

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### ALASDAIR MACLNTYRE'S VIRTUE THEORY

\*<sup>1</sup>John Maina Mwangi, <sup>2</sup>Patrick Ouma Nyabul and <sup>1</sup>John Muhenda

<sup>1</sup>Department of Philosophy, the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi, Kenya

<sup>2</sup>Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, University of Nairobi, Nairobi, Kenya

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#### ABSTRACT

The paper discourses the varied issues related to virtue theory. MacIntyre is deemed to be of the Aristotelian tradition or school of thought when it comes to virtue theory. It is for the foregoing point of view that MacIntyre could be categorized as a virtue ethicist. The paper interests itself with the core aspects that shape the deliberations on virtues. Right from the onset, it behooves us to underscore that the fact that virtue implies good or positive character. The perspective here shall necessitate us to first and foremost bring to mind nature along with the scope of virtue. The collectivity followed by divergences in the classification of virtues will be urgent for the purposes of a holistic approach of the subject matter of focus. The issue at hand is, how ought and are virtues supposed to relate with rationality? For the realization of the aforesaid challenge, the paper utilized analytical method in the assessment of the Aristotelian masterpiece on the topic, that is, *Nicomachean Ethics* as well as MacIntyre's relevant texts plus other authors who have copiously written on virtue theory. Thereafter, it was realized that virtues perfect rationality since, the latter is secondary to the former.

**Key words:** Alasdair MacIntyre, Virtue, Theory.

#### INTRODUCTION

The paper concerns itself with the varied conceptions of virtue underpinned by Aristotle, on whom MacIntyre develops his outlook on ethical theory. Virtues are basically the positive human traits which are acquired through repetitively engaging in acts that are praiseworthy. The underlying tenet for having such an understanding in this paper is due to the argument that virtues perfect rationality by their secondary nature to the latter. Virtues are such essential in our human existence as they facilitate our character formation which though is individual impacts on the society. We ought to be vigilant in the call for proper training of our children right from their young age to the subsequent stages of development. There is a close connection between individual upbringing and the future of a society. It is for this rationale as to why the argument of this study hinges on the correlation between rationality with virtues. The consequence for such a relationship is harmonious coexistence which is so paramount in any balanced society. Either of the two elements, that is, rationality or moral excellence may not meaningfully operate devoid of the other.

#### Emergency of Virtues

What characterizes the human age and what makes him different from other animals is his mind and will. The human being pursues in action a project that he has in his mind. Since rational activity is unique and proper to the human agent, the ultimate end of the human agent is performing rational activities as well. Rational activities can be performed well when it aims at what is truly perfect of a human agent that is ultimate end. Aristotle distinguishes rational activity from the theoretical and practical use of our mind.

We could define virtue as that which makes the one having it good and makes his work good. The re-occurrence of *good* in the definition tells us that virtues will be found chiefly in appetites-the good is that which all human beings seek. Prudence, that is, the virtue of practical intellect that governs what we do is inextricably looked up with temperance and courage. Prudence is in effect the search for judgment of the way to achieve the end of the virtue in the primary sense.<sup>1</sup> When we think of ethics, we are apt to think about right and wrong, morality and immorality and universal, objective standard of conduct.

#### Meaning of Virtue

Virtue is understood as a habitual well-established readiness or disposition of man's power directing them to some specific goodness of an action. When one is inclined to example to always help the needy then one acquires the virtue of charity. Virtue is not the approval or disapproval of an action but rather a source of an action. Virtue makes an action easy to be done. In his preface Joseph Pieper while writing on the four cardinal virtues suggests that virtues are those experiences which enable a human being "to attain the furthest potentialities by his nature."<sup>2</sup> His suggestion at the onset is that no list of virtues can be made from neutral ground, that list that would be made would reflect benefits about human nature and its possibilities.<sup>3</sup> Virtues call to attention not only certain basic obligations or duties which we owe each other but calls us on an endless quest towards perfecting our being. Aristotle, whose theory of virtue most of the people would refer to suggests that "activity is a kind of doing rather than making."<sup>4</sup> According to

<sup>1</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Gilbert C. Meilaender, *The Theory and Practice of Virtue* (Notre dame: University of Notre Dame, 1984), p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

\*Corresponding author: John Maina Mwangi

Department of Philosophy, the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi, Kenya.

MacIntyre when we mould and shape character we are not creating an artifact which is permanent forever. He further says that there can be no pre-conceived blueprint of what a person ought to be. There is no moral science. To cultivate virtues is to set out on a quest which lasts as long as life exists.<sup>5</sup> Virtues are dispositions of man to behave or act in a certain way, they are skills and they are also referred to as character traits. Some kinds of human activities are incompatible with certain virtues, for instance, a person who gains or achieves all he can but cannot give or share all he can, can he be moved by the virtue of justice? Or can one who runs away from danger be moved by the virtue of courage? The virtuous state does not match perfectly and exactly with dispositions to any set of acts and in addition, the virtuous acts may be achieved without the virtue. This is expressed by the fact that one may face danger without running away but this does not make one courageous. The virtues are not techniques which are taught but the skills that we acquire for life and not just for some particular situation or activity.<sup>6</sup> There is a great difference between learning how to cook and following the instruction in the cookbook, passing the test after deeply studying the manual and learning to drive, a difference between living as a Christian and studying catechism. A practical example is of a skilled craftsman, he has not just mastered the technique; he has acquired a skill which helps him to respond creatively to new situations of unanticipated difficulties.

His skills are not taught in a classroom but are acquired or learned by apprenticeship. We come close to describe the problem of virtues only if we consider them as skills but skills which we acquire in general life though even this is not fully adequate and sufficient account. The difficulties in being virtuous are due to our own *inclinations* but not in the difficulties in the virtuous actions themselves. While the skills are only the capacities, virtues actually engage the will in a way that skills do not. This means that when a man makes a moral mistake deliberately and too often may engage the will gradually.<sup>7</sup> To lie in a good cause for the first time, may not portray or mean that we do not have the virtue of truthfulness. It might make good sense to note that we did it deliberately. When we do this too often, we gradually engage the will to the vice and it may be difficult to “find our way back again to simplicity and straightforwardness.”<sup>8</sup> Like skills, virtues require constant practice to acquire them. Nevertheless, since virtues engage the will in a way that skills do not, they are the best thought of not simply as skills but as character traits. The virtues not only equip us for certain activities or even for life in general, rather they influence how we describe the activities in which we engage what we think we are doing and what we think important about what we are doing.<sup>9</sup> Our relation to the events of life are affected by the virtues not only fit us for life but they help to shape our character but also the world we see and inhabit.<sup>10</sup> MacIntyre supports the definition of virtue as “an acquired human quality that possession of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are eternal to practice and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods.”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> [www.culturism.us/booksummaries/Aftervirtue.html](http://www.culturism.us/booksummaries/Aftervirtue.html) (Accessed 20th May 2017).

## Nature of Virtues

MacIntyre says that Jesus and Aristotle considered virtues as essentially fulfilling the pre-existing ends of man as man. Homer, on the other hand, says that virtues are qualities that make a man to discharge his social roles. For one to acquire virtues they need specific practice and action.<sup>12</sup> A good example can be illustrated by the everyday activity, for instance, of playing a football game is practiced but throwing of a ball is not a practice this is because even anyone who is not a player can throw the ball. Farming is a practice but planting turnip is not a practice this is because even someone who is not a farmer can plant turnip. Architecture is a practice but bricklaying is not because anybody can lay bricks even if he is not an architect. By practice, MacIntyre means any “coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to the form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve these standards of excellence systematically.”<sup>13</sup> MacIntyre says that in the Middle Ages creating and sustaining a community would be referred to as a practice. He illustrates this with a child playing chess for money, this is not a practice but if he is doing it for the experience of doing it and the practice can have a competent judge it is a practice.<sup>14</sup> MacIntyre says that to judge something as worthy we must enter into the world of standards that place us in relation to the community.

For instance, justice requires that we treat each other as they merit according to the impartial standards. This kind of practice cannot flourish in societies where virtues are not valued. What we should know is that practices are more than technical skills. The virtues of truthfulness, justice, and courage are important for the promulgation of the practice. Practice is always in danger of corruption, money, and status of the institution. The integrity of the practice will depend partly on it can apply the virtues to prevent the corruption of the institutions that judge and sustain it. The vices corrupt the institution. The happiness that is achieved as a result of practice comes indirectly from the work well done. It is an internal good.<sup>15</sup> The subject of virtues is our powers or faculties of will, intellect, and appetites. There are some virtues which originate or come from the intellect. These are called intellectual virtues. There are some other virtues which are supported by the will and they are called moral virtues. From one faculty may come very many different virtues for example from intellect we may have virtues of thinking, reading, and many others. They are called intellectual virtues because they come from the mind.<sup>16</sup> Only those faculties which are under the control of Will can be subjected to virtues but those faculties under sensory power for example walking, sleeping, eating, reproducing, breathing cannot be subjected to virtues. One can keep chastity but there are some movements of the body which are fixed and determined by nature. They are not under control of the will. For example, one cannot acquire the virtue of not feeling thirsty because the Will, cannot be commanded by vegetative faculties. We can acquire virtues by repeating so many times the act of that virtue. We can also acquire virtues by practicing many times human acts.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (New York: The Burbs-Merrill Company Inc., 1962), p. 33.

If one does something contrary to human act one cannot get a virtue but instead would acquire a vice.

### Division of virtues

Aristotle in his *Nicomachean*, says that virtues consist of two kinds; intellectual virtues and moral virtues. Intellectual virtues owe their origin and development chiefly to teaching and for that reason, they require experience and time. Moral virtues, on the other hand, are informed by the habit, *ethos*. This means that moral virtues are not implanted in us by nature for there is nothing that exists by nature can be changed by habit. To illustrate this clearly, Aristotle uses the example of a stone. "It is impossible for a stone which has natural downward movement to become habituated to moving upward nor can fire be made to move downward nor can the direction of any nature given tendency be changed by habituation."<sup>17</sup> Thus the virtues are not implanted in us by nature or by anything contrary to nature. By nature we are equipped with the capacity to receive the virtues and habit brings this capacity to completion and fulfillment. "All the qualities with which we are endowed by nature, we are provided with the capacity first and display the activity afterward. That this is true is shown by the senses."<sup>18</sup> It is by playing the harps that man becomes a good harpist or a bad harpist. If this were not true and that it comes from nature there would be no need for an instructor and again everybody would be a good harpist since we share the same nature. This is because everybody would be born a good or a bad craftsman. The same also applies to the virtues. It must be noted they can be destroyed by defect and excess, for instance, health can be destroyed by too little food or too much food. The same would apply to self-control, courage, humility, patience and any other virtues. Thus, we can see self-control and courage being destroyed by excess and by deficiency and can be preserved by the mean.<sup>19</sup>

### Intellectual Virtues

Intellectual virtues may be defined as the exercise of habits that perfect the intellect to elicit with readiness to acts that are good in reference to their proper object namely the truth. Intellectual virtues may be classified according to twofold functions of the mental faculty. One of these classifications is speculative intellectual virtues which include wisdom, science, and understanding. The other classification is practical intellectual virtues which are two namely art and prudence.<sup>20</sup> Reasoning well means; being able to use reason to investigate things and to understand or comprehend them. Aristotle claims that the proper end of this kind of reasoning is the truth. This aspect of well-being is connected to what Aristotle called the intellectual virtues, scientific knowledge, excellence in art, intuitive reasoning, practical wisdom and philosophical wisdom. These virtues help a person to reason well. Many ancient philosophers believed that a knowledgeable person was living a better life than an ignorant one. Knowledge helps a person to live a better life because knowledge opens to make better and informed decisions. The virtuous person will be knowledgeable in a range of areas. The virtuous person makes effective and fulfilling decisions and judgments and acts in appropriate ways. Such a person is able to live a better life.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Douglas Birsch, *Ethical Insights; A Brief Introduction* (London: Mayfield

### Rational Virtues

Virtue is a moral habit which results in the achieving or maintaining our values. Our values are usually founded on a moral standard and should reflect our life. This means that rational virtues, acting virtuously will lead us to a happy and successful life. Examples of rational virtue are self-reliance, productiveness, integrity, honesty, pride, justice, benevolence, rationality among others.<sup>22</sup> Self-reliance means independence of one's mind or the capacity to manage one's affair without depending on another. In life man required to act for himself in order to achieve his values. This requires the proper use of judgment not only to choose the right values but to understand the right and best ways of attaining them. The degree that one abandons his intellectual independence is the same degree that he is helpless to act, that is, the degree to which he might not pursue his own life and his values.<sup>23</sup> Productiveness and fruitfulness illustrate that man must achieve values in order to live his life well. Productiveness is a virtue of achieving values. It is the fullest use of one's mind in seeking and gaining those values. To live a better life, man must the basic needs for example food, clothing and shelter in order for him to survive.<sup>24</sup> Integrity as virtue is practicing what one says or in other words to practice what one believes is right.

We have so many reasons why we consider integrity as a virtue. Practicing one's beliefs is that if they are right then they should be benefiting him in his life. Practicing integrity is a clear affirmation that our ideas benefit our lives. Acting against one's own beliefs is to claim our incompetence or our general inadequacy of reason to guide our lives. Since life is our own means of survival, when we act against our own beliefs we will be abandoning our lives. Another reason is that when dealing with others, a person who practices what he preaches is predictable. This will make others to develop the trust since the others will come to realize we are consistently virtuous. To act without integrity even occasionally will make the people create distrust in people.<sup>25</sup> Honesty is recognition of truth as it is and the fact that the unreal is unreal and can have no values. On the other hand, pride is a virtue of self-respect. Pride is believed to be a rational evaluation of one. Pride is at times confused with arrogance. The true pride is rational. It has a secondary result of making a person yearn to improve himself in order to acquire self-respect. It is a virtue since man needs it to live; it is a major pillar that supports one's mind.<sup>26</sup> Justice is a virtue of treating individuals according to their actions. Justice is all about judging and acting on one's judgment. Rationality is a habit of acting by reason. This means acting according to the facts of reality. By choosing to act irrationally we are confessing our lack of trust in our mind. Since reasoning is man's way of survives he undercut his life. Rationality means acting in accordance to reason.<sup>27</sup>

### Moral Virtues

Publishing Company, 1279), p. 82.

<sup>22</sup>[www.importanceofphilosophy.com/ethics-virtue.html](http://www.importanceofphilosophy.com/ethics-virtue.html) (Accessed 13th February 2017).

<sup>23</sup>[www.importanceofphilosophy.com/ethics-independence.html](http://www.importanceofphilosophy.com/ethics-independence.html) (Accessed 19th June 2017).

<sup>24</sup>[www.importanceofphilosophy.com/ethic-productiveness.html](http://www.importanceofphilosophy.com/ethic-productiveness.html) (Accessed 15th May 2017).

<sup>25</sup>[www.importanceofphilosophy.com/ethics-integrity.html](http://www.importanceofphilosophy.com/ethics-integrity.html) (Accessed 9th March 2017).

<sup>26</sup>[www.importanceofphilosophy.com/ethics-pride.html](http://www.importanceofphilosophy.com/ethics-pride.html) (Accessed 6th May 2017).

<sup>27</sup>[www.importanceofphilosophy.com/ethics-rationality.html](http://www.importanceofphilosophy.com/ethics-rationality.html) (Accessed 17th January 2017).

Moral virtues are those virtues which perfect the appetitive faculties of the soul, namely, the sensual appetites and the will. Principally there are three moral virtues. One of them which Alasdair MacIntyre has dealt with is justice which perfects the rational appetites or the will. Second is fortitude and temperance which perfect the lower sensuous appetites; and thirdly, the prudence which is called moral virtue not indeed essentially but by the reason of its subject matter.<sup>28</sup>

### Moral Virtues and Vices

Aristotle believes that virtues are connected to reasoning well. Hence, to be virtuous we must not allow emotions or passions to interfere with our reasoning. In life, we sometimes encounter a situation where a person is too upset to think clearly. To act well we must avoid such situations.<sup>29</sup> Aristotle too claims that *moral virtues* are related to actions and the emotions or passion that accompanies them. He believes that the virtuous person feels or moderate amount of emotion in many situations and when performing many actions. He calls the virtues connected to moderate emotional responses *moral virtues*.<sup>30</sup> Moral virtues are character traits which are concerned with a choice that involves moderation in emotion and action; this moderation is determined by a rational principle discovered by a person of practical wisdom. The intellectual virtues of moral virtues and practical reasoning are closely related. The origin of an action is desired and reasoning connected to achieve the goal. Virtuous action depends on practical wisdom guiding our choices and controlling our passions. A good person is defined as is the one who has acquired the intellectual and moral virtues and does not possess the vices. A good person is also successful at using reason to understand the people and the world.

He is able to make sound judgments about the conduct of life and does not allow deficiencies and excesses of emotion to interfere with reasoning well. Aristotle claims that being a good person involves more than actions. He says that people must be aware and know what they are doing. This is connected to the intellectual virtues or in other words knowledge. On the other hand, they must choose the action on the ground that it is virtuous and choose it as an end. This is connected to practical wisdom. The action chosen must be an expression of the character and must be accompanied by the proper feeling or emotion. This is connected to moral virtue.<sup>31</sup> Good people are aware of what they are doing and make their choice to do something because it is virtuous. These actions and feelings flow from their character and their emotion do not interfere with being virtuous. Aristotle believes that being a good person would only be possible in the presence of certain other factors namely health, integrity, some degree of material prosperity and living in a flourishing city. Devoid of these things, it would be really impossible to live a good life.<sup>32</sup> Aristotle people can also be morally disadvantaged by mental illness and physical factors. People who are seriously mentally ill will not have the same opportunities for knowledge and practical wisdom with those who are fine mentally, therefore, they would be hindered in achieving well-being.

Similarly, people who are seriously ill will not be able to achieve the full degree of well-being. Virtue ethics is concerned with both reasoning and consequences. Ethical actions flow from an ethical character and ethical character is a matter of good education and good habits. Ethical people do not need to follow general rules or evaluate individual actions because they have developed a good character and good habits. They act ethically in a spontaneous way which is a product of character. Aristotle is concerned with the well-being of an individual. The good of ethics is to unearth the best life for an individual to live. Ethics cannot be a matter of an individual acting in isolation. The virtuous person is necessarily social. He must live in a flourishing society and receive proper education and training. Well-being cannot be achieved in isolation. It is achieved together. Thus virtue ethics includes both elements- individual and community. The goal of ethics is well-being for the individual but well-being is necessarily social.<sup>33</sup>

### Acquired and Infused Virtues

Infused virtues as Aristotle spoke of them have acquired habits which related the agent in a determinate way to the good attainable in this life. These dispositions of the soul which relate one to the supernatural end are gifts, not acquisitions. They are infused into the soul. Thus acquired virtues relate to man's end as naturally describable whereas infused virtues relate to man's supernatural end.<sup>34</sup>

### Theological Virtues

Natural principles of human action are inadequate to a supernatural end. It is, therefore, necessary that man is endowed with supernatural powers to enable him to attain his final destiny. These supernatural virtues or powers are called theological because first, they have God as their proper and immediate object. Secondly, they are divinely infused and thirdly they are known only through divine revelation. They are three namely Faith, Hope, and Charity.<sup>35</sup>

### Cardinal Virtues

Cardinal comes from the Latin word *Cardo* which means hinge of the door. There are four cardinal virtues. They are called cardinal because they support all other virtues meaning that other virtues are developed from them; they include prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice.

### Temperance

Temperance is a moral virtue that regulates and moderates the sensual appetite. It is a virtue that gives moderation in sensual pleasure. The principal pleasure of senses is associated with food, drink, and sexual appetites so temperance makes use of these pleasures in conformity with our human nature. The subject of temperance is sensual appetitive. The role of temperance is not to replace emotion but rather the temper or control it so that one can attain a reasonable sensibility that strikes the note between immaturity and insensibility. Temperance makes us mature in our desires and at the same time, it does not make us be insensible. Virtues connected with temperance include sobriety which helps to moderate in intoxicating drinks.

<sup>28</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Loc. Cit. , p 33.

<sup>29</sup> Douglas, *Ethical Insight*, Loc. Cit. , p. 84.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* , p. 85.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* , p. 86.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* , p. 86.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* , p. 89.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

Its vice is drunkenness, a chastity which moderates in sexual appetite. Its vice is lust and poverty moderation in using material things like money.<sup>36</sup>

### Fortitude

Fortitude comes from the Latin word *fortis* which means strong. Fortitude is a type of courage of soul that enables a person to adapt and adhere to a reasonable cause of action when faced with danger and particularly by the danger of death. In short, fortitude is a kind of courage from the soul that enables a person to endure patiently what is painful and hard. It helps the person to conquer the fear of death. Fortitude helps a person to endure suffering to control fear of suffering dangers and risk so that we may endure what is hard and dangerous. It helps a person to face with courage what is troublesome. The subject of fortitude is irascible appetite. Irascible comes from the Latin word *ira* which means anger. Fortitude control anger and makes one face even danger. Patience, courage, and perseverance are virtues connected with fortitude.<sup>37</sup>

### Justice

Justice is one of the cardinal virtue which inclines one to give to each one what is due to him (*unicuiquesuum*). Justice is the strong and firm will to give each his due. The subject of justice is our will and the object of justice is what is due to somebody, what I owe somebody. What is given as a gift to another out of gratitude cannot be given out of justice because the receiver does not have a right to it? The foundation, the source of justice is a natural law or just the legislation of the state (positive law). Positive laws are sometimes a special right of somebody for example if one works for me for one full day, justice requires me to pay him. Natural law and positive laws fix what is due to each one of us. Prudence, natural law, and positive law tell us the right of others. Prudence is the right reason about what is to be done and so it tells us what we must give to each person in accordance with positive and natural law.<sup>38</sup> Justice makes the objective life easy with being influenced from the outside. The role of a justice is to facilitate the unbiased search for the objective right. The role of justice also is to determine the will to acknowledge and fulfill the rights of others. The positive law ensures justice in a society or a state. It must help people to practice justice. It must also help people from breaking justice. The positive law, therefore, strengthens the natural law and gives more details to the natural law according to the historical situation.<sup>39</sup> Positive law can be just or unjust. It is just when it is in accordance with the natural law. It is just also when it is necessary and useful to the community. Positive law is unjust when it violates natural law or when it is not necessary. An unjust law must not be obeyed.<sup>40</sup>

### Communitarian Justice

The aforementioned is a type of justice that has to do with the exchange of good and obligatory contracts within the society. It is a strict equality. Commutative justice is between equals.

Commutative justice can be between two individuals or individual and community or sometimes community and community. Restitution is necessary for a violation of commutative justice. The reason for commutative justice is to establish the right order of the thing so that each will have that to which he has a right hence if one possesses what belongs to another it must be returned to the rightful owner. Gossipers can effect this by an implicit apology to a person they have harmed. In political campaigns when a candidate is falsely accused, the person responsible for such lies must retract them.<sup>41</sup>

### Social Justice

It is a virtue to give to the society what the common good of the society requires. Social justice is not between two distinct parties but it is for all members of the society. All the members in the society must give to the society what the common good of the society requires. Each member should give to the society what he can, according to his ability. A citizen is bound by legal justice to fight for his country unless he is sincerely convinced in his conscience that the war is unjust.<sup>42</sup>

### Legal Justice

Legal justice gives the state what the laws of that state required for the common good. Legal justice is the keeping of laws of a state however the superior of the state are required by legal justice to make just laws. If one does not co-operate in the common good of that community he should be punished.<sup>43</sup>

### Distributive Justice

This is the moral virtue that inclines the person or persons governing a community to promote the social good of the individual. A factor against distributive justice is favoritism, tribalism, nepotism, partiality to give to some parties and not to others. Distributive justice must take care of the weak ones and of the minority hence the great principle "all must give according to their ability and receive according to their needs". Strike if the right is not again commutative justice for example if the workers work for one thousand shillings and the employer give them five hundred shillings. In this case, the workers have got the right to strike to claim their money.<sup>44</sup>

### Vindictive Justice

The above refers to the just distribution of punishment for those who break the law. Vindictive justice refers to the community as such but not between equals. They are between individual and the community and these individuals are members of the community.<sup>45</sup>

### Prudence

The virtue is both an intellectual and moral virtue. It helps us to find and keep easily the right middle (no exaggeration). It helps us to avoid extremes. It is intellectual because it requires also wisdom, understanding, and knowledge.

<sup>36</sup>[www.catholiceducation.org/en/education/catholic.contribution/the-virtue-of-temperance.html](http://www.catholiceducation.org/en/education/catholic.contribution/the-virtue-of-temperance.html) (Accessed 10th June 2017).

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup>[www.catholicgentleman.net/2013/08/the-cardinal-virtues-justice](http://www.catholicgentleman.net/2013/08/the-cardinal-virtues-justice). (Accessed 8th May 2017).

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup><http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/dictionary/index.cfm?id=32673> (Accessed 27th January 2017).

<sup>42</sup><http://en.m.wiki/social-justice> (Accessed 6th April 2017).

<sup>43</sup><http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/dictionary/index.cfm?id=34547> (Accessed 17th March 2017).

<sup>44</sup>[www.beyondintractability.org/essay/distributive-justice](http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/distributive-justice) (Accessed 12th March 2017).

<sup>45</sup>[www.dictionary.com/browse/vindicative](http://www.dictionary.com/browse/vindicative) (Accessed 4th May 2017).

It is a moral virtue in that it induces also justice, temperance, and fortitude. Prudence is correct knowledge about things to be done or more broadly correct knowledge of things ought to be done or things to be avoided. It is intellectual virtue whereby a human being recognizes in any given matter at hand what is a moral virtue that enables a person to devise, to think seriously and they will help him to reach that good or to avoid reaching it. Prudence resides in the practices intellect and it is both acquired by one own acts and it is also infused at the same time as sanctifying grace. It may be said to be natural or developed by us and the supernatural because it is conferred by God.<sup>46</sup> As an act of virtue, prudence involves three stages of mental operations. The first is to take counsel carefully with oneself and from others. Second is to judge correctly on the basis of the evidence at hand and third is to direct the rest of our activities according to the norm determined after prudent judgment has been made. Prudence correctly understood represents a vertex of human life; it is a sign of the truly human person and the mark of great personality.<sup>47</sup> Prudence is a gift of all men. In fact, man differentiates himself from other animals for the capacity to choose the action convenient to his rational nature while an animal is driven by impulse and performs actions that are stereotype juxtaposed one after the other almost by chance and without order. Man instead is the master not only of individual acts but can impress upon it a direction and anticipate the future thus almost inventing this future. The animals create nothing new and his activities are uniformly teleguided by the instinct. Man conform to the immediate future, examines it and directs his destiny in freedom. The capacity of man to emerge from his inferior world is due to the work of reason which almost always finds itself faced by a practical problem.<sup>48</sup>

### Virtue Ethics

Aristotle believes that “virtues are necessary for people to accomplish the basic human function and live a good life.” The basic ethical insight connected with virtue ethics is that the virtues assist a person to live a good life or achieve his well-being. The ethical idea that makes Aristotle’s virtue ethics different is that there is a basic human action and that the virtue helps us to accomplish that function.<sup>49</sup> Virtues ethics is based on the ideas of Aristotle. This ethical theory stresses being a good person rather than performing good actions and it claims that virtues are significant to help a good person. Virtues are character traits that promote the well-being of the one who has acquired them.<sup>50</sup> The virtues benefit the possessor. They enable the person to flourish and to live a life that is *eudaimon*. The virtues make the one who acquires them a good human being. Human beings require the virtues in order to live well, flourish as human beings and to live a characteristically good *eudaemon* human life. The above two features of the virtues are interconnected.<sup>51</sup> Aristotle begins the *Nicomachean* ethics with a discussion about the goal of human action. He observed that the goal, end or purpose of an action is always something that is good. Aristotle believes that the ultimate end is a life that is well lived not a life filled merely with happiness or pleasure.

<sup>46</sup> www.catholiceducation.org/en/education/catholic-contribution/the-virtue-of-prudence.html (Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> June 2017).

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Douglas, *Ethics Insights, Loc. Cit.*, p 81

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>51</sup> Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p 167.

The well-lived life includes not only pleasure and happiness but also achievements, health, wisdom, longevity, moral excellence, knowledge, and other qualities. Therefore the ultimate human purpose is well-being. One of Aristotle’s important ideas is that human beings have a proper function. The human function is connected to the capacity of the human being that they think whereby no other animal possesses the ability to reason. If the distinctive function of a human being is reasoning then human well-being or well-lived life will be related to successfully fulfilling the function of reasoning well.<sup>52</sup> Greeks believed that virtues, knowledge and good life starts with literature, not philosophy. The ancient Greeks in their thought about virtue they were more likely to think of a virtuous individual than abstract principles of virtuous behaviour. The hero was expected to display certain virtues in his pursuit for glory. The virtues of primary importance are those characteristics that lead to success and those include physical strength and speed as well as courage. Since war is not merely an arena for solitary combat loyalty for the course for which one is fighting which is also a virtue and so is wisdom, have manifested in the concern of the men for maintaining the unity of the army and conducting the war as well.<sup>53</sup>

### Good Life

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle gives an answer of how to live a good life. Following his advice by pursuing a life of virtues will likely improve the wellbeing of any given individual. According to him, there are three types of good external, such as friends and wealth; bodily or the beauty, health, and strength of individual and those concerning the soul which includes the virtues.<sup>54</sup>

### Ethical Virtues

Aristotle defined ethical virtues as a habit disposed towards action by deliberate choice of being or the mean relative to us and defined by reason and as a prevalent man would define it. He claims that habits are acquired only through the deliberate practicing of them, so once ethical virtues are acquired, they become dispositions that are possessed at all times. Ethical virtues are means between deficiency and excess of virtue. Aristotle warns that we should avoid these vices and focus on the mean or virtue which as such right reason declares it to be.<sup>55</sup>

### Return to Virtue

In our modern time, we may ask some question on the issue of virtues. How many today wishes to be virtuous? How many people today even use the word? When we talk about this topic at all we are likely to talk of character than virtues of our time sincerely and authentically. In short being true to oneself *virtue* carry a little of its older meaning that is, standards by which to measure and evaluate ourselves. Nevertheless whatever difficulties the world may present it is a fact that many students of ethical both philosophical and theological are returning today to something which may be called an ethic of virtues.

<sup>52</sup> Douglas, *Ethical Insight, Op. Cit.*, p 82

<sup>53</sup> William J. Prior, *Virtue and Knowledge: an Introduction to Greek Ethics*, New York: (London Printing Press, 1991), p. 9.

<sup>54</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics, Loc. Cit.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

This return suggests a widespread dissatisfaction with an understanding of the moral life which focuses primarily on duties, obligation, troubling moral dilemma, and borderline cases.<sup>56</sup> An ethics of virtue seeks to focus not only on such a moment of great anxiety and uncertainty in life but also on the continuities. Whether we should frame one innocent man to save five guilty people, whether abortion is permissible in an extreme case or the ancient question Socrates raised whether it is better to suffer wrong than do it. An ethic of virtue turns away not only from the overemphasis on borderline cases but also from the concept of duty as the central moral concept.<sup>57</sup> Being not doing takes the center stage. For what we ought to do may depend on the sort of a person we are. For what we tend to do might rely on the type of a person we are. The duties that we understand might rely upon the virtues shape our vision of the world. Indeed enshrined in western moral tradition at least from the time of Plato's Republic are the names of four cardinal virtues- prudence (practical wisdom), justice, courage, and temperance. These are the cardinal virtues because they form the hinge or axis on which moral life turns. To this tradition of four cardinal virtues, Christian though added the triumvirate of theological virtues- Faith, Hope, and Love.<sup>58</sup> What we begin to have now is complicated ethics capable of distinguishing many different traits of characters and habits of behaviours. This is not an ethics which can talk only of obligation or only of authentic or only of love. It is an ethics which will permit us to move by way of moral evaluation that judgment of right and wrong.<sup>59</sup>

### MacIntyre on Virtue Ethics

MacIntyre says that virtues are precisely those qualities the possession of which will enable an individual to achieve *eudemonia* and the lack of which will frustrate his movement towards his goal. He also points out that the exercise of the virtues is not in this sense means to the end of the good man. This is because the good for man is constituted by a complete human life lived at its best. The practice of virtues may be a necessity and important part of such a life not a mere preparatory practice to secure such a life. He says that without the virtues we cannot talk about the good for man. The suggestion that within Aristotelian framework there might be some means to achieve the good for a man without the exercise of the virtue does not make any sense.<sup>60</sup> MacIntyre believes that the virtues are dispositions not only to act in particular ways but also to feel in a particular way. Acting virtuously is not what Emmanuel Kant came to believe later, that it is acting against our inclination but it is from inclination through the cultivation of virtues. The practice of virtue requires the golden rule that is, "a capacity to judge and to do the right thing in the right place at the right time in the right way."<sup>61</sup> MacIntyre's account of virtues proceeds through three stages: First which concern virtues as qualities necessary to achieve the good internal to practical; second which considers them as qualities contributing to the good of the whole life of a person and third which relates them to the pursuit of a good for human beings the conception of which can only be elaborated and possessed

within an on-going social tradition.<sup>62</sup> MacIntyre believes that the the practice of morality in our time is the state of great disorder. The virtues arise from the prevailing cultural powers of an idiom in which ill-suited fragments from various parts of our past are deployed together in private and public debates. These are notable chiefly for the unsettled characters of the controversies thus carried on the apparent arbitrariness of each by the contending parties. The second was that ever since belief in Aristotelian teleology was discredited, moral philosophers have tried to provide some alternative rational secular accounts of the nature and status of morality but that all these attempts, various and variously impressive as they have been, have in fact failed, a failure perceived clearly by Nietzsche.<sup>63</sup>

### Virtue in Homeric Society

MacIntyre points out that every individual in life has a given role and status within a well-defined and highly determined society. In such a society a person is aware of himself by understanding his roles in these structures and in understanding his roles he is aware of also what he owes and what he owed to him by the occupant other role and status. There is clear knowledge of what actions lack what is required. This is due to the fact that what is required are actions. A man in heroic society is defined by what he does that is, his actions. A man becomes identical to his actions and he makes himself understood completely and adequately in them. A man gives warranty upon his virtues and vices by performing actions of a particular kind in a particular situation; for the virtues are those qualities which sustain a free man in his role which manifest themselves in those actions which his role requires.<sup>64</sup> For MacIntyre virtue of courage is good not only as a quality of individuals but as the quality necessary to sustain a household and a society. The other qualities related to courage also merit public recognition because of the part they play in sustaining the order in the public.

In the Homeric poem, cunning is considered an important quality because cunning may have its achievement whereas courage is an important ingredient in friendship. In Homeric society the bonds of friendship are modeled on those of kinship sometimes friendship is formally vowed so those by the vow of duties of brothers are mutually incurred. To know who my friend is clearly defined by who my kinsmen are. According to MacIntyre the other ingredient of friendship is fidelity. Fidelity is the most important virtue or in another word faithfulness. Homer speaks always of knowledge of what to do and how to make the right judgments.<sup>65</sup> MacIntyre says that, identity in a heroic society involves particular accountability. I am an individual answerable for whatever I do or failing to do what anyone who occupies my role owes to others. This accountability is only as long as I exist and is terminated only with death. I have until my death to do what I have to do. The exercise by the heroic virtue thus requires both a particular kind of human being and a particular kind of social structure. This type of heroic society represents a form of society about whose moral structure central claims are made. The structure embodied a conceptual scheme which has three central inter-related elements a conception of what is required by the social role which each individual inhibits; a conception of excellence

<sup>56</sup> Gilbert, *The Theory and Practice of Virtue, Loc. Cit.* , p. 4.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* , p. 5.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* , p. 6.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* , p. 6.

<sup>60</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981/2007), p. 149.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* , p. 149.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* , p. 273.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* , p. 273.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* , p. 122.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* , p. 123.

of virtual as those qualities which makes a person to do the requirement of his or her role and conception of the human condition or fragile and vulnerable destiny and to death but rather to accord their due.<sup>66</sup>

### Need for Virtues

Some people stress that virtues have a kind of corrective role that assists to control and guide our emotions. There are others also who stress the fact not necessarily incompatible with the first emphasis that the virtues fit us to live a life characteristic of flourishing human beings. Virtues are characters that are required, “for living well the sort of life that is characteristic of human being”. To say this is almost to return to Pieper’s statement that the *virtues enable a human life*. The two statements will be the same if it turns out to be that life characteristic of a human being is an endless journey towards perfection.<sup>67</sup>

### Reward for Virtue

William Frankena noted that there is a difference between saying of someone; *He had a good life* and *he lived a good life*. The moral good and the pleasant do not always coincide with what *tastes good* does not always nourish. To note this distinction is almost inevitable to ask whether one who leads a good life should also have a good life, whether virtue does or ought to have any reward. It is fairly obvious to say that when we acquire virtuous behaviour it becomes useful and beneficial to the society in which we live. It is hard to imagine a society surviving if for example all its members never display the virtue of courage. At the same time, the brave deed which benefits the society that we live may not benefit the brave man and woman who enact it. We might respond to this by noting that even at the individual level almost any fulfillment requires a certain kind of self-sacrifice.<sup>68</sup> The point of the virtues must be something like the description Pieper gives; it should help human beings to attain the furthest potentialities of their nature.

Morality neither is unconditional nor pointless demand nor is it important simply because it will benefit us in an external way rather lead a good life is to have a good life, even if one should end on a cross. The goodwill of the virtuous person is the only thing we cannot lose against our will. Virtue does bring with it a kind of joy and happiness but no one can live by this joy and, happiness alone it is shared with others.<sup>69</sup> MacIntyre seeks the meaning of the virtues only within the unity of human life as a narrative quest. In his view “the good life for man is the life spent in seeking the good life for man and the virtues necessary for the seeking are those which will enable us to understand what more and what else the good life for man is.”<sup>70</sup> To this Pieper might respond that, like the Stoics, MacIntyre asks not too much but too little. This leads him to settle for too little for instant always to hunger but never to be fulfilled and always to thirst but never drinking deeply from a well of *living water*. This for Pieper is not enough for any creature and therefore not the true point of the virtues for it offers no real place for hope.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>67</sup> Gilbert, *The Theory and Practice of Virtue, Loc. Cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

Pieper discerns a narrative which does not end with life here on earth but instead takes its most surprising and unexpected turn precisely at what seems to be the end. St. Benedict who teaches us that the virtue can thrive only in societies of a certain kind it may be we can learn from Pieper not just to wait but to hope for one who would really be a new Benedict, that is to say, one who would envision the virtues as a way of life for creatures made to be “companion in sharing of beatitude.”<sup>72</sup>

### Virtue Ethics and Moral Rights Theory

The most important difference between virtue ethics and moral rights theory is the assumption by Aristotle that there is a distinctive human function. A second important difference is that the virtue ethics is interested more in the person’s character than in rights and actions. Aristotle’s assumption claims that good actions will flow from a person with a good character. Finally, virtue ethics connects the ethical life with factors like health, education, living in a flourishing state and oriental wisdom which the supporters of the moral theory would claim that they are not essential parts of ethics.<sup>73</sup> Virtue ethics and moral rights theory agree on two aspects of the traditional ethical assumption. Both believe that ethics is rational and that moral judgment can be universal. These theories differ, however, on the issue regarding whether people are morally equal. The moral rights theory clearly states that all human beings are moral equals and possess a moral right. Virtue ethics believe that people start out as moral equal but the practical matters do not remain so.<sup>74</sup> The virtues are along with conscience internal efficient principles of moral actions and they are necessary for moral life. In fact, if the conscience indicates the road the virtues make it easy uniform, ready and in a certain way pleasing. The virtue makes the entire man good, unlike certain technical capacities which make him good only in certain aspects. In fact, virtues touch man intimately and thus in his totality, man acquires second nature. Just as it’s opposite, vice makes him evil in the most important place in his heart.<sup>75</sup>

### Thinking about Virtues

All around us are signs if not a revival of interest in being virtuous, at least of new interest in a theory of the virtues. In his brilliant book, *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre has suggested that this interest is doomed to failure. Doomed only for the present to be sure but surely doomed in a society which lacks the moral consensus any theory of the virtues requires. For MacIntyre however, this is not causing for pessimism. In fact, recognizing perhaps that the virtues of hope are meant for just such times as the one he depicts. MacIntyre hopes that out of our moral chaos and degeneration may come to a new version of virtuous life. It will come he believes among those who fashion a social life in which virtue can have some genuine meaning. That this is possible and that we may have some reason for hope. MacIntyre suggests by comparing our own moment in history to that age in Europe which the Roman Empire declined into the dark ages.<sup>76</sup> A crucial turning point in that earlier history occurred when men and women of good will turned aside from the task of shoring up the Roman

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> Douglas, *Ethical Insight, Loc. Cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>75</sup> Dario Composta, *Moral Philosophy and Social Ethics* (Bangalore: Theological Publication in India, 1988), p. 53.

<sup>76</sup> Gilbert, *The Theory and Practice of Virtue, Loc. Cit.*, p. 1.



Imperium and ceased identity the continuation of civility and moral community with the maintenance of imperium. Instead, they tried to fashion new forms of common life, forms in which the virtues could be lived sustained and inculcated. MacIntyre's hope is that we may find ourselves at similar moments.<sup>77</sup> What is interesting and striking about MacIntyre's analysis, however, is that there is in it little hint that the new communities and new forms of moral life which they sustain will be rooted in or nourished by the religious life the reverence to St. Benedict notwithstanding. Instead although MacIntyre traces the root of our moral disorder to the loss of both the teleological element in traditional morality (inherited to put it too simply from Aristotle) and deontological element (inherited to put it too simply from the Christian notion of divine law) it is significant that his attempts at reconstructing a theory of the virtues seem to assume that we can recapture only the Aristotelian half of our tradition and that the Christian half is gone forever.

### Virtuous Action and Virtue

The factor involved in the arts and those in the virtues are never the same. In the art, excellence lies in the result itself so that it is sufficient if it is of a certain kind. When it comes to virtues an act is not performed justly or with self-control. If the act itself is of a certain kind but only if, in addition, the agent needs to have certain characteristics to perform it. *First*, he must have knowledge of what he is doing, *secondly*, he must come up with a choice to act the way he does and he must make this choice for its own sake. *Third*, he must come from a strong and unchangeable character. However, knowledge is of little or no importance whereas the other two conditions count not for little but are all decisive since repeated acts of justice or self-control result in the possession of those virtues. Thus, the assertion that a man becomes just by performing just acts and self-controlled by performing self-control are true. Without performing them nobody could even be on the way to becoming virtuous.<sup>78</sup>

### Aristotle's Account of Virtue Ethics

According to Aristotle, there are three kinds of things found in the soul of man; emotion, capacities, characteristics. One of them must be a virtue. By speaking about the emotion he means appetites, anger, fear, envy, confidence, pity, affection, hatred, longing, joy, emulation and in general anything that is followed by pain and pleasure. By capacities, he means that by virtue we are affected by these emotions, for example, the capacity which enables us to feel anger, pain or pity. By characteristic he means conditions either good or bad which we are in relation to the emotion for example; our condition in relation to anger is bad if our anger is too violent or not violent enough but if it is moderate our condition is good and similarly with our condition in relation to the other emotions. Now virtues and vices cannot be emotions this is because we are not referred to as good or bad on the basis of our emotion but on the basis of our virtues and vices or because of our good actions and bad actions which contribute to virtuous life and vicious life respectively. We are praised or blamed for our virtues and vices respectively. If the virtue is neither emotion nor capacities the only remaining alternative is characteristic.<sup>79</sup>

We must specify and be clear what kind of character it is. It must then be remarked every virtue or excellence that renders good thing itself and that causes it to perform its function well. If this is true of all things, the virtue or excellence of man too will be a characteristic which makes him a good man and which causes him to perform his function well. Virtue aims at the median, I am referring to moral virtues for it is a moral virtue that is concerned with emotions and actions and it is in emotion and action that excess deficiency and the median are found.<sup>80</sup> Thus we experience fear, confidence, desire, anger, pity and generally any kind of pleasure and pain either too much or too little and in either case not properly. But to experience all this at the proper time, toward the proper objects, towards the proper folks, for the proper reason and in the right manner that is the mark of virtue. Excess, deficiency and also the median also can be found in actions. However, to experience all this at the proper time, toward the proper objects, towards the proper folks, for the proper reason and in the right manner that is the mark of virtue. Excess, deficiency and also the median also can be found in actions. Now virtue is concerned with emotions and actions and in emotions and actions, excess and deficiency miss the mark whereas the median is praised and constitute success. Both praise and success are signs of virtue or excellence is a characteristic involving choice and that it consists in observing the mean relative to us, a mean which is defined by a rational principle such as a man or practical wisdom would use to determine it. It is a mean in regard to two vices: one of them is excess and another one is a deficiency. It is a mean because some vices exceed and others fall short of what is required in emotion and action, whereas virtue chooses the median. Not every action or emotion admits a mean. There are some actions and emotions whose very name connote business shamelessness, envy and among actions adultery, theft and murder. These and similar emotions and actions imply by their name that they are bad. Therefore is not possible to do right in performing them any time we perform them it will always be wrong.<sup>81</sup> In cases of this sort let us say adultery, rightness, and wrongness do not depend on committing it with the right woman at the right time and in the right manner but the mere fact of committing such an action at all is to do wrong. It would but just as absurd to suppose that there are a mean, an excess and a deficiency in unjust or cowardly of the self-indulgent act.<sup>82</sup>

### Conclusion

Virtues are values that are held highly by man and they contribute very much to how a man conducts himself. They help man to improve his character. Virtues contribute to his and are needed for the good life or for human flourishing. They also help the man to rise from initial animal condition to that of the independent rational animal as MacIntyre would support. To live a good life we need the virtues which are either acquired or infused. They also help the man to live a more rational life. Vices are opposed to virtues; they may make a man act irrationally.

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<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 44.

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