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“Vital Habit” Abstract

In his Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle proposed a taxonomy of human ethos that entailed a rigid distinction between the faculties of right reason and habit. However despite this separation, he believed that properly ethical action is only possible through the harmonious concordance of both faculties. Since that time, numerous thinkers have gone to great lengths to vilify habit and remove it from all proper discussion of ethics. This takes many forms, from Mill's dead dogma to Kant's categorical imperative to Rawls' veil of ignorance. In this paper, I propose that Aristotle's framework be reexamined as a strategic description of human ethos which opens the door for a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between theory and practice. This reading at once undermines the fixity of such a distinction, while leveraging it as a tool for analysis.

To this end, the paper makes use of American Pragmatism, and Rorty in particular, Gadamer's description of play, and Bernard Cache's practice. Also central to the discussion is a look at the relationship between theory and practice evident in postmodern architecture and the critique of that relationship found in the work of Michael Speaks and Hans Ibelings. Through this investigation, the paper attempts to articulate a novel understanding of the relationship between theory and practice in both the arts and ethics.