



## THEORY OF CHARACTER

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## **Ethics of Character**

### **Introduction**

The first step in making ethical decisions remains as the most preferred way in enacting informed choices. The second entails taking a systematic approach. It is critical to analyze various components concerning what constitutes a moral action. According to Aristotle, six primary elements guide moral character in any social set up.<sup>1</sup> Notably, they include moral imagination which argues that routine relationships and choices play a significant part in an ethical dimension. Moral ordering and identification rank as the second element in the identification of critical issues and determining priorities. Honest evaluation constitutes the third element entailing application of analytical skills in the assessment of options. Tolerating ethical disagreements and ambiguity is the fourth element which focuses on agreeing on courses of action. The fifth focuses on the integration of managerial ability together with moral proficiency.<sup>2</sup> It entails the ability to anticipate most likely dilemmas that could instigate informed decision making. The last aspect is a moral obligation which is the motivating factor towards engaging in moral judgment and implementation of decisions taken. Through the above approaches, a person can make ethical decisions that are corresponding to their character traits. From the elements as mentioned above, it is evident that virtue and integrity are the foundations of good character.

### **Integrity and Virtue in Character Formation**

An individual has integrity if and when they follow a strict set of principles anchored on moral guidelines. One has integrity when what they do and say are the same and are in line — believing one oneself, always speaking the truth, respecting and loving other in addition to undertaking the right course of action even if no one is observing. Other include

1 Neher, William, and Paul Sandin. *Communicating ethically: Character, duties, consequences, and relationships*. Routledge, 2017.

2 Ibid., 35

understanding and listening to others, never judging others, and dedicate oneself to a good act with fairness and dedication. One with integrity keeps assurances and always sticks to the right thing despite the odds. It is all about honesty, forth rightfulness, straightforwardness, truthfulness, and decency.

Virtue is the moral quality of an individual. Morally upright individuals have a character made features that dedicate to the general good of the society. Thus, integrity stems from a virtuous life that arises from an individual's day to day activities that promote human right and well-being. These arise from strictly molded principles that form out of one's traits and based on morally upright choices.

### **Metaethics**

Moral decisions arise from ethical perspectives formed by an individual's actions. The responses, habits, and activities related to an upright character bends towards good and moral actions.<sup>3</sup> Humans' soul and body are united, thus actions taken by the body represent one's self meaning that individuals are self-governing, self-processing and self-determining.<sup>4</sup> Hence, to build good character traits and act ethically, one must cultivate the best virtues. Action and character are many times interweaved to one's professional engagements or duties and cannot go beyond a person's sense of right and wrong without affecting them adversely. For example, for a teacher to be of sound character, he must align his actions with conscience both in private or public engagement.

A person cannot be separated from their character. Taking on a fitting and proper trait denotes that an individual's responses, actions, and habits are directed and unified towards the right course regarding morality. Thus, individual actions cannot disentangle from public

3 Geoffrey, Goodwin, P. "Moral character in person perception." *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 24, no. 1 (2015): 38-44.

4 Ibid., 65

engagements or activities. Both have a significant impact on one's character.<sup>5</sup> For example, a pharmacist holds it that abortion is an immoral act but goes ahead and fills prescriptions. Such action is undoubtedly bound to have an impact on his or her character. One's actions are a reflection of the person's character traits and can lead to a change in one's overall behavior. The more an individual engages in a kind act such as helping the needy, the more it becomes a particular segment of his or her overall character that further has a significant impact on moral action(s).

In coming to terms with one's noble character, a person is bound to desire and know the good and hence must go after both in private and public. Virtue is an active helper towards achieving the objective and represents a positive character trait. It is developing in prudence and virtue molds behavior thus streamlining a person's integrity. The pharmacist who prescribes drugs for abortion and believes in upholding ethical actions must showcase the belief in activities that promote human good.

### *Application*

A character is firmly attached to an individual, and no single entity can bring a separation between the two. Notably, it has a significant permanence in human lives. Character delineates a set of typical and outstanding marks that allow identification of an individual. While what activity can be distinguished from a person, a character cannot be distanced from a person. The same case applies to moral behaviour.<sup>6</sup> The trait thus directly relates to an individual's identity, a permanence that defines uninterrupted human sameness. On the other hand, personality is more comprehensive and can include aspects such as nature that often calls for biological explanations. The logical point of firmness and excellence is

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 39

<sup>6</sup> Gabriel, Navarro, *Character theory and the McKay conjecture*. Vol. 175. Cambridge University Press, 2018.



founded within frameworks of moral character that gives forth a fundamental aspect of sound decision making.<sup>7</sup> The association gives rise to assessment, judgment, choice and decision making within the right framework of immoral or moral action. Moral behavior is deeply involved in most professions as well as day to day engagements, particularly in decision making. Actions, emotional reactions, and habits all make up a sound character all directed and unified within moral uprightness.

The four categories of character as brought forth by Aristotle include continent; vice-filled, virtuous, and incontinent. The groupings are a deep reflection of a deeper meaning towards Nicomachean ethicss.<sup>8</sup> Within the vice-filled individual, craving and reason share similarities with reason standing forth as a dependent to cravings and desires. Within the incontinent individual, cravings and purpose are not unified since cravings win over purpose.<sup>9</sup> In this case, there exists sufficient know-how on engaging in appropriate action coupled with the desire to undertake it; however, cravings often outmatch purpose. To be a right person, the use of reason needs to win over cravings.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, the continent individual's cravings and purpose are not in unison. The mission wins more often than needs. While there is a desire, purpose outmatches the underlying cravings. The virtuous individual controls cravings with purpose or reason.<sup>11</sup> The above groupings admit to various degrees, for example, one individual may be less continent or more incontinent. At the same time, humans are never static and often vary from one categorization over their lifetime. However, for the majority of persons fall in the incontinent and continent category, they must understand the moral aspect of issues and have the willingness to do it.

<sup>7</sup> Goodwin, Geoffrey P. "Moral character in person perception." *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 24, no. 1 (2015): 38-44

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 44

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 67

<sup>10</sup> Goodwin, Geoffrey P. "Moral character in person perception." *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 24, no. 1 (2015): 38-44

<sup>11</sup> Navarro, Gabriel. *Character theory and the McKay conjecture*. Vol. 175. Cambridge University Press, (2018).

An instructor who engages in stealing examination results for his or her students falls into the group of incontinent. For instance, he or she may be pushed by circumstances originating from his workmates thus seemingly act out of panic. At the same time, he or she may be doing so for the good of students or institution, which is an obligation expected of students to pass exams. The category, however, may not fit into Aristotle's group since the instructor would be working towards the good of students. However, the main challenge is that cravings take full control.<sup>12</sup> However, the expression lacks a form of knowledge since it creates the relationship between action and character thus giving forth wrong preferences. The categorization further reveals another feature of behavior since an individual must display the reason for appropriate knowledge of good. For example, the instructor requires the right know-how of examination rules to engage in accepted and moral action.

An individual's character trait is based on how one defines and stands with the truth. For example, the instructor must have the right knowledge to make the appropriate decision. At the same time, a concern about the source of a gift is critical in maintaining one's character which entails expressing interest regarding the origin of gift.<sup>13</sup> As it is standard with any psychologically balanced individual, one needs the right and most appropriate reason to tap into the best attributes of a human being. Humans must have the right mindset for them to make a change which explains why, the more one is knowledgeable about truth, the better a person maintains good character.<sup>14</sup> The statement explains why an individual endowed with the right reasoning would be in an excellent position to move in the right direction. Such an individual believes and holds it upon him or herself to understand the truth but in real sense lives in denial.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid 76.

<sup>13</sup> Eden, Allison, Serena Daalmans, and Benjamin K. Johnson. "Morality predicts enjoyment but not appreciation of morally ambiguous characters." *Media Psychology* 20, no. 3 (2017): 349-373.

<sup>14</sup> Goodwin, Geoffrey P. "Moral character in person perception." *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 24, no. 1 (2015): 38-44.

Two frameworks make up the human personality with the first reflecting on accommodations that meet demand pattern, expression of one's personal beliefs and other's expectations. On the other hand, role structure makes up the types of an individual's expression regarding how to deal with other people. Character molds one's unique and outstanding attitudes particularly in relations to society's rules.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, it offers an enduring, stable and conscious platform against human moral standing. Such evolves through various stages but maintains one disposition against a person's profiles of the inner self. For example, young adults are often predisposed in accepting authority. Character forms a critical aspect of the socialization process where one is usually at a position to follow through and embrace a particular moral standing thus creating the foundation of morally uprightness and sound behavior. From the above discussion under metaethics, it is evident that characters are a combination of many insights and habits.

In constructing morally sound and accepting behavior, good traits are often directed towards actions that are cited as independent logic.<sup>16</sup> To achieve this, one is inclined towards establishing stable emotions, dispositions, thinking, and behavior pointed to a given direction that is morally acceptable. For example, cowardice and bravery guides personalities to behave, feel, and believe in the best way possible with the aim of responding to scary situations.<sup>17</sup> The postulation points to the fact that, a character is not a fixated phenomenon and that there is no place of contradiction within character development. Description of patterns of feelings thought, and disposition often fails to point to character qualities. However, both negative and positive character dispositions focus on essential elements of consistent behavior in line with a person's feelings, thoughts, and actions.

<sup>15</sup> Allison Eden, Serena Daalmans, and Benjamin K. Johnson. "Morality predicts enjoyment but not appreciation of morally ambiguous characters." *Media Psychology* 20, no. 3 (2017): 349-373.

<sup>16</sup> Cidam, Atilla. "Lay theories of morality in the lives of moral exemplars." (2016).

<sup>17</sup> Neher, William, and Paul Sandin. *Communicating ethically: Character, duties, consequences, and relationships*. Routledge, (2017).



## Conclusion

The foundations of good character are anchored on virtue and integrity. Moral character is established by an individual's decisions, actions, and are all unified towards moral good. Since human beings are souls and body entities, all activities and responses are self-governing, self-possessing and self-determining. To be of appropriate and morally upright character, an individual must come to terms with the good, partake only in positive inclinations and develop virtues. As such, character and an individual are two intertwined entities that form actions, habits, and emotional reactions that all points towards ethical uprightness. At the same time, individual actions cannot be separated from public activities with the two sets bound to have a significant impact on one's overall character. Public stunts such as the instructor helping students to steal exams are acts that affect one's private belief system. They are a reflection of both negative and positive traits bound to alter one's behavior. As such, it is a pointer that the more one engages in a moral act such as helping strangers; it becomes part of their overall character. It thus denotes the fact that to teach and build good character one must understand and come to terms with their reasons and desires. At the same time, humans must go after them publicly and privately. Virtue is just an aid to achieving this since it is the action behind a good character. Growing in virtue, embracing acts such as prudence establishes reasonable and appropriate attitude.



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