

Virtue Ethics in Archaeological Study

By Christopher Fuchs

Telling the Story of Humanity

Archaeology is a scientific profession critical to understanding the story humans have written on the world over the course of our history. However, unlike many areas of scientific study, the "subjects" of that inquiry are, ultimately, people, leading to a complex question of ethics surrounding the treatment of evidence and its place in the archaeological story. Telling that story is not only the archaeologist's job; it is what they must consider when deciding how data are gathered, what is done with it, and how we interact with living communities. Three virtues already present in archaeological practices, could provide comprehensive moral guidance as we tell the story of the past. Whether we gather enough resources to tell as much of the story as possible contributes to our integrity. Representing past people accurately and ensuring their legacy remains protected helps ensure justice. Encouraging the voices of their descendants are heard, as many have the knowledge of their culture needed to tell other sides of the story, promotes cooperation. These virtues can provide moral guidance for archaeology which flourishes as a science of people, for people.

Virtue and the Future

Excavation methods, scientific inquiry, recording and preservation of materials, all lead to us living out the integrity inherent within modern archaeology, while encouraging us to make the most of the resources we have, both in the ground and out

Archaeology with Integrity

Working to accurately understand and represent the evidence, we ensure that the people whose cultures, achievements, and ideas we study through the materials and places that they left behind are not stripped of the creative and technological praise they earned

Archaeology with Justice

Morality with a commitment to cooperation does not seem to be contradicted in any fundamental way by the morality stated by advisors of the Hopi, Tohono O'odham, Western Apache or Zuni tribes, respectively, allowing for more discourse between Western archaeologists and those who have valuable cultural insights

Archaeology with Cooperation

Living the virtues, the archaeologist could change the face of ethical archaeology and be a powerful force for change and education, scientific study and humanitarian collaboration

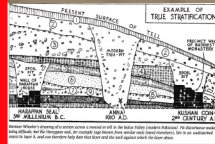
Archaeology with a Bright, Ethical and Most Importantly, **Human** Future Through Ethics of Virtue

Archaeological Excellence

Archaeology as a scientific study has come a long way from the cabinets of curiosities that once populated the collections of the elite. Methodologies, legislature, cultural sensitivity and humane ideals have pushed archaeologists to consider many ethical elements underlying the general scientific pursuit.

Integrity

- The virtue of integrity is present in the improved field methods of today
- Scientific processes and discipline
- Not the haphazard collection of "curiosities"
- Rigorous approaches, legislation, and pursuit of fact bring integrity to archaeological study
- Mortimer Wheeler's "True Stratification", a contribution to methodology and integrity



Justice

- The ideas of lost Biblical tribes and extra-terrestrial intervention have not distracted archaeologists in some time
- The people of the past and present are not so different, with dreams and values, success and failure, but we are left wondering
- We are often on our own to extrapolate from an incomplete source
- Justice in Archaeology is and must continue to be about how archaeology and its sources are presented to the larger world

Cooperation

- The future of archaeology rests on the ability of the archaeologist to work with both the community currently surrounding field sites and with descendant communities.
- Compassion, consideration and empathy all have roots in cooperation, and this is what sets Virtue Theory apart in archaeological practice.
- A belief in the ability of a person to cooperate is easily communicated across cultures.
- A common belief in the charitable abilities of people provides a common starting point for cooperation in the future.

Three Views of Ethics



Aristotle
(384 BC – 322BC)
Virtue Theory

- Virtue: excellence
- Ethics based on character and relationships
- By acting ethically, we improve ourselves
- Relies on principles like Justice, Integrity and Cooperation
- Fell out of style in favor of more religious theories
- Returned to study in mid-twentieth century



Immanuel Kant
(1724 – 1804)
Deontology

- Deontology: study of duty
- Ethics based on rules and obligatory actions
- By acting ethically, we fulfill our obligations
- Relies on principles like Respect, Dignity and Impartiality
- Gained popularity through religious teachings
- Became more secular in eighteenth century



John Stuart Mill
(1806 – 1873)
Utilitarianism

- Utility: useful or beneficial
- Ethics based on beneficial actions
- By acting ethically, we benefit the majority
- Relies on principles like Happiness, Safety and Impartiality
- Gained popularity as an alternative to Deontology
- First fully articulated in nineteenth century