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Introduction to Philosophy

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Virtue Ethics

Several philosophers have talked about different ethics and types of ethics. Aristotle spoke about virtue ethics comparable with happiness. Virtue is the character quality that enables something to exceed its function (telos). In terms of ethics, Philosophy is a descriptive or prescriptive way. In philosophy, philosophers tend to use a prescriptive way that tells how something ought to be. Aristotle believes that ethical virtue comes from habits. Therefore, what people grow up doing may reflect good or lousy virtue ethics. His theory on virtue ethics reflects the truth behind human actions. Humans acquire good virtue through good habits and not by nature. Virtue Ethics is what a person might grow up practicing because of habits developed over time.

Aristotle explains to his readers that “...ethical virtue comes from habits – hence even its name derives (by a slight modification) from the word ‘ethos,’ custom or habits.” He explains that human custom behaviors are known to have ethical virtue. As human beings, we find adjusting our customs and behaviors complicated. Because habits are not by nature, Aristotle gives an example of a non-living thing that is hard to habituate. “For instance, a stone, which by nature moves downwards, cannot be habituated to move upwards no matter how many thousand times you try to train it by throwing it upwards...” (Aristotle). Based on his explanations, virtue comprises habits and not nature; virtue cannot change the nature of a thing or living thing.

Habits are developed from hearing, seeing, and experiencing in a lifetime, not by nature, which comes from our senses.

During Aristotle's discussion about virtue ethics, he made a few arguments to prove his take on how humans develop good virtue. Aristotle says, "...this is true in all cases when we add to the function the outstanding accomplishment that corresponds to the virtue (the harpist's function is to play, that of the good harpist to play well)." He argues that a human has a specific purpose in life, including soul activity and behaviors that express reasons. An excellent man's purpose is to fulfill this purpose admirably. Based on his argument, an individual may be suitable; however, their habits can be harmful, making them inadequate for virtue ethics. If an individual is good at playing sports because of his consistent practice, he is virtuous.

Nature helps us to develop our senses to a certain point, but habits allow our senses to be fully developed. According to Aristotle, "...we are naturally constituted so as to acquire them, but it is by habit that they are fully developed." Humans are born with senses; as they age, they develop their senses by seeing and hearing the things around them. Over time, they begin to develop habits that will perfect their development. Aristotle believes that Virtue is acquired through instruction and application. Depending on what morals we might learn, it can build or break us. Some of us may acquire bad habits leading to destructive behaviors, eventually becoming challenging to break.

In life, I have realized that we learn the right things to do, but eventually, we may divert from that knowledge the moment we develop our way of doing it. Same as if we learned how to cook dumplings, but after cooking dumplings on our own, we develop a habit or a skill the way we prefer. Aristotle gives his example of this theory. "By building well, people get to be good

builders, and they become bad builders from building badly.” (Aristotle). The skills we develop or the habits we acquire are all virtue ethics.

Now Aristotle gives us an insight into the three types of conditions in the soul. Aristotle explains that feelings “....anger, fear, boldness, envy, joy, love, hatred, longing, jealousy, pity and in general whatever is accompanied by pleasure or pain.” These are feelings the body carries and may reflect on ethical virtue. He also talks about capacities, which “....makes us capable of the relevant feelings – in virtue of which we are said to be capable of being angry or sorrowful, or feeling pity” (Aristotle). In his explanation, we can be good or bad based on our habits. Lastly, he states that dispositions “....are what make us in a good or bad way in respect to the feelings; for example, in the case of being angry, we are in a bad way if our feelings is too vehement or too feeble, and so in other cases” (Aristotle). All three conditions of the soul add up to a good or bad habit reflecting on virtue.

To have these feelings at the appropriate time proves it to be true virtue. For example, “If ten pounds is a lot to eat and two pounds a little, it does not follow that the trainer will prescribe six, since this may be a lot or a little for the person who is to take it.” (Aristotle) His explanation of virtue goes far in the human or living world.

In conclusion, humans can have good ethical virtue if they are consistent in their practice. Aristotle claimed that moral excellence derives from habits formed by hearing, seeing, and experiencing. He also believed that every person has a mission that they accomplished in order to be considered reasonable. We can be made or broken by virtue, earned through instruction and application. Virtue is the middle point that promotes flourishing. We gradually acquire virtue through our morals and actions. My support for Aristotle’s idea of virtue ethics is unwavering. Virtue ethics represents the idea of a good life, eventually leading to good habits.