

# Moral Amplifiers

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## “Moral Amplifiers”

### Are these virtues... or what?

- Ambition • Assertiveness • Cautiousness •
- Conscientiousness • Cooperativeness • Curiosity •
- Decisiveness • Diligence • Discernment • Discretion •
- Enthusiasm • Equanimity • Exactingness • Flexibility •
  - Fortitude • Friendliness • Frugality • Generosity •
- Gentleness • Helpfulness • Inventiveness • Joviality •
- Kindness • Liveliness • Mindfulness • Orderliness •
- Patience • Persistence • Productivity • Reliability •
  - Resilience • Respectfulness • Resourcefulness •
- Confidence • Self-Control • Sensitivity • Steadiness •
  - Tact • Thoughtfulness • Zealousness •

## The Seven Objectivist Virtues

Rationality

Honesty

Independence

Productiveness

Justice

Integrity

Pride

## The Making of a Virtue

What’s so darn special about rationality, honesty, independence, productiveness, justice, integrity, and pride?

What makes them virtues?

## The Nature of Virtue

- Virtues...
  - ... recognize fundamental facts.
  - ... apply to most contexts.
  - ... are contextual absolutes.
  - ... are wholly matters of choice.

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## Good Qualities

- Such qualities are regarded as aspects of a good character — and for good reason.
- So are they virtues? Let’s find out!

## Major Virtues: Fundamentality

- Criteria:
  - Recognize fundamental facts?
  - Apply to most contexts?
  - Contextually absolute?
  - Wholly matters of choice?
- Consider: Patience, Resilience, and Sensitivity

## “Moral Amplifiers”

### Not Major Virtues... Perhaps Minor Virtues?

- These qualities are not (major) virtues, on par with rationality, honesty, justice, etc.
- They do not recognize fundamental facts or apply to most contexts.
- So... might they be minor virtues?

## About Minor Virtues

- Minor virtues aren't fundamental: they apply to only some contexts.
- They are contextual absolutes and wholly chosen.
- Example: Courage.

## Maybe they're minor virtues?

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## Minor Virtues: Contextual Absolutes

- As contextual absolutes, virtues are always beneficial and life-enhancing in their proper context.
- But... while regarded as positive traits, these other qualities can be damaging to oneself and others. They're not contextual absolutes.
- Consider: Generosity, Curiosity, Enthusiasm, and Exactingness

## Minor Virtues: Matter of Choice

- Virtues are wholly matters of choice: they are commitments to principles based on facts.
- But... while partly matters of choice, these other qualities are also partly matters of personality or temperament, whether innate or developed as a young child.
- Consider: Cooperativeness, Enthusiasm, Gentleness, Persistence, Orderliness, Equanimity, and Curiosity

## “Moral Amplifiers”

### Not Major or Minor Virtues...

- These qualities are not minor virtues like courage.
- That’s because they are not contextual absolutes or wholly determined by choice.
- So... um....

## What the heck are these qualities?

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## The Reveal

These qualities are not virtues,  
major or minor. They're

**MORAL AMPLIFIERS**

!

## What Are “Moral Amplifiers”?

- They are qualities of character, but not virtues.
- They are outgrowths of personality, such that some people find some of them easier to cultivate and exercise than others.
- They must be deployed selectively, based on the particular circumstances at hand.
- These qualities make a good person better and a bad person worse. They amplify moral character.

## “Moral Amplifiers”

### Three Moral Exemplars

- Ambition
- Kindness
- Persistence

## Ambition

- Ambition is “a strong desire to do or to achieve something, typically requiring determination and hard work.”
- Which characters in Ayn Rand’s novels are ambitious? Are they always ambitious?
- When is ambition self-interested (or not)?

## Ambition

- Ambition in action:
  - Howard Roark versus Ellsworth Toohey
  - John Galt as track hand versus striker
- The value of ambition depends on the morality of the goal sought and of the means employed. (Lance!)
- A person should be ambitious... sometimes.  
Cultivate the capacity, deploy it selectively.

## Kindness

- Kindness is “the quality of being friendly, generous, and considerate.”
- Which characters in Ayn Rand’s novels are kind? Are they always kind?
- When is kindness self-interested (or not)?

## Kindness

- Kindness in action:
  - Dagny Taggart versus Catherine Halsey
  - Howard Roark toward Peter Keating
  - You, helping people you know selectively
- The value of kindness depends on the worthiness of the recipient, plus the effects for the giver.
- A person should be kind... sometimes. Cultivate the capacity, deploy it selectively.

## Persistence

- Persistence is “firm or obstinate continuance in a course of action in spite of difficulty or opposition”
- Which characters in Ayn Rand’s novels are persistent or not? Are they always persistent?
- When is persistence self-interested (or not)?

## Persistence

- Persistence in action:
  - Kira versus Leo
  - Hank Rearden’s work in the world... then strike
- The value of persistence depends on the value of the goal, plus the effectiveness of the means.
- A person should be persistent... sometimes.  
Cultivate the capacity, deploy it selectively.

## The Role of Personality

- Moral amplifiers can be easier or harder for you to cultivate and deploy, based on personality.
- Virtue is never a matter of being born with “the right personality.” Every person has (different) struggles.
- Moral amplifiers are the bridge between personality and ethics.

## “Moral Amplifiers”

### What's easier or harder for you?

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## A Few Lessons about Moral Amplifiers

- Moral amplifiers are not virtues, but that doesn't mean that they're not morally significant!
- Moral amplifiers are qualities of character that a person ought to cultivate, then deploy selectively, based on the context at hand.
- Moral amplifiers are cultivated on a base of personality.

## Aristotle

Is there any connection between Aristotle's ethics and moral amplifiers?

Funny you should ask...

## Aristotle’s Virtues

- Virtues concern passions (i.e. emotions) and actions — i.e. feeling and acting properly.
  - They are “intermediates” between “excess” and “deficiency.”
- 
- Next: Virtue as a Contextual Mean

## Aristotle on Virtue as a Contextual Mean

- ... [moral virtue] is concerned with passions and actions, and in these there is excess, defect, and the intermediate. For instance, both fear and confidence and appetite and anger and pity and in general pleasure and pain may be felt both too much and too little, and in both cases not well; **but to feel them at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way, is what is both intermediate and best, and this is characteristic of virtue. Similarly with regard to actions also there is excess, defect, and the intermediate.**” (*NE*, 2.6)

## Aristotle on Virtue as a Contextual Mean

- Virtue is not any kind of “moderation” or mushy middle. Rather, “the intermediate not in the object but relatively to us.” Example: Milo the wrestler.
- Acting virtuously requires paying close attention to the particular facts (i.e. to the context) then using reason to discern the “mean.”
- Next: Virtues as Cultivated Dispositions

## Aristotle on Virtues as Dispositions

- “...the virtues we get by first exercising them, as also happens in the case of the arts as well. **For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them**, e.g. men become builders by building and lyreplayers by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts.” (*NE*, 2.1)

## Aristotle on Virtues as Dispositions

- Virtues are similar to physical skills: they are learned by practice. A person trains himself to virtue — cognitively and emotionally — by acting virtuously. By that process, virtue becomes “second nature.”
- Even when virtues are well-entrenched, virtuous actions are never done by rote: they must be chosen, i.e. the product of deliberation.

## Virtue for Aristotle, in Summary

“Virtue, then, is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e. the mean relative to us, this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it.” (*NE* 2.6)

- Aristotle’s virtues are very much like moral amplifiers!
- Next: Aristotle on Absolutes

## Aristotle on Absolutes

“But not every action nor every passion admits of a mean; for some have names that already imply badness, e.g. spite, shamelessness, envy, and in the case of actions adultery, theft, murder; for all of these and suchlike things imply by their names that they are themselves bad... It is not possible, then, ever to be right with regard to them; one must always be wrong. **Nor does goodness or badness with regard to such things depend on committing adultery with the right woman, at the right time, and in the right way, but simply to do any of them is to go wrong.**” (*NE* 2.6)

- On the positive side: Justice

## Some Practical Advice

- Distinguish between virtues and moral amplifiers.
- Cultivate your virtues first, and judge people by their virtues first and foremost.
- Identify and manage the failure modes of your personality: you have choices!
- Deliberately cultivate moral amplifiers opposite to that of your existing personality. Become flexible!
- When you're liable to err, drag yourself toward the opposite of your personality.

## One More Thing...

Appreciate that Ayn Rand’s theory  
of virtues as contextual absolutes  
is truly revolutionary!

There is so much more to explore here...

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