

A **virtue**: is a disposition to act virtuously

Being **virtuous**: is the disposition to do the right thing for the right reason in the right way

Eudaimonia: understood as flourishing is perhaps the most helpful translation (and improves upon a simple translation of happiness).

Phronesis: Practical wisdom. By developing our practical wisdom we become better at ascertaining what exactly courage or generosity amounts to in a specific situation and how exactly we might achieve it.

Since the virtues are dispositions, they are traits of that person's character. They either help us approach eudaimonia, or, if we lack them, keep us from eudaimonia. Unlike conduct based views (such as Utilitarianism and Kantianism), virtue ethics is focused on the person first, rather than on each action the person takes. The virtues are valuable because they contribute to our flourishing.

For Aristotle, virtue is not a feeling itself but an appropriate psychological disposition in response to that feeling; the proper response. The correct response to a feeling is described as acting on the basis of the Golden Mean, a response that is neither excessive nor deficient. The table below makes this more apparent.

Feeling/Emotion	Vice of Deficiency	Virtuous Disposition (Golden Mean)	Vice of Excess
Anger	Lack of spirit	Patience	Irascibility
Shame	Shyness	Modesty	Shamefulness
Fear	Cowardice	Courage	Rashness
Indignation	Spitefulness	Righteousness	Envy

The Golden Mean ought not to be viewed as suggesting that a virtuous disposition is always one that gives rise to a "middling" action. If someone puts their life on the line, when unarmed, in an attempt to stop a would-be terrorist attack, then their action may be rash rather than courageous. However, if armed with a heavy, blunt instrument their life-risking action may be courageously virtuous rather than rash. The Golden Mean is not to be understood as suggesting that we always act somewhere between complete inaction and breathless exuberance, but as suggesting that we act between the vices of excess and deficiency; such action may well involve extreme courage or exceptional patience.

Cultivating a virtuous character is something that happens by practice. Aristotle compares the development of the skill of virtue to the development of other skills. He says that "...men become builders by building" and "... we become just by doing just acts". We might know that a

brick must go into a particular place but we are good builders only when we know how to place that brick properly. Building requires practical skill and not merely intellectual knowledge and the same applies to developing virtuous character traits. Ethical characters are developed by practical learning and habitual action and not merely by intellectual teaching.

There are various ways that one can be responsible for one's actions, and various ways that one cannot be responsible for actions that one is involved in. Please make sure to understand the various ways in which *physical* and *psychological force* relate to responsibility, as well as *acting from ignorance* and *acting in ignorance*.

Additionally, the book has a helpful discussion of the various objections to virtue theory. The objections that you should be knowledgeable about are:

- The Unclear Guidance Objection
- The Clashing Virtues Objection
- The Circularity Objection
- The Moral Good / Individual Good Objection