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Dr. Dueck

Introduction to Philosophy

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*The Most Virtuous of Ethics*

Otherwise known as the study of what is right and wrong (aka morality), Ethics play a vital role in everyday life. Every day, we are hounded by simple and complex moral decisions that ultimately reflect a lot about who we are. If I were to wake up one day and decide to throw my dog out the window of my two story house, would that say something about me? Probably. But what if I did the same thing for 10 straight years? (poor dogs). Such a decisions would showcase my lack of certain virtues. A *virtue* is an excellence of a character. It is a character quality that helps something or someone excel in its/their purpose. What I find most interesting is that a virtue is a disposition. It is not a feeling, nor a capacity: but rather a habit of character. Aristotle will say that virtue is found in a “mean” between extremes (or vices)- a balance point between excess and deficiency (both are considered vices). Things like wisdom, temperance, and courage are good examples of virtues. I would say that there is an intrinsical reason as to why we consider virtues... Virtuous! Take courage for example. If let’s say a soldier goes to war without any protection and dies quickly because they were *feeling* courageous, their actions would be considered foolhardiness, not courage (This would be likely due to a lack of another form of virtue, like wisdom- and also because they felt a certain way, they acted, which speaks on the value of their character). Or on the other hand, if another soldier in the same war decided to avoid conflict altogether, hiding in fear- such behavior would be

considered cowardice. The excess of boldness is considered a disorder, and so is the lack of it. What is missing is a balance- a virtue; which can only be virtuous, or “good” because it allows one to flourish in excellence! The soldier should have enough courage to be effective in war. The good news? (you will find out more on the last page) -Virtue can be practiced and developed. If one does so much as focus their efforts and attention towards their *telos* (purpose in life) they will at least be in the right direction towards finding this so-desired mean between vices. To find such a mean is to be essentially whole- something also known as integrity. Aristotle believed that virtue is agent-based. It is all about human life, human flourishing, and the big picture of what it means to be a good person. So how do we achieve integrity? Wholeness? Universal concepts which every human on this planet agrees are good? By finding our *telos*, which in this case is a personal purpose that achieves common individual flourishing. Most people would agree to say that we and that our communities would be in a better place if we were able to find a mean to be courageous, wise and loving (which in this case is an action, so *agape*)- which are all examples of virtues.

Kant’s “good will” is certainly an interesting concept to pick apart. By his definition, this will is the only thing that is intrinsically good (good in itself, without regard to another external value). According to Kant, morality is based on our will acting in accordance with rational *duties*. So a person possessing this “good will” would not act out of inclination, nor self-interest. They would also not be merely acting in accordance with their duty- but rather **because** of rational duty. This is the idea that the reason why we act is the moral part of the action... not the outcome.

Now buckle up Dr. Dueck, because here comes my scenario. If Aristotle and Kant were taking a walk in ancient Israel (just imagine they found a time-machine and now go through adventures in time together) and suddenly came across Jesus, I believe that they would be most astonished upon having a conversation with the rabbi. For the sake of my point, let's say they become part of his 70+ disciples and follow him up until the cross. First, I believe Aristotle would deduct the amount of ethical virtue existent in the character of Jesus. He would be witnessing for the first time in his life a man who had every virtue imaginable, and the perfect mean within each of these virtues. I think he would be confused at how a man could hold so many virtues, but not give any importance towards his personal success and flourishing. That's where Kant would come in with his deontological theory and attempt to explain the behavior of Jesus. He would say that Jesus' source to his actions is like no other, which explains his morality. That the way he acts and lives by serving others is good in itself, without regard to external value. He would also say that Jesus possesses actual good will, which is intrinsically good. His actions, which are not out of inclination nor self interest, nor in mere accordance with his duty to the father- would be seen as perfectly moral. This explanation (+ being in the presence of Jesus) would probably help him understand that Jesus IS intrinsically good. Aristotle would realize that the agent in his "agent-based" theory is non other than Jesus himself! By him being intrinsically good- perfect in every manner, Jesus then becomes the mean to achieve! Not only that: That would also mean Jesus IS the telos which leads to a life full of purpose and integrity. There are multiple reasons why; Because he is morally perfect (in his *actions* for Kant, and in his *being* for Aristotle), because he does not act out of a feeling or even capacity (Jesus states in John 5:30: "I can do nothing

alone. I judge only the way I am told. And my judgment is right, because I am not trying to please myself. I want only to please the father”) and because his virtue is found within a constant habit of character throughout his ministry. When Jesus was praying in the mount of Olives before being arrested, beaten and crucified, **he had the option to run away if he wanted to, but instead fulfilled the good, perfect and acceptable will of the father**, which was also his own- but at the same time not his physical bodies’.

I recently learned in my New Testament literature class that the location of the mount of Olives stood by a desert. So on one side stood Jerusalem as Jesus prayed, and on the other side was the desert. Also, it was passover, which means that the city had near triple of its population camping on that same mount as they could not sleep within the walls of the city. Knowing this, **he chose to pray and trust God**, knowing that it was his act of sacrifice that would open the doors of grace for each and everyone of us to not only flourish as good and balanced people in this life, but be able to flourish with him forever in eternity. He was like a rose, trampled on the ground-who rose (B A R S) back to life to make a garden full of flourishing flowers just like him. He is our telos, and through the transformation and renewal of our minds (virtue can be developed!), we are able to then test and experience what God’s will is- that which is *good*, pleasing and perfect.