

Introspection, Contemporary Accounts, and Rebuttal: a Defence of Aristotle

Ethan Cardinal

Prof. D. Hampton

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Introduction:

Aristotle makes a distinction between intellectual virtues and moral virtues; this distinction is correct. The objective of this argumentative essay is to illustrate why Aristotle is correct in his distinction. In order to do so I will examine and evaluate the theory developed by his contemporaries known as two-faced soul theory. Additionally I will imagine opposing arguments and counter them.

The Distinction:

Aristotle created the division of virtue into two parts based on the two-part division of the soul. One has reason “as such in itself” and the other is “obedient to [reason] as child is to its father (Solopova 522).” This distinction can also be defined, as intellectual virtues are dispositions that are the related causal outcome of the acquisition of principles and rules, while moral virtues are habituated as practical wisdom and not reduced to rules and principles. Many of Aristotle’s contemporaries re-imagine and re-work this distinction; these are largely examined in the next section.

Two-faced soul theory:

Two-faced soul theory is used by contemporaries of Aristotle to interpret and justify the division between intellectual and moral virtues. Plotinus wrote the founding two-faced soul theory text in the third century. Every soul possesses something that inclines it downward toward the body and that which inclines it upward toward intellect (Bejczy 21). Soul is seen as intermediately creating a union between the immaterial world with the material world. Avicenna presents a more satisfactory form of the two-faced soul theory. He defines moral virtues as virtues the soul has due to what is below it; he also defines intellectual virtue as virtues the soul has due to what is above it. Through moral

virtues the soul is related to the body, which it rules. Through intellectual virtue the soul is related to superior things (principles and ideals) (Bejczy 23).

While not strictly confirming to the two-faced soul theory, Kilwardby and Peckham introduce contemporary accounts for Aristotle's distinction, which are immensely important. Kilwardby asserts that intellectual virtues imply pure reason, and moral virtues imply pure reason directed towards sensations (Bejczy 27). Another commentator Peckham proposes that intellectual virtues deal with knowledge of and delight in the highest good, while moral virtues consist of good behaviour regarding fellow man (Bejczy 28).

The two-faced soul theory and Kilwardby and Peckham accounts are the most important accounts for justifying Aristotle's distinction. They serve to reveal why the distinction is meaningful and refer to types of virtues that are different. It is important to point out that like in Aristotle's account the use of soul can be adapted to secular terminology such as "the self".

Opposition & Response:

Aristotle's distinction can be met with two oppositions. Claiming that he has incorrectly categorized/identified the types or that his distinction is unneeded and they relate to the same things.

The distinction feels very natural; through my own introspection it is clear to me that Aristotle distinction of moral virtues and intellectual virtues seem to identify a real difference. Throughout my life my actions take the form of moral and/or intellectual virtues, my awareness of this is result of reflection and introspection. I am aware of many virtuous things I do without any engaged thinking and that I do as a result of habituation,

for example I say “I love you to” my parents and girlfriend at the end of the night or phone calls without processing it. Perhaps the examples Aristotle provides: intellectual virtues - wisdom, understanding/intelligence, and prudence and moral virtues - liberty and temperance make his distinction more apparent (Solopova 522). Through his examples it is clear that moral and intellectual virtues deal with different things. For some this represents a convincing argument – a personal account and the appeal to natural and correct differences between the virtues using examples from Aristotle – but for the sceptical or rational thinker this defence is unacceptable. To continue one must turn to a contemporary account; which asserts that the two types of virtues are identical in substance but differ in their conception (Bejczy 38). Additionally the two-faced soul theory provides an account for the divisions of the types of virtues. The theory proposes that we are drawn to things below us and above us and this division of the self accounts for moral and intellectual virtues respectively. Overall through introspection and the contemporary account of distinctions it is clear that the two types of virtues do not describe the same thing and are needed.

To start addressing the other the opposition – Aristotle incorrectly categorizes/identifies the types of virtues - addressed prior we must first we clean up the terms. Aristotle constantly refers to a soul; this can and should be interpreted in a secular way, so replace soul with “self”. Even with this secular interpretation is difficult to counter this opposition primarily because Aristotle contradicts himself. He gives three different accounts of how virtues relates to the soul: in the first book of *Nichomacean Ethics* the rational part of the soul is double, in the sixth book of *Nichomacean Ethics* intellectual virtues belong to both parts of the rational soul which are called the scientific

and calculative faculties while the moral virtues belong to the non-rational, in the second book of *Eudamenian Ethics* intellectual and moral virtues both belong to the reasonable part which itself is divided into part that “commands” and the part that “listens” (Solopova 522). Through these contradictions there is not a singular account of the distinctions. But this is not a problematic as it appears, all his contradictions are in regards to what part of the soul the virtues relate too, so when we reject a notion of the soul the contradictions lose importance. Given our knowledge of the brain to today we would say that parts of the self – such as the virtues Aristotle lists – could best be accounted for by brain states. Regardless of that we reject the soul and the attempts to identify how virtues relate to it. With a rejection of Aristotle’s account of the parts of soul there is no longer the errors in classification that plagued his theory before. Additionally with the use of the two-faced soul theory and my reply to the other opposition it has been made clear that the two types of virtues are different and meaningful.

Conclusion:

Aristotle is correct in his distinction between moral and intellectual virtues. Although initially the distinction is hard to grasp, it is made clear when one examines his contemporaries who introduce the two-faced soul theory. This account provides meaning and justification for his distinction. Additionally this paper examines two oppositions to his distinction – to counter these I use introspection, contemporary accounts including two-faced soul theory and the abandonment of his classifications of soul division (which included contradictions).

References

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