

Preface

The Revival of Virtue Ethics

Although virtue ethics of Aristotle was the pre-eminent form of ethical theorising in the ancient world but in the course of time it lost its glory with the appearance of some other ethical systems such as consequentialism and deontology. More succinctly, it can be said that a significant changes has been witnessing in the landscape of moral philosophy in the second half of the twentieth century. Before these changes, discussion of practical or normative ethics has centred around two traditions, such as, Kantianism or deontology which has its root in the work of the eighteenth century German philosopher Kant and utilitarianism known as consequentialism which has its roots in the writings from the eighteenth century onwards of the British philosophers Jeremy Bentham, Mill and Sidgwick. According to the Kantianism morality is based on a universal impartial law of rationality based on Categorical Imperative and utilitarianism sees value only in the well-being of human beings, then what rational action must aim at. This indicates that both Kantianism and utilitarianism advocated different sorts of morality as Kantianism unlike utilitarianism holds that rationality consists in adherence to the laws of rationality and making false promises cannot possibly be in accordance with such a law.

Whatever the difference between utilitarianism and Kantianism may be, what is true to say is that both negate the traditional sense of virtue ethics. There is, in fact, nothing wrong to claim that the traditional sense of virtue ethics has mostly been neglected by these two moral approaches. More specifically it can be said that the Greek tradition of virtue ethics has taken a new direction in the eyes of modern thinkers. It is important to point out here that modern thinkers also talk about virtues while doing morality. Hume and Kantian virtue ethics are cases in point. In fact the

Greek tradition of virtue ethics takes a new turn with Hume and then a different outlook of virtue ethics appears with the introduction of Kantian ethics. The tussle between Greek tradition of virtue ethics and the modern approaches is that Greek view of virtue ethics, particularly Aristotelian form of virtue ethics is agent focused whereas the modern outlook of virtue ethics is act or law focused.

In 1958 Anscombe launched a scathing attack on modern approaches in her article entitled "Modern moral philosophy". According to Anscombe both deontology and consequentialism have sought a foundation for morality grounded in legalistic notions such as 'obligation' and these notions in fact make no sense when no lawgiver is assumed. With the celebrated article of Anscombe, the inauguration of the revival trend of virtue ethics has started. The Introductory Chapter of this thesis known as *Chapter one* introduces in great detail the aim and object of virtue ethics and it would also reflect the historical development of virtue ethics.

To talk about virtue ethics, it is very important to know what does virtue ethics actually mean. In the *Second Chapter* we propose to explain and examine the nature and classification of virtue ethics in great detail. We think that virtues are clusters of properties and there is no monolithic conception regarding virtues. If we carefully examine the views of various moral philosophers, we come to know that there are different proposals regarding virtues. Plato tells us there are some cardinal virtues which are more important than others. However, to talk about virtue ethics, one has to explicate the nature and classification of virtue. That is why the *Second Chapter* of my thesis is entitled as "The Nature and Classification of Virtue Ethics"

As we all know that ethics was originated in terms of virtue ethics. Or we can say without question begging that Aristotle was the chief architect of virtue ethics in the traditional sense. Therefore it would be quite relevant at the very outset to introduce and discuss the Aristotelian view of virtue ethics. This is mainly because of the fact that virtue ethics had got its foothold with Aristotle and in this sense there is nothing

wrong to claim that Aristotle was the father of virtue ethics. To talk about the revival trend of virtue ethics, it is very essential to discuss the genesis of virtue ethics as expounded by Aristotle. We can not develop the revival trend of virtue ethics without developing the view of virtue ethics as conceived by Aristotle. In the *Third Chapter* of my thesis we propose to analyse and examine Aristotelian form of virtue ethics and therefore it is entitled as “The Origin of Virtue Ethics: Aristotle’s View”.

We think although Aristotle was the main architect of traditional virtue ethics, but Plato’s own ideas of virtue ethics is equally important to examine. Plato in his celebrated book *Republic* outlines his own idea of virtue ethics. Here he tells us regarding the four cardinal virtues such as ‘wisdom’, ‘courage’, ‘temperance’ and ‘justice’. For Plato these four cardinal virtues contribute virtues made up the whole of virtue. For Plato every virtuous must be a courageous one. Besides cardinal virtues, Plato also envisages civil or popular virtue which may not be directly linked with knowledge of good and evil. We think in the context of the revival form of virtue ethics, Plato’s own interpretation is equally relevant. It is therefore included in *Chapter Four* and entitled as “Plato’s theory of virtue ethics”.

We think before the appearance of Kantianism and consequentialism, the first blow of virtue ethics came from Hume. It was Hume who conceived virtue ethics in a completely different way from Aristotle. According to Hume no action can be virtues or morally good unless there be in some human nature some motive to produce it, distinct from a sense of morality. Hume further contents that no action can be virtuous without their being already some motive to do it other than because of its virtue. Morality, Hume says, is founded upon our natural desires as well as affective responses. Every virtuous action requires a motivation separate from a sense of morality. Hume classifies virtues as artificial as well as natural and thereby considers justice as an artificial virtue. Unlike Aristotle, Hume maintains that just acts are different from natural virtues. For him justice originates when individual becomes

aware that stability of possession would be beneficial to each of them individually. Hume's theory is a blow to Aristotelian virtue ethics simply because of the fact that Hume's virtue ethics is the outcome of act. In this sense, his virtue ethics is act based, rather than agent based. We propose to discuss Hume's view of virtue ethics in *Chapter Five* and it is entitled as "Hume's on Virtue Ethics".

The most culprit of derailing virtue ethics is Kant. Actually his own interpretation of morality is rule or law based guided by reason where there is no scope of passion or emotion. He has completely nullified the relevance of individual passion, emotion, sentiment in the case of morality. Kant conceives virtue as the strength of a person's commitment (maxim) in fulfilling her duty. In this process Kant gives maximum priority on moral principles or moral laws arising out of reason dictated by categorical imperatives. For Kant virtues are secondary, moral rules are primary. Thus, Kantian morality being a deontological enterprise mostly damages virtue ethics expounded by Aristotle. With the publication of Anscombe's "Modern Moral Philosophy", virtue ethics of the old form gains impetus to revive. In fact there is nothing wrong to claim that Anscombe has inaugurated the present revival trend of virtue ethics. In criticizing Kant, Anscombe inclines to say that Kantian sense of moral obligation requires a legislative model of morality in order to make sense and she further contends that Kantian 'self-legislation' is not a sensible notion. Anscombe further goes on to say that secular moral philosophy that has no use for the idea of divine lawgiving cannot make meaningful use of the idea of moral obligation and of moral rightness or wrongness. Instead of moral obligation as sensed by Kant, ethics, Anscombe opines, is fundamentally based on the idea of virtue and of human flourishing and this leads us back to Plato and Aristotle as models of how to do ethics. However, the traditional virtue ethics is not all about the revival of virtue ethics. The revival of virtue ethics adds something new which was either not present in the Aristotelian form of virtue ethics or not clarified adequately. Anscombe says

that we do not really understand the idea of virtue because both Plato and Aristotle do not fully clarify the notion of virtue. Her own suggestion is that one should stop doing moral philosophy until we gain some clarity about philosophical psychology. That means one has to have the idea of psychological terms such as, 'intention', 'wanting', 'pleasure', 'action', etc before doing moral philosophy properly. This reflects that the revival trend of virtue ethics seeks more clarification of psychological terms which has not been clarified by Aristotle and Plato. We propose to discuss the revival trend of virtue ethics in *Chapter Six* and it is entitled as "The Revival of Virtue Ethics."

The revival approach of virtue ethics not only criticises the modern moral theories, at the same breath it also tries to set up moral standards through which good life in terms of happiness as well as peace can be comprehended. There is no question of doubt that a virtuous moral agent comes to realise what is good for the mankind in general, he can foresee the well beings of others as well. Moral standard should neither be framed in terms of absolute moral rules and principles, nor it should be looked upon in terms of the consequence of an action under consideration; rather moral standard should be judged in terms of situation, in terms of surroundings, in terms of love, care, compassion, friendship and benevolence. A moral life is not a life without moral sentiment, moral emotion. Without moral sentiment, moral emotion, real peace and individual happiness is at bay. Therefore, the revival approach of virtue ethics gives much importance on moral standard and criterion of good living. We propose to discuss this issue in *Chapter Seven* and it is entitled as "Moral standard and criteria of good living: A New Approach".

We think that time has come to re-look on ethics. In the course of time situations are being changed. This was the case in traditional virtue ethics and presently it is happening in the case of modern ethical theories as well. We think that traditional ethical theories lost their glories with the appearance of anthropocentrism or the