

# Pros and Cons of Virtue Ethics

## Positive

- The switch of focus for moral value from the *act* to the *agent*
- The importance of character and motivation in making ethical judgements: this is lacking in other normative theories
- The recognition that agents are emotionally involved in ethical reasoning—the *remainder* in a no-win situation
- The recognition that moral dilemmas *can* be resolved practically, unlike a conflict of absolute rules
- The opportunity to *learn* and *improve* one's moral life

## Problematic

- The difficulty of defining the end, *eudaimonia*
- Aristotle's claim that particular virtues lead to *eudaimonia* is difficult to establish
- It is not always clear what guidance virtue ethics offers in resolving a dilemma
- The difficulty of discovering a *virtuous person* whose opinion will define a right course of action
- The wide variety of characteristics offered as virtues: compare Aristotle and Nietzsche
- The circularity of definition: a right decision is what a virtuous person would decide; a virtuous person possesses virtues; virtues are what allow one to make a right decision
- Relativism: deciding on what *mean* to apply in what situation depends on particular circumstances; different virtuous persons may plausibly act differently in the same situation; a virtuous person may act differently at different times (as their practical wisdom deepens)