

# Virtue ethics



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Virtue Ethics Rosalind Hursthouse provides the following account about what is right action, i. e., a particular action A is right for a person S in circumstances c, only if a completely virtuous agent would characteristically perform the action A in the said circumstances. In his argument against Hursthouse's claims on virtue, Johnson bases his claims on the fact that Hursthouse has specified a "fully virtuous person" in the circumstances she mentions. He sets out another category of virtue, referring to those who are not fully virtuous, i. e., sub virtuous. In the light of the existence of the sub virtuous category of people, Johnson claims that Hursthouse's assertion about right action is false, partly because it does not account for the right of those who are non virtuous to perform self controlling actions.

Hursthouse's argument is that an action can be deemed to be right under certain circumstances only if a completely virtuous agent would perform the said action under the same circumstances. The flaw in the argument is that a person who is completely virtuous would not be able to admit to performing unjust, non virtuous acts, or would not perform such actions in the first place. Hence, the same argument about right action cannot be extended to the case of non virtuous persons. To classify an action as right or wrong based entirely upon what a completely virtuous agent would do may itself be flawed, because it classes each kind of virtue into distinct categories of black and white areas with no scope for gray area in between.

As opposed to this, a sub virtuous person who is neither fully virtuous or the complete anti-thesis of it, can admit to acts performed which may not be characteristic of the group to which he or she belongs. While an individual may be fairly good and virtuous on the whole, he or she may sometimes perform and can admit to an act that is not. Similarly, an individual that is

not virtuous on the whole can sometimes admit to actions that are virtuous. Extending this argument further, a fully virtuous person would not therefore maintain a list of actions like the lies he or she has told in order to work towards becoming more honest, but this is precisely the kind of action that a sub virtuous person could and should do in order to improve. A sub virtuous person can perform actions which are self controlling, but applying Hursthouse's argument about right actions, a non virtuous person cannot perform self controlling actions, because virtue ethics in such a person's case is incomplete, i. e, a non virtuous person may not have a conception about ethics and what is right.

The account of right action which Hursthouse has advanced states that an action could be right in certain circumstances only if a completely virtuous agent would act in that characteristic kind of way. But Johnson's argument is relevant because it is based upon the incompleteness of virtue ethics in the context of non virtuous persons. Arriving at a determination of whether an action is right or wrong according to Hursthouse is based upon the assumption that the virtual agent attributes total virtue in a given situation. But the notion of virtual agent may not apply at all in the context of sub virtuous persons because their notion of what is right and wrong is not fixed; rather it tends to change and develop based upon the circumstances and individual incidents. Since virtue ethics remains incomplete in the context of sub virtuous persons, it remains a fluid entity, changing in accordance with the circumstances. For non virtuous persons, the notion of virtue itself may be an unknown entity and the performance of a right action may not be feasible at all.