (i.e. is the *best*); this suggests Aristotle is open to allowing for degrees

Some actions, when appropriately described, do not admit of a mean

Distinguish thick vs. thin (descriptive vs. evaluative)

- Feelings: spite, shamelessness, envy
- Actions: adultery, theft, murder

This is why he pointed out that, in a sense, virtues are extremes, because extremes don't have excesses or deficiencies

2.7

Need to apply it to particular cases (reference to 'this chart' suggests that these are lecture notes)

Range of object	Kind of emotion	Excess	Mean	Deficiency
Danger	Fear/Confidence	Rash	Courageous	Coward
Physical goods (e.g. food, drink, sex)	Lust etc.	Intemperate	Temperate	Insensible
Wealth	"Heart"	Wasteful	Generous	Ungenerous
Status	Spirit	Vain	Magnanimous	Pusillanimous
Respect	Temper (anger)	Irascible	Mild	Cold
Social intercourse	Sensibility	Buffoon	Witty	Boor

READ 1107b34: This is why A needs to claim that the trio applies in all cases; since there is not a common word for the person who is in an intermediate state w/r/t honor, the people at the extreme claim to be virtuous; but, we can see that they are at an extreme and, thus, not virtuous

2.8

Reiterates that mean is, in a sense, an extreme in comparison to excess and deficiency

And, in some cases, one of the extremes seems more like the intermediate

- Rashness is more like courage than cowardice is like courage
- Asceticism is more like temperance than gluttony

One interesting reason for this is that the extreme toward which people 'naturally drift' seems more opposed to the intermediate case (e.g. intemperance/gluttony is where people naturally drift, so it

seems more opposed to temperance than asceticism does)

2.9

It is hard work to be excellent, since there is only one midpoint, and everything else falls short

READ 1109a31: Something like advice; in habituating, it's best to tend towards the contrary extreme

Take stock of yourself; really attend to the pleasure and pain you experience in doing actions and feeling certain ways; for those where you tend not to hit the mean, drag yourself in the other direction, 'like in straightening bent wood'

And, above all, **BEWARE OF PLEASURE**