Discussion Board

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# Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics

In his discussion about ethics, virtues, and vice, Aristotle examines the ways Individuals are held responsible for their choices and actions by exploring the idea of moral responsibility. He argues that human beings can be praised or blamed on the basis of their character dispositions, traits, or their actions. Aristotle views human decision to be a certain form of desire that occurs as a result of his/her deliberation and reflects that Individual’s personal concept of virtue. Therefore, Aristotle proposes that such an Individual is deserving of blame or praise for his/her action insofar as those actions are performed on a voluntary basis. Aristotle’s view is based upon the notion that each voluntary character trait, disposition, or action is based on two fundamental features; the control condition and the epistemic condition. The control condition requires that the character trait or action should originate in the agent and on basis of that trait, the agent is free to decide whether to retain that trait or perform an action based upon it. Any external compulsion would violate the control condition. The epistemic condition requires that the agent should be aware of what he/she is trying to bring about or make happen. Hence, for Aristotle, virtues, and by that condition vices, are voluntary because Individuals themselves are responsible for the states their characters are in (SEP, 2014). This is because the habits or states of an Individual’s character stems from his/her repetition of particular types of action. Therefore, both virtues and vices are voluntary in nature and because of it, it would not be rational to praise someone for performing noble acts, but blaming external circumstances, and not holding someone morally responsible, for performing base acts.

# St. Augustine's Confessions

In Confessions, St. Augustine attempts to reconcile a physical formulation of time with biblical descriptions of Creation. In doing so, Augustine proposed that when the Heavens and the Earth were created by God, He also created time itself. Augustine attributed the creation of the World and time itself to a word that God spoke. However, for an eternal deity, words cannot die like that of morals, therefore Augustine suggests that God may have created time before the Heavens and the Earth so that the Speech of God occurred within the motions of time. However, time does not physically exist in the material world as a chair or rock does but exists within the conscious mind. It is something that human beings know that exists, and are familiar within it, but cannot adequately describe or define it. Nevertheless, human beings continually experience time as moving into one of its phases: past, present, or future. Aquinas views time as a created entity by God and it is a means by which other created beings exist. As time is experienced by human consciousness, therefore an Individual’s temporal perception of the future and the past is also dependent upon that consciousness. However God is eternal and has atemporal foreknowledge about everything, therefore events which appear to humans as successively occurring in time are part of God’s timeless plans. In that sense, it can be said that God plan may constrain but not eliminate the free will of humanity. Human free will exists within the boundaries of God’s timeless plans which are independent of the distinction between present, past, and future.

# Thomas Aquinas' Summa Theologiae

Thomas Aquinas holds that there are certain theological truths which human reason alone cannot reach, such as faith in eternal salvation; however, there are other certain truths associated with religion that are attainable without faith but in an incomplete form. Aquinas saw reason to provide justification for faith and can be used to prove the existence of God and any apparent conflicts between reason and faith are resolvable in principle. Any philosophical argument that conflicts with faith would either not be sound in itself or the thesis under attack by the argument may not necessarily be a part of sound faith. Thus any such philosophical arguments can be answered and refuted within their own terms without the need to bring in concepts from faith or revelation. Aquinas saw reason to be potentially able to reach objective truth, however, it is faith that perfects reason and helps the agent not go astray. Therefore, it can be suggested that any lines of thought developed in guidance of revelation are attainable through reason but not necessarily so in the absence of guiding revelation. However, Aquinas still holds that the mortal intellect is not able to comprehend God an object, but still use that intellect to get an indirect grasp of the idea of God’s existence. Since observing the effects of an event can lead one to grasp its cause, similarly, one who observes reality may use his/her intellect to understand the existence of God by means of analogical knowledge (Ceglie, 2016). Nevertheless, the finer aspects of faith such as the Incarnation or Trinity lie beyond the intellect’s capacity and lie within the realm of faith.

# Descartes' Meditations

In Mediations, Descartes argues that information that one receives through his/her senses are not necessarily reliable or accurate. Descartes skepticism was based on his dream argument wherein he proposed that everything that an Individual comes to believe may be false as may have been generated by a dream. Since dreams occur regularly in people and are highly similar experiences to that of real life, therefore it is possible that the objects an Individual sees in front of him/her may not be real but a product of his dreams. The proposition was based on the claim that real life and dreams can potentially have the same content and any close similarity between the two experiences may deceive one into believing that they have experienced something when they may have, in fact, been dreaming about it. A closely tied argument was Descartes' evil demon hypothesis wherein he proposed that anything that an Individual comes to believe may have been a deceptive idea fed into his/her brain by a malevolent demon. Through these arguments, Descartes indicated the possibility of the five senses being prone to deception. However, it is commonly known that experiences in dreams are scenarios that we imagine, and thus, our real-life beliefs may not be necessarily undermined by what we see in our dreams. Descartes argument was based on the presumption of the dream world and real world being the same to undermine the reliability of the sense, however, modern scientific knowledge and observations all stem from the same senses. However, there are recent scientific theories related to quantum mechanics that indicate a lack of trust in the senses and suggest that objective reality may be an illusion.

# References

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