The Philosophical Roots of Psychology

(by Thomas Wren)

Lecture 2

15 November, 2007

Aristotle

Agenda

► Aristotle's Historical Context
► His Big Question:
  ▪ 1. His Conception of Human Development
  ▪ 2. His Model of the Mind
  ▪ 3. His Method of Inquiry
  ▪ 4. His Conception of the Individual & Society
► Appendix: His Relevance to Contemporary Psychology

Our Four Psychological Themes

	Human Development	Model of the Mind	Method of Inquiry	Self & Society
Plato	Knowing the Good (escaping from the cave)	Four levels of knowledge and four levels of reality	Conceptual analysis and reminiscence	Three parts of soul and three classes of society
Aris-totle	*Eudemonia* (human flourishing, happiness, virtue)	Rational & irrational faculties of the soul (teleology)	Logical and empirical observation	Man as *zoon politikon* (civic life as part of human flourishing)
Des-cartes etc.	…	…	…	…

Historical Context

► The "Golden Age" of Greece (500-300 BCE)

► Socrates > Plato > Aristotle > Alexander

► Aristotle (384-322 BCE)

The "Golden Age" of Greece (500-300 BCE)

Socrates > Plato > Aristotle > Alexander

Aristotle (384-322 BCE)

      Born in Macedonia where father and grandfather were personal physicians of the kings of Ma

      Tutored Alexander, left Athens to avoid persecution and "to prevent Athens from sinning twic

      Studied under Plato, founded the Lyceum

      Wrote c. 27 "books" including works on:

            science (10, including 2 on psychology)

            logic (6)

            philosophy (7)

Aristotle's Big Question

"What is the human function?"

Related Issues:

➤Teleology (goal-directed behavior)

➤Living well (flourishing)

➤The faculties of the soul

1. Aristotle's Conception of Human Development

► *Teleology*

► *Flourishing (Eudemonia)*

► *Virtue*

► *Wisdom*

Teleology

Eudemonia (happiness, human flourishing)

Virtue (moral and intellectual)

Wisdom (the highest good)

Teleology

Definitions:

Telos: Goal: also function, end, final cause

Teleology: The study of goal-oriented behavior

Entelechy: A goal-oriented mechanism of self-actualization

Definitions:

Telos: Goal (from Gr. *tele,* for "far," as in tele-vision)

    Related terms: function, end, final cause (from Lat. *finis*)

Teleology: The study of goal-oriented behavior *(die Teleologie)*

    NOT THEOLOGY!

Entelechy: A goal-oriented mechanism of self-actualization

(die Entelechie - innewohnende, zielgerichtete Kraft)

Example

► Acorns strive to become oak trees.

  ▪ Striving is unconscious.
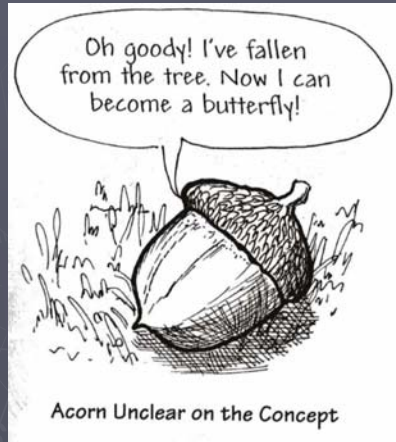
  ▪ Success is automatic, a natural process.

Acorns strive to become oak trees.

The striving (the tendency and the process) is unconscious.

Success is automatic, a natural process:
        Acorns fail only because of **bad luck** (acorn falls on pavement),
never because of *error* (unlike human goal-seeking).

On the Lighter Side
(drawings by Donald Palmer)

Human Teleology
(The Function of "Man")

"Can we suppose that, while a carpenter and a shoemaker have functions and specialized activities of their own, man has no specialized activities and no function assigned to him by nature? Surely not. As each part of his body - eye, hand, and foot - obviously has its own function, so we must suppose that man also has some function above all these. What is it?" (*Nicomachean Ethics*)

Let Aristotle speak for himself…

Human Flourishing

► To answer Aristotle's question one can ask what everyone wants out of life.

► Everyone wants HAPPINESS (Gr. *Eudemonia*).

► This obvious fact is the starting point for Aristotle's theory of "human nature" or "the function of man."

To answer Aristotle's question one can ask what everyone
wants out of life.

> Note: Acorns strive but don't "want"; however, for humans
> wanting and striving go together.

Everyone wants HAPPINESS (Gr. *Eudemonia*).

> Note: *Eudemonia* is also translated as "flourishing,"
> "living well," and "the good life."

This obvious fact is the starting point for Aristotle's theory
 of "human nature" or "the function of man."

Contrast with Plato

► Plato: The Good is an ideal and utterly general Form, known only though pure contemplation.

► Aristotle: Plato's approach to the good life is impractical.

The Good is an ideal and utterly general Form, known only though pure contemplation.

Aristotle found Plato's approach to the good life as impractical, and this is Aristotle's "bottom line."
.
He tries to cash out Plato's view in ordinary life situations such as learning how to weave, heal the sick, or command an army **(Quote is on next slide)**

> "I wonder how the weaver would be aided in his craft by a knowledge of the form of the Good, or how a man would be more able to heal the sick or command an army by contemplation of the pure form or idea. It seems to me that the physician does not seek for health in this abstract way but for the health of man - or rather of some particular man, for it is individuals that he has to heal." (*Nicomachean Ethics)*
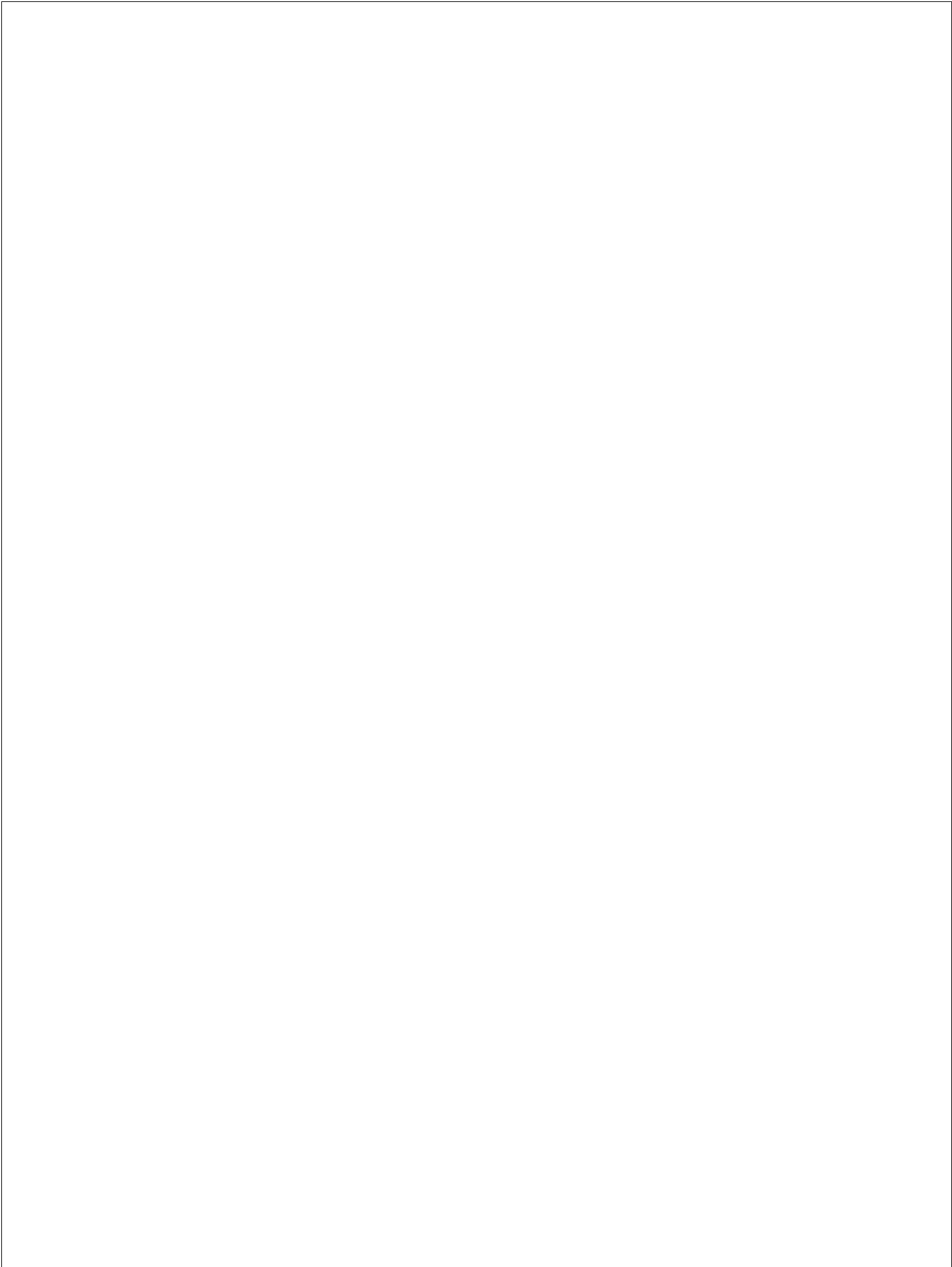
The Function of Man

► The Human <u>Essence</u>: Rational animal

► The Human <u>Function</u>: "Activity of the soul in conformity with reason"

► The Human <u>Good</u>: "Activity of the soul in conformity with the best and most complete virtue [i.e., set of virtues]"

Note use of "MAN" – not entirely generic

The Human Essence: Rational animal

The Human Function: "Activity of the soul in conformity with reason"

The Human Good: "Activity of the soul in conformity with the best and most complete virtue [i.e., set of virtues]"

Virtue(s)

► Virtues are "excellences."

  ▪ <u>Moral virtue</u>

  ▪ <u>Intellectual virtue</u>

Virtues are "excellences." *(Tugenden sind „Vortrefflichkeiten.")*

<u>Moral</u> virtue is excellence of the appetitive part of the soul
(by which we control our actions & passions).

<u>Intellectual</u> virtue is excellence of the rational part of the soul
 (by which we know things and, in certain cases, how to change them).

Moral Virtue

► Moderation is the heart of moral excellence.

► Every action and every passion should be balanced.
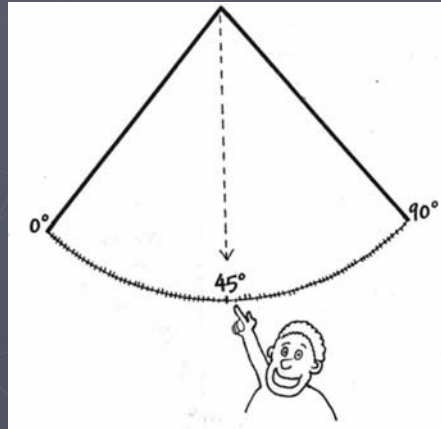
Moderation is the heart of moral excellence.

Every action and every passion should be balanced
(neither excessive or deficient).

Note; Only actions and passion are to be balanced.
The principle does not apply the balancing itself (the higher order).
A scalde can't be "too balanced," and a person can't have "too much moderation."
(Idea behind phrases like "too much moderation" is probably that some people **worry too much** abou

Example: Courage (*Tapferkeit*)

Action Description: Facing Danger		
Cowardliness (Feigheit)	**Courage** (Tapferkeit)	**Foolhardiness** (Unbessonenheit)
Deficient Action	Moderate Action	Excessive Action
Vice	Virtue	Vice

Note that this works just as well if the "action continuum" is a "passion continuum," e.g. of aggression

How Morality is Learned

How Morality is Learned

Two Problems

1. Action descriptions such as "Facing Danger" are very general.

2. Particular applications vary according to concrete situations.
    Falstaff: "Discretion is the better part of valor." *(Besonnenheit
    ist der bessere Teil der Tapferkeit.)* From Shakespeare's *Henry IV, pt. 1*

Therefore, morality is learned through experience.
    Here "experience" includes one's observation of others (parents, teachers, models).

2. Aristotle's Model of the Mind

The soul is "the substantial form" of the body.

This form is not a transcendent form "living up there" (Plato) but rather an immanent form that "lives within" the substantial entity, in this case the individual human being.

> Analogy: The soul is a *structure* in roughly the same way that a computer program is a configuration of data. Without data there would be no structure, and without structure there would be no data (since data are, by definition, meaningful).

Divisions of the Soul
<u>Definition of a "Faculty"</u>

Aristotle called the divisions of the soul "faculties," a functional concept that means ability, power, capability, etc. (as opposed to a substantial concept, which refers to actual substances or things).
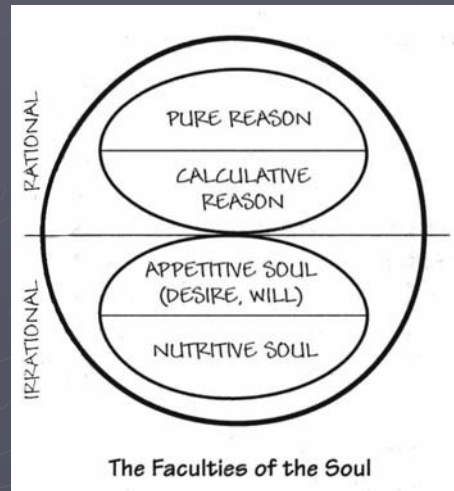
Thus these three oppositions involve the same contrast:

<u>Faculty</u> = <u>Potentiality</u> = <u>Function</u>
Thing   Actuality   Substance

(More on this later)

The Main Divisions of the Soul

►Rational faculties: Reason

►Irrational faculties: Pleasure and Satiety

The Faculties of the Soul

The Main Divisions of the Soul

The two main divisions of the soul are its rational and irrational faculties, which are distinguished by their governing principles, namely Reason (upper circle) and Pleasure and Satiety (lower circle).

Pure & Calculative Reason

Pure (Theoretical) Reason: knows reality but does not change it.

Calculative (Practical) Reason: knows how to change reality.

    -Deliberates over which actions will best achieve specific goals in specific circumstances.

    -"Rationalizes" the irrational parts of the soul by imposing its rule on them.

Practical Reason & Virtue

Fully developed practical reason is "practical wisdom" (Gr. *Phronesis*, sometimes translated as "prudence" or "*Klugheit*").

Recall Aristotle's definition of the human function (flourishing, happiness, happiness, living well) of man as "activity of the soul in conformity with reason."

It follows, therefore, that (to quote Aristotle once more), . . .

Practical Reason & Virtue, cont.

"It is evident, then, from what has been said that it is impossible to be good in the full sense without practical wisdom or to have practical wisdom without moral virtue." (*Nicomachean Ethics*)

Intellectual Virtue

► Practical Wisdom (*Phronesis*) is the specific excellence of Calculative Reason.

► Theoretical Wisdom (Gr. *Sophia*) is the specific excellence of Pure Reason.
  ▪ The full life (*Eudemonia*) combines *Phronesis* & *Sophia*.

Intellectual Virtue

Practical Wisdom (*Phronesis*) is the
      1. <u>*specific*</u> (reference is to conceptual vs. biological "speciation")
      2. <u>excellence</u> (= virtue, salient feature, main function) of Calculative Reason.
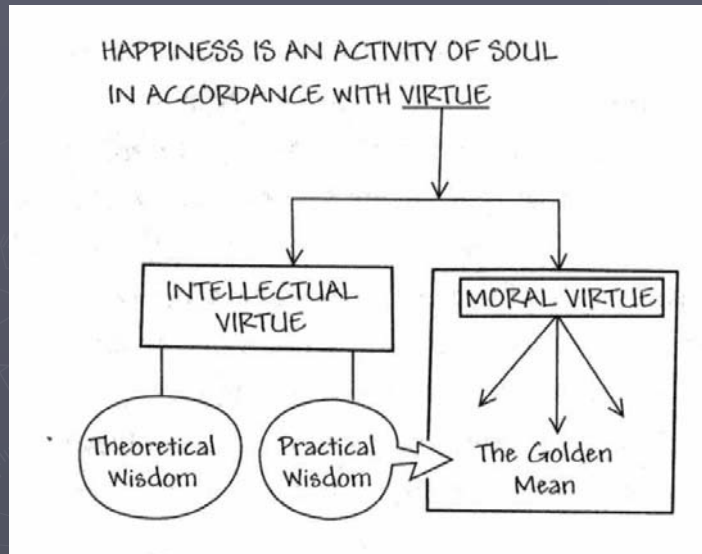
Theoretical Wisdom (Gr. *Sophia*) is the specific excellence of Pure Reason.
        1. Sophia is essentially contemplative.

    The full life (*Eudemonia*) combines the two sorts of reason (*Phronesis* & *Sophia*).
    Thus Aristotle's model of the mind overlaps with his conception of human development.

Psychology and Ethics

Remember that "Happiness" = Flourishing and that flourishing is something that we DO (i.e., an acti

Arrow from Practical Wisdom to Golden Mean indicates that intellectual virtue GUIDES moral virtu
    It "guides" by clarifying upper and lower limits of moderation
    It also guides in other ways, e.g., appropriate means, salient features of a situation, etc.

3. Aristotle's Method of Inquiry

Aristotle   Plato

Plato points up to the heavenly Forms, which are known to us from birth even though we need "gadflies" such as Socrates to help us remember what we know.
His method of inquiry is to ask questions that stimulate the memory.

Aristotle holds his hand flat, to show that the objects of human knowledge are things in this world, which can only be known through sense experience.

His method of inquiry is to abstract ideas from empirical observations.

Aristotle's Logico-Empirical Approach

LOGIC includes deductive & inductive reasoning

Deduction: Go from general characteristics of a class (e.g., a biological species) to specific, individual instances.

Induction: Go from individual instances (samples) to general description of the class.

Aristotle's Logico-Empirical Approach (continued)

►EMPIRICAL INQUIRY observes and classifies physical phenomena.

 ▪ <u>Observation:</u> creates *classes*

 ▪ <u>Classification:</u> organizes classes

EMPIRICAL INQUIRY observes and classifies physical phenomena.*

    <u>Observation:</u> begins with sense experience, not conceptual analysis; discovers similarities and differences among the observed objects and thereby creates *classes.*

    <u>Classification:</u> organizes classes into hierarchies ("trees") of *genus and species.*

*Especially biological phenomena. Remember, his father and grandfather were doctors for the royal family in Macedonia.

4. Aristotle's Conception of Self and Society

► Human nature is essentially social as well as rational (Gr. *Zoon politikon*).

► Therefore, human flourishing requires civic engagement.

---

4. Aristotle's Conception of Self and Society

Man is not only a rational animal but also a political animal (Gr. *Zoon politikon*).

Human nature is essentially social.

Therefore, human flourishing requires civic engagement as well as other sorts of activities.

Civic Virtues

► Examples of civic virtues.

► Citizenship as duties, not rights.

► Fulfilling these duties = Fulfilling one's nature (and hence pleasurable).

CIVIC VIRTUES

Examples: Civic virtues include

trustworthiness,

willingness to participate in governance and other political activities,

reciprocity, and

respect for the law.

Citizenship was understood as a set of duties (to serve the state), not a set of rights (to receive individual benefits).

Fulfilling these duties = Fulfilling one's nature, and so like the exercise of any virtue, it is pleasurable. [The "Aristotlian Principle" & Competence Motivation]

ARISTOTLE'S RELEVANCE TO CONTEMPORARY PSYCHOLOGY

►Faculty Psychology

►Personality Theory

►Empiricist Approach

ARISTOTLE'S RELEVANCE TO CONTEMPORARY PSYCHOLOGY

Many other issues

Faculty Psychology

- Rejection of the concept of a "faculty" (Baldwin)

- Renewed interest in the concept by cognitive functionalists (Fodor)

ARISTOTLE'S RELEVANCE TO CONTEMPORARY PSYCHOLOGY

Faculty Psychology:

Rejection of the concept of a "faculty" (James Mark Baldwin)

Renewed interest in the concept by cognitive functionalists (Jerry Fodor)

Personality Theory

► Rejection of virtues as lacking cross-situational stability (Hartshorne & May; Mischel, Gergen)

► Renewed interest in virtue and character by moral psychologists (Power & Lapsley; Lind)

► Motivational theory: efficacy/competence striving, prosociality, etc. (Adler, McClelland, Atkinson, White)

PERSONALITY THEORY

Rejection of virtues as lacking cross-situational stability
(Hartshorne & May; Walter Mischel, Kenneth Gergen)

Renewed interest in virtue and character by moral psychologists
(Clark Power & Dan Lapsley; Georg Lind)

Motivational theory: efficacy/competence striving, prosociality, etc.
(Alfred Adler, David McClelland, J.W. Atkinson, R.W. White)

Empiricism

RATIONALISM VS. EMPIRICISM

ANCIENT TIMES: Plato vs. Aristotle,
EARLY MODERNITY: Descartes vs. Locke
20th CENTURY: Chomsky & Skinner

Empiricism

Aristotle's empiricism was filtered through John Locke. What is most striking is parallel contrasts between Rationalists and Empiricists in different eras:

ANCIENT TIMES: Plato vs. Aristotle
EARLY MODERNITY: Descartes vs. Locke
20th CENTURY: Chomsky & Skinner