

1. What is your highest moral purpose or ultimate moral aim? What are the origins for this highest purpose & how do you justify it? Is there a better way to justify your highest moral aim? Is your highest moral purpose/aim viable & workable in the way you actually live your life? How present is this moral purpose before your mind when it comes to moral decision-making? What kind of moral legacy do you want to leave behind for your family, friends, & community?
2. What is your personal criteria for evaluating truth-claims, commands & duties, cultural, moral constructs, values, responsibilities, reparations, virtue, moral compromise, consequences committed, spheres of activities, authorities, associations, movements, issues of moral, social concerns, constructs, duties, & applications are present?
3. How do you personally justify your own moral truth-claims? How do you evaluate your own truth-claims? How do you handle your own truth-claims when they come into conflict with each other in a particular situational setting? Do you take the time to reflect upon the moral habits formed in your life? Do you reflect on the moral decisions you made? Do you take time to reflect on the consequences (immediate & long-term) that were produced from those moral decisions? How do you reflect upon the habits formed, moral decisions made, & consequences produced? Do you even know where to begin?
4. What is your starting point for actually doing ethics in moral decision-making?
5. What are your own moral assumptions about what is good/evil, right from wrong? What are the origins of those moral assumptions? Have you ever reflected upon them? Are the moral assumptions consistent with another given the real possibility of cognitive & existential dissonance & worldview fracturing? How do your moral assumptions affect other foundational, categorical, & habituated beliefs & doings of your worn worldview: God, reality, truth, knowledge, humanity, & aesthetics? What fixed biases, fluid-like preunderstandings, the faculties of the mind, the experiences of life, & situational setting do you think might be affecting the clarity of your ability to evaluate moral truth-claims?
6. Have you considered the problems of (a) arbitrary, prejudicial conjecture, (b), pre-commitments, (c) assumptions (an idea accepted without proof), & self-deceptions? Are you able to recognize them?

We recommend a combination criteria for evaluating moral truth-claims & approaches for it helps free one from a “rutted road” routine pattern, promotes analytic, synthetic, existential, & lateral thinking, & seeks to evaluate on the basis of weightiness or probability when comparing one ethical approach to another: (1) logical coherence; (2) empirical adequacy; (3) existential relevance; (4) workable; (5) Viable; (6) explanatory power; (7) advance ethical & aesthetic excellence & nutritious consequences. See Paul R. Shockley & Raul F. Prezas, *Thinking with Excellence*, pp. 48-56; 160-166.

Virtue Ethics (VE): An Action is right iff it is what the virtuous person would do in similar circumstances. The virtuous person is one who possesses the virtues. Central question: what type of a person should I be? Virtue comes from Greek word “*arete*” meaning excellence.

Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* is the central historical text on VE. Virtue cultivates flourishing (speaks to the whole of one’s life), engendering happiness. Everything that you are (intellectually & morally) & have (set of external goods) are to flourish. Other seminal texts include Plato’s *Meno* & Plato’s *Republic*. Also, VE was “reborn” in 20th century with G.E.M. Anscombe’s 1958 pivotal article, “Modern Moral Philosophy.”

Socrates first raises the question, “What is virtue?” In *Plato’s Meno* states it is knowledge = virtue. For if knowledge can be taught, virtue can be learned. Mind/reasoning is essential for the good life. We act in accordance to our nature. Stated differently, why equate virtue with knowledge? Virtue meant fulfilling one’s function. As a rational being, we are to function rationally. In view of the inescapable desire for happiness (knowing that happiness is the ultimate end of our action or ultimate human good), we are to seek to behave rationally. Thus, the reason we morally fail is due to ignorance or forgetfulness. Stated differently, why harm yourself? In sum, there can be no higher good than the possession of virtue for a virtuous person is bound to be happier than one who is not.

Plato: In Plato’s *Republic*, virtue = well-ordered soul. Soul is composed of three parts: mind, appetites, & emotions (spirit). When all three harmonize or aggregate together, each flourishing in their respective domain with mind in control over all, a well-ordered soul will emerge bearing the fruit of four cardinal virtues: justice, courage, wisdom, & self-control. But whenever the appetites (any addiction will do) or emotions (e.g., anger) take over against the mind, one will have a disordered soul.

Aristotle contends virtue = habits of excellence. We become what we repeatedly do. Intellectual virtues are taught & moral virtues are acquired through habituation. Carefully cultivate moral goodness by rigorous practice. But the ideal of virtue is doing the right thing because you want to do the right thing; you desire to act virtuously. VE is about character formation, becoming a person of excellence; VE works on your motivation, your desires, & your intentions. You want to want to be a person of excellence!

Louis Pojman describes 3 types of aretaic ethics involving duties, rules, or principles: (1) **Pure Aretaic Ethics:** virtues possess intrinsic value & moral principles from the virtues (e.g., Aristotle; Philippa Foot; Alasdair MacIntyre); (2) **Standard Deontic Correspondence Thesis:** virtues are derived from duties, rules, or principles; for every rule there is a corresponding virtue that is to be cultivated in one’s disposition (e.g., William Frankena; John Rawls; Paul R. Shockley); (3) **Complimentary Thesis or Pluralistic Ethics:** deontology & aretaic models are necessary for a complete system with both virtues & duties complimenting each other on an equal footing (Robert Louden; Walter Schaller). See Louis P. Pojman, *How Should We Then Live: An Introduction to Ethics*, pp. 174-184. See also Shockley’s Aretaic Graded Absolutism as an example of Correspondence Thesis integrating graded absolutism with virtue theory & natural, moral law offering an anti-reductionistic approach: (a) Fulfilling moral obligations & developing habits; (b) hierarchical structure of duties that may help relieve or resolves moral difficulties when they come into conflict with each other; (c) focusing on strength of character as one faces the troubles & pressures of life. www.prshockley.org.

Advantages: (1) Focuses on the development of habits that promote human excellence & happiness; (2) Recognizes how rational behavior requires being sensitive to the social & personal dimensions of life; (3) Rational” actions are not based on abstract principles but on moderation; (4) provides moral motivation rooted in disposition of excellence that strengthens resolve & enriches the attitude to do a moral action in a healthy direction; (5) Virtues are character traits that are “good” for people to have; the virtuous person will flourish in life. **Ideal exemplars**, those who teach us by example & not by precept only, include Buddha; Moses; Jesus; Gandhi; Mother Teresa.

Disadvantages: (1) Vast differences on what constitutes a virtue? Are the virtues the same for everyone? Different people, cultures, & societies have different opinions on what counts as a virtue. Is there a single set of virtue traits applicable to everyone? (2) Lacks clarity in resolving moral conflicts; (3) Self-centeredness because its primary concern is the agent’s own character; (4) Well-being is the master value & all things are valuable only to the extent that they can contribute to it (self-interest?); (5) Imprecise: It fails to give us any practical step-by-step help of how should we behave; (6) Leave us hostage to luck: some will attain moral maturity & others will not; (7) It is weak in the area of what to do in right-action approach since it is focused on character-formation.

Aristotle: Key terms: Virtue; Habits; Character (sum-total of one’s habits); **Eudaimonia** (happiness; successful living; human flourishing); **Phronesis** (give into the right desire in the right circumstance at the right time, in the right way, for the right reason); the **Golden Mean** (avoid excessiveness & deficiency in all moral activities-practice the path of moderation always); **Mimesis** (mentored by one who possesses virtue). **Vice** is a bad habit

For the morally deficient there are two serious states: (1) **Akratic:** the morally weak person who desires to do other than what he knows ought to be done & acts on this desire against his better judgment. (2) **Enkratic:** the morally strong person who shares the akratic agent’s desire to do other than what he knows ought to be done, but acts in accordance with his better judgment. **Incontinence** is a peculiar form of badness. Unlike vice, incontinence does not involve willing bad behavior. Rather, it consists of knowing what is good but lacking the self control to do the good. Incontinence is not as bad as vice since it is partially involuntary. But the fully virtuous person = desire + judgment = agree; no conflict within. Thus, choose to be virtuous. **Desire + duties must agree with each other with no conflict within.**