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Introduction to Philosophy

Theory of Value 6

Recapitulation

- Kant's core idea: morality should be based on universal rules which are acceptable to rationality by themselves, not because of the consequences
- The test: if you can will the universalized version of the reasons ('maxim') of your action, then the action is good > you must do it then, otherwise you're not rational.

Kant's Examples

- One cannot will **as a universal law** to end one's life out of self-love (because it will bring more bad than good), because the function of self-love is to preserve life
 - One cannot will to borrow money without returning it, because promising would become impossible
 - One cannot will to be lazy and not develop one's talent, because one is rational and thus cannot help to develop one's talents
 - One cannot will not to help someone in distress, because one would deprive oneself of help as well
- > What do you think of these examples? Do they serve Kant's purposes?

Kantianism does Better than Utilitarianism

- Kantianism does not have a problem of fairness
 - It follows from Kantianism that every person should be treated equally
 - For one cannot will as a universal law that some people are treated as worth more than other people > we are all rational
- Rawls (1921-2002) proposes to save utilitarianism by introducing a Kantian element to it:
 - The veil of ignorance: a community should make the rules in such a way that the group as a whole becomes happiest, but **with nobody knowing where they end up** in the group.

Aristotle

- The core idea of Aristotle: in our actions we have one goal – happiness = being a well-functioning human being
- Happiness consists in the activity of the rational part of the soul
- Because being rational is the characteristic activity of human beings
 - The function of human beings must be unique to them, because the function explains what makes human beings human beings, and not any other living being
 - Human beings share with other living beings the activities of growing and procreation, and of perception and moving around, but not that of rational activity
- But of course well-functioning is not merely rational activity, but rational activity done well = 'in accord with virtue'
 - Virtue = the capacity to do something well

Aristotle on the Virtues

- In each domain of action (dealing with pleasure, with money, with danger, with honor, with distribution among people) there is a virtue
 - This virtue is the capacity to reach the best decisions in that domain of action
 - These virtues are based on having acquired, on the basis of exercise and habituation, the right desires and emotions > even without thinking one already has the right inclinations for certain actions

Aristotle on the Virtues II

- In each domain of action the virtue is between two bad extremes/two vices
 - The one vice is the desire/inclination to want **too much**, the other vice is the desire/inclination to want **too little**
 - E.g. courage: too much fear – cowardice; too little fear – rashness; right amount of fear/awareness of danger – courage
 - E.g. moderation: too much desire for pleasure – immoderation; too little desire for pleasure – insensitivity; right amount of desire for pleasure – moderation
- This is not a test – like: the middle of the road is the best -, but rather a thesis about the emotional basis of virtues
 - It is connected with the idea that if we are in a 'in between state' as far as our desires/emotions are concerned, we are most susceptible to rational considerations and can reason without problem
 - A virtue consist in having the desires and emotions (and thus having certain values) in such a state that one is best positioned to engage in rational activity well, and thus achieve happiness.

Virtue and Deliberation

- Having a certain virtue, we have the right types of goals in our actions; but we need to figure out how to achieve this goal by deliberating
 - If we are good at deliberating, we have the intellectual virtue of *practical wisdom* = *phronêsis*
 - Again, it is easier to deliberate well if we have the character-virtues in place

The Scope of Aristotelian Ethics

- Aristotle's ethics is not about doing the morally right thing, not about consequences, but about what kind of life is the best life
 - Actions are right, because they fit/flow from the best type of life = the life of reason
 - Aristotle's ethics concerns every domain of life, not just one part of it, like morality or justice > justice is just one of the virtues in Aristotle
 - Aristotle's ethics is ego-centric: everybody is concerned with their own happiness
 - However, because we share rationality, we recognize the value of other human beings (more so if they are virtuous!) > it would not be rational to take better care of oneself.
 - Aristotle's ethics is not so much *prescriptive* (determining what actions/rules are good) as *descriptive*: it describes how adopting the right values (through having virtues) leads to well-functioning
- It is the job of individual human beings or, even better, to humanity, to find out what values are most conducive to a rational life > a very optimistic idea!



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