

A **virtue**: a character trait

Being **virtuous**: doing the right thing for the right reason in the right way

Eudaimonia: understood as flourishing is perhaps the most helpful translation (and improves upon the simple translation of *happiness*. I heard it explained once as the kind of happiness that you feel on your deathbed as you reflect on your life).

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. It is akin to how a guitar player is able to 'just tell' when a particular series of chords is needed. The more skilled the guitar player, the more practical wisdom they have about such matters.

Developing and being virtuous are necessary to achieve eudaimonia, but they are not guarantees of eudaimonia. Aristotle was well aware that the world was an unfair place, and various internal or external factors can prevent your life from going well. The key idea, though, is that you will never have a good life if you are not virtuous. 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. Your virtues are valuable because they contribute to your 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

Virtue theory allows for a tremendous amount of moral flexibility. If you are a terribly impatient person, then your first attempts to be patient will likely be quite imperfect. Once you, after years of work, become a patient person, your virtues will regularly lead you to act patiently. When you think back about your early attempts to be patient, you may shake your head. But, those early actions were good (though imperfect).

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". Much like with learning how to lay brick, you must accept what your current skill level is, and then constantly work to improve upon it. The same applies with developing the virtues of patience, courage, righteousness, etc.

Additionally, the book has a helpful discussion of the various objections to virtue theory. The only objection that you should be knowledgeable about for the exam is the priority problem. Roughly, the problem is that unlike the other moral theories that we have surveyed, virtue theory places *virtue* as its moral foundation. We are not to be patient to others because we have a *duty* to do so, but because it is what a virtuous person would do. The book tests our intuitions about this difference in priority with two kinds of thought experiments.

The first thought experiment asks why we would save the life of a child who is in danger of being hit by a car. You, of course, grab the child and prevent a serious accident - but the question is *why* do you do it? Many of you likely want to say 'because it's a child who needs protecting' or something like that. Such an explanation sounds like you, in some sense, feel it is our duty to protect such a child. The virtue theorist, however, cannot give this answer. They must say it is the right thing to do because it's what a virtuous person would do. The pressure is that such a case seems to, instead, be explained that a virtuous person would do it because it is their duty. Hence, virtue is not fundamental to ethics. Duty is.

The same kind of problem arises if we consider why it is wrong to needlessly harm others. It seems as though I have a duty to respect their autonomy (or something close to that). Hence, a virtuous person wouldn't randomly punch strangers in the face because of that duty. Hence, virtue is again not foundational.