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# The Four Cardinal Virtues



## Synopsis

In *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, Josef Pieper delivers a stimulating quartet of essays on the four cardinal virtues. He demonstrates the unsound overvaluation of moderation that has made contemporary morality a hollow convention and points out the true significance of the Christian virtues.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Dr. Pieper, with his grounding in Scholastic thinking, especially Thomas Aquinas, brings to the reader an interpretation of this classical tradition that has things to say about the human person today. He attempts to make what could become a list of requirements for ethical behavior into a human quest for the wisdom that enables one to become the kind of person one strives to be."  
(*Studies in Formative Spirituality*)

Josef Pieper (1904-1997) was a distinguished twentieth-century Thomist philosopher. Schooled in the Greek classics and in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas, he studied philosophy, law, and sociology, and taught for many years at the University of Münster, Germany.

Simply brilliant reading. Living naturally is what the crux of this book is all about. The book delves into ethics, civics, justice, philosophy, psychology, and I think it is a healthy tool for understanding classical literature: Shakespeare, for example, and the inner psychology of his characters as this moral plain, that Pieper describes, is so much closer to his than most of what we hear in our

modernity. Pieper, here, spends time defining what the classic moral compass is, taken primarily from the last officially sanctioned church doctor St. Thomas Aquinas. Pieper brings Aquinas and other philosophers' language up to date, for the ears of the modern mind. Christianity's definition has too much to do with how its enemies, or alterior users, wish to define it and Pieper spends a short time correcting this in places. If you liked this you might like Pieper's *Virtues of the Human Heart* which is a bit less descriptive but more powerful. Pieper also makes the point that the most important struggle is the internal struggle for meaning and direction in any organization or person.

Tapping into the core of the western philosophical tradition, Pieper shows the reader how the ancient virtues of Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance, have a universal and pressing contemporary application, in the world of human decision making....i.e., the right thinking that clears a path ahead. Formulated out of the Greek, Roman, Hebrew, and Christian traditions, he reminds of their elemental spiritual basis in Faith, Hope, and Charity. He notes with special emphasis, the primacy of the Cardinal Virtue of Prudence, as the clear eyed and humanly perfectable, effort to take a hard, and as objective as possible, look, at the entire factual context of a decision. And, in one of the most beautiful chapters among many in this wonderful book, is Pieper's elucidation of how this calculation is aligned and informed by the Spiritual Virtue of Charity. I find the book to be both a practical and a spiritual insight into human awareness itself.

Joseph Pieper is one of the finest philosophers of the 20th century. *The Four Cardinal Virtues* is an indispensable resource for understanding the best of ethics gifted to us from antiquity. Joseph Pieper is a brilliant philosopher, all the more so because he makes the exposition of these hinge virtues accessible to us all, even those of us less adept at philosophical explications. Further, with this book, he draws the reader into deep waters in understanding the totality of what it truly means to be human. The illuminating relevancy of each argument and exposition is a joy to the mind because what he exposes to us is timeless. I agree with the other reviewer who suggests that this book be followed by Joseph Pieper's *Faith, Love and Hope*. I imagine a great writer could not overstate the value of these wonderful books, much less a novice like myself. If you want to learn about the true nature of the timeless virtues, get and read these books!

Some of it requires an effort to follow, compounded by the inherent difficulties in rendering a good translation, but worthwhile for anyone interested in understanding human behavior. . Pieper offers a number of startling insights. A book everyone should read at least once.

This book is one of the best I've ever owned, truly indispensable for the development of a philosophical mind and training of the heart to cleave to God.

outstanding book that was in even better condition than advertised. Highly recommended.

A must for any student of virtues and values in education and in family education. Clarify misconceptions and is amazing clear.

A huge fan of Josef Pieper, so I was glad to pick this book up. Pieper does a great job covering the Cardinal Virtues.

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