

# **Character Strengths & Virtues**

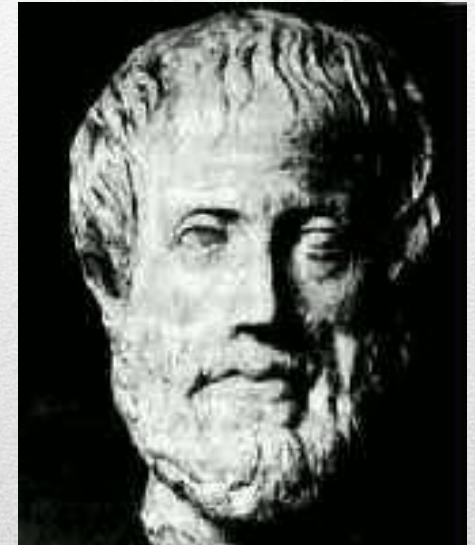
## **From Aristotle to Andy Griffith**

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- Seeks to develop individual character
- Assumes good persons will make good decisions
- Integral to the Jesuit tradition  
*The Spiritual Exercises*
- Provides a way of integrating other ethical theories



# Aristotle's Virtue Ethics

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- “Do what the Bible tells you”--Divine Command Theories
- “Follow your conscience”—The Ethics of Conscience
- “Look out for #1”--Ethical Egoism
- “Do the right thing”--The Ethics of Duty
- “Don't dis' me”--The Ethics of Respect
- “...all men are created ...with certain unalienable rights”--The Ethics of Rights
- “Make the world a better place”--Utilitarianism
- “Daddy, that’s not fair”--The Ethics of Justice
- “Be a good person”--Virtue Ethics

# Ethical theories

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<b>Virtue</b>	<b>Strength</b>	<b>Alternative names</b>	<b>Brief Definition</b>	<b>Model People</b>
<b>Wisdom</b>	Creativity	Originality, Ingenuity	Thinking of novel and productive ways to conceptualize and do things.	Beethoven, Shakespeare, Albert Einstein, Bill Gates
	Curiosity	Interest, Novelty-Seeking, Openness to Experience	Taking an interest in ongoing experiences for its own sake; exploring and discovering.	Columbus, astronauts, Richard Branson
	Open-Mindedness	Judgment, Critical Thinking	Thinking things through and examining them from all sides; weighing all evidence fairly.	Socrates, Plato, Aristotle
	Love of Learning		Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge, whether on one’s own or formally.	Da Vinci, Ben Franklin
	Perspective	Wisdom	Being able to provide wise counsel to others; having ways of looking at the world that make sense to oneself and to other people.	Aristotle, King Solomon, Jimmy Carter
<b>Courage</b>	Bravery	Valor, Courage	Not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain; acting on convictions even if unpopular.	Joan of Arc, Rosa Parks, Chinese man blocking tanks
	Honesty	Authenticity, Integrity	Presenting oneself in a genuine way; taking responsibility for one’s feelings and actions.	Thoreau, Fred Rogers (aka Mr. Rogers)
	Persistence	Perseverance, Industriousness, Resilience	Finishing what one starts; persisting in a course of action in spite of obstacles.	Thurgood Marshall, Thomas Edison, Harold Abrahams
	Vitality	Enthusiasm, Zest, Vigor, Energy	Approaching life with excitement and energy; feeling alive and activated; motivated and ambitious.	Tony Robbins, Robin Williams, Richard Simmons
<b>Humanity</b>	Love	Friendship	Valuing close relations with others, in particular those in which sharing and caring are reciprocated.	Jesus, Buddha, Romeo and Juliet
	Kindness	Compassion, Care, Generosity, Nurturance	Doing favors and good deeds for others.	Florence Nightingale, Warren Buffet, Fred Rogers
	Social Intelligence	Awareness, Sensitivity, Empathy	Being aware of the motives and feelings of other people and oneself.	Oprah Winfrey, Gandhi, Bill Clinton
<b>Justice</b>	Citizenship	Social Responsibility, Loyalty, Teamwork	Working well as a member of a group or team; being loyal to the group.	George Washington, 9-11 firefighters
	Fairness	Justice, Equity	Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice; not letting personal feelings bias decisions about others.	Martin Luther King, Gandhi, Bono
	Leadership	Social Dominance	Encouraging a group of which one is a member to get things done and at the same maintain time good relations within the group.	George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill
<b>Temperance</b>	Forgiveness	Mercy	Forgiving those who have done wrong; accepting the shortcomings of others; giving people a second chance; not being vengeful	Abraham Lincoln
	Humility	Modesty/Self Esteem	Letting one’s accomplishments speak for themselves; not regarding oneself as more (or less) special than one is.	George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Ron Howard
	Prudence	Good Judgment, Organized, Responsible	Being careful about one’s choices to achieve long-term goals; not taking undue risks; not saying or doing things that might later be regretted	People who use designated drivers and/or birth control
	Self-Regulation	Self-Control, Moderation	Regulating what one feels and does; being disciplined; controlling one’s appetites and emotions.	Monks, Athletes, Musicians, successful students
<b>Transcendence</b>	Appreciation of Beauty/Excellence	Awe, Wonder, Elevation	Appreciating beauty and excellence; sensuous connection to various domains of life, such as nature, art, science, etc.	Alfred Nobel
	Gratitude	Thankfulness	Being aware of and thankful of the good things that happen; taking time to express thanks.	Lou Gehrig
	Hope	Optimism, Future-Mindedness, Future Orientation	Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it; feeling a sense of self-efficacy	ML King, Gandhi, John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy
	Humor	Playfulness	Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side.	Walt Disney, Jim Carey, George Clooney
	Spirituality	Religiousness, Faith, Meaning, Purpose	Experiencing flow; having coherent views about one’s purpose, the meaning of life, and the meaning of the universe.	Dalia Lama, Mother Theresa, Dietrich Bonhoeffer



# Courage

from Peterson & Seligman's (2004) *Character Strengths & Virtues*, New York:  
Oxford University Press

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- Socrates contended that forethought was behind the deepest forms of bravery: “thoughtful courage is a quality possessed by very few,” whereas “rashness and boldness, and fearlessness which has no forethought, are very common qualities”
- Bravery involves use of judgment (prudence), is not coerced action, and involves presence of potential danger/risk/cost/loss
- “As the concept of bravery evolved over the centuries, it changed gradually from an emphasis on proving oneself in warfare to include an appreciation for the taking of social and economic risks as dictated by conscience” (215)
- Take a moment to think about the last act of bravery you personally witnessed.

# Bravery

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- Not as flashy as bravery...persistence shares with it the mustering of will needed to act in the face of contrary impulses:
  - Boredom, tedium, and frustration
  - Difficulties of all sorts
  - Temptation to do something easier, more pleasurable
- Persistence is a voluntary continuation of action in spite of obstacles, difficulties, or discouragement
- The Tortoise and the Hare

# Persistence

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- In some ways vitality often flavors other strengths of character, making it difficult to study empirically
- Vitality is a way to describe the engagement of flow, and it is most noteworthy (and praiseworthy) when displayed in circumstances that are difficult and draining
- Facing and resolving one's fears can be one of the most vital tasks of one's life.
- Pause and reflect on the last time you felt alive, vital, and engaged

# Vitality

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# **Humanity**

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- Love is a cognitive, behavioral, and emotional stance toward others that takes three forms:
  - Child-parent
  - Parent-child
  - Romantic (closeness with an individual whom we consider special and who makes us feel special)
- Much of the clinical work on love has focused on attachment. John Bowlby pioneered this work in the aftermath of WWII.
- There is abundant evidence that secure attachment is associated with more desirable outcomes at all ages (321)
- Another important line of love research involves the triangular theory of love formulated by Robert Sternberg.

# Love

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**Intimacy**

Liking  
(intimacy alone)

Romantic love  
(intimacy + passion)

Consummate love  
(intimacy + passion  
+ commitment)

Companionate love  
(intimacy +  
commitment)

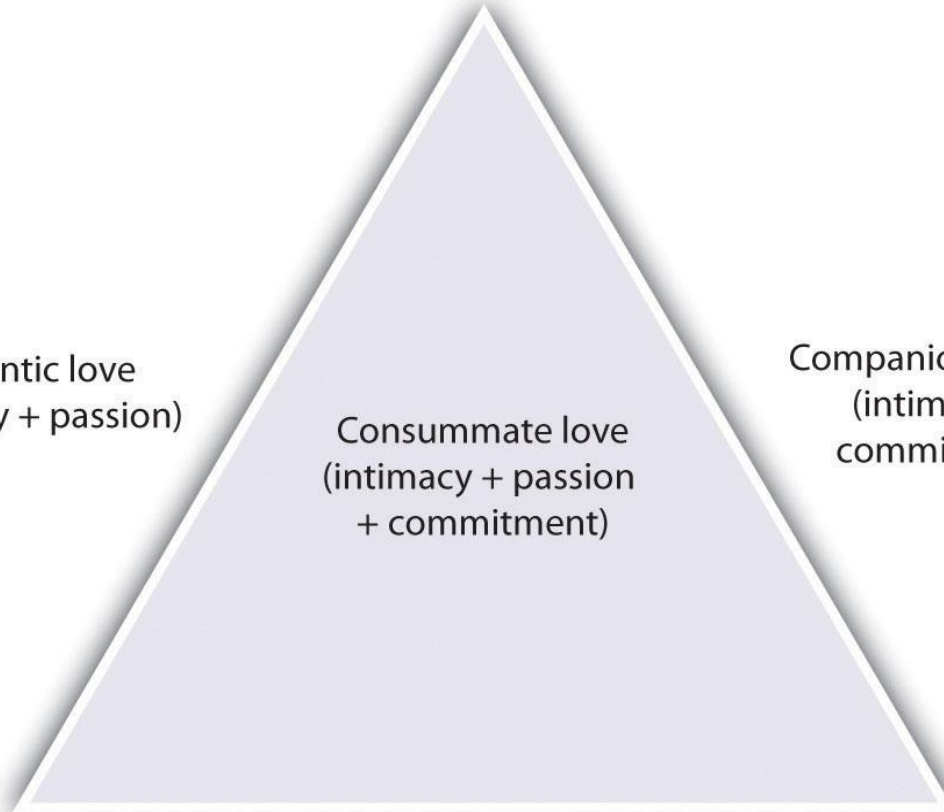
Infatuation  
(passion alone)

Fatuous love  
(passion + commitment)

Empty love  
(commitment alone)

**Passion**

**Commitment**



- *Kindness, generosity, nurturance, care, compassion, and altruistic love* are a network of closely related terms indicating a common orientation of the self toward the other (326)
- Secular and devotional literature from around the world are replete with stories of individuals who experienced changes in their personality, well-being, and goals after receiving altruistic love from another person (329)

Egoism-----Altruism

(Another word for egoism is *narcissism*)

# Kindness

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- Social intelligence is concerned with interpreting and processing “hot” information, or information of direct personal relevance for survival and well-being (338). There are three overlapping aspects of “hot” information:
  - Emotional processing
  - Self understanding
  - “Reading” and working with others

# Social Intelligence

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# Justice

from Peterson & Seligman's (2004) *Character Strengths & Virtues*, New York:  
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- People with the character strength of citizenship have a sense of duty to the group and pull their own weight as group members.
- Example: Sam Nzima



# Citizenship

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- Fairness refers to an individual's treatment of other people in similar or identical ways—not letting one's personal feelings or issues bias decisions about others.
- One of the most striking themes of the Civil Rights movement in the US is the commitment of its members, black and white, to the ideal of fair treatment for all.



# Fairness



Leaders are charged with:

- Getting group members to do what they are supposed to do, and
  - Preserving good relationships and morale among these members.
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- Likert (1961) differentiated between task-oriented and relationship-oriented behaviors that leaders engage in.
    - We manage tasks
    - We lead people
  - Good leaders possess intelligence (Aristotle's "rationality"), dominance, and flexibility

# Leadership

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# Transcendence

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- Transcendence involves some kind of deep, meaningful connection to the other, or to the Other, as you will.
- Aristotle's virtue ethics is founded on the principle that the virtuous person who seeks to discover the good life will inevitably find it in relationship with others—*an area where control either does not matter, does not work, or both.*

# The virtue of transcendence

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# Tripping Over Joy

What is the difference  
between your existence  
and that of a Saint?  
The Saint knows  
that the spiritual path  
is a sublime chess game with God  
and that the Beloved  
has just made such a fantastic move  
that the Saint is now continually  
tripping over joy  
and Bursting out in laughter  
and saying, "I Surrender!"

Whereas, my dear,  
I am afraid you still think  
you have a thousand serious moves.

- “What marks gratitude is the psychological response to the gift, whatever its nature, and the experience, however briefly, of the transcendent emotion of grace—the sense that we have benefited from the actions of another” (524)
- Dopamine can be raised by acts of kindness and expressions of gratitude.
- The *Examen of Consciousness* introduced by Ignatius is an elegant gratitude ritual that can increase this strength in the practitioner’s life.
- In groups of two or three share what has given you life in the past 24 hours.

# Gratitude

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