

## Aristotle's Definition of Moral Virtue: Genus and Differentia

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### Abstract

Under the definition of moral virtue to Aristotle mainly from the “genus” and “differentia” moral virtue of two aspects. Define the essence of a thing is the concept of the provisions of the general is the most classic is the “definition =genus + differentia”. That is the definition of a thing explanation, first find out what kind of belongs to the concept that this type of thing universality; and which also have their respective different things or that they own feature, this is the case worse. In a nutshell is, the first thing to classify, that is, he has the universality, and then again to its unique characteristics, which are the personalization will be summarized thus distinguished.

**Key words:** Moral virtue; Virtue; Genus; Differentia

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### INTRODUCTION

Aristotle analyzed genus of virtue first when he defined moral virtue in his *The Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle think that virtues from the soul, the soul is the passion, ability, character of three parts, so virtue is inevitable is one of the three. Aristotle made a clear classification to the soul that soul has three parts: irrational, rational, and there are both rational and irrational. Everything has a soul. Also a part of the human soul is non-rational that same as animals and plants. The irrational is almost all an

instinctive drive. As part of the soul is rational, is a kind of cognition, is also a part of being human peculiarly, is that people of reason. Besides, there are also part of both rational and irrational, also means belonging rational and irrational, this part usually referred to as “desire”.

### 1. THE GENUS OF MORAL VIRTUE: IT IS A STATE OF CHARACTER, NOT A PASSION NOR A CAPACITY

Irrational part of the soul is not virtue. Rational part of the soul is intellectual virtue. Divided into rational and irrational part of the soul is moral virtue. Moral virtue is derived from will part of the soul. Moral virtue is derived from the soul. And the soul has three parts that passion, ability and personality. It is only one of them, then after excluding two and the rest is the moral virtue that belongs to the “genus”.

Actions, then, are called just and temperate when they are such as the just or the temperate man would do; but it is not the man who does these that is just and temperate, but the man who also does them *as* just and temperate men do them. It is well said, then, that it is by doing just acts that the just man is produced, and by doing temperate acts the temperate man; without doing these would have even a prospect of becoming good. But most people do not do these, but take refuge in theory and think they are being philosophers and will become good in this way, behaving somewhat like patients who listen attentively to their doctors, but do none of the things they are ordered to do. As the latter will not be made well in body by such a course of treatment, the former will not be made well in soul by such a course of philosophy.

Next we must consider what virtue is. Since things that are found in the soul are of three kinds—passions, capacities, states of character—virtue must be one of these. By passions I mean appetite, anger, fear, confidence,

envy, joy, friendly feeling, hatred, longing, emulation, pity, and in general the feelings that are accompanied by pleasure or pain; by capacities the things in virtue of which we are said to be capable of feeling these, e.g. of becoming angry or being pained or feeling pity; by states of character the things in virtue of which we stand well or badly with reference to the passions, e.g. with reference to anger we stand badly if we feel it violently or too weakly, and well if we feel it in an intermediate way; and similarly with reference to the other passions.

Now neither the virtues nor the vices are *passions*, because we are not called good or bad on the ground of our passions, but are so-called on the ground of our virtues and our vices, and because we are neither praised nor blamed for our passions (for the man who feels fear or anger is not praised, nor is the man who simply feels anger blamed, but the man who feels it in a certain way), but for our virtues and our vices we *are* praised or blamed.

Again, we feel anger and fear without choice, but the virtues are modes of choice or involve choice. Further, in respect of the passions we are said to be moved, but in respect of the virtues and the vices we are said not to be moved but to be disposed in a particular way. For these reasons also they are not *capacities*; for we are neither called good or bad, nor praised or blamed, for the simple capacity of feeling the passions; again, we have the capacities by nature, but we are not made good or bad by nature; we have spoken of this before (Aristotle, 2003). If, then, the virtues are neither passions nor capacities, all that remains is that they should be *states of character*. Thus we have stated what virtue is in respect of its genus.

Passion refers to the desire, envy, anger, fear, confidence, happy, friendly feeling, hatred, desire, envy, compassion, which is feelings associated with pleasure or pain generally. Passion is a kind of emotion, emotion is a "genus" of passion. And differentia of passion is a feeling accompanying by pleasure or pain. And ability is a power that able to feel those passions, such as anger, pain, and pity. The ability to actually refers to the ability to have passion, it is the basis of passion. So, passion and ability are connected. And this ability is not an ordinary ability, but passion-based capability.

Character, is relationship with these our feelings of good or bad. For example, we are in a bad relationship with the feelings of anger, when we are too weak or excessive anger. We are in a good relationship with this feeling of anger, when anger appropriately. We are in a bad relationship with a fury relationship, if anger is moderate, we will in good relations with this feeling. In other words, beyond a certain degree of anger is evil, on the contrary, if we are in an appropriate way is a kind of good. Other feelings may also and so on. Aristotle said: "the virtue and vicious so are not passion". We feel good is good, we feel the evil is a vicious, so corresponding virtue is vicious, corresponding good is evil.

Virtue, then, is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e. the mean relative to us, this being determined by reason, and by that reason by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it. Now it is a mean between two vices, that which depends on excess and that which depends on defect; and again it is a mean because the vices respectively fall short of or exceed what is right in both passions and actions, while virtue both finds and chooses that which is intermediate. Hence in respect of what it is, i.e. the definition which states its essence, virtue is a mean, with regard to what is best and right an extreme.

Virtue is a character, but also a vicious character; Virtue is a kind of the behavior of the intermediate, is a kind of good character, and vicious is a violation of the intermediate behavior, is a kind of evil character. Virtue and vicious refer to is a kind of long-term habit of having constant character. Therefore, virtue is not equal to the good, vicious also is not equal to evil. One or a few good thing does not represent a virtue and do not represent the same or a few bad things can not represent vicious. Definitely not the good and virtue, evil and vicious confused. Emotion itself cannot be based on good and evil, only lay on the basis of moral passion can call it the good, the intermediate is laid on the emotional is good, and becomes evil. We can't accord to a person's fear, desire, hatred, friendly, happy emotion and to blame or praise, these emotions are everyone has, so has nothing to do with the moral emotion. Aristotle explained: "we feel fear or anger has nothing to do with choice", because of fear or anger is a kind of ability, it is not selected is instinctive, "but virtue is to choose the right way, virtue consists of choice".

Therefore, virtue is a choice model, and the ability to feel fear and anger has nothing to do with choice. You should use what kind of way to judge the virtue and vicious? The way of moral judgment is the intermediate, but the vicious way of judgment is excessive and less. We will not just because of have the ability to feel the passion and praise or blame, also can't so call good or evil. And we are born with this ability, and virtue is not born with, not from naturally, virtue is a kind of habit, is a kind of intermediate habits, good habits; and also a vicious habit, a habit of excessive or less, evil habits, life is not down with this ( good or evil) habits, virtue is acquired or vicious form. Well, Aristotle virtue is excluded emotions, ability, so it can only be a character. So, Aristotle excluded the virtue is emotion, is the ability, so it can be to character. There are a lot of character, but virtue is a kind of what kind of character? Only to determine such a question, make a virtue the definition of "genus+ differentia", to be able to grasp the essence of virtue.

We must, however, not only make this general statement, but also apply it to the individual facts. For among statements about conduct those which are general

apply more widely, but those which are particular are more true, since conduct has to do with individual cases, and our statements must harmonize with the facts in these cases. We may take these cases from our table. With regard to feelings of fear and confidence courage is the mean; of the people who exceed, he who exceeds in fearlessness has no name (many of the states have no name), while the man who exceeds in confidence is rash, and he who exceeds in fear and falls short in confidence is a coward. With regard to pleasures and pains—not all of them, and not so much with regard to the pains—the mean is temperance, the excess self-indulgence. Persons deficient with regard to the pleasures are not often found; hence such persons also have received no name. But let us call them “insensible”.

With regard to giving and taking of money the mean is liberality, the excess and the defect prodigality and meanness. In these actions people exceed and fall short in contrary ways; the prodigal exceeds in spending and falls short in taking, while the mean man exceeds in taking and falls short in spending. (At present we are giving a mere outline or summary, and are satisfied with this; later these states will be more exactly determined.) (Aristotle, 2009). With regard to money there are also other dispositions—a mean, magnificence (for the magnificent man differs from the liberal man; the former deals with large sums, the latter with small ones), an excess, tastelessness and vulgarity, and a deficiency, niggardliness; these differ from the states opposed to liberality, and the mode of their difference will be stated later. Again, it is possible to fail in many ways (for evil belongs to the class of the unlimited, as the Pythagoreans conjectured, and good to that of the limited), while to succeed is possible only in one way (for which reason also one is easy and the other difficult—to miss the mark easy, to hit it difficult); for these reasons also, then, excess and defect are characteristic of vice, and the mean of virtue.

To illustrate virtue is not only a character, but also that it is a kind of what kind of character, how to distinguish it from other personality. The meaning of “virtue” is excellent and outstanding, the essence of something is to make it different from other things. So, it can be said that every virtue or prominent role in making such remarkable things in a perfect state, and make it run well. For example, even if the eye is the eye of virtue to become the eyes and make it in excellent condition; because, by virtue of the eye so that we see very clearly. That is to say, the eyes are virtuous, a good pair of eyes is not sick and is in a good state of its external manifestation is to see something clearly and see clearly that the eyes of Germany or excellence and outstanding. The virtue of a knife is sharp, cutting things. The nature of the housing is livable, suitable for people to live is the virtue of housing; it is important to note that in this case, the “virtue”, does not mean moral virtue, it is about the general virtue. Aristotle

is seeking the moral virtue by general virtue. Human virtues and other virtues should have in common it is that people can be in a good condition and do their own thing.

## 2. THE DIFFERENTIA OF MORAL VIRTUE: IT IS DISPOSITION TO CHOOSE THE “INTERMEDIATE”

“Genus” is common, especially the nature of virtue, that is, Virtue “is a differentia.” In each of the sustained separable things, there are three possible, too little, too much or equivalent, or in this case is the content itself, either for us (people); Equal is a middle way between excessive and less. Was moderate refers to the distance between each extreme equal distances, this distance is a “one” and all the circumstances are the same; relative to our people, but also moderation is neither too little, it is not “a” and not all people are the same. For example, 10 is more (too) and 2 is small (less than), intermediate 6 is moderate middle. However, for people are not so simple, is not the simple addition and subtraction can be calculated.

The so-called “moderate” is not the same for everyone, “moderate” it is constantly changing. “Amount” There are three that is excessive, less appropriate and the three “quantity” should be the amount of the main word, what kind of “quantity” reflects its “quality” mean? The main word here is “moral virtue” three “quantity” to reflect in its “quality” (moral virtues, the nature of virtue, reflect the quantity and quality) is moderate. “Quality” that is the essence, Aristotle defined as the search for a predetermined nature of moral virtue “quality” is “moderate”. This refers to moral virtue; it is a passion and behavior related behavior among passion and there is excessive, less and intermediate. The moral virtue should insist on appropriate behavior and emotional “quality”, otherwise it is not a virtue but a vicious; since moral virtue is moderate, so malignant or abuse is excessive and less. For example, fear, confidence, desire, anger, compassion, joy may be excessive or less, both of which are not so good a situation; but should be, for in due time, to the appropriate object, the right people, by appropriate incentives, in an appropriate way to deal with or treat these emotions, that is, this is the virtue of the properties of the middle way.

“For a similar behavior also have excessive, less and moderate.” A behavior also has it is excessive, less and moderate, behavior if, as a subject, from the analysis on “quantity” is the three conditions. Moral virtue refers to the behavior.

Virtue is associated with passion and emotion, behavior, and in our own actions and emotions, excessive is a form of failure, as is also a form of failure, and moderate is laudable, because it is a form of success; praise and success are moral attribute.

A brave behavior, it should be able to brave to do one thing, if did not complete the fail this behavior may not be brave; brave on the results should be successful. Moral behavior is praised by people's behavior, is successful, this may be modest can use praise or success. In contrast here is talking about right and wrong should be construed as legal and illegal. Unfair is also varied (as the Pythagoreans imagined evil is unlimited, but the good is limited), just as the road is only one, and there are many improper way, which is why success it is difficult, it is easy to fail. That is because it is excessive and less evil characteristics, and moderation is the virtue characteristics. So virtue is a choice of quality, present in relative moderate among us, and this is appropriate logs provided. Virtue is the middle of the two kinds of evil that excessive and less. In the emotion and practice, and the evil or not due, or more than, virtue is to find and select the appropriate justified. The answer is, not all of the feelings and practice have a moderate state. There are some actions and feelings, its name means evil. Such as shameless, envy, and murder, stealing and adultery in behavior. Because they themselves are evil, not due to excessive and less to them. In these matters, legitimate and illegitimate does not depend on whether we are with the right person, at the right time or place to do it in an appropriate way, but just do these

things are improper. That is similar to such behavior does not exist in a moderate amount of excessive and moderate, there is no excessive proportionate and less modest.

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## CONCLUSION

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“So, virtue is a kind of intermediate, its purpose is to moderate.” Aristotle said is very reasonable. But think about it is not entirely so, some successful acts did not necessarily have the virtue, and the failure of some behavior is not necessarily without virtue; some failed, not praised behavior may also be virtuous behavior, even noble act. Therefore, it is determined whether an act of virtue can not simply look at whether the success or acclaim, praised the success or just a standard to judge behavior, but not the only criteria; it also includes a method for judging the ability of evil, when people it can be determined when the evil, but also be able to better judge the good.

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