Virtue Theory

Virtue theorists believe that the central question for individuals is not "how should I act?", but is instead, "what kind of person should I be?"

Compare this with Utilitarianism and Kantian ethics:

Utilitarianism and Kantian theories → **How should I act?**

Virtue theory → **What kind of person should I be?**

Virtue theorists then describe a list of personal qualities that the moral person should have.

The most famous virtue theorist is Aristotle (384 BC – 322 BC).
The person with the correct virtues would flourish, or achieve a state called "eudaimonia"

How to solve moral dilemmas?

A virtuous person will make the correct decision!

Problems

1. How do we know which virtues are the correct ones?

2. Do the virtues differ from one culture to another? Is it possible to be a virtuous Nazi?

3. Moral dilemmas may have more than one solution. How do we decide which one is correct?

Aristotle and Virtue

"Virtue (*arete*) then is a settled disposition of the mind determining the choice of actions and emotions, consisting essentially in the observance of the mean relative to us, this being determined by principle, that is, as the prudent man would determine it."

Nicomachean Ethics Book II, Ch. 6

The virtues that Aristotle believed were important:

Sphere of Action	Mean	Excess	Deficiency
fear and confidence	**Courage**: mean in fear and confidence	no special name: exceeds in fearlessness	Cowardly: exceeds in fear and is deficient in confidence
		Rash: exceeds in confidence	
pleasures and pains	**Temperance**	Profligacy, dissipation, etc	scarcely occurs, but we may call it Insensible
giving and getting (smaller amounts of) money	**Liberality** (Rackham), **generosity** (Sachs)	Prodigality (Rackham), Wastefulness (Sachs)	Meanness (Rackham), Stinginess (Sachs)
giving and getting greater things	**Magnificence**	Tastelessness or Vulgarity	Paltriness (Rackham), Chintziness (Sachs)
greater honor and dishonor	**Greatness of Soul**	Vanity	Smallness of Soul
small honors	no special name	Ambitious	Unambitious
anger	**Gentleness**	Irascibility (Rackham), Irritability (Sachs)	Spiritlessness
truth	**Truthfulness**	Boastfulness: pretence as exaggeration	Self-depreciation: pretence as understatement

pleasantness and social amusement	**Wittiness**	Buffoonery	Boorishness
general pleasantness in life	**Friendliness**	obsequious, if for no purpose	quarrelsome and surly
		flatterer, if for own advantage	