



Virtue Ethics

Achieving the good life by practicing the virtues

Goodness

- To call something good, we are always referring to a thing's function. When we talk about a good stapler, we want to know how well it staples paper together, for example. Goodness is always defined in terms of the thing itself.
- And with regards to a things goodness, we are also talking about its Wholeness. For example, a good stapler is one which has all of its parts, and therefore functions better than one which is missing parts. So, wholeness and functionality are what we are referring to when we call something good.
- Notice that a good piece of cake is defined differently than a good stapler because they function at different capacities. A piece of cake makes for a lousy stapler, and vice versa. That is why we have to define good- ness in terms of the thing itself.
- Wholeness also has to do with a sense of completeness. And likewise, in the Greek context, the opposite of Good isn't Bad; it's Starvation.

What is Good?

This is the central question of ethics and Aristotle believed there was a right and wrong answer to this question. _____

Starvation implies a lack of wholeness, but also starvation limits one's function. A starving person, for example, will only be concerned with getting food - not with being "nice" or "generous" or what-have-you. We will come back to this...

- Functionality is the ability for something or someone to do what it was intended for. The Greek notion of Telos comes into play here. Telos is an aim, purpose, or end. And the question needs to be asked, "What kinds of things are capable of providing Telos vs. living Telos? So, when we submit some work to be graded, and get it back with a "Good Job" written at the top, what does that mean? What is a good car?"



Who is a "Good Person"?

The morally good person is a person who is:

1. Intent upon advancing the various goods of human life with which they are effectively in contact,
2. In a manner that respects their relative degrees of importance,
3. And to the extent to which the actions of the person question can actually promote the existence and maintenance of these goods.

There are three parts to this definition, all of which are very important. So let's take a look at them individually:

1) *Intent upon advancing the various goods of human life with which they are effectively in contact:*

This just means that you promote good for those things which you can actually do something about. Now don't forget - this includes you too. You are valuable as well, so we don't break our backs for others at the expense of our own good. There is a place for sacrifice, but we need to be careful with it.

2) *In a manner that respects their relative degrees of importance:*

So we don't work really hard at, and base our lives around becoming good at playing video games, for example. You may be the best video gamer around, but in terms of its actual importance, it ranks pretty low - so we need to find out what is important and focus our efforts around that, if we are to be good people.

3) *To the extent to which the actions of the person question can actually promote the existence and maintenance of these goods:*

One very important question in your life should be to know the answer to the question, "What good can I actually do?" Perhaps this will start with yourself first, then to your family. How can you help make your family more functional and whole?

What about Love?

Let's go back to starvation for a moment. For people who are starving, what is their aim or goal? Is it to help others? To promote various goods? No, their focus is only themselves. This affects how/if we are able to love.

Love is intending the Good for another. Thus, a good person is capable of Love. A really good person is capable of Unconditional Love: intending the Good for another despite how they have been treated. "Loving your enemies" for example.

- Mother Theresa taking in an untouchable off the streets who was dying and needed to be cleaned and cared for: His words to her were, "I have had to live my life as an animal, but now I can die like a human being." Simply because he had been "taken in" by others to give to him. This is love, this is intending the Good for another.
- This kind of relating to one another in love spreads like a shockwave through every dimension of human life and is transformative.
- But this does not always happen in life, does it?
- Most of us have experienced the pain of rejection.
- **Rejection is the worst thing that can happen to you as a person.** We all know about those times early in life - perhaps being rejected by your parent, or even being the last to be picked in

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gym class. Those thoughts have stamped themselves to our mind and have become part of our personality causing insecurity amongst other things.

- These experiences also spread through our life like a shockwave with deep pain to the point where we scramble to develop defenses for them, in order to ensure it will never happen again. Mechanisms like anger, substance abuse, and often times humor itself is used to cover up pain.
- More often than not, this rejection leads to a type of hiding - which leads to isolation and our rejection of others out of fear which leads to starvation. Did you know that small children, if isolated from love will die? They will die even if they are given all the biological necessities (food, water, shelter). Thus, we see that Love is a biological necessity as well.
- This kind of rejection happens all the time - here is how it typically plays out: Someone is rejected (perhaps even accidentally) and they begin to separate themselves emotionally or physically or both. That separation is perceived by the other, and then they too draw back - feeling rejected too. This is how isolation happens - it is a kind of "Assault/Withdrawal" behavior that we see in the media is given to our children as a way of life.

Thus to do wrong, or be a bad person is to intend or will others to suffer - usually through aggression.

A really good person is able to intend the good for others in any event.