CHARACTER ETHICS

Also known as Virtue Ethics, The Ethics of Self-Realization, The Ethics of Self-Perfection

Traditional ethical theories have emphasized ‘doing’ before ‘being’ (= what to do vs. who you are = thus the concern is: “tell me what to do – give me rules to tell me what to do – give me a theory that grounds the rules that tell me what to do”)

Character Ethics holds that this “gets the ethical cart before the horse” and emphasizes ‘being’ over ‘doing’ (= who you are / who you are becoming - as what you do is a manifestation of who you are)

Aristotle’s ethics are an example of Character / Virtue Ethics (which is “the Greek way of doing ethics.”)

Character is composed of character traits = dispositions to behave and to emote (have emotions) in particular ways in particular circumstances – to do so consistently

A character trait that is ‘good to have’ is called a virtue
A character trait that is ‘bad to have’ is called a vice

People are mixtures of virtue and vice – the challenge is to increase the number and strength of one’s virtues and to decrease the number and strengths of one’s vices

What makes a character trait good to have? – eudaimonia = ‘well-being’
- virtues increase and preserve well-being

What makes a character trait bad to have? = dysdaimonia = the opposite of well-being
- vices decrease eudaimonia and increase dysdaimonia

We are able to recognize ‘good persons’ = eudaimonic persons = persons whose virtues are many and strong and their vices are few and weak. These persons evidence phronesis = ‘good practical-moral judgment’ (we recognize that they consistently “know the right / good thing to do”)

Acquiring virtues / good character:
We experience recognition and admiration of good persons
We seek to become like good persons by a process of imitation of good persons
We develop good – virtuous habits by a process of habituation
We are influenced by moral traditions within which we learn the virtues / what it is to be a ‘good person’
We are influenced by moral communities within which we learn the virtues / what it is to be a ‘good person’