

## *Virtue Ethics in 90 Seconds*

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In contrast to deontological and consequentialist ethical theories that focus on determining and performing the morally right action in any given circumstance, **virtue ethics** is concerned with the *character* of the person performing the action.

Action-based ethical theories, like utilitarianism and Kantianism, ask “What should I *do*?” and require us to act according to certain rules or principles, such as “perform that act that will result in the greatest good for the greatest number of people,” or “perform that act that can be universalized and that treats all people as ends in and of themselves.”

Virtue ethics, on the other hand, asks “What sort of person should I *become*?” and focuses on *being* rather than merely *doing*. Its concern is the heart and motivation of the person.

The formation of virtuous habits is the primary emphasis of virtue ethics. We do this by modeling our behavior after a person who embodies the morally good life. By practicing morally right behaviors over time, these behaviors become habits or virtues that are so ingrained within us that we no longer have to struggle over moral decisions, but behave in the morally right way, almost by instinct. In this way, we develop moral character and become virtuous people. For virtue ethicists, our actions come from our character, or who we are.

Three questions that constitute criticisms of pure virtue ethics are:

- (1) How do we identify the virtues to which we should aspire?
- (2) Who is the model virtuous person who should serve as our example?
- (3) How do we determine what to do in morally unclear situations?

And that’s *Virtue Ethics*...in 90 seconds.