

Vice virtue

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“ I prefer an interesting vice to a virtue that bores.

” Moliere, a French playwright during the 1600s, highlights his predilection in depravity rather than ethics. However, while some may choose to criticize this quote; it is also in representation of the social patterns demonstrated throughout history. While the playwright also incorporated words like “ interesting” and “ bores,” is he really just suggesting that he would rather be in the presence of high-energy individuals than low-energy individuals? In attempt to both justify and understand Moliere’s thinking, it is necessary to define both vice and virtue while taking into account both their past and modern-day associations. While a couple of synonyms for vice are words like “ immoral” and “ wicked,” both the meaning and perspective of vice have shown to vary throughout time depending on the historical context linked to the word. During the 1600s, iniquity was most commonly associate with prostitutes or those committing criminal behavior (i.

e. thieving and vandalizing); such individuals were often challenged by the Catholic Church who then influenced the rest of society to perceive these individuals similarly (1). Since then, religious definitions of both vice and virtue have dictated the way we perceive others. Another example of this is the Salem Witch Trials in Colonial Massachusetts during 1992-1993. The call for the trials was due to an incurable sickness that was diagnosed with having links to witchcraft (2).

The reason for this diagnosis was also because of a young slave woman practicing the religion of Vodun (which was stereotyped to be a sinister religion during the time period) within the colony (3). The diagnosis lead to

fear which then caused the execution of nineteen individuals who had been excused with practicing witchcraft. The church played an extremely prominent role in the way ethics were perceived, however, the present-day associates of vice are not necessarily linked to those existing in the 1600s. Today, the ethics that determine the historical context and meaning for vice are those that are simply considered to be nonconforming. For those that choose not to identify with a religion, stereotypes of having unethical intent are conspicuous. Luckily, religious domination has subsided throughout the last century and the current generation of youth actually celebrates the nonconforming ideas; siding with Moliere's outlook.

With reference to the current youth's favoritism, urban slang like "bad" is actually then used as a favorable term when describing another individual, the context being nicknames such as "bad boy" and other "bad" aesthetics (4). The meaning of "vice" has progressed throughout history and is continuing to be altered by the perceptions of the current generation of youth. However, virtuous efforts have shown a near constant perception throughout history, but have been revolutionized by the new virtues brought to light. Having a high moral ground is the most common denotation associated with virtuous individuals, but did the previous perception held for virtue actually celebrate both morality and ethics? Virtuism of the 1600s-1800s was correlated around both hierarchy and religious conformity (5). During this time period, the colonies had just established their independence from the powerful monarchy of Great Britain.

To insure long-term independence, multiple documents-such as the Declaration of Independence (1776) and the Bill of Rights (1791)-were

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established to protect the people of the colonies, but unfortunately not all people were truly considered. The documents were actually designed specifically to protect the rights of Caucasian men and their ability to prosper at the top of the social hierarchy (6). The virtuousness was then seen in those who were inferior and did not attempt to challenge their position within the social hierarchy. Women were the most controversial group of those who were inferior. The virtuous status of a woman was defined by her willingness to be both reliant and subservient to the patriarchy of the household (7). If the women did not abide by these social guidelines of conformity (especially women suffragists) they were degraded for their actions.

Today, however, equality is far more eminent as well as the want to advocate for socially inferior groups; those who advocate are seen as virtuous due to their empathetic mindset and want to help others. Some modern-day examples pertaining to this activism could be the current uprising of feminism (belief that all men and women should be equal), gay-straight alliances, or the Black Lives Matter campaign. Women, LGBTQ individuals, and those fighting against racial prejudice are acknowledged by their ability to prosper. While there are few inequalities that still exist in today's society, social groups that had once been considered to be a component of the inferior class and have taken the initiative to defeat the societal oppression happening in the hierarchy; these individuals are defined by virtuous traits as the modern-day association of virtue is essentially in regards to recognizing the need for general well being and mutual respect within a society. Conformity and the way in which it is perceived determines the efforts of both vice and virtue.

During the Eurocentric period between 1600-1700, those who were willing to conform to societal standards—established by both the community and the religious dominance—were seen as virtuous; those not willing to conform to standards were seen to express characteristics in correlation with vice.

However, since the 20th century, the connotation associated with both vice and virtue has been altered in a way that makes them fairly similar; modern-day society has seemed to place glorification onto both vice and virtue and without assigning any extra (and unnecessary) adjectives to them. Moliere's preference can best be summarized by present day values of vice, but disinterest in the former values of virtue. Perhaps Moliere was a man ahead of his own time. Citations: 1.

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