**VIRTUES AND VICES**

1. WHAT IS A VIRTUE?

A virtue is a habit or an acquired human quality of character that allow one to achieve personal happiness. By definition, then, virtue is something good, an "excellence" of human character. There cannot be a bad virtue. Vice is the opposite—a habit that spoils one’s chances of achieving personal happiness. By definition, vice is bad; there cannot be a good vice.  
Virtues are valuable to us because they are the requirements for living the good life. Doing something to undermine our virtues or our ability to practice virtues is a great harm to people.  
Virtues are not separate from happiness itself. They can be understood as the means to happiness, but since happiness is not a good over and above the other goods of life, acting virtuously and striving to be virtuous is identical to happiness. Therefore virtues are valuable as such, for themselves.  
[In medical practice, the virtues of medicine would be the character traits that enable one to succeed/excel at the medicine, that is, to achieve the goods at which the medicine aims; the lack of such virtues would effectively prevent us from achieving any of the good of medicine.]  
Virtues can be either moral or intellectual—they make either our actions good or our thinking good.

***What makes something a moral virtue?***

Six basic characteristics:

1. A *dispositional* feature of character: it makes us good and do our jobs well. They "actually engage the will"—moral virtues if possessed are (in the sense of must always be) used. [Being sickly, 43 years old or married aren't dispositional]

2. Voluntarily acquired: we aren't born with them, but it is up to us to acquire them. As they are beneficial to us, we have as well *reason* to acquire them. [Someone who doesn't or even doesn't choose to acquire them is at least foolish, and may be bad. Having perfect pitch or being good at holding liquor is not voluntarily acquired.]

3. Involve acting with judgment: because they engage the will, and because they involve our emotive side, virtues blend emotion and judgment in a way that is mutually supportive. "Emotional perceptiveness" –hitting the target, in the right way, at the right time, etc. [Unlike spelling or knowing who wrote Hamlet]

4. Needed for living well: Living well requires getting all the components of acting and feeling right: hitting the target. That's what the virtue does. [Unlike ability to play chess]

5. Pervasively relevant to how adequately you fulfil your various roles in life: central in all areas of life. [Unlike being able to swim or sing in tune] How would you show this of a character trait?

6. Involve acting with a proper motive: showing a virtue involves acting with appropriate motive or attitude. [Unlike being curious, shy or energetic]

2. SO WHAT ARE THE VIRTUES?

We'll just take a very traditional answer to this. As most people will say, things like: honesty, courage, justice, prudence, self-control, loyalty, sincerity, etc. "The four major virtues in Greek ethics are justice, courage, temperance, and love. An excellent person will be a person who (1) *is* habitually just, courageous, temperate, and loving; (2) has just, courageous, temperate, and loving *feelings*; and (3) *behaves* justly, courageously, temperately, and lovingly." p35.

3. SOME LEFTOVER POINTS ABOUT VIRTUE

* It should be clear from the above that virtues strengthen men and women to meet their moral responsibilities
* Virtues also help us to fit in—to society in general, and to practices and activities we have chosen to participate in
* Possessing the virtues, the acquired qualities necessary to achieve the goods in a practice, is a package deal. The all arise together, or they don't exist at all. Practices are complex, and many qualities are required to succeed at them. It takes only lack in one area to fail at the whole thing. The virtues must work together or they will mutually destroy each other. Grouping the virtues as an intellectual exercise, is helpful for understanding and memory, but experientially, the grouping or the differences between various ways of grouping is not important.
* Unique blend or profile of virtues in each person = character. We all highlight or favor particular virtues.

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CLASS EXERCISE HANDOUT FOR DISCUSSION WEEK 1

VIRTUES are the feelings, habits or behaviors best suited to achieve personal happiness. The first recognition of prudence is that moderation (striking a balance) between excess and deficit is the way to best achieve happiness.

1. Try to name the two extremes (vices) of the following virtues. These are mostly from Aristotle.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Emotion, Desire**  **or Attitude** | **Sphere of action** | **Vice (Excess—too much)** | **Virtue (Appropriate balance)** | **Vice (Deficit—not enough)** |
| fears | responding to danger | bravado | courage | cowardice |
| physical pleasure | satisfying our appetites |  | temperance |  |
| desire to help | giving gifts |  | generosity |  |
| desire to succeed | pursuing accomplishments |  | proper ambition |  |
| self-affirmation | appraisal of oneself |  | proper pride |  |
| desire to recognized | expression about oneself |  | truthfulness |  |
| shame | awareness of one’s flaws |  | modesty |  |
| anger | responding to insults |  | patience |  |
| attitudes towards others | general social conduct |  | friendliness or amiability |  |
| distress | indignation at other’s undeserved good fortune |  | righteous indignation |  |
| amusement | conversation, humor |  | wittiness |  |

INTELLECTUAL VIRTUES

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Intellectual activity** | **Vice (Excess—too much)** | **Virtue (Appropriate balance)** | **Vice (Deficit—not enough)** |
| Accurate awareness of the limits of one’s knowledge | Intellectual pretentiousness, conceit | Intellectual humility | Intellectual submissiveness |
| Facing and fairly addressing ideas, especially ones we don’t like. | Intellectual rashness—acceptance of any new idea | Intellectual courage | Intellectual cowardice—passive and uncritical acceptance of what we have "learned." |
| Seeing things from the point of view of others |  | Intellectual empathy |  |
| Exercising rational control of one’s beliefs, values, inferences. |  | Intellectual autonomy |  |
| Being true to one’s own thinking |  | Intellectual integrity |  |
| Continuing despite difficulties and frustrations |  | Intellectual perseverance |  |
| Faith in the power and value of reason to better our lives and to used by others |  | Confidence in Reason |  |
| Treatment of other viewpoints. |  | Fairmindedness |  |