

# This Is Philosophy - Chapter 2.66 : End Summary

## Virtue Ethics (Is Morality All about Having a Virtuous Character?)

"Instead of obsessing about good actions, we ought to focus on what it is to be a good person."

**Immanuel Kant:**

The two central components of virtue ethics: the concept of virtue, the concept of character.

A good person is a virtuous person, one with a certain sort of character.

## What is Virtue?

**Virtues** are: good qualities or characteristics.

"Being a virtuous person assures that you are doing the best that you can and that you are living the best life possible given whatever situation you are in."

Varying from *Utilitarianism* in that the consequences of your actions don't define your morality. Instead your motivations and attempts are a more defining aspect of virtue.

"The opposite of virtue is vice."

Too Little	Just Right	Too Much
Stingy	Generous	Wasteful
Cowardly	Courageous	Reckless
Cranky	Friendly	Sucking Up/brown-nosing
False modesty	Honesty about oneself	Bragging
Anorexia	Moderate Consumption	Gluttony
Sloth	Ambition	Workaholism

"It is good to be ambitious and bad to be lazy or slothful."

You want to find a mix in your actions.

## What is Character?

**Character** - a tendency to act in certain sorts of ways.

Good character doesn't mean being virtuous sometimes or when it's convenient.

**Personal Integrity** - a unity of the virtues, made habitual, and leading to action.

## Objection 1: Virtue is Compatible with Evil

Mobs and Gangs have moral codes that they can follow and in doing so be virtuous at the same time that they commit terrible crimes. This seems to be a lot like other Ethical Theories, like Utilitarianism which allows for murder in certain cases.

"Having some virtues and some vices might lead to worse consequences than not having those virtues at all."

## Objection 2: Clashing Virtues

The classic dilemma of being too nice or too honest.

"[S]ome virtues apparently conflict with each other."

And the Virtue Ethics theory provides little support when it comes to dealing with these conflicting situations.

"There is no broader, overarching guidance other than the familiar "just be virtuous," which is no help in these conflict cases."

## Objection 3: Relativism About Virtue

**Aristotle** - human beings have a function.

"[I]f we understood the nature of this function that we could decide which virtues are best to adopt. Just as the function of the opposable thumb is to grasp, and the function of the eyes is to see, Aristotle thought that there must be a function, or a right way of functioning, for human beings."

A cliché summary of Aristotle's Theory:

"Happiness is not the result of rational decision-making, but the process of it in accordance with virtue. Happiness is a journey, not a destination."

## Objection 4: There is No Such Thing as Character

**Character** - the idea that each person has a tendency to act in certain sorts of ways given the appropriate situation.

But character is an ineffective way of describing somebody, since it's based off of their previous actions, it can't provide a clear picture of how they will act in the future.

"Appeal to character is a tidy plotline to understand the behavior of others (and ourselves), but isn't nearly as predictive as the general facts of human nature that the experimentalists are uncovering."

This has been proven in social experiments that have found things like:

"[S]ituational factors are often better predictors of behavior than personal factors...to put things crudely, people typically lack character."