

# Virtue Theory

1. Objectives
2. Administrivia
3. You Asked...
4. Virtue Ethics

Objectives:

By the end of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Describe Aristotle's virtue ethics
2. Examine criticisms of virtue theory

1. Last written reflection today

Anything Else? Anyone?





**Aristotle**

384 - 322 BCE

## Elements of Aristotle's Ethics

- ☒ Function
- ☒ Happiness
- ☐ Virtue
- ☐ Mean







**Aristotle**

384 - 322 BCE

The human good is to live a  
life of virtue in accordance  
with reason





**Aristotle**

384 - 322 BCE

life well lived = happiness



**Aristotle**

384 - 322 BCE

### Elements of Aristotle's Ethics

- ☒ Function
- ☒ Happiness
- ☐ Virtue
- ☐ Mean



Russ Shafer-Landau

“

A virtue is a character trait. It's not a mere habit, or a tendency to act in certain ways...

...the virtuous person also has a distinctive set of perceptions, thoughts, and motives.

- Text, p. 260

”

**Aristotle**

384 - 322 BCE

“

...the virtue of a human being will likewise be the state that makes a human good and makes him perform his function well.

- Aristotle, NE, 1106a15

”



Perceptions

Thoughts

Motives\*





**Aristotle**

384 - 322 BCE

## Elements of Aristotle's Ethics

- ☒ Function
- ☒ Happiness
- ☒ Virtue
- ☐ Mean

**Aristotle**

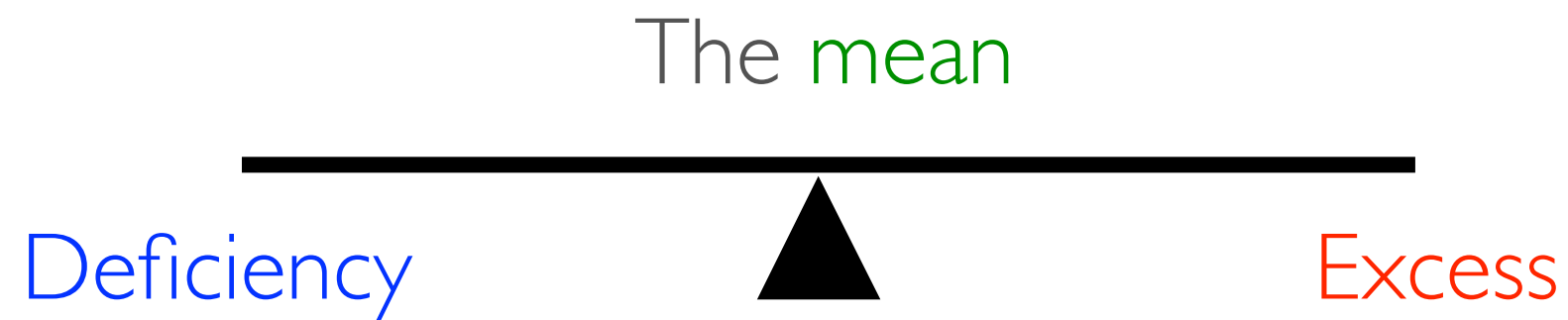
384 - 322 BCE

“

Now virtue is concerned with feelings and actions, in which excess and deficiency are in error and incur blame, while the intermediate condition is correct and wins praise... Virtue, then, is a mean, insofar as it aims at what is intermediate.

- Aristotle, NE, 1106b27

”



Action/ Feeling	Deficiency	Mean	Excess
Fear and Confidence			
Pleasure and pain			
Shame			
Adultery...?			



Russ Shafer-Landau

“

How attractive is a life of virtue? Very. Just think of what we hope and try for when raising our children. We want them to be kind, fair, generous, that they know how to be a good friend, that they can sensitively offer comfort to others in need.

- Text, p. 263

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Russ Shafer-Landau

“

Even if a life of virtue is not a guarantee that you will flourish, a life without virtue is a poor one.

- Text, p. 263

”



Russ Shafer-Landau

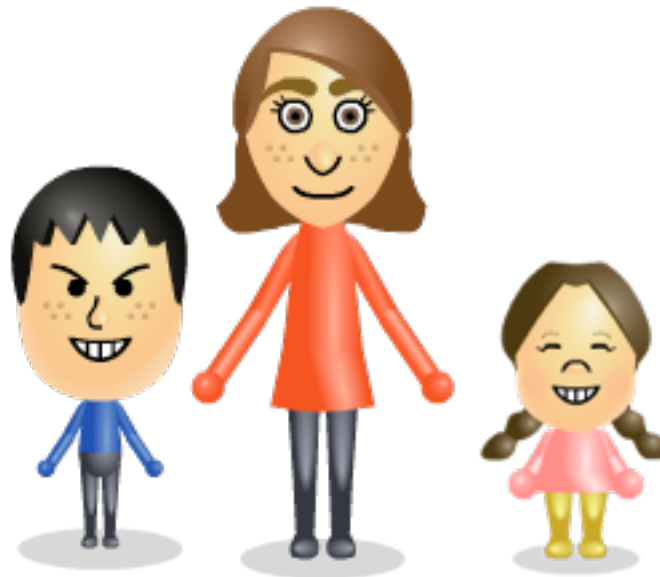
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A tragic dilemma is a situation in which a good person's life will be ruined, no matter what she does.

- Text, p. 264

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Tragic dilemma

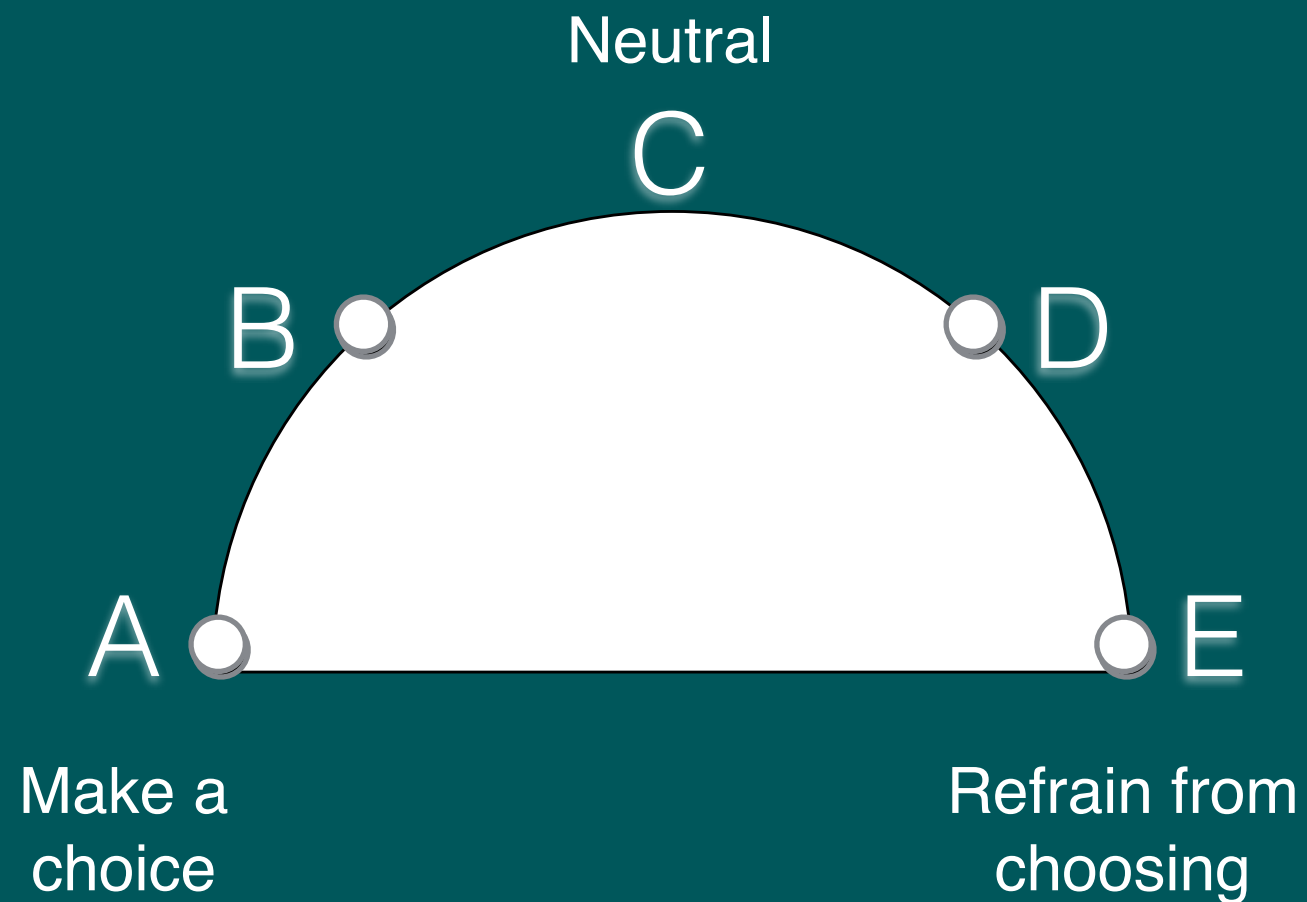




# Poll

## Question

What would a virtuous person do in this situation?



“



Russ Shafer-Landau

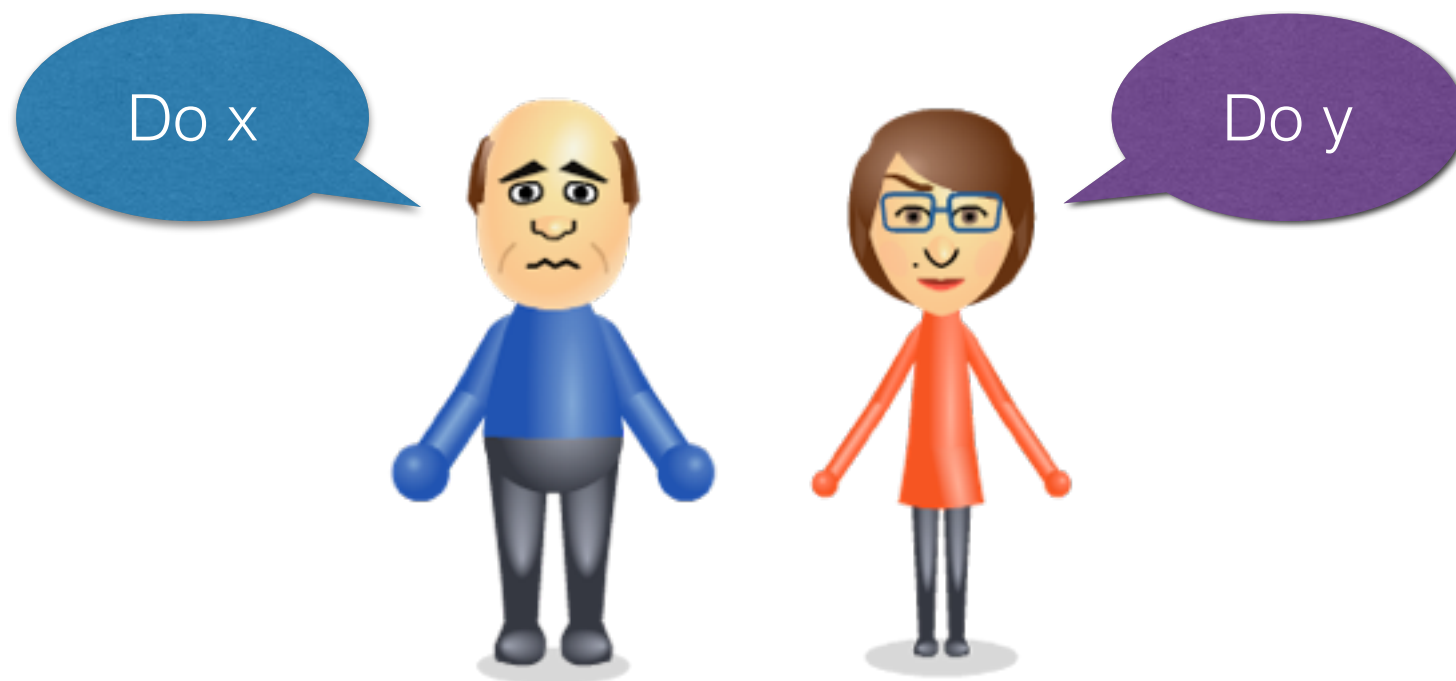
If there are many virtuous people, then what happens if they disagree about what to do in a given situation?

- Text, p. 269

”



## Conflict and Contradiction





Russ Shafer-Landau

“

Virtue ethicists reject the idea that there is any simple formula for determining how to act...To them, ethics is a complex, messy area of decision making, one that requires emotional maturity and sound judgement.

- Text, p. 256

”

## Priority Problem

Virtue  
Theory:

Virtue  $\Rightarrow$  Duty

Other moral  
Theories:

Duty  $\Rightarrow$  Virtue

“



Russ Shafer-Landau

...are people virtuous because they perform right actions, or are actions right because virtuous people perform them?

- Text, p. 270

”

“



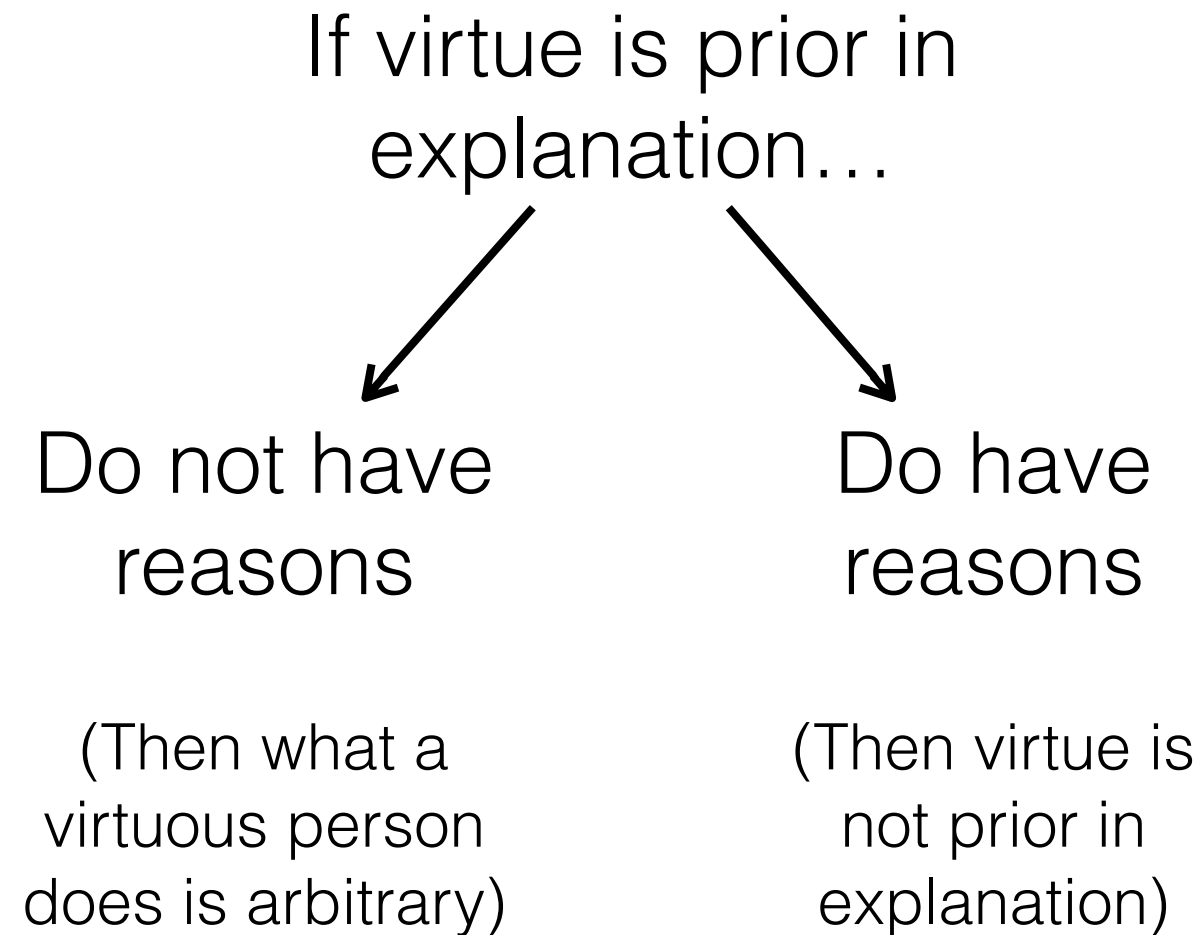
Russ Shafer-Landau

Virtuous people either have, or don't have good reasons for their actions....

- Text, p. 271

”





Are there reasons to be good? What are these reasons? Defend