

Virtue Ethics



Defines ethics in terms of

- the good person vs. the right act
- the characteristics of an ideal individual
- successful living

Virtue Ethics



- Based on human nature
- Goal of life = *Eudaimonia* (success)
 - **Mistranslated** “happiness”
 - means doing well what you were meant, designed to do.
- Teleological system (based on purpose, function)

Virtue Ethics



- Purpose or Function
- What is a good X?
 - What is it supposed to do?
 - What is its characteristic activity or function?
 - What sets it apart from other things?
 - What characteristics allow it to perform its function well?

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Purpose in nature (teleology)

The purpose or function of

- The eye: to see
- The heart: to pump blood
- A fin: to swim
- Bacteria: to decompose

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Plants

- Nutrition
- Growth

Animals = plants plus...

- Sensation
- Locomotion

Humans = animals plus...

- REASON

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- Aristotle defines Man as **the rational animal**
- What he does characteristically, uniquely and best is rational activity

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- Goal of life = success, actualizing one's natural potential
- Humanity defined by reason
- Success for humanity therefore defined by intellectual activity

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- The ideal life = scholar, scientist, intellectual
- This life best actualizes one's potential as a rational animal

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- Aristotle is a realist
- Being an intellectual requires certain things
 - Friends to philosophize with
 - Not being hideously deformed
 - Wealth for food, servants, avoiding non-intellectual work (i.e. manual labor)
 - Avoiding serious illness or financial ruin (luck)

Virtue Ethics

- Do natural things have purposes?
- Can you discover their purposes by looking at what they do?
- If human beings have purposes, must they be the same?
- Is what humans do characteristically or best REASON?

Virtue Ethics

- Virtue (arete): A Disposition of character which lead to success (*eudaimonia*)
- Disposition: a tendency to act a particular way

Virtue Ethics

- Virtue is a mean between the extremes of excess and deficiency.
- Virtue is learned through good upbringing and practice as an adult
- One learns courage through attempting to act courageously
- No distinction between the good life in the natural and moral senses

Virtue Ethics

Virtue means doing something at the right time in the right amount.

Example virtues: Courage, Temperance, Honesty, Pride, Generosity

Christianity

- Added Faith, Love, less emphasis on reason
- Replaced Pride with Humility, Servitude
- Made Poverty a virtue

Virtue Ethics



Advantages

- Ethics empirically justified
- No egoism/altruism dichotomy
- What's good for you is good for others
- Aristotle understands the role of unquantifiable judgment

Virtue Ethics



Criticisms

- Underlying teleology - purpose in nature?
- Is there a virtue for every moral value?
- Is Aristotle universalizing his bourgeois intellectual values or those of Greek culture?