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How Virtue Ethics Affect My Life

At times I feel confused or lost about who I am or what I should do I most often look towards the principles of virtue ethics. Since learning about them in my philosophical ethics class two years ago, they have always stood out to me as the most logical way to approach life and to be sure that I am doing the right thing. In terms of making decisions that are good or bad I sometimes consider consequential or deontological arguments, but most often I have questions about my life as a whole, I have been known to focus on the bigger picture, much like philosophers of ancient times like Plato and Aristotle.

When I become overwhelmed with the concept of who I should be, I look towards the idea of eudaimonia, which is defined as activity of the soul exhibiting virtue in a complete life. Which is the human telos, or the function humans are meant to fulfill. When humans fulfill their function, then they are living excellently, thus they are happy. It is reassuring to know that there is a function to my life, and I am working toward that end of happiness. I also enjoy how happiness under virtue ethics is not a mood, emotion of state of mind, rather it is an “activity of the soul”. This means that happiness cannot be accomplished in a day, it is a summation of a lifetime of working toward this end of the human function. When happiness is described solely as an emotion, it makes it seem unattainable in a sense. Because it is impossible to be happy all the time, everyone experiences different emotions, and they must be sad or angry at times. But the way our society values happiness sometimes makes me feel pressured to be happy all the time, but that is an incredibly high standard that I hold of myself. Aristotle’s definition of happiness reminds me that if I am working to build habits of good character and trying my best to live excellently that I am doing just fine.

Aristotle also puts an emphasis on loving wisdom and living wisely, whether that be practically or intellectually. One lives wisely practically by developing habits, which in turn allow someone to ethically make decisions and know what to do. In other words, when ethical questions arise, a virtuous person makes the right decision because they have built a good moral character through their habits and align their decisions with this character. Intellectually, one lives wisely by being willing to learn and understanding theory. In Greek, philosophy means loving wisdom, and ancient philosophers believed the intellectual life enhanced their overall life, allowing them to flourish even more and become closer to divinity. This applies to my life in that I chose to pursue a philosophy minor because I wanted to learn how to develop these kinds of habits by learning to live ethically and because I loved learning about the ideas of many different philosophers and I knew I could increase my intellect by taking classes that discussed different areas of philosophy.