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**Best Ethical Theory: Virtue Ethics**

Ethical theories are systematic ways of approaching an evaluation of moral issues with a view of arriving at the right or wrong side of an issue. Among the significant theories well developed in moral philosophy, three have emerged including; The utilitarianism developed by Bent, Kant’s deontological ethics, and virtue ethics developed by Aristotle. Selecting the best of the ethical theories is a job if one is to be done; however, of all the ethical theories, the best is Aristotle’s virtue ethical theory because of its focus on traits and the ability to apply them in the different settings.

Ethical theory as an idea is one of the essential principles of ethology since it is used to determine which actions are correct or wrong. Nevertheless, it is crucial to summarize the three ethical theories to provide the base for the understanding of the reader.

**Summary of the Three Ethical Theories**

**1. Utilitarianism**

According to William state, Miller and Bentham, the theory of utilitarianism is basically a consequentialist theory. This postulates that any particular type of action is either moral or immoral based on het results; better specified by the measures of happiness, or utility, or the lack of it or suffering. This “greatest happiness principle” is different from the selfishness which aim at the good for everyone (Wolff, p. 121). However, utilitarianism attracts some criticisms in the following aspects; While the principle that holds the end justifies the means, encourages people to engage in immoral practices by supporting them because they yield better outcomes.

**2. Kant’s Deontological Ethics**

Deontological ethics is the moral theory which was proposed by Immanuel Kant and according to the principle, the moral worth of an action lies in the action itself not in the outcome of the action. According to Kant, moral actions stem from a sense of duty and must conform to the categorical imperative: An action is moral if it can be done by anyone anywhere without causing any contradiction (Wolff, p. 150). The Kantian ethics hold the principles of respect for person or principle in treating anyone as an end and never as a means. The critics, however, have put so many weaknesses on the Kant, they say that he is so dogmatic to give principles to practice and overlooks some scenarios where two moral values exist.

**3. Aristotle’s Virtue Ethics**

Aristotle’s virtue ethics modify the role of justice, which form the structure of actions relevant to the virtues humans ought to acquire so as to attain “eudaimonia”, or happiness. Virtue ethics is agent-relative, that is, it aims at promoting the business of the virtue of the individual, urging people to acquire traits of character and decide consistently by practical reason “phronesis” (Wolff, p. 174). Unlike utilitarianism and Kantian ethics, virtue approach focuses on agent’s motives, environment, and growth. It has been said that virtue ethics does not provide specific wisdom when it comes to solving moral problems and may well be context sensitive.

**Defense of Virtue Ethics**

Of the three theories, the focus of the essay is on Aristotle’s virtue ethics as it provides the most reason to believe it is the most valuable ethical theory because of its rejection of the problems with utilitarianism and Kantian ethics and its focus on a more complex and truly human means of setting standards of behavior. Next is the defend of the virtue ethics against two main objections.

**1. Lack of Action-Guidance**

A weakness of virtue ethics is that it does not offer guidance in form of rules or steps on how to deal with ethical issues. Whereas utilitarianism calculates the greatest good or accompanies an action with the principle ‘act only in a way that you would wish to be acted upon’, or Kant’s categorical imperative, virtue ethics bases effort on the amorphous idea that one should act as a virtuous person would if placed in the certain scenario. Some will actually say that this is not being precise enough can lead to subjective and occasional moral judgments (Wolff, p. 201).

In response, Aristotle has offered an argument to this effect under the philosophy concept of phronesis (practical wisdom). Not surprisingly, virtuous agents are not required to conduct themselves mandated by strict rules, but rather are to gain understanding after times of practice, study, and contemplation. Phronesis provides practical reason to follow sensible solutions to the problem to avoid ignorance in arriving at the extremes—what Aristotle considers the ‘mean’ or the ‘middle ground’ (Wolff, p. 180). For example, courage is located between impulsiveness and fearfulness. Such approach is more realistic as it reflects the complexity of human existence compared to the measured algorithms of rules. As the environmental pressure changes for example from patient-centred interaction to clinician-patient interaction, virtue ethics can respond to the new pressure better than deontological and consequentialist approaches.

**2. Cultural Relativism**

Another problem with proponent of virtue ethics is that they assert that virtues differ from culture to culture and era to era. For instance, what may be considered right and moral in one culture may be considered wrong and immoral in other cultures thus creating a chance for ethical dilemmas (Wolff, p. 203). Still, opponents of the relativism inherent in virtue ethics claim that this detracts from the generalization of the theory.

However, although cultural observance is considered passably in Aristotle’s virtue ethics, the permissions are not entirely relativistic. The concept of eudaimonia or the notion of the good life or of human flourishing resonates with different people’s overall idea of the good life. Even though people may act differently these qualities like courage, generosity, and honesty are the same all over the world. In addition, virtue ethics supports interaction and tolerance since it enjoins persons or societies to learn the virtues of other cultures. It is this flexibility of virtue ethics that helps them not only deliver culturally sensitive results while still allowing for their implementation cross culturally without falling into the trap of cultural relativism.

**Why Virtue Ethics is Superior**

Thus, virtue ethics has some benefits over utilitarianism and Kantian ethics that placed it as the most suitable and encompassing ethical theory.

**1. Flexibility and Context-Sensitivity**

As compared to Kantian ethics and utilitarian moralities, virtue ethics does not have drawbacks of the formalness of the former and identified potential ethical issues of the latter. It doesn’t deny that moral life is nuanced and does not sum up to adherence to absolute prohibitions or performing calculations of ‘the greatest good.’ Rather, it makes people focus on how to act appropriately to the challenges of any given settings. This flexibility is most helpful where adherence to rules entails more questionable morality as is the case in Kant’s of using deceit in response a murderer in order to save the intended victim (Wolff, p. 153).

**2. Alignment with Human Nature**

This ethic of virtues conforms with psychology and social life since it is developed by Aristotle. It affirms that people, from birth are social animals who are wired to relate with other people in a community. Given its advocacy for the importance of such values as compassion, justice and humility virtue ethics ensures that people in society live in harmony and or in a symbiotic manner. In this way, this communal concern may be distinguished from both the selfish rationality espoused by utilitarianism as well as the antiseptic and generalized proceduralism of the Kantian system.

**Conclusion**

But in comparing between all three theories, Aristotle’s virtue ethics is the best since ethics of character, is adaptable to situations, and because it is innate to man. In that sense, it is well equipped to cultivate virtues and forms of practical reason that equip individuals for the task of making moral choices in complex settings. However, despite the aforementioned criticisms but these can easily be countered by probably appealing to “phronesis” and the universal pursuit of the notion of “eudaimonia”. From the foregoing, it implies that virtue ethics not only helps a person to become excellent but a society as well. According to Aristotle the end for man is the application of the soul in accord with virtue.

# **References**

Wolff, Jonathan. *An Introduction to Moral Philosophy*. 2nd. W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2023.

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