

Summary of Antiquity: Virtues ethics

Virtue Ethics: resuming...

Virtue ethics is about **character** (**agent-centered**)

Virtues may be defined as the **just means** between two **values** (this is what Aristotle proposes) but this idea is **not necessary** present in contemporary virtue ethicists

Education and **habits** are necessary in order to develop a virtuous character, but they should be coupled by **experience** and **reason**, that is to say **practical wisdom**

The virtuous person is able to take into account the particular **circumstances**

Eudaimonia ('happiness') is not only the major **goal** of the virtuous person, but also his/her major **reward**. And eudaimonia is not a state, but an **activity**

Virtue Ethics

Problem 1: what does this doctrine requires to do? Or the “**anti-codifiability**” **problem:** virtue ethics doesn’t provide a rule of conduct, that is a procedure for determining what is the right action in any particular case in such a way that anyone could understand and apply it

- A virtuous person should first of all promote virtues and avoid vices (for example, do what is honest and do not do what is dishonest): this idea gives a sort of guidance
- Exactly because virtue ethics is flexible and situation-sensitive the agent should be responsible for what he does, therefore he provides an example that can be observed by others

Virtue Ethics

Problem 2: Does it apply universally? Or the cultural relativity problem

For example, in Homeric Greece the ideal virtuous man was the hero or warrior and the virtues were strength and courage. For Aristotle virtue is linked to rationality and the ideal virtuous man is the Athenian citizen. For Thomas Aquinas virtue is related to religion, so virtues are faith, hope, charity and humility and the ideal virtuous man is the saint. For Benjamin Franklin, virtue is related both to earthly and heavenly success, so the virtues were (among others) cleanliness, silence, industry

Maybe virtues are not relative, but their application in different cultures may differ

Virtue Ethics

- **Problem 3:** is it always possible to apply his doctrine? Or the **Conflict Problem:** what does virtue ethics requires when we face dilemmas where two different virtues conflict?
- For example, what are you going to do if you have two different compelling obligations, like going to a wedding of a friend or studying for the final exam?
- A virtuous person would be someone who expresses the right degree of concern for all relevant considerations □ The conflict is only apparent: through practical wisdom it should be possible to understand what is the most important virtue in every case

Virtue Ethics

Problem 4: is that doctrine egotistic? Or the self-centered problem: virtue ethics is primarily concerned with the agent's own character

- This objection fails to recognize that virtues are other-regarding as well as self-regarding (for example, kindness requires to respond in a nice way to others)