CHARACTER APPROACH
(e.g. Aristotle, Elizabeth Anscombe)

"WHAT KIND OF PERSON SHOULD I BE?"

Focuses on the character traits that make one a good person. Qualities that we value and should strive for (e.g. compassion, fairness, honesty). What's right is to be a person of good character/virtue (vs. just consequences or code). There are some universal qualities (virtues, character traits) that are good for all people to have; qualities needed for successful living.

QUESTIONS?

ASK YOURSELF:

What kind of person should I be?

How can I be compassionate, fair, honest, respectful, responsible, etc.?

SAYINGS

ASSOCIATED WITH THIS APPROACH:

"Our character is what we do when no one is looking"

"Watch your habits, they become your character"

"It builds character"

PROS +

CHARACTER TRAITS MATTER. Can help us focus on the character traits that make one a good person, qualities to strive for (not just consequences or code/rules).

Your friend visits you after your recent breakup. You are so happy to see them. You ask why and they say: "You are my friend and I really care about you" (e.g. feelings of compassion). Different than: "I felt it was my duty since I follow the rule/code that I should visit those suffering…" or "I calculated the greatest good I could do today and this is it".

MOTIVATION. Accounts for important aspects of our moral/ethical motivation (e.g. friendship, love).

RELATIONSHIPS. Allows us to account for personal relationships & situational nuances.

You are walking down the street and see three people being attacked. On the right side of the street your good friend is being attacked, on the left side two strangers are being attacked. You need to act fast. A character approach allows you to weigh your personal relationships. Don't you have more responsibility to a good friend or family member (e.g. your best friend or sibling) than to two strangers?

CONS −

WHICH TRAITS? No guidance for which character traits we should pursue.

Some say we should always be courageous, but is courage always an ideal character trait? Could a person argue that the 9/11 terrorists showed courage by risking their lives for what they believed in? Courage for what? Which traits should we pursue instead?

WHAT ACTION? No guidance for what to do or how to act, including times when important character traits conflict.

Honesty vs. Compassion. Your friend gets an expensive haircut for a job interview or date and seems to really like it. You think it's terrible. They ask you what you think. Should you be honest and share your true feelings or be compassionate and help them feel good and confident? Aren't both honesty and compassion important? May need to look to another approach for help.

CONCLUSION

This is a very well respected approach that is an essential component of WeTake5.com's "5Cs" pluralistic approach to ethical decision-making. Regarding the "Which Traits?" Con listed above, Rushworth Kidder has found some universally valued character traits that seem to show up all over the world: Compassion, Fairness, Honesty, Respect and Responsibility (Kidder, 2009).

Helpful References: Hinman, Lawrence P. (2012) *Ethics: A Pluralistic Approach to Moral Theory (5th Edition)*; Kidder, Rushworth M. (2009) *How Good People Make Tough Choices: Resolving the Ethical Dilemmas of Living (Revised Edition)*. Harper Perennial; Rachels, James and Stuart. (2006) *The Elements of Moral Philosophy (5th & 7th editions)*. McGraw-Hill