

Aristotle on virtue ethics

[Sociology](#), [Ethics](#)



Virtue ethics primarily entails the description of the rightness or appropriateness of human action as derived from ethical theories. In the modern day world, these virtue ethical theories have been challenged on account of their failure to guide human action in given or predetermined circumstances. The criticism is that there is more focus towards the character of the moral agent as opposed to how the agent ought to act, which in turn give virtue ethical theories lesser consideration.

Virtue ethical theories stipulate the moral requirements by defining the desired human ‘virtues’ that every human should essentially strive to achieve. Swanton (2005) remarks, “In virtue ethics, the notion of virtue is central in the sense that conceptions of rightness, conceptions of the good life, conceptions of ‘the moral point of view’ and the appropriate demandingness of morality, cannot be understood without a conception on relevant virtues” (p. 5). Therefore, the element of ‘virtue’ determines the appropriateness of choice based on individual human actions. It is also important to note that the aspect of ‘good life’ is what guides the identification of appropriate virtues.

Aristotle’s virtue ethics focus on the aspects of individual good as perceived from a society’s point of view, which primarily affect the society as a whole. In essence, he predicts that the primary definition of ‘good’ in society is based on the input coming from individual will, which determines the accompanying actions. Aristotle and William (2009) remarks, “It is necessary that it should be directed by the will, and that the will in turn should be directed to a right end by deliberate preference; by moral principles” (p. 9). This suggests the fact that the moral correctness of an

action is essentially embedded in a person's will and that this is inherent. This also suggests the fact that man chooses what to do a specific point in time, and that he is guided by moral character in his actions.

Morality is based on human actions, and the relativity depends on an individual going by presented circumstances. Therefore, in as much as individual will prompts human action, the major trigger comes from the context under which human actions occur. This suggests that virtues can be manipulated according to presented circumstance. According to Aristotle and William (2009), "From his belief in the existence of this natural capacity, and this bias or inclination towards virtue, and moreover from his believing that man was free and a voluntary agent, Aristotle necessarily holds the responsibility of man" (p. 9). This further illustrates failure in Aristotle's virtue ethics to identify required actions going by circumstance, despite the fact that he recognizes that natural capacity of man plays a distinct role with regard to morality.

It is therefore critical to ask: Do virtue ethics consider human actions are solely circumstantial and not inherent? In essence, Aristotle appears to be utterly disconnected from his subject such that he gives no due consideration to the ideal or absolute standard required for the definition of good, which he denies that its knowledge can be beneficial or useful (Aristotle & William, 2009). This concludes that the virtue theories presented by philosophers like Aristotle fail to recognize context occurrences or events, and how these prompt human action with regard to morals. Failure to recognize setting serves to reduce the credential of such predictions since

the concept of virtues alone cannot independently define whether an action was good or not. Therefore, virtues are dependent of circumstances and individual will, which guide moral standards in a specific environment