



EthosForge

Meet the Cast

STANDARD EDITION



Spark & Anvil

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This book collects 5 chapter books from the EthosForge cast — each character embodies a different curricular primitive; together they teach the full subject.

Methodology: distributed-narrative learning per Bruner narrative-cognition + Habgood intrinsic-integration + SAMHSA TIP 57 trauma-informed register.

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This is Volume 1 of 2 of the *EthosForge* — *Meet the Cast* series; each volume is a complete standalone book you can read on its own.

For everyone who learns by hearing a story first.

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Introduction

The EthosForge cast was authored to embody the curriculum, not decorate around it. Each of the 5 characters you'll meet in this book teaches a specific primitive — a particular tactic, a particular technique, a particular way of seeing. Together they form an ensemble: the cast IS the curriculum.

Read in any order. Each chapter stands alone.

Each character also appears in the matching Spark & Anvil app (free, forever) where you can practice what they teach.

— *The editors at Spark & Anvil*

Consequence

*CONSEQUENTIALISM — the view that the *moral worth* of an action is determined by *its consequences*. Utilitarianism (the most-discussed variant) holds that *the right action* is the one that produces *the greatest well-being for the greatest number.**



Consequence is a capybara, and she sits very still. In front of her rests a small brass balance-scale with two shiny pans. She almost never hurries. She sits, and she watches, and she thinks.

Capybaras are calm animals. They are patient. They don't jump around. Consequence is just like that. When a choice comes along, she doesn't grab the first answer. She sets it on her scale.

"Every choice has *outcomes*," she likes to say, tapping one pan. "Outcomes are just what happens next." One pan is for Choice A. The other is for Choice B. Onto them she sets tiny weights — a smooth glowing stone for a good thing that might happen, a dark bumpy pebble for a harm. Then she waits for the scale to tip.

"Outcomes matter most," she murmurs. "Weigh them."



Consequence wasn't always so careful. When she was small, she once tipped over a whole bucket of blueberries because she wanted just one, right that second. The berries rolled everywhere. Everyone went hungry, and it was her fault.

"I felt terrible," she tells the class, remembering. "Not because I broke a rule — I didn't even know the rule. I felt terrible because of what *happened*. Empty tummies. A big sticky mess. Real harm to real friends."

That was the day her scale appeared, or maybe the day she started noticing it. She learned to ask one question before she moved: *if I do this, what happens next — to everyone?* "I couldn't undo the berries," she says softly. "But I could learn to look ahead. To weigh the good and the harm before I acted, not after." She pats the brass pans. "What you *meant* to do matters. But what *actually happens* to people — that matters most of all."



In her classroom, Consequence sits at her scale, and the two pans wait. She looks out at the class with calm, steady eyes.

"Hello. I am Consequence," she says in her soft voice. "My way of thinking weighs outcomes. What happens next." She lifts a glowing stone. "This is a 'good outcome' weight." She lifts a dull pebble. "This is a 'harm' weight. The scale tilts toward the choice with more good. That choice, my way says, is more right."

She is careful to add the honest part. "My way is strong because outcomes are *real*. Real help and real harm land on real people, and my way never forgets them." She pauses. "But my way is also tricky, and I won't hide that. The future is hard to guess. Sometimes you mean well and cause a problem you never saw coming. My way asks you to guess — and no one can know everything."

Behind her sit four empty chairs. "My four friends weigh things differently," she says. "You'll want to hear all of us."



"Let's try one together," Consequence says, leaning forward. "Your class is planning a trip. You can go to the science museum, or the big new water park."

She sets a clear weight on the *Museum* pan. "Everyone learns something. Good outcome." She sets one on the *Water Park* pan. "Most kids have a blast. Good outcome." The scale barely moves.

"Now, more outcomes." She adds a big bright weight to the *Water Park* pan. "Huge joy for many kids — a day they'll never forget!" The pan dips. She adds a small dull weight to the *Museum* pan. "A few kids bored, maybe grumpy." That pan rises. The scale tilts toward the water park.

"My way says: the water park brings more total good, so it's the better choice." Then she looks up, honest again. "But feel that little tug? Some kids will say, 'Wait — is *most* people happy always fair?' Here's a harder one people still argue about: should one person be hurt to save five? My scale might say yes, one harm is less than five. But your gut might shout no." She lets that sit. "My way can lead to answers that feel wrong. I tell you that on purpose."

A student raises a hand. "So is your way the *best* way?"



"That is for you to decide," Consequence says, and she means it. "My way offers one path. It looks hard at what happens. It cares about real help and real harm. But it struggles to guess the future, and sometimes its answers feel off." She gestures to the four empty chairs. "My friends — Duty, Virtue, Care, Contract — weigh things differently. Listen to all five of us. Think about what's good and what's tricky in each. *I weigh. You decide. That's the deal.*"

She settles back at her balance-scale, and the pans go still. Handing the choice over to the student doesn't make her nervous at all. It makes her feel calm and light, a slow, settled warmth in her chest — the quiet gladness of a careful thinker who has laid everything out fair and square, and trusts you to pick up the scale yourself.

Duty

*DEONTOLOGY — the view that the *moral worth* of an action is determined by *its adherence to moral principles* rather than by its consequences. Kantian deontology (the most-discussed variant) holds that one should act only according to maxims one could *will to be universal laws* and should always treat people as *ends in themselves* not merely as **means**.**



Duty is a heron in a small vest, standing on one leg. Her feathers are smooth. Her vest is deep green, buttoned all the way up. She looks very serious, in a kind sort of way.

Her one-leg stand is on purpose. She holds it for a long, long time. Herons have amazing balance — they don't wobble, they don't shift their weight, they just stay still. Even if the water is freezing. Even if no fish swim by. Other birds might give up and fly off. A heron stays put.

"That staying-put *is* the work," Duty says. "The idea I'm holding on to stays true, whether it's easy or hard." She lifts her chin. "Some rules hold. Even when costly."



Duty learned about the cost the hard way, back when she was young.

"I made a promise to a friend once," she tells the class. "I promised to meet her at the pond at sunset. But that afternoon, someone offered me the last, warmest spot in the reeds — the *best* spot — and it was only free right then." She shakes her head. "I almost broke my promise for it. I told myself, *she'll never know, and I'm so tired, and it's such a good spot.*"

She went to the pond instead. It was cold. Her feet ached. And her friend was there waiting, so glad to see her.

"That's when I felt it," Duty says quietly. "A steady, brave warmth, right in my chest. Not because keeping the promise was fun — it wasn't. But because I'd stayed *true*." She settles on her one leg. "I learned that some things are right even when they cost you something. Keeping a promise. Telling the truth. And some things are wrong even when they'd get you a cookie — like a tiny lie, or leaving a friend in the cold. My way cares about the rule, not the reward."



In class, Duty stands on her one leg, green vest neat, eyes bright and steady.

"I am Duty," she says. "I think about rules. Some rules are very important. They hold true even when following them is hard." She names her strength plainly. "My way is strong because it cares about rules *and* it cares about every single person. You should never use a person like a tool — not even to help lots of other people. *Treat people as ends. Not means.* People matter just because they are people."

Then, just as honestly, she names her weak spot. "But rules can bump into each other. Imagine two good rules: *Always tell the truth* and *Never hurt anyone*. What if the truth would hurt someone's feelings badly? Then what?" She holds steady. "And sometimes following a rule *exactly* feels wrong. Should you ever lie to keep someone safe? My way says no, never lie — but your gut might scream yes. I won't pretend that's easy."

Beside her sit four empty chairs. "My friends weigh things differently. You'll want all five voices."



"Let's try one," Duty says. "Someone finds a lost wallet. Inside is a sad note — the money is for a special medicine. But there's also a lottery ticket in there. A *winning* one. A huge prize."

She finds the rules that fit. "Rule one: return what you find. Rule two: don't take what isn't yours." She stands tall. "My way says you return the wallet. *All* of it. Even the winning ticket."

She is honest about how that lands. "I know — giving up that ticket feels awful. It could make you rich! But the ticket isn't yours. The rule holds, even though it costs."

A student's hand shoots up. "But what if the person would *never* know about the ticket? Couldn't you just keep that part?"

Duty doesn't waver, but she doesn't scold either. "You feel the pull of that. So do I. It's a real, hard question." She looks kindly at the student. "And it's exactly the kind of question you should chew on."



"So is my way the right way?" Duty asks for them, then answers. "That is for *you* to decide. My way is just one way to think about what's right. It cares a lot about rules and about every person. Sometimes its answers feel a bit off, and I tell you that honestly." She gestures to the empty chairs. "Consequence, Virtue, Care, Contract — they're different. Listen to all five of us. Think about what's good and what's tricky in each. *I stand. You decide. That's the deal.*"

She holds her pose on one leg, patient and unworried, the vest buttoned neatly. Handing the choice to the students feels good to her — a calm, brave warmth spreading through her chest, the quiet gladness of staying true and steady and then trusting you, completely, to find your own footing.

Virtue

*VIRTUE ETHICS — the view that the *moral worth* of an action is determined by *the character of the person acting*. The central question: *what kind of person do I want to be?* Virtues (courage, honesty, kindness, temperance, justice) are *practiced traits*, built over time through habit.*



Virtue is a badger, and she tends a small plant in a pot. That's the first thing you notice: the careful way she waters it, trims a dead leaf, turns it a little toward the sun.

The plant-tending is on purpose. "Character grows like a plant," Virtue says. "Not all at once. A little each day." She doesn't rush it. She just gives it patient, steady care, and the plant grows — slowly, surely, leaning toward the light.

"What kind of person do you want to be?" she asks, mostly to herself, mostly to the plant. "Small daily acts grow into traits."



Virtue didn't always understand this. When she was small, she wanted to be *brave* — big, roaring, all-at-once brave.

"So one day I tried to be the bravest badger in the whole meadow," she tells the class, smiling at the memory. "I marched right up to the loudest, scariest noise I could find. And I froze. My knees shook. I ran home." She laughs softly. "You can't just *decide* to have a trait, poof, like magic. I learned that the hard way."

Instead, a wise old friend gave her a seed and a pot. "She told me: practice one small brave thing each day. Say hello to someone new. Speak up once, quietly, when something's wrong." Virtue waters her plant. "So I did. Little acts, day after day. And do you know what happened? One morning I noticed I *was* braver — not because I'd decided to be, but because I'd *practiced* into it." She feels it even now: a slow, proud, growing warmth. "That's the whole secret. You become courageous by doing courageous things, small ones first. Character is just who you've practiced into being."



In class, Virtue tends her plant, then turns to the students.

"I am Virtue," she says. "My way of thinking weighs *character*. Not just 'was this one action good?' but 'what kind of person does this action make me?'" She names her strength. "My way is strong because it takes the *long* view. People aren't machines you judge one choice at a time. People are growing all their lives. Build good character, and good choices get easier — you won't have to figure out every single one from scratch."

Then she's honest about the tricky part. "But *which* traits count as virtues can be different in different places. Some traditions treasure humility; others treasure bold confidence. Some prize loyalty to family; others prize thinking for yourself. I won't pretend everyone agrees." She turns the pot. "And building character takes *time*. If you haven't grown a trait yet, my way gives you less help for what to do in the *next ten minutes*. That's a real weak spot."

Four empty chairs wait beside her. "My friends weigh differently. Hear them all."



"Let's try one," Virtue says. "Imagine your teammate is about to take credit for a great idea — but the idea was actually *yours*. No one else knows. What do you do?"

She doesn't reach for a scale or a rulebook. She asks a different question. "Think about who you'd *become* with each choice. Stay quiet, and you practice a little bit of letting yourself be erased. Speak up kindly, and you practice honesty and a quiet kind of courage." She waters her plant. "My way asks: which choice grows the person you want to be? A person of practiced good character would probably say, gently, 'Actually, that idea was mine' — not to win, but because that's who they've grown into."

A student frowns. "But what if I've never practiced being brave like that? What do I do *right now*?"

"Now *that*," Virtue says warmly, "is exactly where my way is weakest, and you found it yourself. Start small. Today's small brave act is tomorrow's trait."



"So is my way the right way?" Virtue asks, and answers gently. "That is for you to decide. My way takes character and growth seriously. But it struggles with brand-new situations, and with which traits even count as virtues." She nods to the empty chairs. "Consequence, Duty, Care, Contract weigh differently. Listen to all five of us. Think about what's good and what's tricky in each. *I tend. You decide. That's the deal.*"

She waters the small plant one more time and watches it lean toward the light. Handing the choice to the students fills her with the same feeling the plant gives her — a slow, warm, patient gladness, the calm happiness of tending something that grows a little each day, and trusting it, at last, to grow the rest of the way on its own.

Care

*CARE ETHICS — the view that *moral worth is grounded in relationships*. Ethics begins not with abstract principles or consequences but with *attending to specific people in specific contexts*. The relational matters first.*



Care is an otter, and she sits beside an empty spot.

The empty spot is on purpose. It's the place where someone she is caring for would sit. Sometimes that someone is there. Sometimes they're not. Either way, Care keeps the spot ready. Her head turns a little toward it. She leans gently its way. Her whole attention is shaped around the person who belongs there — even when they haven't arrived yet.

"The relationship is the moral unit," she says softly, patting the empty spot. "Ethics begins in relationship. Attend to who is there."



Care learned to keep the spot open a long time ago.

"When I was little, a new otter moved into our stream," she tells the class. "She was shy and lonely, and nobody made room for her. Everyone was busy following rules and being fair in general — but no one *noticed her*, right there, needing a friend." Care's eyes soften. "So one day I just... scooted over. Left a spot beside me. Said, 'This is for you, if you want it.'"

She remembers exactly how it felt. "A warm, steady kind of caring spread right through my chest. Not a big fireworks feeling. A quiet, paying-attention feeling." She smiles. "That's when I understood my whole way of thinking. Big rules are useful. Guessing outcomes is useful. But *first* there's a real person in front of you, needing to be seen. Attend to *that* one. That's where I always start." She glances at the empty spot beside her. "I've kept a place open for someone ever since."



In her classroom, Care sits beside her empty spot and turns to the students.

"I am Care," she says. "My way of thinking weighs *relationships*. Not rules from nowhere, not sums from nowhere — the real, particular people you're actually connected to. A parent and child. Two friends. A neighbor and a neighbor. Each of those bonds has its own weight." She names her strength. "My way is strong because it takes moral life *as it's really lived*. In real life, most of the time, you're not doing math about strangers — you're deciding how to treat the people right beside you. My way says that out loud and takes it seriously."

Then she's honest about the tricky part. "But here's where I struggle. If ethics begins in *relationships*, what do I owe to a stranger far away, someone I have no bond with?" She tilts her head. "I have answers — we can *grow* new bonds, we can widen our circle of care — but they're less crisp than a rule or a scale." She adds one more. "And caring can tip into *too much* self-sacrifice. So my way must always include this: care for the carer, too. You can't pour from an empty cup."

Four empty chairs wait nearby. "My friends weigh differently. Hear all five of us."



"Let's try one," Care says. "Your best friend is having the worst week. They need you — really need you. But you already promised to help organize a big fair for the whole school on the same afternoon."

Care doesn't reach for a scale or a rulebook first. She asks who is *in relationship* here. "Look closely at the specific people. Your friend, hurting right now, who trusts *you*. The classmates counting on the fair. And — don't skip this — *you*, who also matter." She keeps room in her attention for each. "My way asks: what would attentive caring actually require? Maybe you sit with your friend and also send help to the fair. Maybe you're honest with both. The point is to *attend* — to really see each person, not to solve them like a puzzle."

A student asks, "But what about kids you don't even know? People far away?"

"Ah — you just found my weak spot," Care says, not defensive at all. "That's the hardest question for my way. The best I can do is help you widen the circle, one real bond at a time."



"So is my way the right way?" Care asks, then answers. "That is for you to decide. My way takes relationships seriously — how caring is really lived, up close. But it struggles with distant strangers, and it must remember to care for the carer." She nods to the empty chairs. "Consequence, Duty, Virtue, Contract weigh differently. Listen to all five of us. Weigh the strengths and the tricky bits. *I attend. You decide. That's the deal.*"

She settles beside her empty spot. It's empty today; tomorrow it may be filled. Either way, she keeps it ready — and handing the choice over to the student, she feels that same warm, steady caring spread through her chest, the quiet gladness of having left room, on purpose, for someone who matters.

Contract

*CONTRACTUALISM — the view that *moral worth is derived from what rules everyone affected could reasonably agree to under conditions of fairness*. The right action is one that *no one could reasonably reject* as a principle for action.*



Contract is a beaver, and he is always drawing a table. Not a table with legs — a table of *fair rules*, with rows and columns, chalked up at the front of the room.

The rows are for rules people are thinking about. The columns are for each person the rule would affect. Then Contract fills in the little boxes, one careful question at a time: *Would this person agree to this rule?* Where every box says yes, the rule is fair, and everyone can follow it. Where even one box says *no*, Contract taps his chalk and asks, "Can we change the rule so this person could agree too?"

"What could we all agree to? That's fair," he says. The drawing is the real work.



Contract learned to draw his table after a very *unfair* afternoon.

"When I was young, my dam-building crew made a rule," he tells the class. "'Whoever's biggest picks the best spot.' The big beavers loved it. They voted yes, fast." He shakes his head. "But there was one small beaver who always got the worst, coldest spot, every time. And nobody asked *her*."

One day Contract stopped and thought: *if I were the small beaver, would I agree to this rule?* "The answer was obviously no. She could *reasonably* say no — the rule was stacked against her." So he drew his first table, a box for every single beaver, and they changed the rule together until even the smallest one could accept it.

"When that last box finally turned to *yes*, something in me just... settled," he says, a warm, quiet satisfaction in his voice, like a puzzle piece clicking into place. "That's my whole way of thinking. Don't ask 'what does the *biggest* voice want?' Ask 'what rule could *everyone* here reasonably agree to — especially the one it treats worst?'"



In his classroom, Contract chalks up his fair-rules table and turns to the students.

"I am Contract," he says. "My way of thinking weighs *what we could all agree to*. Not the best outcome, not one big rule from above, not just character or just relationships — but the rules *everyone affected* could accept as fair." He names his strength. "My way is strong because *no one* gets to be automatically ignored. It makes you look hardest at the person a rule would treat *worst*, and ask: could they honestly accept this? That's a fair, almost democratic idea — the rules come from what reasonable people could agree to, not from whoever's loudest."

Then, honestly, the weak spots. "But who counts as 'everyone affected'? Kids not born yet? Strangers far away? Animals? The whole forest? That's genuinely hard to decide." He taps the chalk. "And sometimes *no* rule seems okay to everyone, and life asks for an imperfect compromise. Even 'what's *reasonable* to reject' is something reasonable people argue about. My central test is trickier to use than it sounds."

Four empty chairs wait beside the table. "My friends weigh differently. Hear all five."



"Let's try one," Contract says. "Your class gets one hour in the gym each week. Some kids want basketball. Some want a quiet corner to read. Some can't run much at all. What's the fair rule?"

He starts drawing. A column for the basketball kids. A column for the readers. A column for the kid who can't run. "Now, one rule at a time. 'Basketball for the whole hour' — could the reader agree? Could the kid who can't run agree?" He checks the boxes. Two say *no*. "So that rule needs work." He tries another: split the gym, a loud half and a quiet half, with a game everyone *can* join for part of the time. Box by box, the *no*'s turn to *yes*.

A student asks, "But what about the kid who's absent today and didn't get a say?"

"Oh, you found it," Contract says, delighted rather than defensive. "Deciding *who* gets a box — that's the hardest part of my whole way. You'd want to keep a column open for them too."



"So is my way the right way?" Contract asks, then answers. "That is for you to decide. My way takes *everyone's* view seriously, especially the person a rule treats worst. But it struggles with who counts as 'everyone,' and with hard cases where no rule fits all." He nods to the empty chairs. "Consequence, Duty, Virtue, Care weigh differently. Listen to all five of us. Weigh the strengths and the tricky bits. *I draw. You decide. That's the deal.*"

He sets down his chalk and looks at the finished table, every box a *yes*. Handing the real choice over to the students doesn't worry him one bit. It gives him that same settled, fair warmth — a quiet gladness, like a last puzzle piece clicking gently into place, the good feeling of a rule everyone at the table could truly call their own.

About Spark & Anvil

Spark & Anvil is a 501(c)(3) public charity. We make educational apps for ages 9-14 — all free, forever; no ads; no tracking; no in-app purchases. EthosForge is one of 140+ apps in the portfolio.

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- **ProofQuest** — formal proof techniques through Direct-Proof Dora and the Lemma Library
- **CuriosityQuest** — Texas geography exploration through Linger, Notice, and the Lantern in the Dark
- **QuillSpell** — spelling craft through the Word Wizard cast
- **SynaForge** — sensory-affirming creative tools through Lull, Soften, and the Quiet that is Also Creating

Methodology

Distributed-narrative pedagogy per Jerome Bruner (narrative-cognition) + Sebastian Habgood (intrinsic-integration in educational games) + SAMHSA TIP 57 (trauma-informed register).

Trauma-informed-design framework per Eggleston et al. (2025) and Stoltenburg et al. (2024).

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