

Module 1: Getting Acquainted with Ethics and the Ethical Theories

Lesson 1a: Introduction to Ethics

Two (2) ways to Define Ethics

1. etymological

- a. Ethos - **Greek word** Custom & generally means behavior or character
- b. mos or mores (or morality) – **Latin word** same meaning with ethos

- ** We can, therefore, comprehend the relationship between ethics and morality.
- ** Some people understand morality and ethics are somewhat synonymous
- ** **but** some contemporary philosophers think these two thoughts are different

Friedrich Nietzsche

Morality pertains to doing good based on the things taught to us

 through culture, parental rearing, religion, and education

conditioned action

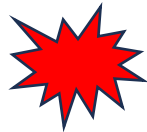
Ethics is the freedom of our thought to do good not because somebody taught us to do good but because we understand that doing a specific action is good

an action free from conditioning

2. real definition

We could not come up with an accurate definition of ethics without understanding the whole course. Thus, the only way to make a precise definition is through knowing that ethics involves:

- (1) **the agent**, or the one acting on the action
- (2) **the act** itself
- (3) **the principles** that make the act either good or bad
- (4) only use our **human reason** to qualify the principles that make the action as good/bad.



Ethics, therefore, is the **philosophical discipline** that deals with the **principles and truths** concerning the **rightness or the wrongness** of action through the use of our **human reason alone**

a branch of **philosophical value theory** which provides the **principles to regulate** our actions based on moral evaluations

Every action, therefore, is qualified through **reason, our intellect**

2 Branches of Ethics

(1) normative ethics

focus on the moral questions; **establishing moral standards to determine right and wrong actions**

"What is the right thing to do?"

(2) metaethics

is the question "about" ethics

"What does 'right' even mean?"

Lesson 1b: The Nature, Meaning of Human Act, and the Moral Accountability of the Agent

The Distinction between Human Acts and Acts of Man

Human Acts

properties

- (1) knowledge
- (2) freedom
- (3) voluntariness

(Aristotle, 1962, Bk. III 1110a 1-20)

Acts of Man

"sensual" in nature



produced through our senses and are, therefore, involuntary

Determinants of the Morality of Human Acts

our actions

↳ considered morally **accountable** or **not**through

(1) the act itself

↳ depending on its nature

↳ **Good.....e.g. CHARITY**

↳ **Bad.....e.g. Insulting someone**

(2) motivation or the intention of doing the act

principles governing intention

a. Doing indifferent act

e.g. Talking (an indifferent act...neither good or bad)

↳ **Good.... If, for example, the agent speaks of kindness**

↳ **Bad.....if, for example, the agent speaks to insult someone**

- b. good action tainted by evil intention
- c. good action with a good motive will increase the moral goodness of the action
- d. An evil act will never become good despite good intentions.

(3) The Circumstances that surround our actions

Note

Circumstances are **not** part of the act but are conditions outside it. Some circumstances increase moral accountability or lessen it

1. Circumstances that Lessen the Accountability

When we do a wrong action and let the other person **defend us**, we lessen our moral accountability. **By allowing the receiver of the action to protect**, we diminish our moral responsibility. **That does not mean that our action leads to goodness, but it lessens the evil of our efforts.**

2. Circumstances that Increase Accountability

e.g. killing someone behind their back without giving them a chance to escape increases the wrongness of the act

3. Justifiable Circumstances

e.g. accidentally killing someone through self-defense

4. Circumstances that need to be Specified

Some circumstances required **specification**, such as the victim being the perpetrator or the assailant

5. Circumstances do not prove Guilt

Circumstances such as being present in the scenario **do not mean** that the person is the assailant of the crime.

Modifiers of Human Acts

1. Ignorance

Sometimes being ignorant would diminish our moral accountability for our action.

However, when we fake or pretend to be innocent, it makes us accountable for our actions

2. Passion

Passion, however, is neither good nor bad; **it is indifferent**. Passion depends on whether we act out our good or evil desires. When we are passionate about studying but do not study and thus cheat on the examination, this becomes a wrong passion.

3. Fear

(1) acts done with fear which is voluntary and therefore morally accountable

(2) acts done because of being, (**just being afraid**) which is involuntary and therefore not morally accountable

4. Violence

Our actions when there is violence towards us are involuntary and therefore not accountable.

5. Habit

Our practices which we continuously did became habits. **They were willed and therefore morally accountable**

Trying to counter habits that lead us to wrong actions means we can escape moral accountability and rectify whatever wrong routine we have

BUILD GOOD HABITS TO HAVE GOOD MORAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Lesson 2: Virtue Ethics

Virtues

are attitudes, dispositions, or character traits that enable us to be and to act in ways that develop this potential.

Virtue ethics

✱ considers the argument between what is right and wrong through the idea of the good, which is virtuous.

*A man who follows virtue ethics sometimes asks: **is this the right thing to do?** Is my virtue in line with my decisive action?*

Unlike utilitarianism, **they first ask whether the move would yield profitable consequences**

✱ considers all types of virtues, such as; honesty, integrity, diligence, and generosity, of which all actions should lead toward the good life.

Aristotle - virtue ethics is closely related to wisdom because wisdom is attained through virtue.

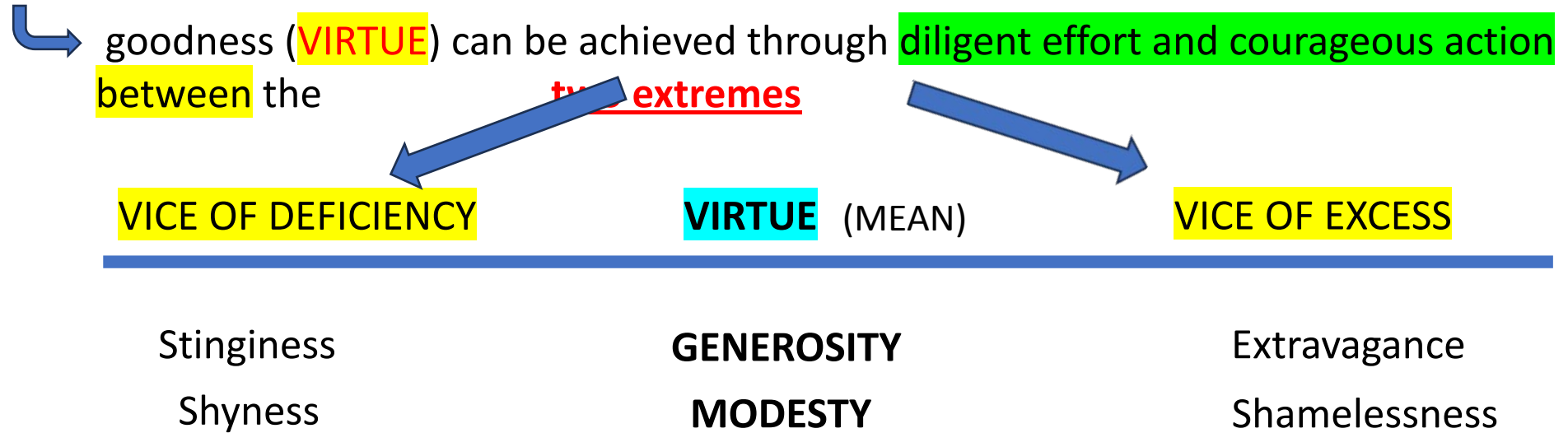
Descriptions of **Virtue** “rough” (Timmons)

- (1) a relatively fixed trait of character or mind
- (2) typically involving dispositions to think, reason, feel, and act in certain ways across a range of different circumstances
- (3) is central in the **positive evaluation** of the moral worth of persons.

Descriptions of **Vice** “rough” (Timmons)

- (1) a relatively fixed trait of character or mind
- (2) typically involving dispositions to think, reason, feel, and act in certain ways across a range of different circumstances
- (3) is central in the **negative evaluation** of the moral worth of persons.

IS VIRTUE EASY TO ATTAIN?



✦ it is never easy to achieve virtue. It is a balance between two things and can never be easily achieved even though we provide enormous effort

✦ it is in constant practice that we can achieve virtue

↳ AN ACTUAL VIRTUOUS PERSON

(1) knows his/her actions

(2) chooses virtue for the sake of virtue

(3) does an action because it is moral

(4) chooses the action willfully.

6 steps to understanding what a human is

1. Proper function

e.g. A Knife's function is to CUT

2. Proper function concerns what is distinct from each being

* Humans share functions with other living things, such as **living and perceiving**

* **What truly sets humans apart is their unique ability to REASON.**

3. Reason (rationality) is essential to be exercised

4. The highest good involves the exercise of the soul (mind).

* the proper function of a human being is the activity of the rational part of the soul, performed in accordance with virtue.

5. Humans who are guided by virtue are those who perform well (use their reason well).

* **Being virtuous is performing one's proper function well.** This involves developing robust character traits that lead to predictably good behavior.

6. The highest good, therefore, is a rational activity (of the soul), guided by virtue.

*A good life is the fulfillment of this human function. This means engaging in rational activities and consistently acting **VIRTUOUSLY**.

Note

Virtue is central to achieve “happiness” in life, which leads to the discussion of virtue and vice. Virtue Ethics, then, are “Facts about virtuous agents, including their virtuous character traits and how such traits influence their reactions

e.g.

VIRTUE

FACT/S

benevolence (or compassion)

others in need

includes a sensitivity to the needs of others

constitutes a reason for anyone who can do so to help them

NO NEED TO APPEAL TO THE VIRTUE OF BENEVOLENCE TO EXPLAIN THE RIGHTNESS OF HELPING OTHERS IN NEED BECAUSE THE RIGHTNESS IS ALREADY EXPLAINED BY THE FACT THAT OTHERS' NEEDS ARE REASONS THAT EXPLAIN THE RIGHTNESS OF HELPING.

Thomas Aquinas and Virtue

↳ God is humanity's TELOS or final end

in the presence of God.

Note

Aristotle terms this end as the EUDAEMONIA or happiness

↳ * humans can understand ethics through our reasoning

* However, our sins prevent us from doing what is ethical

↳ to be virtuous, we need to know God's "natural law," which is known through our intellect

↳ To be ethical is to use our rationality, which is developed through disciplining ourselves to act ethically.

Buddhist Virtue Ethics

Buddhism teaches its followers to be virtuous through balance and harmony with the world. It upholds humility and the goal of being free from *dukkha* (or suffering).

↳ A life of virtue is rooted in the **EIGHTFOLD PATH**

(1) a suitable view

* having a correct attitude towards one's social and religious duties

(2) good intention

(3) being mindful

(4) concentration

(5) effort

(6) good words/ speech

(7) good bodily conducts

(8) to create a good livelihood for oneself and others

Chinese Virtue Ethics

✦ **CONFUCIANISM** was introduced by **Kongzi** (c. 551-479 BCE)

- * “a virtuous person is a person of ethical excellence who practices doing good diligently”
- * **Li** (or ritual) is the art of practicing one's character from his nature
- * to be considered virtuous, we need to **practice** doing well based on our humanity
- * we will use our **intellect and will** to achieve good since we already know what is good
- * in constant practice of doing good, we achieve ethical virtue, also known as **Ren.**

✦ **DAOISM** by Laozi (Lao tzu) *also known as Taoism*

- * harmony with the **Dao**
↳ often described as a **natural, flowing force**

* Its fundamental virtue is called **Wu Wei** or “effortless action



**the path a person should take to be one with nature,
which sometimes could be walking away from society**

- **De**



represents the virtues or qualities that arise from living in harmony with the Dao. These virtues include **compassion, humility, and frugality**, and are seen as the outward expression of one's alignment with the natural order.

Practicing Taoism

1. Organize your home according to the practice of feng shui. The practice of feng shui is the organization of space to create positive energy in your home. ...
2. Meditate. ...
3. Practice tai chi. ...
4. Practice Qigong. ...
5. Practice yoga. ...
6. Join a Taoist temple.