

# THE ONTOLOGY OF IDENTITY

Blaine J. Fowers, Ph.D.  
University of Miami

# Big Picture

1. Aristotle positively invites evolutionary analysis
2. Aristotle's natural ethics provides an integrative theoretical context for
  - a. Evolutionary psychology
  - b. Developmental psychology
  - c. Social psychology
3. Psychological research fleshes out Aristotle's theory
4. Natural ethics can guide political and personal life
5. Provide a physical, social ontology for identity

# Man is by nature a political animal<sup>1</sup>

- “Political beings”
- By nature
- Animal
- Evolutionary Theory
- Space of Moral Questions



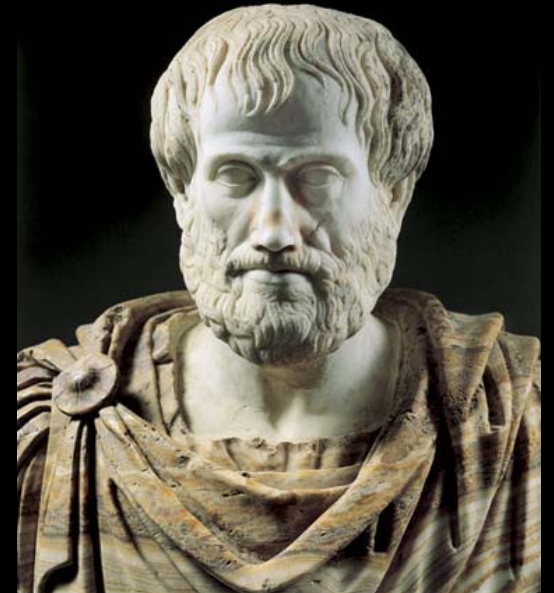
# Aristotle's Natural Ethics

- Priority of the Good
- Function argument



# Man is more of a political animal than bees or any other gregarious animals<sup>2</sup>

- Power of speech<sup>3</sup>
- Good and evil
- Justice and injustice
- Morality makes a “state”



# The “state” is by nature clearly prior to the individual<sup>4</sup>

- Key evolutionary point
- Two greatest threats to survival
  - Other groups
  - Exclusion
- Individual is not self-sufficing<sup>5</sup>
- A beast or a god?<sup>6</sup>



# A social instinct is implanted in all men by nature<sup>7</sup>

- Neither isolated nor herd animals
- Social instinct
  - Infant sociality
  - Social identity



# Infant Sociality

- Facial recognition
- Synchrony
- Mutually Responsive Orientation
- “Self”-regulation
- Shared gaze and object focus
- Imitation
- Theory of mind
- Committed Compliance
- Moral self



# Evolutionary Evidence

- Ubiquity
- Heuristic form
- Neurophysiological
  - Oxytocin studies
  - Activation of the ACC in self-regulation
- Comparative research
  - Impulsiveness “problem”
  - Chimpanzee maternal-infant interaction
- Evolutionary Account
  - Self-regulation adaptation

# Social Identity

- Social categorization
- Individual identity
- Social identity
  - In-group favoritism
  - Prioritize in-group over self
  - Loyalty heuristic
- Social identity & justice<sup>8</sup>



# Evolutionary Evidence

- Ubiquity
- Heuristic form
- Simulation studies
- Neurophysiological
- Comparative research
- Evolutionary Account

# Aristotle and Evolutionary Psychology

- Aristotle invites evolutionary analysis
- Aristotle's ethics is integrative:
  - Humans are essentially social beings
  - Human development is socially keyed
  - Social identity as basic as individual identity
  - Evolution, development, sociality
- Psychological research fleshes out Aristotle

# Integrative Implications

- Natural ethics provides guidance
  - Morality of groups
  - Malleability of group inclusiveness
    - Group identity is culturally defined
    - Membership change
    - Redefine group boundaries
    - Focus on common ground
- Physical, social ontology for identity

## Acknowledgement

This work was funded by a generous grant from the  
Arsht Ethics Initiatives and  
the University of Miami Ethics Programs