Laura Calvin

 Professor Louis Sanchez

 PHI101: Introduction to Philosophy: OA

April 7th, 2023

Paper 2-Ethical Virtue

The focus of virtue ethics is on the individual, asking what fundamental attitudes motivate them to act in a morally upright manner. This ethical theory is grounded in the concrete examples of virtuous individuals and views the values of good and evil as too abstract for practical guidance. Virtue ethics thus represents a third type of ethical theory, alongside deontological and utilitarian ethics, with Aristotle as its most prominent representative. Aristotle emphasized the importance of logic and reasoning in the pursuit of knowledge. He believed in the pursuit of "middle and measure", advocating for individuals to exhibit bravery instead of cowardice or recklessness, and generosity instead of greed or wastefulness.

For Aristotle, humans were inherently social beings, unable to live without society. However, he held the belief that women were inferior to men. In terms of happiness, Aristotle believed that individuals could only achieve true happiness by fully developing all of their potentialities.

Virtue ethics is concerned with the ideal of being an excellent person, which requires consistent practice and is demonstrated through moral action. These actions are not determined by social coercion or chance, but rather are freely chosen. The fundamental question of virtue ethics is how one can act in a morally upright manner. The central concept of this ethical theory is the virtuous person, characterized by possessing outstanding character traits such as wisdom, prudence, fortitude, and justice. Virtue ethics seeks to answer ethical questions by considering how a virtuous person would act in any given situation.

The concept of virtue can be traced back to Aristotle, who defined it as an attitude that has become a reliable habit. Aristotle made a distinction between intellectual virtues and ethical virtues. He called the good that man desires "eudaimonia", which means happiness in Greek, and he understood it as a successful life as a whole, which includes living a virtuous life. According to Aristotle, a life in accordance with virtue was the key to achieving eudaimonia, happiness or fulfillment. This means that a life in accordance with virtue is the ultimate goal for humanity to attain "eudaimonia". Virtues are the qualities and abilities that enable a person to act well. Aristotle defined virtues as the avoidance of extreme attitudes and the pursuit of the right middle. For instance, generosity is the middle ground between stinginess and wastefulness. Thus, virtue is defined as the avoidance of extreme attitudes and the highest form of successful human action.

Aristotle's theory emphasizes the importance of habit in the development of ethical virtue. He argued that human beings are not born with ethical virtues and that these virtues cannot be taught to them through their natural behavior. Instead, humans must learn to acquire and develop ethical virtues by making them a habit. The concept of virtue ethics was initially introduced by Socrates and Plato, with Aristotle building on their ideas to develop his own

theory. Aristotle's focus on the relationship between virtue and happiness was a central theme in his writings, influenced by Plato's ideas but also adding his own unique perspective to the concept. Thus, he developed his own theory of virtue ethics as a connection between virtue and happiness.

Plato distinguished four cardinal virtues since his time, including prudence, which is an intellectual virtue enabling one to identify the right ways and means to realize the good in a particular situation. The other three cardinal virtues are moral virtues that allow individuals to pursue and act morally good. Aristotle acknowledged that these virtues are not fixed in themselves and must be redefined according to different social, cultural, and personal circumstances based on the right middle standard. Aristotle claimed that "the good for man is an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue" and that following this is the key to human happiness. (page 493).

To illustrate, during a shopping trip, a wise person would question the suspiciously low prices of clothing items, whereas an ignorant person wouldn't think twice about it. A virtuous and intelligent person would be disappointed by our lack of critical thinking in such situations.

In my perspective, Aristotle's theory of virtue ethics is highly reasonable. It asserts that individuals should practice virtue to make sound decisions in life. I find Aristotle's emphasis on defining virtue to be relatable and straightforward. Additionally, I think this theory can be applied to moral life in general, as individuals can choose to adopt virtue as a habit and incorporate it into their daily lives. I believe that most individuals choose to act virtuously because they recognize it as the morally right thing to do, despite the fact that there will always be those who choose more selfish paths. In short, Aristotle's theory of virtue ethics provides a

solid foundation and approach for individuals to cultivate ethical behavior. Overall, I find this

concept to be sensible and effective.