

# What Is Practical Judgement?

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## **Introduction**

Over the past two decades virtue ethics has garnered a great deal of attention. Ethicists, including business ethicists, have adopted virtue ethics as an alternative or supplement to Kantian and utilitarian ethics. Virtue ethics has been seen as having several strengths.

First, the ethic emphasizes the centrality of character. Choices are not made in a void. They grow out of a person's character and shape it as well. Second, good choices embody and reflect a wide array of habits of human excellence. These excellences include not merely justice and respect (the virtues emphasized in Kantian and utilitarian ethics) but other habits of choice, such as loyalty, caring, moderation, courage and trustworthiness. Third, people come to understand the meaning of choices in and through activities that have a certain shape or form—what Alisdair MacIntyre has called “practices” (MacIntyre, 1984 p. 187-203). Doctors must understand the implications of their practices for patients, not for litigants or students. They grasp these implications through acting as doctors—i.e., engaging in the practice of medicine. Kantian and utilitarian ethics overlook these crucial social forms of intermediary practices, making all actions simply a matter of individual choice. Finally, these practices and virtues are learned in communities—families, churches, professions, firms, the nation, and, increasingly, the world community. On this view, if we want to understand the dynamics of choosing well, we must pay attention to the structures,

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