

Capitalism and Morality

ARISTOTLE AND AQUINAS: INTRINSIC MORALITY VERSUS GOD'S MORALITY

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Throughout history, there have been many different philosophies regarding the way in which one should live his life. Many of these philosophers have agreed that there is a greater being, God, who causes us to want to act virtuously. How one should live this virtuous life is the subject to which many philosophers dispute about. This is because people have many different views on what the virtues are and how to act in order to obtain these virtues. With all of the different manners in which one sees virtues, it is difficult to truly know which ones are good and which ones are not. Aristotle and Aquinas both see God as the highest being and believe that the highest life is one that acts for the sake of heeding to this highest being. However, their views on exactly how God is are different. Aristotle was not a religious person, but did recognize God as the highest being. He however, did not perceive God as the compassionate being that Aquinas did. And, he did not believe that one was going to meet this higher being after death as Aquinas did. He thought that being a virtuous person was a good enough reason to be moral. Aquinas believed that one should be moral because God was leading him to a moral life. Although Aristotle and Aquinas had differing views on their God, they both believed that one had to live a moral and flourishing life to be happy.

Aristotle was born in Stagira in the year 384 B.C. When he was seventeen, he was sent to Athens, the intellectual center of the world to study. From here, he studied under Plato. After Plato's death, he moved to Macedonia to become a tutor for Alexander the Great. When he returned to the Platonic school, he felt that he did not have a place there any longer. He eventually constructed his own school of thought at a place called Lyceum. Soon after Alexander's death in 323 B.C., Aristotle fled Athens because he was charged with impiety just as Socrates had been. He soon died in 322 B.C.

Aristotle was considered a realist because he moved Plato's realm of the forms back onto Earth. He said that sense experience, which is found inherent in our world, was the starting point of all knowledge. However, Aristotle as well as Plato believed that the one thing that separates man from all other living organisms is man's ability to reason.

Aristotle believed that there are three parts to the human soul. The first is an irrational one that can also be present in animals. This is the vegetative or nutritional virtue. This virtue allows humans and plants to have proper nutrition and to grow. The next part is the appetite or moral virtue. This virtue is both irrational and rational at the same time. This part controls one's emotions and desires. Both animals and human beings can also possess the appetite. Aristotle recognized that animals, as well as human beings, can have desires, but because the appetite is also rational, it allows one to control the desires that animals cannot control. The part that distinguishes humans from animals is the third part of the soul. This

part is strictly rational and is called the calculative part. It allows humans to have intellectual virtues such as reason.

Along with the ability to reason, God also gave human beings many other emotions that have a tendency to sway the way in which people live their lives. Because man can make reasonable decisions for himself, he is said to be responsible for his own actions. Due to this, it is up to man to be able to live the kind of life that will lead him to be like the highest being, God. Human beings are only able to acquire this virtuous life via action. Aristotle believed that humans needed to strive toward the highest life that is possible. This life was only possible when human beings pursue good rather than pleasure. In Aristotle's view, the good was what was good for each individual. This good life is one of earthly happiness or flourishing that can be achieved by way of reason and the acquisition of virtue however, these virtues can only be acquired through habituation. Human flourishing can only occur if a person is being virtuous. When doing what one wants to do is the same thing as what one ought to do, one is able to flourish happily. However, moral weakness is not a good virtue. When someone does something that they know is wrong, yet do not follow their reason that allows them to know that it is wrong, they are said to have moral weakness. Being virtuous can be easy for man to do because he is led by his egoism. He wants to be the best possible human being that he can. By being moral, a man is able to be the best possible person, and to build on his ego. In response to his constantly growing ego, man attempts to be moral so that he is able to constantly be more virtuous than another is. By attaining happiness, human beings are able to reach the moral life, which Aristotle referred to as the "Good Life". Aristotle said that although man is being led by his ego, he is an intelligent being that will use his practical wisdom to pursue the entities needed to live the good life. His egoism, however, cannot interfere with his friendships with other human beings.

Man, being naturally social, must have friendships with other human beings. Aristotle once said that, "Without friends no one would choose to live, though he had all other goods." By living in a polis, human beings are able to gain friendships and secure all of the other necessities such as food and shelter that they would need to survive. Without the benefit of friends, man would not be fulfilling his need to be social, and therefore not be able to become virtuous. The goodness of the polis depends on who is living in it and how they act in the company of one another. In order for the polis to be good, it must also be run by a righteous government. Aristotle saw that to be a good citizen, one must take an active role in the government. He believed that the rule of law was higher than the rule of an individual citizen because men can have private interests that they are trying to establish, while the law does not. In Aristotle's view, the role of the government should be limited and should only use force when first acted upon.

Only when human beings have reached this highest life, are they said to have reached eudaimonia. In order to reach this eudaimonia, one must have obtained self-perfection. Nevertheless, acquiring this self-perfection is harder said than done. In order to reach self-perfection, one must fulfill all of the demands that allow him to be happy. These are, living in a polis, having friendships, being a good citizen, and being active in government. Once all of these are satisfied, and satisfied well, one can truly live the life of eudaimonia. However, this life is not possible for all human beings. Aristotle believed that slavery was a natural circumstance. He said, "Some men are adapted by nature to be the physical instruments of others." This statement allows one to know that Aristotle did not believe that all men were equal beings. Thus, one can see that even though Aristotle saw that some men were above all other living organisms, he did not believe that all men were.

Aristotle also believed that to be moral, one must find a mean between two vices. He said that there was a vice of deficiency, which is having too little of one vice and a vice of excess, which is having too much of one vice. The middle of these vices was the virtuous mean. Courage would be an example of the virtuous mean. Being a coward would fall under the vice of deficiency category while being rash would fall under the vice of excess category. Therefore, one must have moderation between the two extremes.

To be able to obtain these virtues in the proper form, one must be able to control their desires. This is done by using the calculative part of the soul.

Aquinas was born in 1224 to noble parents. They sent him away to study at the Monastery of Monte Cassino to be educated for a career in the Church. He was then sent to the University of Naples where he was first introduced to the writings of Aristotle. Because of his intense studies and following of Aristotle, Aquinas was considered an Aristotelian. Next, he joined the Dominican Order, the Order of Friars Preachers, against his parents' wishes. He was punished for this by being locked in his family's castle. Once he was released, he professed his vows to the Order of Friars Preachers. After the University first denied him of it, because of a fight that the Dominicans refused to join, Aquinas eventually earned his theology degree. At one point in time, he said that he had a mystical experience from God that had told him that all the writing that he had done in his life was "mere straw". This caused him to stop writing altogether. He died in March 1274.

In regard to God, Aquinas saw that one must live a life that allows him to eventually reach the Supreme Being. To reach this Supreme Being, one must have a belief in him. He is able to do this by knowing the five ways in which Aquinas proves that there is a God. He believed that these five ways would doubtlessly ascertain this higher being. The first way is called the argument from motion. He stated, as did Aristotle, that an object that is in motion is put into motion by another object or force. Consequently, he believed that the entire movement must have been begun by some force. This force was God, the "Unmoved Mover". The second way in which he proved that there must be a God is called the Causation of Existence. He stated, as all know, that no object can create itself. Therefore, there must have been something, God, who was the first to create things. The third way is called the Contingent and Necessary Objects. He saw that there are two types of objects that exist in the universe. They are contingent beings and necessary beings. A contingent being cannot exist without a necessary being causing its existence. The necessary being that is able to do this is God. The fourth way is called the Argument from Degrees and Perfection. He saw that things have varying degrees of quality. One is able to tell the differences between these degrees by judging the thing against an object that has the perfect quality, God. The final way is called the Argument from Intelligent Design. By being a part of the universe, one can know that it must have been created by an intelligent designer, God. This is evident because of the intelligent life that is in our universe. If it weren't for an intelligent designer, one would not be able to deduce that there is a God. In these five arguments, Aquinas is able to show that the existence of God is an argument that is hard to be disproved, and should thus be followed.

The reason that these must be known is because Aquinas believed that human beings lived to gain knowledge to attain the highest good, eudaimonia. To satisfy this constant desire to gain this knowledge, one must know philosophy. He viewed philosophy to be hand in hand with theology therefore, one must know both studies. However, one should note that it is very difficult to do this because philosophy often times goes against many religious beliefs. Aquinas also saw this as a problem, but solved the problem by stating that God will lead everyone in the right direction as long as he is followed.

Like Aristotle, Aquinas believed that human beings live for a telos or end, which is eudaimonia. Aquinas saw that goodness was the reason in which one was led by. The only problem in this was that everyone has a different opinion as to what exactly is good and what is not. Human beings have a natural ability to be rational that all other living organisms do not have. This natural ability allows humans to act knowingly and willingly when doing something. Because of this ability, the human being that is able to perform the task properly will be considered good.

Aquinas however, believed that God was the soul creator of the world and that we should look to him to find out the divine meaning of life and how to act to obtain that. He did believe in our ability to reason, but he did not believe that it was the one thing that led us as Aristotle did. He also saw that the highest

virtue that humans can obtain was not intellectual as Aristotle thought it was. He said that the highest excellence that the soul was able to obtain was theological. Similarly like Aristotle, Aquinas believed one was able to obtain this virtue via habit. He also said that human beings possess a type of metaphysical soul that is persuaded by God. He said that to reach our end, we must follow this soul and follow the life that God has devised for us. God possesses an “eternal law” to govern the world according to his perfect reasoning. Because human beings have reason acquired from God, we also share in this natural law, and this is how we are able to know what is good. Aquinas believed that all human action should be stemmed from the pursuing of God. He believed that the life that one leads should be based upon the reason that one is intrinsically given through reason via God.

Aristotle and Aquinas have many similar thoughts on the way that the human person should live. Both of them believe that humans are rational beings. They also believe that because humans are rational they can follow their instincts and live a life of moral goodness. Aquinas however, believed that God was leading human beings to a rational, moral life, while Aristotle believed that being moral was naturally inherent in human beings. Although they had different views as to why human beings should want to live a good life, they both agreed that the one thing that humans should strive for is eudaimonia. Aquinas, being an Aristotelian, agreed with many of the ways in which Aristotle viewed the human person. However, where he diverged was his belief in God. He took the teachings of Aristotle and added God to them so that they would allow for more acceptances from our Christian society.

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