

BIG QUESTIONS

IMPROVING CHARACTER THROUGH VIRTUOUS HABITS

OVERVIEW:

Philosophers have long focused on the question of how we can improve our characters and become better people. One of Aristotle's great insights was to notice how virtues — like generosity, open-mindedness, and wisdom — are built up out of habits, which are ultimately formed by repeatedly performing particular actions. In this exercise, we'll walk you through the process of focusing on a virtue you'd like to acquire or strengthen. Then, we'll create steps you can follow to develop it and put this plan into practice.

1 Virtues are character traits that allow us to live excellent and morally good lives. Pick a virtue from the following list — or identify one of your own — that you'd like to cultivate:

- Generosity
- Courage
- Temperance
- Self-confidence
- Truthfulness
- Charity
- Respect
- Justice
- Friendliness
- Wit
- Compassion
- Loyalty
- Prudence
- Authenticity

2

Describe, in as much detail as you can, how someone with this virtue would act. What would she say and do? How would she treat others? How would she spend her time?

3

Drawing on this description, pick a habit associated with this virtue and one concrete action or practice that would lead to the acquisition of this habit. Include a cue to perform the action.

HABIT	ACTION OR PRACTICE
A generous person would care deeply about giving to the poor and would regularly give to the poor out of her own resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Send a \$10 check to charity (action) everytime I get my paycheck (cue).▪ Put gift cards in car and give to the homeless (action) when approached for change (cue).

4

Fill in the following table. Then, use the log to keep track of whether you are consistently performing the practice (and why or why not).

Habit:						
Practice:						
Goal:						
Week 1: Practice Log						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Progress Update/ Reflections						
Week 2: Practice Log						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Progress Update/ Reflections						
Week 3: Practice Log						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Progress Update/ Reflections						