

## *Chapter Three*

### *The Origin of Virtue Ethics: Aristotle's View*

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### The Origin of Virtue Ethics: Aristotle's View

If we look back to the history of ethics, it appears to us that ethics actually started with virtue ethics and Aristotle, in fact, was the chief architect of virtue ethics. Aristotle, like Socrates and Plato before him, and the stoics after, begins his inquiry with the questions: what is a good and happy life for a human being? In his term: what is *eudaimonia* (happiness)? Is it a life of civic achievement and active public service; of living with family and friends in pursuit of common ends' of pleasure and excitement; of theoretical reflection; of prosperity and health or freedom; of possessing and exercising virtuous character? In replying to all these questions, Aristotle's well-known answer is that the best human life will require at its centre the exercise of virtue, or excellent human functioning. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle argued that the life for a human being consists in the exercise of the virtues or the excellences. As a leading proponent of virtue ethics, Aristotle seems to have conceived that there is nothing worth having in life except the exercise of the virtues. A virtue, Aristotle opines, is character states that dispose us to respond well to the conditions of human life through both wisely chosen actions and appropriate emotions. Therefore, to maintain a good live or more specifically, to live a good life one has to act through wisely chosen actions and appropriate emotions.

According to Aristotle to live good life requires acting from such states. However, it presupposes a certain measure of prosperity and luck. That means ones good life owes much to agency and effort along with good fortune. To act out of virtue may require that the world be in some way hospitable to one's intention. Having been anticipated moral luck and outer effort, it has been established that virtuous activity cannot be purely internal and must have some outward success in the world. Besides internal conditions, it will also require propitious conditions as well as

external resources or good. A good life equally requires external goods, such as friendship, enjoyed for their own sake and not merely instrumental to virtue. According to Aristotle, the presence of friendship adds something to happiness in its own right, and its loss or absence mars it. Therefore, virtue and related subsequent questions, Aristotle conceives, of how we ought to act towards self and others arise within the more fundamental questions of human well being. This leads us to say that reflection about the good life is the context for a study of the virtues and for assessment of moral conduct of one's life.

In fact it is important to point out here that the central theme in the ancient discussion of *eudaimonia* is the place of external goods in a conception of happiness. Ancient theorists argue for the centrality of virtue in the eudaimon life. However, throughout *eudaimonia* difficult questions soon arise as to the impact on such a life of goods that are external to one's control, but that seems intuitively to be part of a life worth living. The impact of the role of moral luck or fortune, and the vulnerability of a good life to circumstances beyond one's own effort cannot be ruled out. According to Aristotle, happiness is a structured, mixed good and its constituents are virtuous activities and external goods. Virtuous activities subordinate external goods. By virtuous activities in the happy life some recent commentator includes "the excellence exercise of theoretical reason, or contemplation"<sup>29</sup> Richard Kraut argues lucidly for an alternative interpretation in which there are two clear answers Aristotle offers to the 'what is happiness' question. One best answer stands with the view that happiness consists in just one good, namely, the excellent exercise of the theoretical part of reason and the second best answer stands with the view that happiness consists in the exercise of practical virtues such as courage and magnanimity. Some individuals may be capable of the best kind of life and other of the second best. All these things

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<sup>29</sup> Sherman, Nancy: , *The fabric of character: Aristotle's theory of virtue*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, p.94.

put together indicate that the formal criteria of the highest human good which is ultimate, comprehensive and humanly self-sufficient point to the conception of happiness that will include good beyond our control. However, one thing should be noted carefully that when Aristotle was talking about virtuous activity, he was conceiving virtuous activity as more complete than virtuous states that remain unactualised.<sup>30</sup> To Aristotle, virtuous activity requires, in an unequivocal way, external goods beyond our own control to be used as instruments. However, external goods have other roles in the good life as some external goods are intrinsically valuable and their loss can spoil happiness.. Aristotle says, "Yet evidently, as we said, it (happiness) needs the external goods as well; for it is impossible, but not easy, to do fine acts without the proper equipment. In many actions we use friends and riches and political power as instruments; and there are some things the lack of which takes the luster from (or ruins) happiness, as good birth, satisfactory children, beauty; for the man who is very ugly in appearance or ill-born or solitary and childless is hardly happy, and perhaps a man would be still less so if he had thoroughly bad children or friends or had lost good children or friends by death."<sup>31</sup>

In fact the so-called virtuous activity is intimately connected with Aristotle's metaphysical view which states that a potential state becomes and more fully realized and complete as it takes on a more determinate form. In this sense, the wood *qua* proximate material is a potentiality and becomes more fully actualized when the carpenter through his craft, shapes the material into a chair. Likewise, virtue is a state of potentiality more fully realised when it is determinately expressed in concrete activity.<sup>32</sup> Besides metaphysics Aristotle looks for other things as well. For him a life worth living is an active one that part of its value has to do with an engagement in the world marked by a sense of zest and energy. A life of having

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<sup>30</sup> Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1095b31-1096a2.

<sup>31</sup> Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1099a32-b5.

<sup>32</sup> See Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1129b30-31.

virtue spent in inertia would not appeal to us in the same way. Like Sleeping Beauty, lying in wait under a glass lid, there is something deeply unfulfilling about such a model of passive beauty and goodness. Aristotle says, " Possession of excellence seems actually compatible with being asleep, or with lifelong inactivity, and, further, with the greatest sufferings and misfortunes; but a person who was living so on one would call happy, unless he were maintaining a thesis at all costs."<sup>33</sup>

We are in a position to answer the question: How can we come to know a virtuous person? Following Aristotle, we can say that a virtuous person can be identified with the help of his various kinds of external activities, choices and conduct. With the help of his manifest activity, one can have the fineness of his character. Character, according to Aristotle, is deeply connected to a reliable and steady pattern of activity. It is not a dormant inner state, but a reliable way of responding to a wide range of external as well as internal conditions. He further contends that virtue is a state of character connected with choice and action. Aristotle further holds that those who act rightly will win the fine and good things in life. But what of virtuous effort that is active but that nonetheless results in impeded or unfree activity? In assessing whether contemplation is a viable candidate, Aristotle often asks whether a life devoted to its pursuit would be a suitably active life. Aristotle's analogy with the Olympiast is important. The Olympiast, injured before the competition and relegated merely to imagining himself competing in the race, has failed to achieve his end in some important sense. As Aristotle puts it, only those who compete are crowned. Likewise, the person committed to good living cares that action ensues and that one's efforts enable one to act. If one is tortured on the wheel, all the good intentions in the world are not sufficient to achieve the end of virtuous action.

However, there are other passages where Aristotle feels that fine activity is safer than this and less vulnerable to fortune. A truly virtuous agent can act well however

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<sup>33</sup> Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1095b32-96a2.

cramped the circumstances and niggardly the gifts of fortune. In fact the fineness of action is captured in doing what one can. Aristotle in a number of passages of *Nicomachean Ethics* seems to have conceived that excellence or virtue is a 'matter of study and care' more than mere chance. Aristotle goes on to admit this view by appeal to our values. For him happiness is not easily dislodged; for its primary component, i.e., virtuous activity, is an enduring and stable good, manifest even in great misfortune. He says that the virtuous person "will bear the fortunes of life most finely and altogether suitably, if he is truly good and foursquare without reproach."<sup>34</sup> Aristotle, however, feels that frequent and great misfortunes can crush and spoil one's happiness and thereby gives rise to pain and impeding activity. But even in these, Aristotle claims, what is fine shines through, when a person bears with good temper. Aristotle says, " ...if activities control life, as we have said, then no happy person could ever become miserable; for he will never do acts that are hateful and mean. For the truly good and wise person, we presume, will bear the fortunes of life becomingly and from the resources he has will always perform the finest actions he can."<sup>35</sup>

What is revealed from the above is that even virtuous activity can get by with little. The hallmark of true goodness and wisdom is durability and flexibility in expressing one's virtue. Frequent and severe reversals can eat away at one's happiness, perhaps by frustrating one's good intentions or hampering one's output, or simply by bringing pain or hurt that must be borne alongside the daily work of doing good. However, so long as there can be some exercise of the appropriate virtues, there is fineness in one's actions. According to Aristotle a truly good and wise person cannot become wretched or morally despicable and this supports out intuitions. This leads us to say, following Aristotle, that the central part of good living is something that is

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<sup>34</sup> Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1100b19-22.

<sup>35</sup> Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1100b33-1101a3.

within our control and not left to the wind. We expect it to be tolerably stable. But it has its limit. In fact some of the reversals that cramp external outlook can be as severe and chronic as to gnaw at even the best person's interior and it cannot be visualise at the surface level. Aristotle conceives how happiness is vulnerable to tragic reversals. He further contends that though some deprivations merely prevent full realization of virtue, others undermine its very sustenance. Aristotle further goes on to say that our children may die by senseless violence, our freedom may be taken away, we may have little knowledge what to eat or find ourselves without adequate health care. However, if we are truly good and virtuous, then still we may still act with decency, without becoming moral wretches. These kinds of deprivation, especially when they are chronic and multiple, can harm the lives of the virtuous. Something inside may spoil even the most resolute. It takes long time, Aristotle says, to reverse these kinds of blows and a long run of continued, favourable luck. The points of these remarks is that as enduring as virtuous character is, Aristotle, unlike the Stoics, never unequivocally holds the view that virtuous agency is invulnerable to fortune. Virtue is more stable than other kinds of goods, but it is not fully exempt from the same kind of forces that undo one's happiness.

### **The Emotional Aspects of Virtue Ethics**

**The emotional structure or in other words *philosophical psychology* is one of the** main content of virtue ethics. Anscombe, the leading proponent of the revival of virtue ethics draws the conclusion by saying that "we should stop doing moral philosophy until we gain some clarity about philosophical psychology."<sup>36</sup> The emotional aspect of Aristotelian virtue ethics will be made clear with the help of a dialogue between Aristotle and Kant on the subjects of the emotions and their place in morality. According to Aristotle virtue is expressed not merely in fine action but in

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<sup>36</sup> Crisp, Roger and Michael Stole. *Virtue Ethics*, Oxford University Press, 1997, p.4.

fine emotions as well. He further contends that both actions and emotions as morally praiseworthy aspects of character. Kant's theory in contrast locates moral merit narrowly in duty motivated action, while emotions or feelings often viewed as distracting from, or at least not adding to, what is morally meritorious. The immediate question then is: how emotions figure in moral character and in what sense one can be responsible for them? Can emotions be said to be fine?

Putting aside these questions let us first explicate the nature of emotions. It is said that the general issue of the role of the emotions in morality is complex because of our general ambivalence towards emotions as reflected on the practical and theoretical levels. In our everyday life, emotional experience is little understood and important parts of our emotional lives remain private and often unarticulated. More importantly although emotions are frequently given free rein in our literary transports, we often remain puzzled about how to bring out fantasy and imaginative wanderings back to the emotional core of our nonliterary lives. Consequently, when we turn to the role of emotions in morality, we bring to bear only a narrow brand of our emotional inventory. Aristotle does not cast emotions in this way or view them as inhibitors of reason and does not always exploit the full explanatory force of his own account of emotions, he, however, does argue forcefully for the central importance of emotions in healthy and virtuous living. Theoretically, conceptions of emotions in philosophy and psychology have also tended to **sunder** emotions from morality. In Cartesian interpretation, emotions often conceived of as inner feels, outward behaviours, or drives. Here emotion is to some degree cut off from more complex mental representation. In the Freudian legacy, emotion as drive occupies a central place within most stages of that theory. Aristotle, however, does not agree with the positions stated above. Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is a theory of the emotions where emotions are object-directed and constituted by thought contents that are evaluative. Emotions are not feels or drives, but cognitively rich, mental states. Emotions will



have effective elements and in some cases motivational elements as well, but the cognitive element is central for the overall identity of the emotion. According to Aristotle, emotions are not stray features of moral motivation or optional aesthetic **trim**, but are a necessary and reliable constituent of virtue and its actualization. However, Aristotle's assumption that emotions play an important role in morality faces strong challenge from Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* where Kant clearly divides between emotions and reason and gives importance on reason than emotions for doing morality. Whatever the challenge may be, we have to spell out after Aristotle in what sense his conception of emotions in general, and his conception of the cultivated emotions of virtue, in particular, take us beyond the familiar view that emotions just happen to us without the engagement of our rational capacities. In what sense are emotions states for which we can be held responsible? These questions need to be addressed owing to understand the moral significance of emotions as conceived by Aristotle.

**Allied ethical problem associated with emotions:**

It is said that emotions are central to morality as morality begins with care not only about how we act, but also about how we feel, what our emotional moods are, as well as our attitudes and affects. The point is not that emotion is internal and action external, for both action and emotion have exterior moments that point to deeper interior states and thereby linked with character. Emotions present themselves as modes of registering value and modes of communicating value that are important to our interactions with others and our engagement in their well being. Therefore emotions express human attitudes. However, this view has been challenged by Kant as he says that emotions are viewed as the enemy of both reason and morality. Emotions are the foe of agency and control, representing our passive sides. Emotional stories and beliefs arising out of emotional experience lack moral dignity. Moreover, there is a problem of *partiality* in the case of emotion as emotions may

respond to what is morally salient, but in an overly partial and selective way, fastening on evidence that is too restrictive, or unrelated to the rightness and wrongness of the action. Emotions do not allow us to take up the sort of impartial or universal point of view required for morality. Therefore, it is said that emotions connect only accidentally with moral interest. Kant in his *Groundwork* conceives that emotion does not provide the ground for a criterion or rule. Emotion, Kant says, can conform to moral law but this conformity is itself too contingent and precarious to exclude actions which transgress the law. Emotion incurs sympathy which is morally blind as sympathy is neutral with regard to moral approbation or condemnation.

Moreover, it can be said that there is unreliability of emotions as moral motives and very often emotions exhibit excess and are capricious too on again to give rise to a stable motivation for moral action. Emotions are also unreliable sources of motivation. Therefore, if virtue dependent on habitual emotions, Kant tells us elsewhere, is neither armed for all situations nor adequately insured against the changes that new temptations can bring about. Emotions are involuntary happenings endured with little intervention. Unlike action or belief, they appear to be exempt for direct willing. It is further objected by saying that emotions are typically attached to objects and events that beyond our control. Emotions make us vulnerable and threaten our self-sufficiency. Emotions involve caring about certain objects and this makes us vulnerable to their presence or loss. Therefore, to give importance to emotions is to embrace vulnerability. Thus, in a nutshell we can summarise the shortcomings of emotions in the following points:

- (i) There underlies the plurality of discrimination through emotion.
- (ii) Emotions possess accidental nature.
- (iii) Emotions are unreliable as motive.
- (iv) Emotions often explained in terms of excess or caprice.
- (v) Emotions involve involuntarism.

- (vi) The vulnerability that comes from emotional attachment to objects threatens self-sufficiency.

All these points as cited above go against the view that an emotion is an important element of philosophical psychology associated with virtue ethics.

**Aristotle's Replay:**

In responding to the objection that emotions are partial, Aristotle goes on to say that although emotions may sometimes stubbornly attach to slender evidence or too selective in focus, but their unresponsiveness to certain reasons does not entail that they do not rest on reasons at all. Nor we can say that emotions are intractable. According to Aristotle emotions have firm cognitive foundations and rest on appraisals which are not immune to reflection or criticism. However, this is not to deny that the process of developing moral rational and morally supportive emotions is a slow one. Nevertheless Aristotle does not exclude the transformation of emotion from an overall process that engages reason. Aristotle further contends that choosing emotions may not trouble morality and if partiality involves in the case of emotion, like prejudiced beliefs, then such emotions, Aristotle opines, need to be controlled or transformed. However, it is true to say that many forms of emotional selectivity are permissible and even to be encouraged. Even Aristotle in *The Doctrine of Virtue* states that the positive duty of beneficence must always be carried out by humans, who by their nature are finite and subject to limitations of time and resources. Deliberation about the particulars must rely materially on emotions and the information. They are an essential source of information. The report of the emotions, may not, however, be final or decisive. But even so emotions can mark a moral decision. In this sense emotions may not be necessary for grounding morality, but they do appear necessary for putting it into practice.

Secondly, it is objected by saying that emotions are unreliable by motive. Can emotions reliably motivate us to do what we know the right thing to do? As far as

reliability of emotion is concerned, Aristotle inclines to say that it is *cultivated or habituated* emotions, not immediate impulses that are part of virtue.<sup>37</sup> What is to be cultivated is strength as well as sensitivity to the variety of circumstances in which specific emotions, such as generosity, kindness, fear, or pity, are important responses. And importantly few of our potentialities stand us well in their raw or untutored state. Having been admitted the view that virtue is something cultivated or habituated emotions, Aristotle perhaps would like to say that virtue is not natural virtue, rather the gradual development product of a slow and steady habituation of natural perceptivities where habituation requires the engagement of practical reason. According to Aristotle, we have the susceptibilities 'to receive virtue by nature, but they are made perfect by habit'<sup>38</sup> and by practical wisdom. We think what Aristotle conceives is inherently lie submerged in Kantian thinking. When Kant distinguishes between 'immediate' inclinations and the 'practical' emotions, the latter requires a process of habituation much like that to which Aristotle points. According to Kant emotions are shaped by reason, by the normative values reason itself generates.

Thirdly, it is said that emotions may be involuntary, similar to compulsion and physical disease than to intention. Emotions, Aristotle conceives, are varied and complex phenomena and at times subject to a considerable degree of consent and self-governance. Emotions are ways of being affected but are also ways of coming to assent to certain beliefs and construal. Emotions are active aspirations of imagination and belief. Even though individuals cannot typically will to feel certain emotions, they can choose to cultivate certain emotions over time as a significant part of developing moral character. The cultivated emotions of mature character are more like complex activities than basic acts. The vulnerability of the emotional life to contingent events and objects is more complex matter. Fulfillments and satisfactions

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<sup>37</sup> Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103a14-18, 1105b19-1106a4.

<sup>38</sup> Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. 1103a25; 1144b30-32.

of desire and emotional investment affect one's chances for happiness, but not the goodness of one's moral will. In contrast, Aristotle goes on to say that moral motives are themselves partially constituted by emotions, and goodness as well as happiness rest certainly in the state of one's emotions. There is no separate, invulnerable source of motive just like as Kant's pure practical reason from which morality can issue. The inner code of character can get computed by emotional states. For Aristotle, there is no part of the soul that in a comparable way can remain invulnerable. For Aristotle emotions register the importance of certain concerns and objects in our lives. Emotions are powerful modes by means of which we record that something is valued. The Aristotelian view of emotions, in general, can be harmonised with the judgments of practical wisdom. Even the part of soul, Aristotle opines, shares in reason and in a derivative sense can be said to have reason. According to Aristotle through proper training emotions could be the part of the soul that can be made to listen to and obey the more reasonable and circumspect judgments of the authority of the rational part.<sup>39</sup> Emotions are responsive to reason and can be shaped by it. Emotions also support the judgments of practical wisdom. Therefore, it can be said that we can well with regard to the emotions; emotions are truly virtuous and temperate. More specifically, it can be said that we stand with emotions when emotions are transformed in deep manner instead of merely suppressed or controlled.

### **Some intuitive views about the role of emotions in morality:**

We have already spelled out the pros and cons of emotions as considering it an important part of morality. We have seen that emotions in general can not so much useful for morality. However, Aristotle shows with sufficient authenticity and clarity that cultured and habituated emotions are inevitable part of our morality. Let us further explore the intuitive aspect of emotions in morality. It is claimed that emotions

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<sup>39</sup> See Aristotle. *Nicomachen Ethics*, 1102b25-26, 1102b31.

play a crucial epistemological role in their function of recording information. Emotions can think of as modes of attention helping us to sense what is morally silent, important, or urgent in ourselves and our surroundings, what Descartes perhaps called 'intentionality of the emotions'. Emotions, in fact, guide us to find out the proper morally relevant news. Emotion is part our life. For example, in the case of sorrow and grief, what is silent is that humans suffer and face loss; in the case of pity emotions sometimes fail through blameless ignorance, sickness or accident; in the case of empathy, emotions need the express support and union of others who can understand and identify with them; in the case of love, we find through our emotions certain individuals attractive and worthy of our time and devotion. Besides, emotions draw us in a way that demands our attention. All these things put together help us to endorse the view that emotions help us for moral deliberation and choice; they serve as epistemological tools and without the assistance of emotions we would often be hard-pressed to know which occasions require our ministrations. This leads us to say that emotion in itself is "an essential source of information and emotion in itself essential to the process of decision making."<sup>40</sup>

It seems clear that emotional sensibility is more than a purely perceptual or cognitive matter. That means besides perceptual and cognitive matter, emotions equally touch others modes of sensitivity. Although emotions are more than perceptual or cognitive matter and even touch other modes of sensitivity, but the general point remains that emotions do not reduce to the exercise of cognitive function or even to the exercise of sensory modalities. Emotions also play a role in communicating information to others. In this regard it can be said that emotions are modes of responding. Furthermore, emotions become modes for both receiving information and signaling it. What we are and what we hold as important are reflected in our emotional attitudes and expressions. Through emotions we can track and convey what we care

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<sup>40</sup> De Sousa, Ronald. *The rationality of emotion*, Cambridge, M.A: MIT Press, 1987, p.30.

about. One's position, i.e. who is he is reflected through his emotional attitudes and expressions and this emotional attitude may be verbal as well as non-verbal.

It seems uncontroversial that the presence of certain affects and conversely their actions can be morally significant. For example, helping action that is emotionally flat may not be received or morally evaluated in the same way as action conveyed through more passive, affective expression. As recipients, we may judge that it lacks what is important for our well-being. Of course, emotional tone is not always to the point. For example, if someone is bleeding profusely, then helpful action might simply be action aimed at stopping the bleeding, whatever its emotional tone. The communication of emotion is neither here nor there, but it equally matters a lot in other cases. It typically matters in how we comfort a child, how we volunteer services to a student, how we show our willingness to help a colleagues who requires our resources. All these are sufficient to indicate that we do care others by showing patience, availability, considerateness empathy. In such cases the quality of the emotional interaction is inseparable from the act of helping. Mutual aid is conveyed by the kind of affective, gestural articulation and we may feel another's attentional devotion because of a smile, or a laugh, or a twinkling eye, or a long and intense gaze. On the contrary, we can equally sense others disapproval through gaze, or head shaking, or flat intonation. All are signs or symbols of how we are being taken by others.

So far we have examined in what sense emotions are conceived as modes of attending and conveying value largely in the context of others and our external surroundings. Besides this, emotions are equally important for knowing ourselves as they can record and convey value to ourselves. The revelatory function of emotions is especially worthy of consideration as they disclose information that we might not have been aware of independent of experiencing those emotions. The disclosing power of emotion plays an important role in the case of self-knowledge which

according to both Kant and Aristotle is central to the cultivation of virtue. According to Aristotle the arena for self-knowledge typically will be within friendship, what Aristotle calls 'character' or 'virtue' friendships.<sup>41</sup> Aristotle holds that such friendship actually helps each other to know intimately and equally helps to share a mutual interest in living a critically reflective, good life. Moreover, they spend their days with one another in a way that promotes the candid flow of emotions and evaluate information those emotions contain. Like Aristotelian voice, Kant says that the duty to self-knowledge is something of a 'meta-virtue' underlying all virtues. Kant says, "...the first command of all duties to oneself is to know oneself- to know one's heart."<sup>42</sup>

Emotion is associated with depth psychology and in this sense a present emotion can transport us to past similar emotions and with the experiencing of those past emotions, we come to disclose ourselves to evolutions and construal that are important in those relieved emotions. This is the work of effective memory. In this process emotion is both the subject of self-knowledge, i.e. in virtue of what it discloses and the medium. In fact operations of emotions themselves often create some of what is valued and also are valued intrinsically. Emotions do not always reveal what we already care about, but can themselves insist with value otherwise neutral state of affairs. This role of emotion will have crucial importance in moral development, and in learning in general. We can learn best from those with whom we can identify and from those whom we value positively. This idea is linked with Aristotle's view that *Philia* is the central arena in which character development takes place. The expression of emotion reveals old values and creates new ones as well. Barring all these positive contributions, experiencing emotion itself bears value. A world without humor, language, playfulness as well as aggression and fear would simply be impoverished and in such a world human as human remains

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<sup>41</sup> Sherman, Nancy .*The fabric of character: Aristotle's theory of virtue*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, chapter 4.

<sup>42</sup> Kant, I. *The Doctrine of Virtue, Part II of The Metaphysics of Morals*, p.441.



unrecognizable. To be an emotional creature and to live with others on an emotional plane, i.e. in a life that engages our emotions and in which emotions are parts of the social fiber, is an intrinsic part of living humanly. We ought to prize that way of experiencing self and others.

Even in Aristotelian view, a *eudaimon* life is a life lived emotionally and part of what is valuable is just realising oneself through emotions. We express our excellent functioning through both action and emotion and these expressions are valued in their own right. For Aristotle, friendship is non-instrumentally valued within the good life. We simply value the emotionality of a shared life. Aristotle says, ".....there are some things the lacks of which takes the luster from happiness."<sup>43</sup> For Aristotle without friendship happiness would be seriously marred, hopelessly less complete.

In another important aspect emotions are mostly connected with morality. This is what we call emotions as motives. Emotions are motivational as they can move us into action. In fact a true human acts out of compassion, out of friendliness, out of sympathy. In this sense, emotions are reasons for acting. In a nutshell, it can be said emotions are sensitivities that help us to attend to and record what we care about. Emotions are modes of recording values. Emotions also assist us in signaling those valuing to both ourselves and others. They are modes of conveying and expressing values. Emotions can reveal values we were previously unaware of and in this regard they are modes of disclosing values. Emotions help us to establish what we value rather than mere revealing antecedent values. In this sense they are modes of establishing values. Moreover, emotions can be valued for their own sake and in this sense emotions are intrinsically valued. Most importantly, emotions motivate action and also provide impetus for action. They are motives for action.

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<sup>43</sup> Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1099b2-6

## The Role of Emotions in Virtue Ethics: Aristotelian View

Aristotle unlike many others admits the moral relevance of emotions in virtue ethics. He holds in various parts of his *Nicomachen Ethics* that emotions play a considerable role in moral life. In fact many would like to say that Aristotle's ethical work of emotions is a conception of mature moral character and there is no systematic conception of emotions in those works. At the end of *Nicomachen Ethics*, Aristotle introduces a discussion of excellences of character as excellences of the *orectic part*, i.e. the part that houses the emotions, the only analysis we find is that emotions such as appetite, anger, fear, and confidence, are connected with pleasure and pain.<sup>44</sup> In some other places, Aristotle maintains in what sense virtue is connected or associated with right pleasures and pains. He goes on to say that we become virtuous through the punishing and reformatory effects of those pleasures and pains. Aristotle further notes that emotions will not themselves be states of character, even though states of character will be ways of standing well or badly toward the emotions. However, when we examine Aristotelian emotions, we do not discuss about how emotions are internally transformed, rather we examine in what sense Aristotelian virtue is a way of hitting the mean with regard to both action and emotion. We should expect an analysis of emotion in the ethical writings somewhat comparable to the analysis we find of action and choice. In the *Rhetoric*, Book II, we conceive an extensive treatment of the emotions that goes some way to filling in the lacuna. What emerges there is an account of the emotions in which evolutions play an important constitutive role. Whatever Aristotelian rhetoric impacts on popular *endoxa* or psychological theories, the result seems to move us toward the kind of analysis that is absent in ethical writings and that is crucial for understanding the affective structure of virtue. However, it would be more worthy to evade briefly these views owing to mark their contrast with Aristotelian account.

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<sup>44</sup> Aristotle. *Nicomachen Ethics*, 1105b21-23.

According to the popular or common sense view emotion is thought to be an irreducible quality of feeling or sensation. Arising out of physical state and if anybody belongs to that stage he thereby feels the emotion belonging to that stage. According to this view emotion is something a felt affect, a distinctive feeling. However, this commonsense view appears to be untenable as states that emotions are no more than private states or mental representation of what they are about. A second view propounded by William James and Carl Lange holds that emotions are behavioral movements, an awareness of bodily changes in the peripheral nervous system. Such emotions mostly dominate children's and adults' reports of their emotional experiences. A few lines as quoted by De Sousa from *Sappho* will reflect the genesis of this view: "When I see you, my voice fails my tongue is paralysed, a fiery fever runs through my whole body my eyes are swimming, and can see nothing my ears are filled with a throbbing din I am shivering all over..."<sup>45</sup> There is a third view of emotions that actually locate outside the privacy of the mind locating emotions as behaviour. Here we can mention the name of later Wittgenstein and to some extent the name of Gilbert Ryle. It states that "'action tendency' and 'emotion' is one and the same thing."<sup>46</sup> According to this view emotions are modes of readiness to act. Emotions as excitations are helpful in need of release and discharges of tension. Even emotions, it states, is conducive in terms of dispositions to concrete behaviour. Emotions are about something that we represent in thought; they have propositional content and in fact their identity actually depends on that content. This view actually helps us to understand Aristotelian view of emotions as Aristotle too conceives that emotions are about something that we represent in thought. For Aristotle emotions are intentional states; they have cognitive content by means of which they are identified.

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<sup>45</sup> De Sousa, Ronald. *The Rationality of Emotion*, Cambridge, M.A: MIT Press, 1987, p.50.

<sup>46</sup> Frijda, Nico. *The Emotions*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986, p.71.

According to Aristotle an object of emotion is not simply something pointed to or behaviorally signaled, but something that appears to be an agent in a certain way and that can cause emotion in virtue of that intentional representation. Emotion, Aristotle conceives, is a kind of judging, i.e. judging about the goodness or badness. For example, I am angry at him because I believe that he injured me. In this case anger requires an evaluation that one has been unjustly slighted by another. For Aristotle pleasure or pain is intentionally related to the evaluation and pleasure and pain is itself a judging of something good or bad. Emotion, Aristotle opines, is a kind of pleasure or pain and even in some case emotion can lead to a reactive desire that may inspire action. Aristotle says, "Anger is a desire (orexis) accompanied by pain toward the revenge of what one regards as a slight toward oneself or one's friends that is unwarranted."<sup>47</sup>

It is important ~~to~~ note here that when Aristotle was talking about the relevance of emotion in virtue ethics, he actually insisted on the evaluative aspect of emotions. Aristotle suggests that the evaluations constitutive of emotions are about matters important to us. In the case of fear, he says it is 'great' pains or losses or what has 'great' power of destroying us. Here the concept of *Phantasia* loosely translated as 'imagining' is worthy of discussion. According to Aristotle the subject of *phantasia* is complex and full examination of it would take up deep into philosophy of mind. *Phantasia* is a function of perceptual and cognitive capacities related to what we often think of as interpretive seeing or in Wittgenstein idiom 'seeing as'. In some cases *phantasia* is associated with conditions of nonveridical perception where *phantasia* may not represent the object in one's perceptual field. Conceptualising emotion through *phantasia* would allow Aristotle to ascribe emotions in more than a merely metaphorical way to children in their early development stages as well as to animals. In his *De Anima*, Aristotle seems to have conceived that human

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<sup>47</sup> Aristotle. *Rhetoric*, 1378a30-32.

intentionality as a part of larger common story about the intentionality of animal motion. Aristotle is well aware of cognitive states that fall short of strict belief. This slot is filled by Aristotle's technical notion of *phantasia*. Having said this, Aristotle at least in the *Rhetoric* is more concerned with showing that the cognitive states constitutive of emotions can grip us and earn confident mental acceptance, independent of whether there is sufficient strength of evidence for assenting 'objectively' to something being the case.

The question then arises: how does Aristotle account for the internal aspects of emotion? In line with *De Anima* Aristotle perhaps would like to say that what he feels is only the vestige of fear caused by *phantasia* in the technical sense, but not by belief. However, his own observation in *Rhetoric* is something different as here he says that it is not just vestigial fear that he feels but genuine fear because in a certain way he really does not accept that all dangers are removed. By differentiating his own observation, Aristotle, however, acknowledges that beliefs and *phantasia* are unstable. All these things put together substantiate that cognitive states that fall short of strict belief may ground emotion.

As far as the affect or feel constitutive of emotions is concerned the element of emotions has been described as intentionally directed toward a constitutive evaluation. When I feel angry, feel pain at the thought that I have been insulted. However, this is not always explicit in Aristotle's formulations as although he conceives that pleasure and pain 'accompany' an emotion or that a particular emotion is 'with' pleasure or pain, yet the notion of accompaniment is too weak. However, in other formulations Aristotle is aware of this point, making explicit the intentionality of affect through the preposition *epi*. Pity is a painful feeling directed toward (*epi*) the appearance of someone suffering. This reflects that in more careful formulations, Aristotle seems to regard affect not as some free floating sensation, but as intentionally connected with the evaluative focus of the emotion. However,

Aristotle is not particularly interested in locating awareness of the effect of emotion in specific physiological sensations. For Aristotle in the case of anger there is a boiling of blood around the heart and awareness of this is not essentially to experiencing the pain of anger. At the same time Aristotle is sensitive to the general point that a felt affect does not adequately distinguish emotions. Aristotle in his *Rhetoric* inclines to say that contempt, spite, and insolence each involves pain, though these emotions are differentiated not by any particular pain but by the constitutive evolutions towards which they are directed. The effect of an emotion can change within the evaluative focus of that emotion. Love is a case in point as love can be bittersweet, infused with both the greedy pleasure of vertiginous romance and the pain of vulnerability.

### **In what sense is emotion a motive for action?**

Aristotle seems to have conceived that emotion is a motive for action. Emotions are primarily motivational, primarily ways of evaluating and taking in information about one's surroundings. An emotion also involves an evaluation, an affect, and a desire. Even some emotion, Aristotle says, do have desiderative elements, such as desire, insolence etc. Emulation and envy are also taken up as actional as emulation makes us take steps to secure the good things in question and envy makes us take steps to thwart our neighbour for having them. But when we turn to calmness, confidence, shame, and pity, the actional components are not included. However, there is no denying that emotions can motivate action as well as further thought. Aristotle opines that the desiderative aspect of emotion can be absent in an account of emotion in a way the cognitive and affective elements of emotion simply cannot. However, when we turn to the role of emotion in Aristotelian virtue ethics, the motivational dimension of emotion also need not be as central as it is often made out to be. Even in some sense the motivational role of emotions can become uninteresting in Aristotelian own concept of virtue ethics.

It is rather difficult to substantiate that a necessary condition of any act of moral judgment requires proper emotional engagement. In fact it is well known to all of us that the relevance of emotion in morality has large been defused by many moral schools. However, what is relevant in context to my thesis is that in the case of virtue there is a decision to act because it is judged as the right thing to do. That means to say that we are moved to act by feelings can seem to leave the feeling dangling, unattached to the moral choice, in a way that it is not when we say that part of our very recognition of the moral occasion and of the rightness of the action depended on the emotion. When Aristotle claims that in some cases we do act out of an emotion, what kind of account of emotional motivation does Aristotle give? Whether his understanding of emotional motivation falls under the general schema of the practical syllogism? Is emotional motivation, for Aristotle, essentially a case of acting from a pro-attitude combined with a belief? However, understanding emotion in terms of syllogism as discovered by Aristotle seems to be too rational. Aristotle assumes that emotions play a pervasive role in the active life of virtue and virtuous character states are the development product of habituated emotions combined with and informed by practical reasoning. According to Aristotle, when we actualise character, we do so through expressing both fine emotion and fine choices. In morality we not only assess our actions, but for our emotions as well as both can be praiseworthy and blameworthy. In many cases we are admired or condemned, credited or blamed for our emotions. That means we are morally responsible for emotions.

Are emotions related to choice? In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle explicitly emphasizes the passivity of the emotions, and the literal sense that they are modes of being acted upon. In respect of the emotions we are said to be moved. In *Nicomachean* Aristotle contrasts passions or emotions with states of character involve choice and states of character, but not emotions, are the objects of moral

phrase and blame. This contrast seems perplexing as emotions along with actions are the modes by which virtuous states of character are expressed and virtuous involve choice precisely in the sense that they can be expressed in ways that are deliberate and chosen. Aristotle perhaps restricts or confines choice to only those realisations of virtue through action. However, this seems to be rather objectionable as we conceive that both emotion and action fall under what is praiseworthy or blameworthy in character. The full expression of character is subject to what seems to be univocal moral assessment. There seems to be univocal use of the evaluative terms.

According to Aristotle, the emotional structure of character involves choice. We do choose how to express our character through emotions. Choice is in cultivating or habituating emotions so that they will become reliable resources for the many roles emotions play in the moral life. Even through emotion, we choose the condition of our emotion; we cultivate them as part of forming our states of character or *hexeis*. Therefore, choosing emotions involves an education of consciously shaping emotional capacities and refining them into more discerning sensitivities. According to Aristotle to choose an emotion is to cultivate them and thereby one can develop a state of character that shapes emotional capacities as an enduring resource of character. We can regulate our emotions through certain efforts, because emotions are not raw impulses, but socialized modes of response. Aristotle even maintains that a child's own cognitive and affiliative efforts contribute significantly to the shaping of emotions. On the whole, his remarks on virtue can be understood in a profound way as characterising a developmental course whereby the transformation of one's emotional nature becomes increasingly over time more one's own responsibility and choice. The genesis of virtue as conceived by Aristotle is that the good life is valued principally not because of what happens to us, but because of one's own effort achieved through study and care.



As far as the right states of character is concerned, Aristotle says that anyone who is to listen intelligently to lectures about what is fine and just must have been brought up in good habits. The soul of the student must first have been cultivated through habits. Aristotle maintains that character is deepened and refined by deliberation and ethical reflection. Even laws, Aristotle opines, play a crucial role in character training and are meant to cover the whole of life. Friendship and community will have a powerful place in the maintenance of good character. However, in the case of virtuous character; the excellent condition of the agent is presumably a harmony of emotion with judgments of what is best and fine. Aristotle suggests this as a goal of virtue and as embodied in the idealized figure of the *phronimos*. Achievement of virtue is not a divine goal for Aristotle; rather he takes it as a human goal. If a life of contemplative activity is the first-best life, then virtuous life, including well-ordered emotions, is already the second best. Virtue demands appropriate emotional expression and therefore emotions can be seen as playing an effective role in virtue in more ways than simply at the motivational level. Besides motivational level, emotions are also morally useful because they serve various epistemic functions. In virtue of certain rules emotions serve in a right way towards the right persons in the right circumstances. Aristotle, however, does not develop this sort of point though his remarks about emotions as evaluative give little reason for thinking that the motivational rule of emotion will exhaust the role of emotion in virtue.

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