

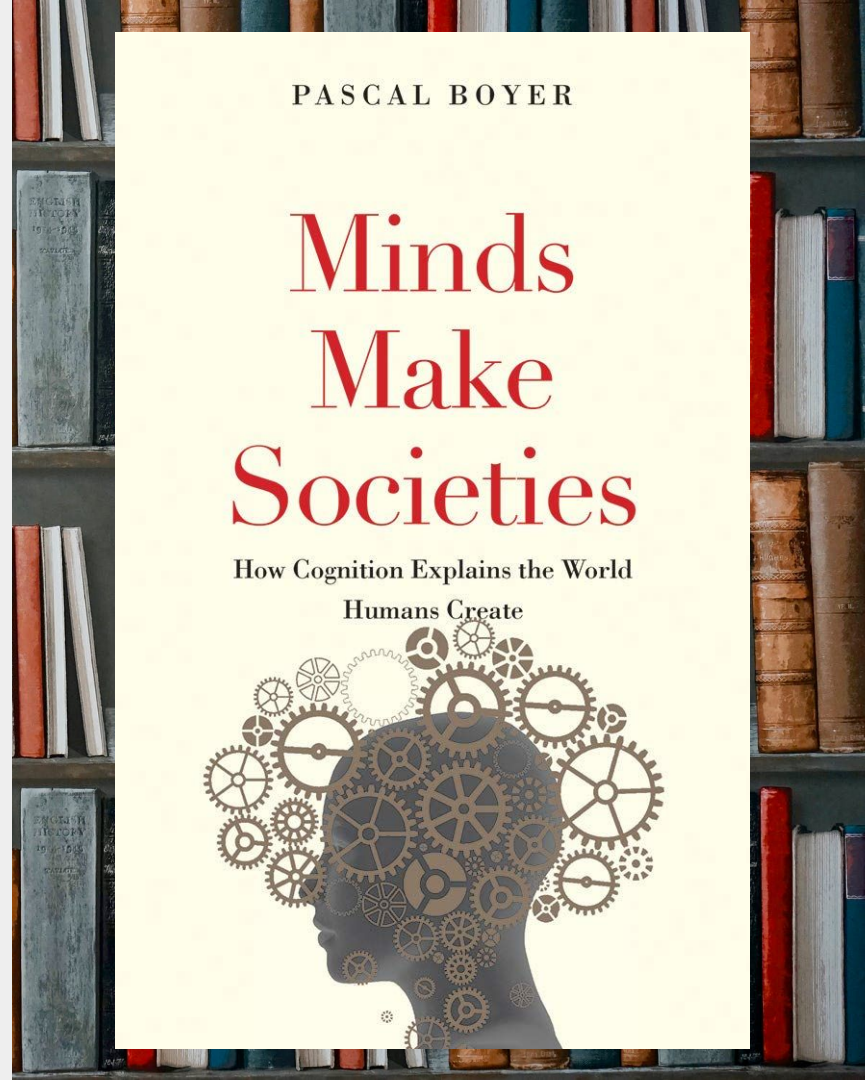


Virtues and Vices



In *Minds Make Societies*, Pascal Boyer (2018) discusses the complications behind trying to understand the phenomenon of religion.

Related to the issues concerning this course, Pascal discusses that religious beliefs endured a radical shift in focus between the 7th and 2nd century CE...



Boyer points out that what we commonly take to be necessary features of religion (like a doctrine, clergy, and the cultivation of a soul that must be saved) are recent developments that only appeared with the development of large-scale state societies with an extensive division of labor (see Boyer 2018: 108).





In fact, these notions of souls and salvation did not emerge until what the philosopher Karl Jaspers calls the Axial Age (600 BCE-100 CE).

“These new movements emphasized cosmic justice, the notion that the world overall is fair, [and] they described the gods themselves as interested in human morality” (Boyer 2018: 108).

“The most important theme, which to this day shapes our understanding of religious activities, is the notion of the soul, as a highly individual component of the person that could be made better or purer and, crucially, could be ‘saved.’

The doctrines centered on the many ways one could eschew corruption or perdition of the soul” (Boyer 2018: 109).





“So the Axial Age matters, because the movements that appeared at that point in history had a considerable influence on subsequent religions.

Indeed, the so-called world religions of today are *all* descendants of these movements”(Boyer 2018: 109-110; emphasis added).

If we want to use religion and “Big Gods” as an explanation for collective action, then we’d have to understand why “Big Gods” (who care about your soul) arose during the Axial Age...

Note:

“A striking aspect of this development is that religious innovations appeared in the most prosperous societies of the time, and among the privileged classes in these societies. Gautama was a prince, Indian and then Chinese Buddhism spread primarily among the aristocracy, and Stoicism, too, was an aristocratic movement” (Boyer 2018: 110).



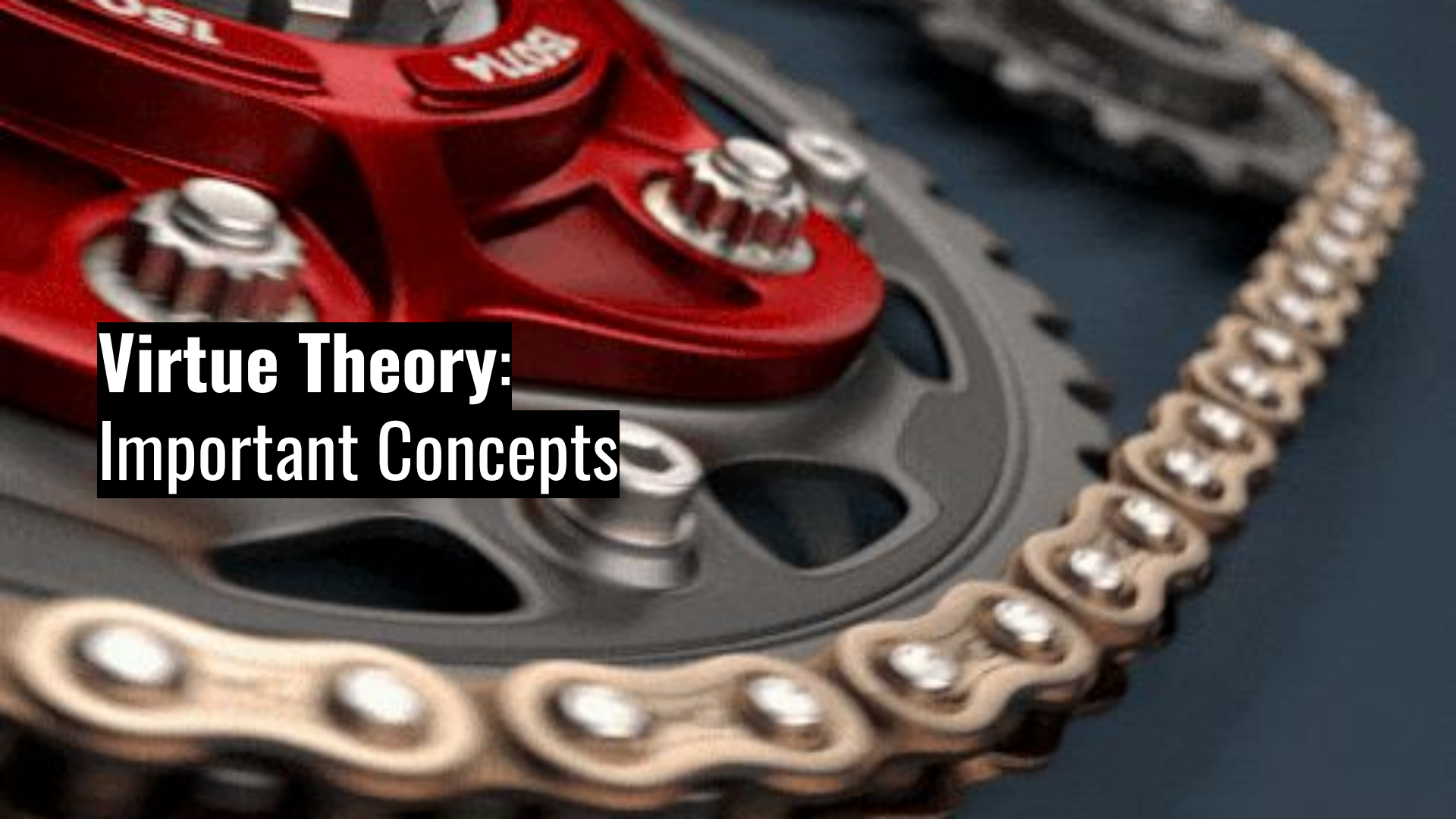


Storytime!





Axial Age, (600 BCE - 100 CE)



Virtue Theory: Important Concepts

Virtue

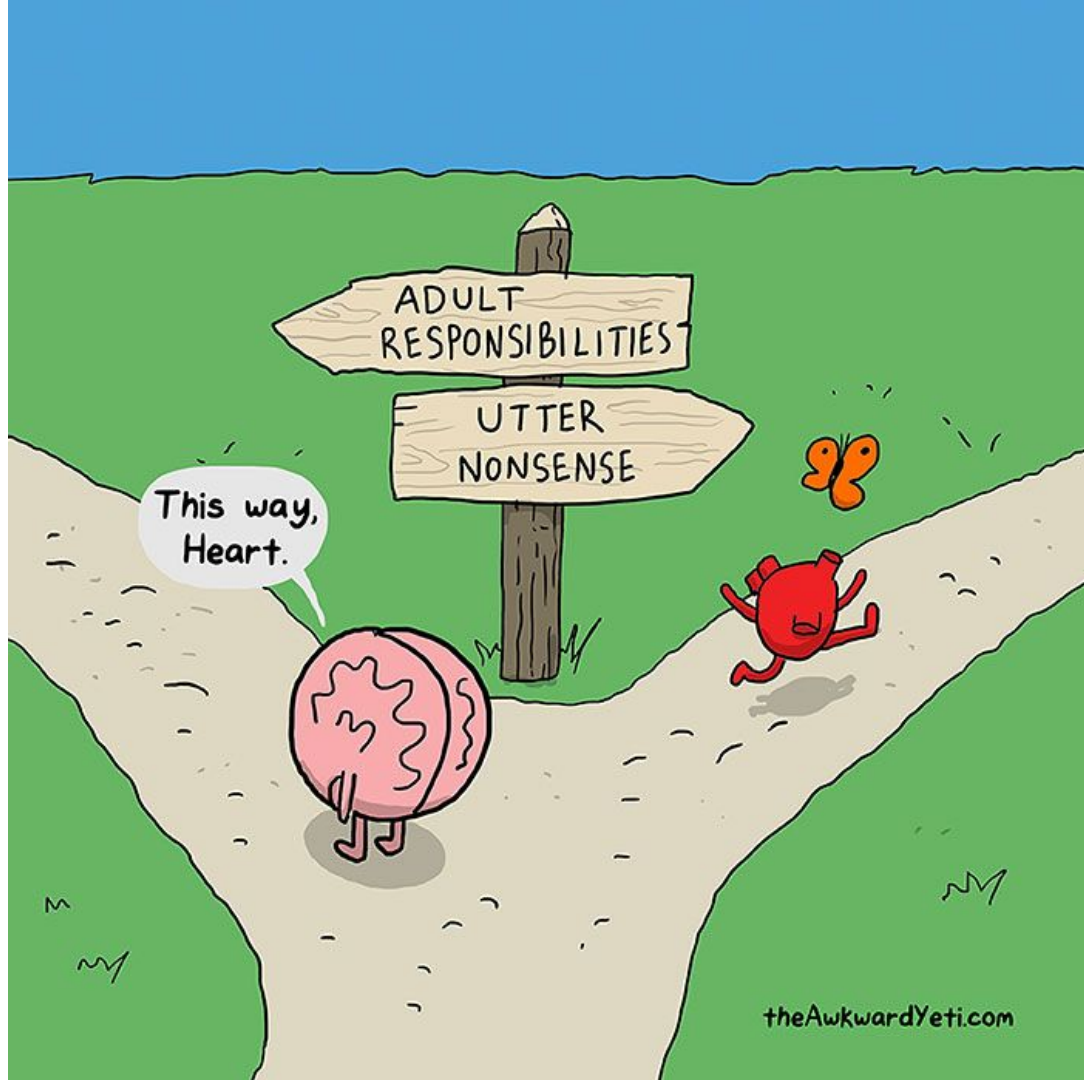
A **virtue** is a state or disposition of a person; unlike a mere habit, however, a virtue is a disposition to act *for reasons*, and so a disposition that is exercised through the agent's practical reasoning.

In other words, virtue is moral and intellectual excellence; it requires doing the right thing for the right reason without serious internal opposition, as a matter of character.





For this reason,
virtue involves two
aspects:
the emotional (or
affective) and the
intellectual.



Eudaimonia

Eudaimonia, sometimes translated as “flourishing”, is the final end of life; it is what all the actions in a **complete** life aims towards.

Virtue is devoted to achieving this final end.

Vice

A **vice** is a quality that prevents a thing from achieving its final end or from performing its function well.





“By the time you come to think about ethics and want to develop or improve your life as a whole, you already have a life.

You already have a social position, a cultural education, a family, a job, and so on” (Annas 2009: 523).



**Practice
Makes
Perfect**

“However, classical virtue ethics always assumes that reflection about our ethical views will reveal them to be inadequate.

All classical virtue ethics assumes, in a way oddly absent from many modern theories, that ethical thought essentially includes an aspiration to be better than we are, to reach an ideal that is not already attained” (Annas 2009: 523).

Right Action

The **right action** is the action that the virtuous character would do;
e.g., What would Jesus do?

Wrong Action

The **wrong action** is the action that a vicious character would do; e.g., What would Jafar do?

“The answer that virtue ethics offers to the question what is the right thing to do denies that there is any such thing as a ‘theory of right action’ in this abstract sense. In explaining what is the right thing to do, virtue ethics appeals to the idea of what would be done by the virtuous person..

For virtue ethics appreciates that ‘the virtuous person’ cannot be defined in a void and then used to derive right actions in a void.

Rather, the thought is that what I should do, in my situation, is what I would do if I were brave (generous, fair, etc.), where this is taken to mean: braver than I am, nearer the ideal of the brave person.

Working out the answer is complex” (Annas 2009: 524).

There is a progress from the mechanical rule--following of the learner to the greater understanding of the expert, whose responses are sensitive to the particularities of situations, as well as expressing learning and general reflection.



Integral to virtue theory is reasoning well.

To review...

“In classical virtue ethics, we start our moral education by learning from others, both in making particular judgments about right and wrong, and in adopting some people as role models or teachers or following certain rules...”





“At first, as pupils, we adopt these views because we were told to, or they seemed obvious, and we acquire a collection of moral views that are fragmented and accepted on the authority of others...”

“[T]hen, the learner will begin to reflect for himself on what he has accepted, will detect and deal with inconsistencies, and will try to make his judgments and practice coherent in terms of a wider understanding which enables him to unify, explain and justify the particular decisions he makes....”





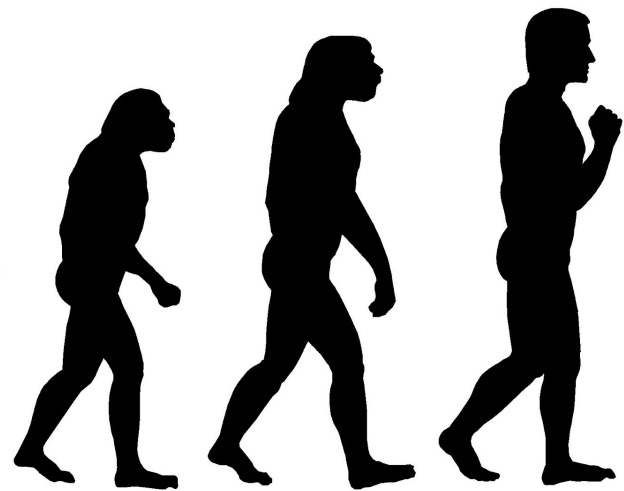
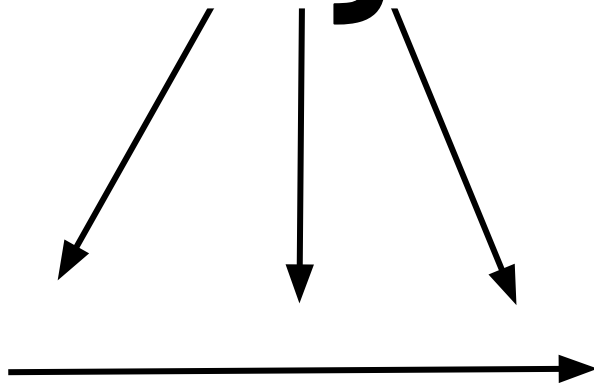
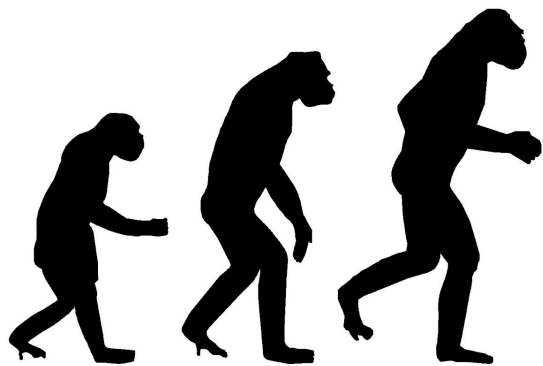
“[This is a process that requires the agent at every stage to use his [or her] mind, to think about what he [or she] is doing and to try to achieve understanding of it” (Annas 2009: 517).



Traditionally, **reasoning** is defined as the process by which one concludes one thing on the basis of something else; i.e., it is the mental act of moving from evidence to a conclusion based on the evidence.

Why did reason evolve?

**reason?
why?**

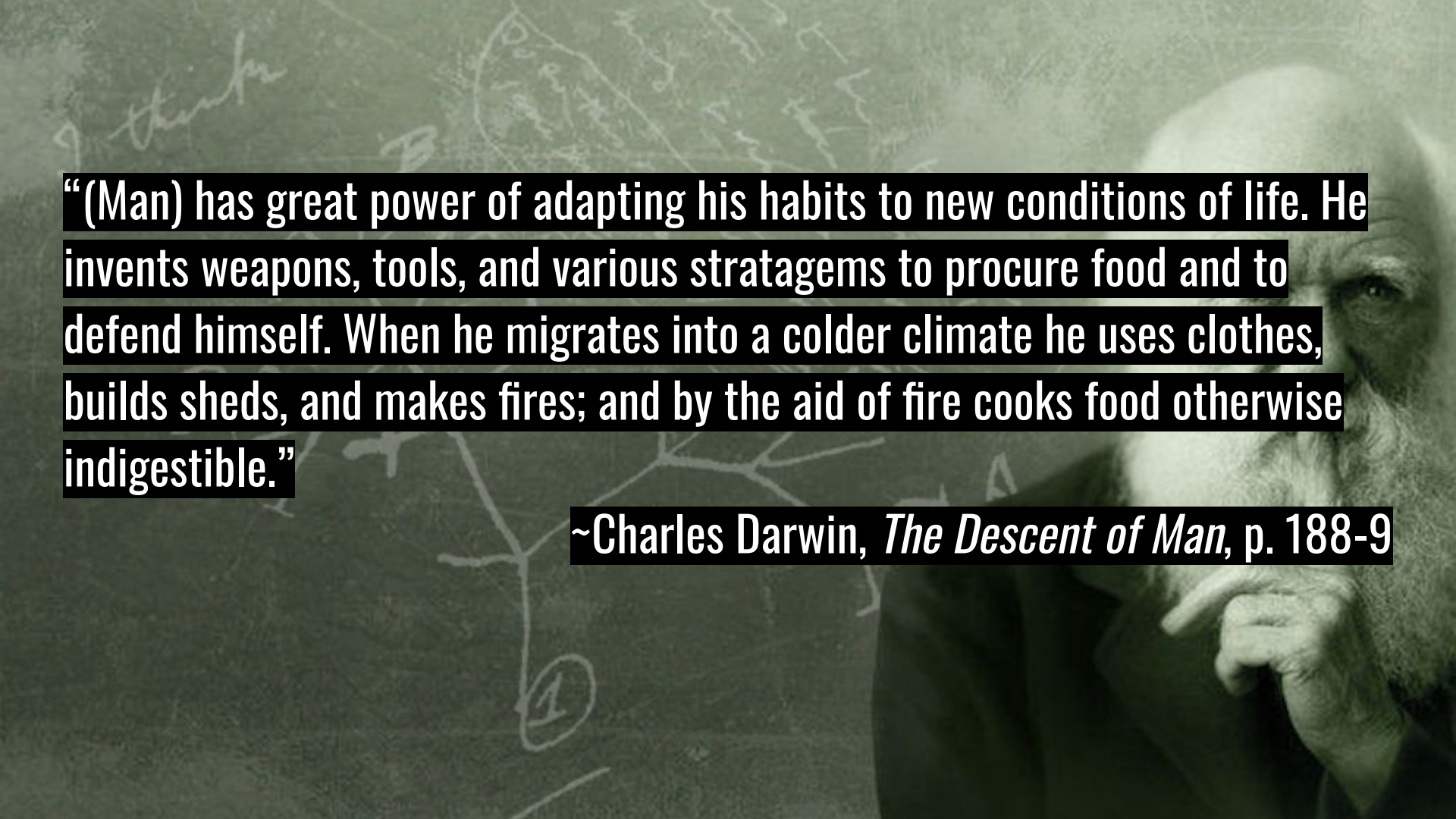




The Traditional View

From Aristotle to the 20th century, reason has been viewed as a means for individuals to acquire more accurate beliefs and hence make better decisions.

In other words, reason, by performing this intellectual function, allows humans to gain knowledge: reasoning is for forming true beliefs (see Mercier and Sperber 2017).



“(Man) has great power of adapting his habits to new conditions of life. He invents weapons, tools, and various stratagems to procure food and to defend himself. When he migrates into a colder climate he uses clothes, builds sheds, and makes fires; and by the aid of fire cooks food otherwise indigestible.”

~Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, p. 188-9

Question:
Who is a virtuous person?

Proposed Theories



Aristotle

Vices (Deficiency)

Cowardice
Insensibility
Stinginess
Pettiness
Apathy
Lack of spirit
Mock modesty
Boring
Shamelessness

Virtues

Courage
Temperance
Charity
Proper self-value
Proper ambition
Good Temper
Truthfulness
Wittiness
Modesty

Vices (Excess)

Rashness
Self-indulgence
Prodigality
Vulgarity/Vanity
Greed
Volatile
Boastfulness
Buffoonery
Shyness

BEHAVIORS

Deficiency

Mean

Excess

Deficiency

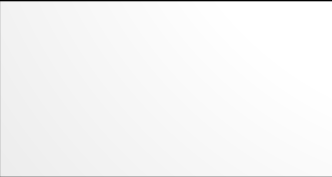


EMOTIONS

Mean



Excess



A close-up portrait of Virginia Held, an elderly woman with short, curly, light-colored hair. She is wearing a grey jacket and a light-colored scarf. A brown strap is visible over her right shoulder. The background is a blurred green and yellow, suggesting an outdoor setting. The name "Virginia Held" is overlaid in white text on the left side of the image.

Virginia Held

The **ethics of care** is a 20th century movement that sought to shift virtue ethics away from Aristotelian virtues (that saw the culmination of eudaimonia in aristocratic ideals) **towards more interpersonal virtues** with a focus on how we can care for each other.

Aristotle's Virtues

Courage

Temperance

Charity

Proper self-value

Proper ambition

Ethics of Care

Compassion

Self-understanding

Giving conscientiously

Proper self-love

Proper values

The main difference between Aristotle and Held is that **Held emphasizes** not just not harming others, but **actively helping others** and building strong interpersonal relationships (which can be challenging).

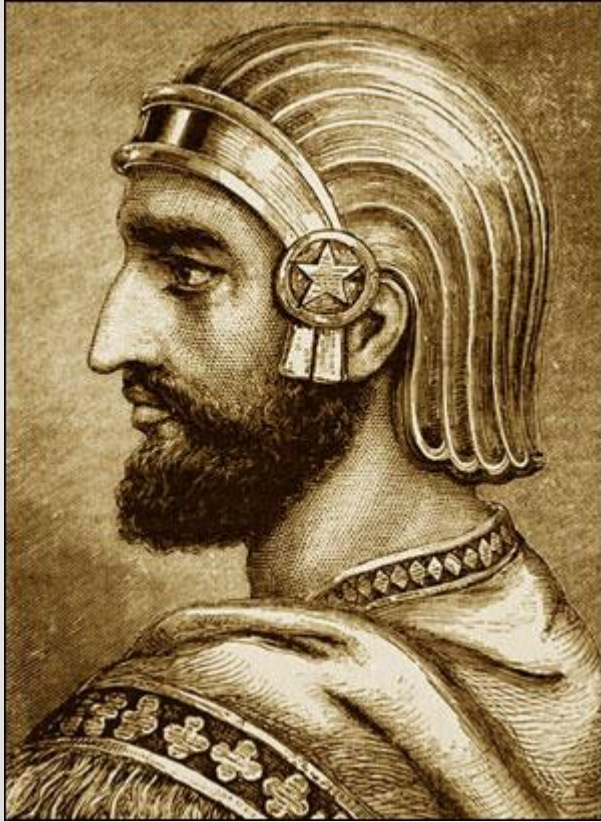


Buddha

Storytime!

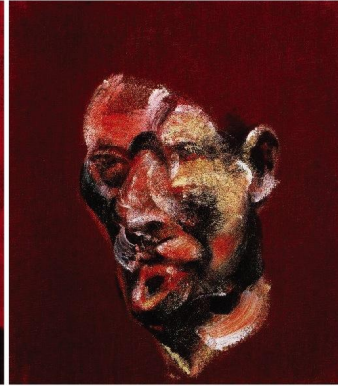
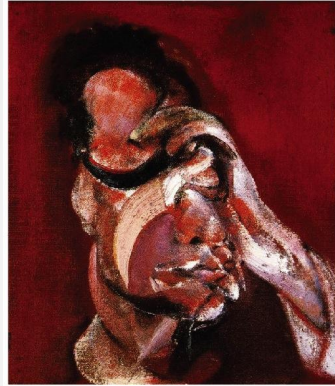








The Four Passing Sights





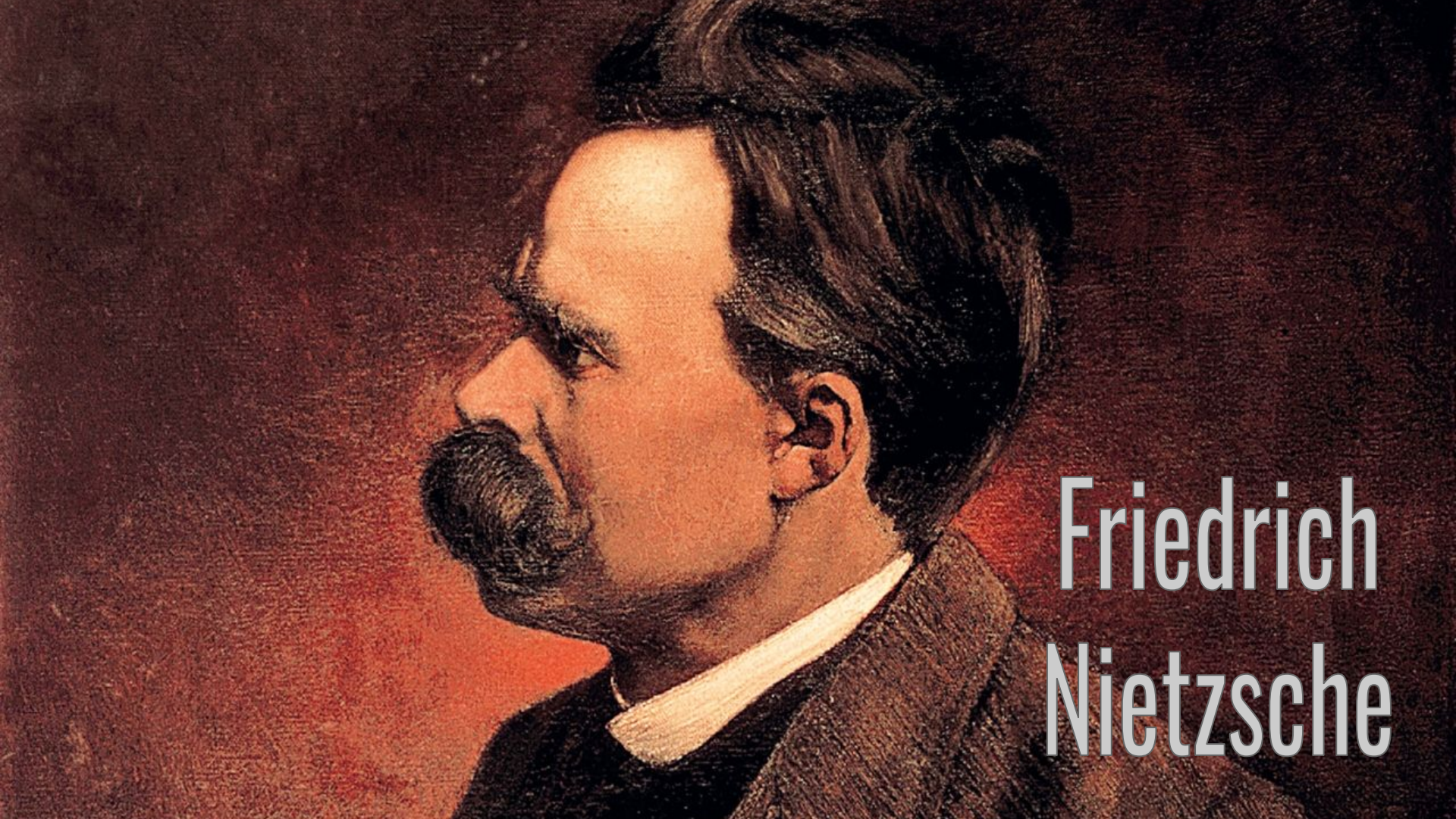




Buddha Virtues

- Compassion
- Generosity
- Integrity
- Renunciation, ie giving up excess desire
- Wisdom
- Sympathetic Joy (antidote to envy)
- Effort
- Patience
- Truthfulness
- Resolution
- Lovingkindness
- Equanimity, or Evenness of Mind

All of these can be challenging.



Friedrich
Nietzsche

Problems

**Which is the
right set of
virtues?**

**There are many different
accounts of just what virtue is...**

**How do we decide which is the
right account?**

**Wouldn't this require another
code of ethics to decide which is
the best one?**

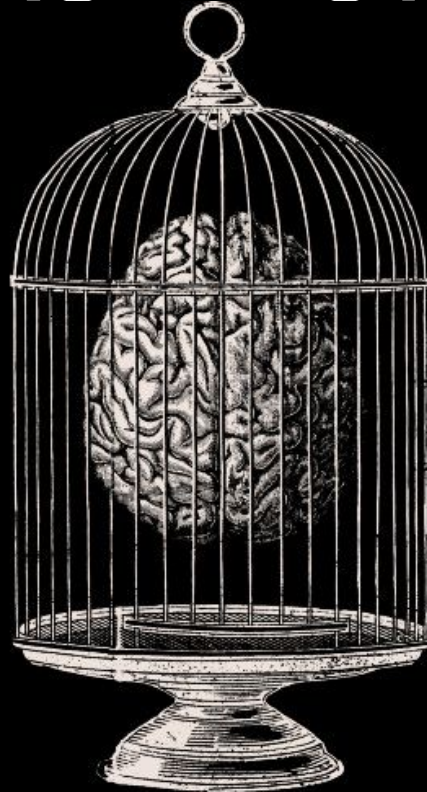
The Puzzle of Collective Action?

Although Aristotle argues that citizens must actively participate in politics if they are to be happy and virtuous, this theory doesn't directly address how collective action is possible.

**How will we
know when we're
virtuous?**

We can look for virtuous people to help us, but how will you know someone is virtuous if you don't know what virtue is?

COGNITIVE BIAS OF THE DAY



THE DUNNING-KRUGER EFFECT IS A COGNITIVE BIAS IN WHICH PEOPLE OF LOW ABILITY HAVE ILLUSORY SUPERIORITY AND MISTAKENLY ASSESS THEIR COGNITIVE ABILITY AS GREATER THAN IT IS (KRUGER & DUNNING 1999).



W.V. QUINE

Philosophy of Logic

SECOND EDITION

PHILOSOPHY
OF LOGIC





