

# *Chapter One*

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History of ethics witnesses a vast revision or a drastic modification or ethical revision in the domain of ethics over the years. In fact it would not be an exaggeration if we adhere to the view that ethical movement starts with virtue ethics and philosophers over the years have been occupied with the task of thinking about moral issues for a very long time. Since Socrates philosophers have sought a general criterion or criteria for distinguishing between right and wrong and between good and evil and also have explored and applied different philosophical techniques of analyzing argument to this task. However, in the course of time we witnessed various interpretations of the term morality ethics deals with. It is important to point out that in the course of time there we noticed three different prominent trends which are very much contrary with each other in terms of their criterion. These are virtue ethics, the ethics of consequentialism and deontological ethics. Ethics, in fact, started with virtue ethics and Aristotle was the architect of this system. According to this system an ethical action would be morally good if it is done by a virtuous being. We shall develop the criterion of a virtuous being later on. According to the consequentialism, an ethical action would be morally good if it gives rise to a better or desirable consequence. According to this theory the moral sanctity of an ethical action would be determined in terms of its consequence. And finally, an ethical action would be morally sound if it is done by following the ideals of moral principles or rules. Kantian principle of morality is a case in point where ethical judgments are conceived in terms of obligation. Thus, it can be said that in the case of virtue ethics, the action is agent based. Here the sanctity of a moral action depends on whether the moral agent is virtuous or not. It is something internal. However, both consequentialism as well as deontological approaches are something external. They are external in the

sense that in the case of consequentialism, the validity of a moral action is determined in terms of the consequence of an action under consideration and the so-called consequence is something external. Likewise, in the case of deontological approach, the moral action is done out of moral rules and principles which are again something external.

Although virtue ethics appeared before the arrival of deontological as well as consequential approaches, but in the course of time virtue ethics loses its foothold with the arrival of other two systems as cited above. More specifically it can be said that virtue ethics is either sidelined or completely ignored or neglected by the modern ethical approaches. Wright following Foot remarks, "Virtue is a neglected topic in modern ethics and Kant is one of the culprits."<sup>1</sup> The dominance of consequentialism and deontological approaches is immense in the field of moral philosophy and truly speaking they cover the whole sphere of ethics for many years. However, in recent times, we witness a very different trend in the field of ethics and after the publication of the celebrated article of Anscombe's "*Modern Moral Philosophy*", there has been a revival interest of virtue ethics. This new interest has come about in part as a result of dissatisfaction with the way moral philosophy has been done in modern times. As modern moral philosophy has emphasized on moral obligation and on moral law at the expense of the sources of morality in the inner life and character of the individual and virtue ethics in recent times has sought to make good that deficiency while at the same time adapting ancient ideas of virtue, the revival of virtue ethics is amply justified. We shall propose to justify the revival of virtue ethics to a great extent with reference to environmental ethics. We think that the foundation of environmental ethics actually hinges on virtue ethics and we shall propose to show that to justify environmental ethics, one has to admit the revival trend of virtue ethics. Thus, it can be said that on one hand virtue ethics revives as a general default of other two

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<sup>1</sup> Wright, G. H. von. *The Varieties of Goodness*, London, 1963. p.136.

systems, such as, consequentialism as well as deontological approach, and on the other hand the revival of virtue ethics is a must for justifying the ethical foundation of environmental ethics. We shall propose to address these two issues in this thesis.

We think that in the course of its revival, virtue ethics has largely been inspired by the Aristotelian model of ethics and we shall show in what sense virtue ethics incorporates both the traditional interpretation as well as the modern approach in the course of its revival. In fact Aristotle notably held that a proper understanding of what is admirable and right in human action cannot be captured in general rules and principles, but is a matter of sensitivity and fine discernment incorporated into good habits of moral thought, desire and action. The proponent of virtue ethics would like to say that the moral life is too rich and complex to be captured by consequentialist or social contract approaches of the sort that seek to ground ethics in unifying first principles.

### **What is virtue ethics?**

Virtue ethics is a branch or wing of moral philosophy that emphasizes character, rather than rules or consequences, as the key element of ethical thinking. This approach in fact differentiates virtue ethics from other sorts of ethics. In the West virtue ethics was the prevailing approach to ethical thinking in the ancient and medieval periods. The tradition suffered an eclipse during the early modern period, as Aristotelianism fell out of favour in the West. Virtue ethics returned to prominence in Western philosophical thought in the twentieth century, and is today one of the three dominant approaches to normative ethics (the other two being deontology and consequentialism).

A system of virtue ethics, having offered an account of the good life, then identifies those habits and behaviours that will allow a person to achieve that good life. These habits and behaviours are the virtues (*arête*), a clusters of properties. In the course

of one's activities one will have opportunity to practice these virtues. Sometimes these virtues will be, or will seem to be, in conflict with one another: A common dilemma is the apparent conflict between honesty and compassion, when telling a friend the truth about his appearance would hurt that friend's feelings. In such cases the agent must exercise her practical wisdom (*phronesis*) to resolve the conflict. Ultimately, a lifetime of practicing these virtues will allow the agent to flourish and live the good life (*eudaimonia*). In fact, in most accounts, practicing the virtues partially constitutes *eudaimonia* rather than being merely a means to that end.

This schema of the moral life strongly differs from those offered by virtue ethics' predominant rivals, deontological and consequentialist ethics. These systems aim to articulate principles or rules that provide an agent the ability to decide how to act in a given situation. Consequentialist and deontological ethics often still employ the term 'virtue', but in a restricted sense, namely as a tendency or disposition to adhere to the system's principles or rules. These very different senses of what constitutes virtue, hidden behind the same word, are a potential source of confusion. This sort of confusion is witnessing everywhere as it has been claimed that there are a considerable discussion of virtues even in Kantian as well as in consequential ethics as well. However, the approaches are different with each other. The virtues that are available in Kantian ethics are secondary, they are secondary in the sense that they only guide the rules and principles through which a moral action is performed. The same is prevailing in the consequential ethics as well. However, the genesis of virtue ethics as expounded by Aristotle is different. According to this approach, virtues are all about of ethics, there is no way of conceiving virtues as secondary, rather virtues are basic, primitive and all about of doing morality. Morality is not something rule given or the outcome of consequence fulfilling in terms of either individual happiness or the happiness of the greatest numbers of the greatest

people. Morality is something external, a purification or cultivation of one's inner self and this would be made possible only if the agent under consideration can possess the cardinal virtues or virtuous qualities as specified.

This disagreement over the meaning of virtue points to a larger conflict between virtue ethics and its philosophical rivals. A system of virtue ethics is only intelligible if it is teleological : that is, if it includes an account of the purpose (*telos*) of human life, or in popular language, the meaning of life. Obviously, strong claims about the purpose of human life, or of what the good life for human beings is, will be highly controversial. Virtue ethics' necessary commitment to a teleological account of human life thus puts the tradition in sharp tension with other dominant approaches to normative ethics, which, because they focus on actions, do not bear this burden.

### **Historical origins and development of virtue ethics**

Like much of the Western tradition, virtue ethics seems to have originated in ancient Greek philosophy. Discussion of what were known as the Four Cardinal Virtues – prudence , justice , fortitude and temperance - can be found in Plato's *Republic*. The virtues also figure prominently in Aristotle's moral theory.. The Greek idea of the virtues was later incorporated into Christian moral theology. During the scholastic period, the most comprehensive consideration of the virtues from a theological perspective was provided by St. Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae* and his *Commentaries on the Nicomachean Ethics*. The idea of virtue also plays a prominent role in the moral philosophy of David Hume.

Virtue ethics has been a recurring theme of political philosophy in the emergence of classical liberalism or republicanism, particularly in the Scottish Enlightenment that was carried to the British North American colonies and influenced the Founders of

the United States. An exemplar of this was George Washington, who summarized his moral philosophy in a few words said on the final day, September 17, 1787, of the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia. Many of the participants were dissatisfied with the Constitution they had just drafted, and concerned about its prospects for adoption and success. Washington is reported to have said, "Let us raise a standard to which the wise and the honest can repair. The event is in the hands of God." He was saying that we are not morally responsible for outcomes, which largely result from factors we cannot control, and that while it is virtuous to do one's duty, sometimes we have to venture into new territory, creating new duties for ourselves not previously established. When we do that, our guide is the good opinion of those we admire as virtuous, and that the most virtuous members of society provide the standards for making moral decisions, by their own virtuous examples.

### **Achieving *eudaimonia***

*Eudaimonia* is a state variously translated as "happiness" or "human flourishing". The latter translation is more accurate; *eudaimonia* is not a subjective, but an objective, state. It characterizes the well-lived life, irrespective of the emotional state of the person experiencing it. According to Aristotle, the most prominent exponent of *eudaimonia* in the Western philosophical tradition, *eudaimonia* is the proper goal of human life. It consists of exercising the characteristic human quality-- reason-- as the soul's most proper and nourishing activity. Aristotle, like Plato before him, argued that the pursuit of *eudaimonia* was an activity that could only properly be exercised in the characteristic human community-- the *polis* or city-state.

Although *eudaimonia* was first popularized by Aristotle, it now belongs to the tradition of virtue ethics generally. For the virtue ethicist, *eudaimonia* describes that state achieved by the person who lives the proper human life, an outcome which can be

reached by practising the virtues. A virtue is a habit or quality that allows the bearer to succeed at his, her, or its purpose. The virtue of a knife, for example, is sharpness; among the virtues of a racehorse is speed. Thus to identify the virtues for human beings, one must have an account of what the human purpose is. There is, and always has been, sharp disagreement on this question: thus, as Alasdair MacIntyre observed in *After Virtue*, though thinkers as diverse as Homer, Aristotle, the authors of the New Testament, Thomas Aquinas, and Benjamin Franklin have all proposed lists of the virtues, these lists often fail to overlap. Aristotle praises magnanimity but does not mention faith; the New Testament does the reverse.

Aristotle categorized the virtues as moral and intellectual. Aristotle identified nine intellectual virtues, the most important of which were *sophia* (theoretical wisdom) and *phronesis* (practical wisdom). The moral virtues included prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. Aristotle argued that each of the moral virtues was a mean (see Golden Mean) between two corresponding vices. For example, the virtue of courage is a mean between the two vices of cowardice and foolhardiness. Where cowardice is the disposition to act more fearfully than the situation deserves, and foolhardiness is the disposition to show too little fear for the situation, courage is the mean between the two: the disposition to show the amount of fear appropriate to the situation.

We are yet to outline what we mean by virtue ethics? We have, however, defined under what situation an action would be morally good under virtue ethics. We will see in the later stage that the very definition of virtue ethics in the eyes of recent thinkers is not clear enough. So it would be better for us to define virtue ethics in the traditional sense. Some ethicists wanted to see one or another preferred set of moral principles supplemented or complemented by an account of virtuous traits and actions. Others, however, have sought a genuinely free standing ethics of virtue.



Whatever, the nature of virtue ethics may be, one thing is very clear that such approach is widely understood today as involving an ethical approach independent of other major ethical traditions. The question then is: what distinguishes virtue ethics from other ways of doing ethics?

In the case of virtue ethics, the focus is on the virtuous individuals and on those inner traits, dispositions and motives that qualify her as being virtuous. That means in the case of virtue ethics, the inner purification of moral agent is desired. So long the moral agent is pure in terms of her inner traits; the action done by her would not be morally good. But in the case of other approaches the forms of ethics are either based on the consequence of the action or the moral ideals or rules or principles. The question then is: Are all forms of virtue ethics completely free from moral rules and principles? In responding to this question, it can be said that there may have the application of rules in virtue ethics, but they are secondary in context of the actions. Similarly, it can equally be true to say that in the case of consequential approach, the moral agent may be a virtuous, but this does not matter as the consequence of an action is the principle objective in determining the moral sanctity of an action. This would reflect that the relevance of virtue ethics in other ethics may not be nullified, but what is important to note here that other things do not make sense so long its basic thing remain intact.

Secondly, many modern philosophers think of the moral life as a matter of relating properly to moral rules, but in the virtue ethics of the ancient world and in those few instances of virtue ethics one finds in modern or recent philosophy, the understanding of moral or ethical life primarily requires us to understand what it is to be a virtuous individual or what it is to have one or another particular virtue conceived as an inner trait or disposition of the individual. So virtue ethics is distinct from other wings of ethics as unlike the other wings, virtue ethics is *agent-focused*.

The other important area of virtue ethics is that virtue ethics makes primary use of areatic terms in its ethical characterizations and it either treats deontic epithets as derivative from the areatic or dispenses with them altogether. Thus, an ethics of virtue thinks primarily in terms of what is noble or ignoble, admirable or deplorable, good or bad, rather than in terms of what is obligatory, permissible, or wrong, and together with the focus on the inner character of the agent, this comes close enough to making off what is distinctive of and common to all forms of virtue ethics, such as, the ancient virtue ethics of Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and the Epicureans, and the modern virtue ethics. Unlike the virtue ethics, an ethics of rules will typically characterise acts as morally right or wrong, morally permissible or obligatory, depending on how they accord with appropriate rules.

However, within virtue ethics, there we witness further divisions and classification of virtue ethics, such as, less radical as well as more radical kinds of virtue ethics. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle focuses more on the inner traits and character of the virtuous individuals than he does on what makes actions good, or noble, or right. In this regard it can be said that Aristotelian conception of virtue ethics is *agent-focused*, rather than *act-focused*. According to Aristotle, the excellence or rightness of an action does not essentially depend on the motives or habits that gave rise to it or on the character of the person who actually did it, rather the virtuous individual is someone who, without relying on rules, is sensitive and intelligent enough to perceive what is noble or right as it varies from situation to situation, circumstance to circumstance. This reflects that being virtuous involves being keyed in to facts independent of one's virtuousness about what acts are admirable or called for. What has been said above is called the less radical kind of virtue ethics.

Besides this we also notice a more radical kind of virtue ethics which tells us that the ethical character of actions is not thus independent of how and why and by whom the actions are done. Rather what is independent and fundamental is our

understanding and evaluation of human motives and habits, and the evaluation of actions is entirely derivative from and dependent on what we have to say ethically about the inner life of the agents who perform those actions. The more radical kind of virtue ethics is thus agent –based, not merely, like Aristotle’s views, agent –focused. Thus, the distinction between less radical version of virtue ethics and more radical version of virtue ethics is made clear. They are radical in the sense that the moral sanctity of an action would be determined on the basis of the inner traits of the moral agent. One is agent-focused and the other is agent –based. However, it would be very difficult to outline who advocates agent based virtue ethics and who advocates agent – focused virtue ethics. In fact there we do not have a clear cut examples by means of which it can be said that ancient virtue ethics was agent-focused and modern interpretation of virtue ethics is agent-based or vice versa. However, in modern time the virtue ethics of James Martineau is radical and in the ancient times Plato’s interpretation of virtue ethics witnessing in Republic deserves the same category.

It is important to point out here that there are various senses of virtue ethics and there underlies a considerable difference among them. However, whatever the difference may be among them one thing remains the same and it is that either virtue ethics is agent-based ethics or agent-focused ethics. Whatever it may be, the position of virtue ethics would be clear if we make a contrast virtue ethics with other ethics. There is no question of doubt that in order to revive virtue ethics and make it worthy of consideration in the current climate of ethical debate and theory, we have to do more than simply brush off ancient Aristotelianism. Many would suggest that many central Aristotelian ethical views appear to us nowadays to lack plausibility or moral force. So we have to understand old Aristotelian in the perspective of new revival of virtue ethics. There is no question of doubt that virtue ethics is a kind of ethics based in our current common sense ethical thinking and in this regard

Aristotle's own interpretation of virtue ethics is very close to the common sense interpretation. However, Aristotle's own interpretation of virtue ethics equally misses many things that have been discussed in modern times.

It is tempting to say that it is a moral theory according to which we should live in virtuous life, or act virtuously. However, this is not enough in utilitarian theory as proposed by Mill and deontological theory as propounded by Kant. According to the utilitarian theory one should be virtuous because that will give one the best chance of maximising overall well-being and according to the deontological theory one should be virtuous because that is the way to obey the moral law. Virtue ethics, however, rules out or rather counters the moral standard of both Mill and Kant by giving maximum importance on reason. Virtue ethics unlike the others makes essential reference to the rationality of virtue itself. Thus, for example, the real reason why I should not lie to you is not that it is against the moral law, nor that it is likely not to maximise well being , but because it is dishonest. This clearly reflects that the notion of virtue is far more basic than the notions of utilitarian and Kantian theory. Virtue ethics, in fact, does not require the language, such as 'obligatory'; rather it gives importance on aretaic or virtue-centred concepts than deontic or obligation-centred concepts.

The other important notable feature of virtue ethics is that it is predominantly agent based, it gives importance on moral agents and their lives rather than on discrete actions, such as, telling a lie, having an abortion, contrasted in isolation from the notion of character, and the rules governing these actions. According to Anscombe ethics can be based on the idea of a virtue and of human flourishing and that this leads us back to Plato and Aristotle as models of how to do ethics. However, Anscombe at the same time does not wholly agree with the view of Plato and Aristotle as she thinks that the idea of virtue of Plato and Aristotle did not fully clarify the notion of virtue. For Anscombe to have a clear sense of virtue ethics one has to

have the idea of *philosophical psychology*. Anscombe own appraisal is that unless and until we gain some clarity about philosophical psychology, we should stop doing moral philosophy. Anscombe further seems to have conceived that ethics needs to be based in ideas about human flourishing or the *good life*; eudaimonia according to Aristotle. Unfortunately, the form of *eudaimonism* is absent in most modern theories. In fact eudaimonism in the sense intended by Aristotle holds that genuine virtue must be in the interest of the virtuous individuals.

Very recent thinkers like Murdoch and many others seem to have conceived that the virtue ethics as advocated by Plato and Aristotle actually linked with the idea of moral sensitivity. According to Murdoch the authority of morals is the authority of truth, which is of reality. Reality is not a matter of just abstract intellect, rather reality is something of looking and seeing and this view of moral perception is present in Aristotle's own idea of virtue ethics, more specifically his own account of the practical wisdom (*phronesis*) of the virtuous man. Almost in the line of Murdoch, McDowell following Socrates holds that virtue is knowledge and therefore it requires 'getting it right' in some sense. McDowell conceives virtue as a sensitivity to the requirements placed on one by the salient features of the situations in which one finds himself. Virtue can explain behaviour and in this sense virtue is just the sensitivity. In this regard, McDowell calls upon Socraterian view of the 'unity of virtue' which means that all virtues are in fact one.

A virtuous person has a conception of how to live. He comes to realize that morality in no way codified by universal law or principle. Therefore in the eyes of virtuous, the question of moral universalisability in the case of morality simply does not arise as morality is not guided by principles; rather it is guided by reason or rationality. A virtuous person can follow only one moral principle, the principle that one should be virtuous. Following Aristotle, McDowell says that there are no true generalisations in ethics. This view of virtue ethics has a simile to with the view of later Wittgenstein's

view of 'rule-following'. On McDowell view, Wittgenstein is correctly suggesting that the rules of any form of rationality can be grounded only in human practice. Moral education consists in enabling the person or moral agent to see correctly, rather than to apply principles as suggested by the deontologist.

One would, however, like to say that how can a virtuous agent guide himself without moral principles? In this regard we can cite *practical syllogism* as given by Aristotle. According to this, we can explain a virtuous action by postulating a major premise (the conception of how to live), and a minor premise (an immediate awareness of certain salient features of the present situation). Because of the uncodifiability of the conception, this means that an attempt to construe that conception as a mere non-cognitive state (some form of desire) will fail, since we are not in a position to say what desire is for independently of our grasp of that conception itself.

### **Different forms of Virtue Ethics**

As far as virtue ethics is concerned, there we find different types of virtue ethics and some are more radical than others. In one sense virtue ethics is classified as *agent-focused* and *act focused*. We can find this classification if we carefully go through Aristotle's concept of virtue ethics. Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* focuses more on the inner traits and character of the virtuous individuals than he does on what makes actions good, or noble, or right. Therefore his theory of virtue ethics is called *agent-focused* virtue ethics. Besides agent-focused virtue ethics, we also notice *act-focused* virtue ethics- an ethics where everything is determined in terms of its consequent. In the case of act –focused virtue ethics moral rules actually govern human actions. However, it is important to note here that Aristotelian ethics in an important aspect is act-based. According to Aristotle the excellence or rightness of an action does not essentially depend on the motives or habits that give rise to it, or on the character of the person who did it. Rather the virtuous individual is someone who, without relying on rules, is sensitive and intelligent enough to perceive what is

noble or right as it varies from circumstance to circumstance. Being virtuous, therefore, involves being keyed in to facts independent of one's virtuousness about what acts are admirable or called for.

Unlike agent focused, there we conceive a more radical version of virtue ethics known as agent-based as echoed by Aristotle. According to this view the ethical character of actions is not independent of how and why and by whom the actions are done, rather what is independent and fundamental is our understanding and evaluation of human motives and habits. Here the evaluation of actions in question is entirely derivative from and independent of what we have to say ethically about the agents who perform those actions. However, the application of agent-based virtue ethics is not comprehensive and one can find hardly a few clear-cut examples of such radical approach of virtue ethics. In fact Plato in his *Republic* comes quite close to such a radical view.

We think that both sorts of virtue ethics deserve contemporaneous relevance, because so long we do not involve ourselves with agent-focused new Aristotelian form of virtue ethics, it would be difficult for us to make a comparison with present day alternatives such as utilitarianism and consequentialism. In fact there are at least three forms of virtue ethics and which one is more relevant than other is difficult to establish. More importantly, although Kantian ethics is philosophically known as deontological, the relevance of virtue ethics cannot be ruled out. So the revival of virtue ethics may appear or regenerate a new form which may be abstracted even from Kantian ethics as well. This issue deserves an interesting observation and we shall certainly focus on this issue in due course.

### **Theory versus Anti-theory**

It is by far a general tendency that there are certain fundamental characteristics possessed by ethical theories and there is a hierarchal order in ethical theories. More specifically, it can be said that ethical theories quest for hierarchically ordered,

exceptionless and universally applicable moral principles. The proponents of anti-theory stand against it as they hold that the theorist's preference for impartially and simplicity has led moral theories to posit an underlying unity to all moral thought and conceive all moral disputes as resolvable by decision procedure. That means to say that all moral complexities are reducible to and measurable in terms of some single commemorating moral consideration. However, it is far from clear that everything that deserves the name of moral theory has all these tendencies. This is reflected from Aristotle's. In fact Aristotle, according to many, is conceived as a moral theorist *par excellence*, but he denies the possibility of exceptionless universal principles as cited by Kant. According to Aristotle there is no place in his philosophy for the idea of a single kind of moral consideration in terms of which all moral issues can be resolved. Nor do we say that Aristotle is imperialist if one means a view that requires one to treat all people equally and without preference or partiality.

Can we then say that Aristotle is no longer a moral theorist? The tussle between theorist and anti-theorist remains endless and argument and counter-argument may be raised for and against the ethical theories. Keeping ourselves free from delving into this debate, what we can say is that we need theory in ethics and thus that theoretical virtues like simplicity and unifying power have some weight in deciding what kind of ethical view one needs to adopt. But the very fact is that our moral understanding of things is too rich and complex to be reduced to universal principles. Therefore any kind of scientific deal, any kind of simplifying unification in terms of single factor is not per se objectionable. It has certain attractiveness. However, our ordinary intuitive moral thought is not just complex, but subject to paradox and internal incoherence, and this is a far less acceptable situation than what the anti-theorists imagine to be the case.



Let us consider the problem of moral luck as discussed by Thomas Nagel.<sup>2</sup> Let us imagine a case where a person is driving along a lonely country road and paying too much attention to the scenery might swerve into the oncoming traffic lane, incur no accident, and blame himself very little if at all for her inattention or negligence. However, if we imagine the same scenario except that a car in fact is coming in the opposite direction, with the result that an accident occurs and the other driver or a passenger in her own car is killed, the negligent driver will very much blame herself. Although, the difference between the two cases is a matter of luck or accident and our common sense moral intuitions find it implausible and morally repugnant to believe that differences in blameworthiness and other serious moral differences between people should be a matter of luck or accident, beyond anyone's control or advance knowledge. Therefore, the moral judgments we make and intuitions we have about cases of negligence are in fact inconsistent.

It is in fact true to say that out ordinary moral intuitions fail to cohere with one another. Our common moral thinking treats it as something obligatory to do good things for others and almost always obligatory to refrain from blaming them. However, there is no similar obligation in regard to benefiting oneself or refraining from doing damage to one's prospects or even one's health. This difference is captured by saying that common sense morality is self-other asymmetric in regard to our obligations. But why should not we have obligations to advance and not to damage our own prospects, our own happiness? Common sense has an answer which tells us that it makes no sense to suppose there is an obligation to do things we are already inclined to do and can naturally be expected to do. As we naturally and expectably do care for our own interests, there cannot be an obligation to do so. However, what is said above may not be true in the case of those persons who are

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<sup>2</sup> Nagel, Thomas: "Moral Luck", in *Mortal Questions*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, pp.614-622.

self-destructive, lazy and health risking people. It is further noted that we are usually very concerned to help those who are near and dear to us and is not concerned to help others who are not near and dear to us. According to common sense, we have obligations towards our near and dear and we do not have obligations towards others who are not our near and dear. If common sense stands with this principle, then certainly there is something wrong in common sense. In the case of common sense our intuitions turn out to clash among themselves and if we are to attain to full coherence in our ethical thinking, we are forced to reject at least some intuitions. To take this decision we have to be philosophically and morally inventive.

### **Virtue Ethics versus Kantian and common sense morality:**

There is no question of doubt that although Aristotle was the proponent of virtue ethics, the revival of virtue ethics in contemporary form requires radical interpretation or reinterpretation of Aristotelian form of virtue ethics. More specifically, it can be said that Aristotelian form of virtue ethics needs to be readdressed and re-looked in new dimension to revive virtue ethics. In fact many central Aristotelian ethical views at present are lacking plausibility or force. Even the agent-focused radical form of virtue ethics known as neo-Aristotelian faces serious theoretical debate and challenge among Kantianism, consequentialism and common sense morality and it would be demanding to much even of Aristotle to fulfill the contemporary thrust. In fact there is no question of doubt that Aristotelian own thinking of virtue ethics is closely akin to our common sense or ordinary thinking of virtue ethics in his own day, but time has gradually been changed and a demand for rethinking the old tradition in a new outlook is on the card. For example, the notion of guilt and our modern day emphasis on kindness and compassion are not really to be found in Aristotle or in Greek philosophy generally. As a matter of fact there are moral issues or ethical evaluation of actions in which Aristotle's common-sensed-based account appears ineffective. Modern moral philosophy therefore puts considerable emphasis on

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virtues that do not fit Aristotelian model of virtue ethics and modern-day virtue ethics has reason to resist taking over that doctrine from Aristotle.

Moreover, Aristotle contends a doctrine of the unity of the virtues which hinges on the principles that in order to have any single important virtue one must possess all the important virtues. The revival form of virtue ethics proposes a modification as unlike Aristotle, it tells us that if we are seeking a virtue ethical theory having a kind of intuitive plausibility for our time we must best to consult unlike Aristotle and draw upon our current day thinking and intuitions about what is ethically admirable and what counts as a virtue. However, those intuitions support an overall ethical view that is in important respects structurally similar to Aristotle's view. But modern thinkers feel that side by side it is best to begin by structurally comparing Kantianism, common-sense morality, and consequentialism and our common thinking about the virtues.

The term 'structure' as cited above needs to be clarified. It has to be understood in terms of the concept of 'self-other asymmetric'. Other things being equal, we usually think it is morally better to give more rather than less help to another person who needs help; but doing more rather than less for oneself is not typically regarded as morally more meritorious. It is wiser to provide oneself with a better lunch to relieve one's headache, but 'morally better' is not a phrase that naturally comes in mind in connection with such actions. Similarly, though we admire someone for having been prudent on her own behalf, we would not usually consider the professor for such a trait morally better than someone lacking the trait. However, if one becomes kinder to people than some other person, then one is normally regarded as to that extent morally more praiseworthy. So with regard to well being, there is a self-other asymmetry in our common thinking about what is morally better than worse.

The same 'self-other asymmetries' also exist in Kantian morality as Kant says that we have duties to benefit or promote the well-being of, others that we lack in

connection with the promotion of our own well being . Kant further contends that we also promote the well being of others is virtuous and morally meritorious in a way that benefiting oneself is not. Both Kantian as well as common sense views adheres to the view that it is virtuous and morally good to benefit others, seek others' happiness, in a way that is not virtuous or morally good to promote one's well being.

### **Rethinking Virtue Ethics**

What has been observed above is that the revival of virtue ethics needs to reorganize and reinterpret the traditional approach of virtue ethics as expounded by Aristotle and Plato. Such reinterpretation takes the help of deontological method as propounded by Kant, consequentialism as advocated by Mill and commons sense view of morality. This leads us to say that the revival form of virtue ethics even finds its relevance in deontological theory. Thus the trio-dimensional aspects of ethical history in terms of virtue ethics, deontological ethics and consequentialism coherent with each other to give a shape of the revival form of virtue ethics. This does not make sense to say that the revival trend of virtue ethics is a complete deviation from the traditional form of virtue ethics as propounded by Aristotle, rather it would be better for us to claim that the revival of virtue ethics stands with the traditional form of virtue ethics with certain modifications or certain mit<sup>o</sup>igations. In fact to think Kant as a proponent of virtue may seem to some readers itself novel and not easily associated with the Kant familiar to discussions of justices and rights. Certainly, Kant's own conception of virtue is distinct from Aristotle, but at the same time Kant was a great admirer of the Stoics as clearly witnessing in his writings. Kant was self aware of his historical predecessors and is sympathy with important parts of the ancient tradition of virtue. His own distinctive contributions cannot be underestimated, but by his own telling, the account of virtues owes clear debt to "the ancient moral philosophers, who pretty well exhausted all that can be said upon virtue."

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