

Learning Guide Unit 3

Reading Assignment

As you read the learning resources, consider the following:

1. How do the teachings of figures like Aristotle, Aquinas, Buddha, Confucius, and Laozi converge or diverge in their views on human flourishing, virtue, and the pursuit of ethical excellence?
2. What role does the concept of the Dao play in Confucian and Daoist virtue ethics, and how does it shape their understanding of moral values and ethical behaviour?
3. What objections and criticisms have been raised against virtue ethics, particularly regarding its perceived vagueness, subjectivity, and relativism? How do virtue ethicists address these critiques and defend the validity of their approach to ethical decision-making?

Read:

1. Matthews, G., & Hendricks, C. (2019). *Introduction to philosophy: Ethics*. Rebus Community.
<https://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks/textbooks/introduction-to-philosophy-ethics> Licensed under CC 4.0

- View the Online Book
- Read Chapter 3 - [How Can I Be a Better Person? On Virtue Ethics](#)

In this chapter, Douglas Giles delves into different ways to think about moral virtue. He explores four ethical systems that focus on virtue: Aristotle's virtue ethics, Aquinas's Christian version, Buddhist virtue ethics, and Daoist and Confucian virtue ethics. Each system has its own take on what it means to live a good life.

Aristotle thinks we should find a balance between extremes in our actions. Aquinas, a Christian philosopher, believes that virtue helps us grow closer to God. Buddhism sees virtue as a way to end suffering and reach spiritual enlightenment, and Chinese philosophy, including Daoist and Confucian, holds that virtue is about being in harmony with the Cosmic Dao.

In the world of ethics, virtue ethics flips the script. It says that instead of just following a bunch of rules like a robot, we should focus on growing and becoming better people. Virtue ethicists believe that virtues, like honesty, trustworthiness, and generosity, are the key to a happy and fulfilling life. They focus on teaching people how to make good decisions based on their values and what is best for everyone, not just themselves.

2. Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification*. Oxford University Press.

- View the Online Book in UoPeople library
- Read Chapter 1.2 - Universal Virtues? Lessons from History (p. 33–39)

In the realm of modern psychology, a new specialized field has emerged in the last two decades that studies happiness. It is called positive psychology. Positive psychology has uncovered a profound correlation between virtuous character traits and happiness. After a thorough examination of sacred and philosophical texts from various cultures around the world, it also found that six specific virtues were highly valued in almost every culture. These virtues are esteemed for their own intrinsic worth, not merely as a means to an end, and they are attainable. They are:

1. Wisdom & Knowledge
2. Courage
3. Love & Humanity
4. Justice
5. Temperance
6. Spirituality & Transcendence

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Martin Seligman, widely recognized as the father of positive psychology, emphasizes the crucial role of developing strengths and virtues for leading a fulfilling life. He believes that incorporating one's unique strengths into various aspects of daily life can lead to abundant gratification and genuine happiness.

NOTE: To access Peter and Seligman's book, log into the UoPeople library and go to LIRN. **How to Access LIRN** is now added to the library.

- Select Religion & Philosophy under the Jump to the Specific Group section.
- Search using the entire name of the book.
- View the online book.

Additional Reading:

1. Dimmock, M., & Fisher, A. (2017). Aquinas's natural law theory. In *Ethics for A-Level* (1st ed., pp. 49-63). Open Book Publishers.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1wc7r6j.8>

This article explains Aristotle's idea of virtue ethics, focusing on the development of moral character. By reading this text, students will understand the concept of eudaimonia, or flourishing, as the ultimate goal of human life, and how virtues like courage and generosity contribute to achieving it.

2. Hole, B. (2020). Minimum Circumstances Necessary for Virtue and Happiness. *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia*, 76(1), 237–260. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26915602>

This article discusses the basic conditions required for a person to live virtuously and achieve happiness. It explores the difference between Stoic and Aristotelian views on the role of external circumstances in moral life.

NOTE: To access these articles, visit the UoPeople Library and click on the link to JSTOR. Search for the complete name of the article.

Watch:

1. McCombs School of Business. (2018, December 18). *Virtue ethics / Ethics defined* [Video]. YouTube.

This short video from the University of Texas provides a nice introduction to the nuts and bolts of virtue ethics. How do we develop a virtuous character? By acting. We have to force ourselves to perform virtuous actions until it becomes second nature to us. As Eleanor Roosevelt said, "You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You are able to say to yourself, 'I have lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along.' You must do the thing you think you cannot do." Virtue ethics pushes us to ask the question: what kind of person do you want to be?

Virtue Ethics | Ethics Defined

