

Self-Constitution: Action, Identity, and Integrity
Lecture One: The Metaphysics of Normativity
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Normativity = the grounds of a demand's authority and the psychological mechanisms of its enforcement

Necessitation = the psychological manifestation of normativity

Two Views of Virtue

1. The miserable sinner view – virtue as the repression of desire
2. The Good Dog view – virtue as the enthusiastic manifestation of perfect training

What they have in common: necessitation is a sign of something wrong

The Nature of Action

Mill's view: action is production

Aristotle's view: action is distinct from production and is its own end

Aristotle's view of why a good person does a good action:

- the act is done for a certain end
- the action is chosen for its own sake
- the action is chosen for the sake of the noble

Reconciliation:

Aristotelian logos of an action: “to do this act on this occasion for the sake of this end”

this whole thing is done for its own sake and because it is noble

Kantian maxim of an action: “to do this act for the sake of this end”

this whole thing is done for its own sake and from duty

Acts = committing suicide, making a false promise

Actions = committing suicide in order to avoid misery, making a false promise in order to get some ready cash

Two views of asking for the reason:

- You are asking for something outside of and behind the action which causes or grounds it, for the sake of which it is done. The purpose gives the reason for the act.
- You are asking for an explication of the action that makes it intelligible that the agent thought it worth doing for its own sake. The purpose supplies the missing part of the maxim. The reason is not something behind the maxim, but something embodied in it.

Sketch of the thesis of the Lectures:

Action requires agency

Agency requires unity of identity

Unity of identity is not prior to action, because identity in the relevant sense – personal or practical identity - is constituted by action and choice

>You constitute yourself as the author of your actions

>Action is self-constitution

>Good actions constitute us well, that is unify us, and bad ones badly. Since unity is required for agency, and agency for actions, good actions are more fully actions than bad ones.

Necessitation = the work of self-constitution

A General Theory of Normativity:

Normative principles are principles of unification

Aristotle's metaphysics

Function = purpose or characteristic activity that makes an object what it is

Matter = parts or materials from which an object is made

Form = arrangement of the matter that makes the function possible

Constitutive Standard = normative standard given by the form

The normative authority of constitutive standards: an object that ignores them to an extreme degree literally disintegrates.

Short of the extreme degree: conceptual space for defective objects and performances

Defect = object or performance that fails to meet a constitutive standard

The Paradox of Self-Constitution

How can we make ourselves unless we are already there?

Aristotle's metaphysics extended to living things

Function of a living thing = self-maintenance, to be and keep being what it is

Matter of a living thing = fragile and in need of replacement

Form of a living thing = arrangement that enables it to keep replacing its own matter and so rebuilding itself

> Form of a living thing = self-constitution (a living thing just is an activity of self-constitution)

Why the paradox doesn't arise: the constitution of personal identity is a form of life