

# Psychological Aspects of Social Issues

Chapter 7  
Virtue Ethics  
Be a Good Person

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## Outline/Overview

- Aristotelian ethics
  - Core concepts – virtue, eudaimonia, golden mean
  - Evaluating the theory
- Ethics of care
  - Gilligan contrasted with Kohlberg
  - Principles/discussion
  - Evaluation – current research

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## Aristotelian virtue ethics

- Life is teleological
- Eudaimonia – happiness/human flourishing
- What is a virtue?
- Develop by being exercised - “we become just by doing just acts”

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## The “Golden Mean”

- Midpoint between behavioral extremes.
- Confucianism
- Also Socrates, and Plato
- Consistency with our experience?
- Examples

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## Virtuous/happy life

- Moderation in all things.
- Contrast with Kantian ethics
  - Kant - act out of sense of duty
  - Virtue ethicist do right due to our character
- How do we decide virtues that we should be cultivating?
  - Moral exemplars
- Imitate the proper moral example initially and later internalize
- We get virtues by exercising virtues.

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## Evaluating Virtue Ethics

- Living a “good life”-good starting point
- Coherence is met
- Generally consistent with moral judgments & experiences.
- Usefulness, applying - problematic
  - How do we know what a virtuous person would do?
- Circularity
- Plenty of guidance out there about virtue and vice.
- Virtues can be in conflict
- Can weight principles – hybrid?

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## Ethics of Care

- Emphasizes interpersonal relationships and virtues
- Carol Gilligan advanced these ideas as a reaction to Kohlberg's work
- Gilligan believed the description of moral reasoning Kohlberg developed explained how men went about moral decision making
- Women are more likely to focus on interpersonal relationships

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## Recent research – real difference?

- Vaughn - recent research has raised doubts about there being dramatic differences between genders.
- "Sort of" true.
  - not huge, but reliable differences
- Meta-analyses have found differences in the small-medium effect range
  - Gender differences in caring orientation seems to be largest for adolescents.
  - Females do develop higher levels of prosocial behavior
- Baier points out the importance of integrating both justice and caring into our moral framework.

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