

# Virtue Theory

US275 Scientific Ethics  
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## Virtues

- trained behavioral qualities
  - result in habitual acts of moral goodness
  - restrain self desires
  - express kindness to others
- opposite of vice
  - habitual acts of moral wrongness



*Allegory of Virtues*  
Corregio, ~1525

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## Cardinal Virtues

- Plato
- main virtues
  - wisdom
  - temperance
  - courage
  - justice



*The Four Cardinal Virtues,*  
Strasbourg Cathedral, 13th Century  
<http://www.bluffton.edu/~sullivanm/strasbourg/westside.jpg>

# Theological Virtues

- New Testament by Paul
- faith
- hope
- charity



*Martyrs Faith, Hope, Charity and their mother Sophia*  
Karp Zolotaryov, 1685

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# Virtues in Hinduism

- nonviolence
- truth
- purity
- self-control



*Lord Rama,*  
Lord Rama is the seventh incarnation of Lord Vishnu and represents Hindu courtesy and virtue.  
Unknown, 1816

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# Confucian Virtues

- courtesy
- generosity
- honesty
- persistence
- kindness



*Confucius presenting the young Gautama Buddha to Laozi*  
Qing Dynasty

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# Virtue Ethics

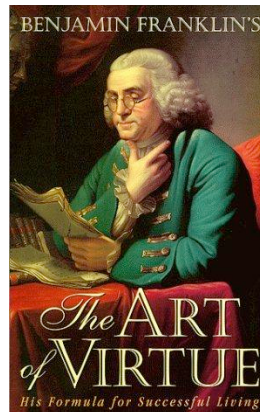
- Ideal person
  - not enough to only do the right thing
  - must also have proper disposition, motivations and emotions



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# Moral Virtues

- honesty
- benevolence
  - nonmalevolence
- fairness
- kindness
- conscientiousness
- gratitude



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# Nonmoral virtues

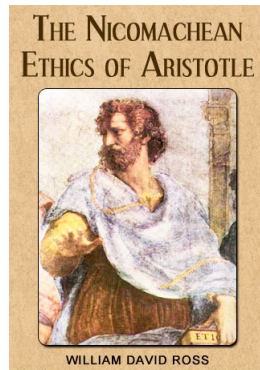
- courage      optimism
- rationality      self-control
- patience      endurance
- industry      musical talent
- cleanliness, etc...



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# Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*

- virtues needed for good life
  - *eudaimonia* (Greek) meaning “happiness” or “human flourishing”
- intellectual virtues
  - may be taught directly
- moral virtues
  - must be lived to be learned



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# Golden Mean

- virtues are the middle ground
  - between excess and deficiency
- similar to:
  - Confucian *Doctrine of the Mean*
  - Buddhist concept of the *Middle Path*



*The Golden Mean*  
Wenzel Hollar ~1650

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# Moral Excellence

- Virtues essential for keeping the peace ~ Hobbes
  - need to spontaneously follow virtues
  - need to shun vices
- person of moral excellence
  - cannot help but to do good

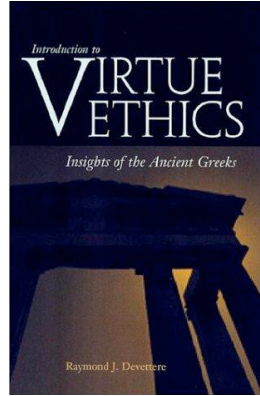


*Saint Nicholas of Bari*  
Gherardo di Jacopo Starna ~1422

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# Virtue-based Ethics

- should acquire good character traits
  - not simply act according to moral rules
- morality involves being a virtuous person
- focused on *being*
  - rather merely *doing*



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# Pure Virtue-based Ethics

- Virtuous people
  - do the right thing
    - so are virtuous people
- Virtue relativism
  - virtues change over time and place
- limited guidance on how to resolve ethical dilemma



*The Virtuous Athenian*  
Joseph-Marie Vien, 1762

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# Action-based theory

- should act properly by following moral rules
- we judge people based on how they act
  - not on whether they are virtuous people
- rule oriented
  - deontic

**Why do rules have such power over our minds?**



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# Criticisms of Action-based ethics

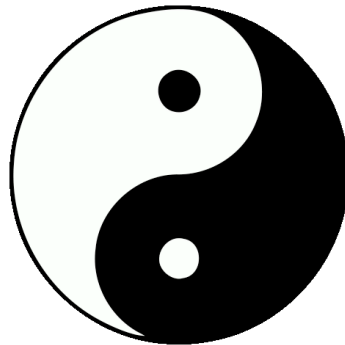
- lack motivational component
  - largely negative
  - *thou shalt not* \_\_\_\_\_!
- rules get in the way
  - of spontaneous kindness & generosity



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## Pluralistic (Complementarity) Ethics

- importance of both rules and virtues
- complement each other
- both may have intrinsic value



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## Assignment

### **The Basis of Character?**

“Character is doing the right thing when nobody’s looking. There are too many people who think that the only thing that’s right is to get by, and the only thing that’s wrong is to get caught” J.C. Watts

### **In your discussion group:**

Discuss whether or not it is better to “do the right thing for the wrong reason” or to “do the wrong thing for the right reason.”



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# Readings

## Chapter 9: Virtue Theory

Pojman & Fieser (2009) Ethics:  
Discovering Right and Wrong



Detail from Government.  
Mural in the Lobby to Main Reading Room, Library of  
Congress Thomas Jefferson Building, Washington, D.C  
Elihu Vedder, 1896

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# Any Questions?

Email me at:  
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<http://www.xipitbullennets.com/images/animated-question-mark.gif>

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