UNIT: 5 VIRTUES OF ARISTOTELIAN ETHICS

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5.1: LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to

- Explain the nature of virtue.
- Understand the concept of virtues of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle.
- Know about the cardinal virtues of Plato.
- Discuss the similarities and difference between Plato and Aristotle.
- Describe Indian concept of virtues.

5.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces to you about the concept of virtues in Aristotelian ethics. This topic has a significant place in his ethics. A question of high importance in any investigation of ethics is how we can teach people to be good. In this regard Aristotle clearly stated that he does not think virtue can be thought in a classroom or by means of argument. Then his ethics is not

designated to make people good, but rather to explain what is good, why it is good and how we might set about building societies and institutions might introduce this goodness.

For Aristotle, virtue is something that can be learned through constant practice which begins at a young age. We might understand his outlook better, if we recognize the meaning of the word "arete" which is rendered as 'virtue' in most English translations. This term more generally means "excellence." That is why a horseman can exhibit arete in horsemanship without necessarily implying any sort of moral worth in the horseman. It should be obvious to anyone that excellence in horsemanship cannot be learned by reading simply about horsemanship and hearing reasoned argument for how best to handle a horse. Becoming a good horseman requires steady practice.

According to Aristotle, there is no essential distinction between the kind of excellence that marks a good horseman and the kind of excellence that marks a good person generally. Both kinds of excellence require practice first and secondly theoretical study. Thus, the teaching of virtue can be only secondly importance after the actual practice of it.

5.3 NATURE OF VIRTUE

Aristotle is on the opinion that ethics in not merely a theoretical study. Unlike any intellectual capacity virtues of character are dispositions to act in certain ways in response to similar situations, the habits of behaving in a certain way. According to him each of the virtue is a state of being that naturally seeks its mean relative to us. Aristotle states that the virtuous habit of action is always an intermediate state between the opposed vices of excess and deficiency. Too much and too little are always wrong. The right kind of action hence always lies in the mean.

Virtue is expressed in the performance of duties. And duties are turned into virtues by habit. The habitant performance of duties leads to virtuous disposition. Thus, virtues refer to acquired dispositions of mind. A

man can be called a virtuous man in one who has acquired a fixed habit of performing duties. Virtue denotes a good character; duty denotes a particular action that we ought to perform. Virtue is the excellence of character, which is the result of the habitual performance of duties. Duties are overt acts in conformity with the normal law or moral ideal. A person does his duty, but he is virtuous. Character is the inner counterpart of conduct, which is its expression. That is why virtue is expressed in duty. And hence duties habitually performed lead to the formation of virtue.

Virtue is the habit of deliberate choice of right actions. Also it is the habit of controlling instincts and impulses and realizing the good of self as a whole. It is an excellence of character too. Aristotle described the nature of virtue is that it is a permanent state of mind, found with the concurrence of the will. It is based upon on ideal of what is best in actual life an ideal fixed by reason. For him, virtue is a permanent acquired disposition in harmony with the morel law. It is a settled habit of willing in conformity with the moral law. Virtue consists in living habitually in the universe of right actions. Moreover, it is a quality of character, determined by the idea of the highest good of the self as a whole. Virtue lives in the performance of duties. Thus, virtue and duty are like the two parts of the same coin. Virtue is the excellence of the inner character and duty in the external expression of a good character and duty denotes a particular kind of action that we ought to perform.



LET US KNOW

The central thesis of the Socratic ethic is contained in the formula: "Knowledge is virtue". Right thinking is essential to right action.

5.3.1: Knowledge, Virtue and Habit

For Aristotle, a habit is a kind of "second nature" itself, and a determinate power to act in a specific way. Habits can foster the good life by cultivating virtue and by molding the passions to feel pleasure and pain

in the right ways. Aristotle comments that, the man who does not rejoice in noble actions is ever not good, since no one would call a man just who did not enjoy acting justly. Therefore, his account of habit is well- grounded in a synthesis of the rational and emotional elements of moral judgment. For him, the casual connection between good habits and virtue is made in two distinct ways. Firstly, virtues are the states of character, rather than passions or faculties and states of character are created only through a process of habituation. Secondly, virtue requires consistently good choices and a choosing of the action for its own sake. Because good habits give rise to consistent patterns of action and mold the passions to feel pleasure and pain rightly.

Virtue is the habit of good will and also the habit of performing duties. The habitual performance of duties depends upon the knowledge of duties on particular occasions. It also depends upon the knowledge of the ultimate good of the self that determines the duties. Thus we see that virtue implies knowledge or we can say wisdom as well as habit. Hence "Virtue is knowledge"- as said by Socrates and Plato is true. In the same way it is also true as Aristotle says that virtue is habit. Because mere knowledge of the good and duty is a concrete situation does not make for virtue. Knowledge must lead to actions. And knowledge of duties must lead to habitual performance or duties. Virtue without action is a bare potentiality - it is as good as non - existent. For that reason virtue implies both knowledge and habit. In this context we may refer Mackenzie's saying - "virtue is a kind of knowledge as well as a kind of habit."

The virtuous man is one who has knowledge of duties in concrete situations. He also cultivates the habit of performing the duties. Thus it is true that mere knowledge or moral insight does not constitute virtue. It must be accompanied by habit.

5.3.2: VIRTUE AND HAPPINESS

Aristotle recognizes happiness as a central purpose of human life

and a goal in itself. As a result of it, he devotes more space to the topic of happiness than any thinker prior to the modern era. He also says that happiness depends on the cultivation of virtue. He convinced that a genuinely happy life required the fulfillment of a broad range of conditions which include physical as well as mental well-being. In this way he introduced the idea of a science of happiness in the classical sense, in terms of a few field of knowledge. Formal definition of happiness is that it is a complete and sufficient good. Happiness satisfies all desires and has no evil mixed in with it and that it is stable.

We have defined happiness formally as the complete and sufficient good for a human being. There are several ways in which Aristotle approaches the question of what happiness consists in. Firstly, he noted that flourishing for plants and animals consists in their functioning well according to their nature. So, one question we should asked here - what is the proper or peculiar function of a human being? Aristotle thinks it obvious that our proper function consists in reasoning and in acting in accord with reason. This is the heart of the doctrine of virtue, both moral and intellectual. Therefore, on this line of reasoning we are led to the conclusion that the possession and exercise of moral and intellectual virtue is the essential elements in our living well.

Aristotle stated that happiness is the principle of action and the cause of all good things. Happiness consists in a complete life lived according to virtue. It is difficult to say whether the happiness of a person after death should depend on the fortunes of his descendants. Another difficulty is that a noble person may suffer external misfortunes which lessen his happiness.

All human activities aim at some end that we consider good. Most activities are a means to a higher end. Then the highest human good is that activity that is an end in itself. That good is happiness. When we aim at happiness, we do so far its own sake, not because happiness helps us realize some other end. The goal of the Ethics is to determine how best to achieve happiness. Aristotle says that a virtuous man must be happy. For

him, happiness is found in fulfilling the functions of a man properly. The characteristic function of man that differentiates him from other animals is his reason. Thus, happiness is to be found in the right exercise of reason. A life of reason implies a settled virtuous character. That virtue is always accompanied by happiness. Virtue is not happiness in itself rather happiness is the index of virtue. It depends upon virtue and external goods too.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1: What is the relation between virtue and happiness?

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Q2: Is habit and virtue related?

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5.4: VIRTUE: SOCRATES, PLATO AND ARISTOTLE

Although the concept of virtue appears in several philosophical traditions, the roots of the tradition mainly lie in the works of Plato and Aristotle in the west. Even today, the key concepts of the tradition derive from ancient Greek philosophy. These concepts include 'arete' or excellence or virtue, phronesis, practical and moral wisdom and eudemonia.

Socrates View:

The central thesis of the Socratic ethics is contained in the formula: "Knowledge is virtue". For him knowledge is the highest good. Right thinking is essential to right action. In order to steer a sheep or rule a state, a man must have knowledge of the construction and function of ship or of the nature and purpose of the state. In the same way, if a man knows what virtue is, unless he knows the meaning of self-control and courage and justice and piety and their opposites, he cannot be virtuous. But on the other hand knowing what virtue is, he will be virtuous. For him knowledge is both the necessary and the sufficient condition of virtue. Without knowledge

virtue is impossible and its possession insures virtuous action. Plato also stated that knowledge of right and wrong was not a mere theoretical opinion, but a firm practical conviction. It is not only a matter of the intellect but of the will also.

Socrates believed that right knowledge is the key to right conduct. "Then if virtue is one of the things in the soul, and if it must necessarily be helpful, it must be wisdom. Since quite by themselves all the things about the soul are neither helpful nor harmful, but they became helpful or harmful by the addition of wisdom or senselessness. Socrates made great effort to define virtue but his real interest was not to define virtue but to make men virtuous.

Virtue Can Be Taught:

Virtue is related with 'will' and 'will' becomes virtuous by habit and practice. We believe that it is not by reason but by repeated performance of good deed we gain virtue. But Socrates told that virtue was knowledge and since knowledge was a system and a science it could be thought. Sometimes we give up many bad practices on learning their true nature but this is also a common fact that we know better but do worse.

Virtue is One:

The traditional Greek moral theory held that there are four virtues: Wisdom, Courage, Temperance and Justice. But Socrates believed in a single virtue anyhow, and that of knowledge. According to him "Knowledge is virtue of virtues and all virtues were descendants of knowledge.

Virtue is Great Happiness:

Socrates said that there can be no happiness without virtue and no happiness is equal to that of virtue. Thus, virtue is the greatest happiness.



LET US KNOW

Socrates and Aristotle refer the same view that "virtue is happiness".

Plato's View on Virtue:

Plato's views on virtue can be traced from his celebrated work Republic. Because the discussion of the four cardinal virtues i.e. prudence, justice, wisdom and temperance can be found in his Republic. He also claimed that the rational part of the soul or mind must govern the spiritual, emotional and appetitive parts in order to lead all desires and actions to eudemonia. The principal constituent of which is virtue and eudemonia is the classical formulation of virtue ethics. It holds that the proper good of human life is eudemonia, that can be variously translated as "happiness," well-being" or the "good life". This goal can be achieved by a lifetime of practicing the virtues in one's everyday activities. Indeed, such a virtuous life would constitute eudemonia in itself. It should be seen as an objective, not a subjective state, characterized by the well lived life, irrespective of the emotional state of the person experiencing it.

Besides Republic, Plato's concept of virtue can be traced from his work Meno. It is a Socratic dialogue in which the two main speakers, Socrates and Meno, discuss human virtue, whether or not it can be taught, whether it is shared by all human being and whether it is one quality or many? The dialogue beings when Meno was asking Socrates to tell him if virtue can be taught or not. Socrates says that he is clueless about what virtue is and so is everyone else he knows. Meno responds that virtue is different for different people. But, Socrates finds this odd and he suspects that there must be some common virtue to all human being and it is one.

Socrates rejects the view that human virtue depends on a person's gender or age. He leads Meno towards the idea that virtues are common to all people, that temperance and justice are virtues even in children and old

man. However Platonic Ethics is based on the concept that "virtue is a sort of knowledge. That means the knowledge of good and evil that is required to reach the ultimate good and that is what all human desires and actions aim to achieve. It holds that there are three parts to the soul, Reason, Spirit and Appetite, which must be ruled by the three virtues. They are wisdom, courage and moderation. In turn, all these are ruled by a fourth i.e. Justice by which each part of the soul is confined to the performance of its proper function.

In the discussion of Plato's theory of virtue, we found that he considered virtue to be an excellence of the soul.



LET US KNOW

Plato has discussed his theory of virtue in his two works. They are Republic and Meno.



Activity 5.1

1. How many virtues are there as stated by Plato in his work "Republic"?

Ans: .....
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ARISTOTLE'S VIEW ON VIRTUE:

Ethics is considered by Aristotle to be practical rather than theoretical study i.e. one aimed at doing well rather than knowing for its own sake.

Aristotle's metaphysics and psychology is from the basis of his theory of ethics, which is the first comprehensive scientific theory of morality. It is an attempt to give a definite answer to the Socratic question of the highest good. For him, the highest good for man is the complete and habitual exercise of the functions which make him a human being. And this is what Aristotle means by the term 'eudemonia' that is translated by the common word 'happiness'. According to Aristotle there is no objection that this word is not interpreted to mean pleasure. Because pleasure accompanies virtuous activity as a secondly effect and thus it is included in the highest good, but not identical with it.

Aristotle defines virtue as "Virtue is a disposition, or habit, involving deliberate purpose or choice, consisting in a mean that is relative to us, the mean being determined by reason, or as a prudent mean would determine it". He again says that a virtue is a trail of mind or character that helps us achieve a good life, and argues that it is a life in accordance with reason. He defines it as "the things in virtue of which we stand well or badly with reference to the passions is the states (trail) of character. Character involves a person's dispositions that relate to what, in different circumstances, they feel and the actions they perform. Moreover what we find pleasant also reveals our character.

Aristotle rejects the Socratic maxim that knowledge is virtue, in the sense that knowledge of the nature of virtue is sufficient to insure virtuous action. He has stated that in addition to knowledge of virtue, we must endeavor to possess and exercise it. Virtue ethics is largely identified with Aristotle and he characterized the virtues as moral and intellectual virtues. Moral virtue includes justice, prudence, fortitude and temperance and theoretical and practical wisdom are included by intellectual virtue. He further stated that each of the moral virtue was a golden mean between two undesirable extremes. Aristotle also taught that virtue has to do with the proper function of a thing. An eye is only a good eye in so much as it can see. Because the propose function of an eye is sight. He reasoned that

human must have a function specific to humans and that this function must be an activity to the 'soul' in accordance with reason. For him moral action is fostered by a normal society and it is difficult for one to receive from his early days a right inclination to virtue unless he is brought up under virtuous laws. Again, these laws are also required to teach us the duties of life when we have come to man's estate. Because, most people are moved by necessity and fear of punishment rather than by reason and the love of nobleness. The state should seek to provide a social environment conducting to the morality of its citizens and when necessary it should empty punishment and other legal devices to enforce morality.

Virtues and the Doctrine of Mean:

Aristotle stated that in us a virtue of character is a disposition to feel, desire and choice 'well', which is necessary if we are to live well and so achieve eudemonia. We can feel our passion either "two much" or "too little" but, virtue involves being disposed to filling in an 'intermediate' way, neither too much nor too little. Some people feel angry too often, over too many things or may be whenever they get angry they get very angry, evenat minor things. Other people feel angry not often enough perhaps they do not understand how people take advantage of them. To be virtuous is to feel at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people with the right motive and in the right way. And this is the Aristotle's doctrine of the mean.

It is important to note that Aristotle's doctrine of the mean does not claim that when we get angry. We should only ever be 'moderately' angry. We should be as angry as the situation demands, which can be feeling angry or only slightly irritated. The very close connection between what we feel and how we choose to act virtues are dispositions of choice as well, and there is a 'mean' for actions as well as for feelings. Practical wisdom helps us to know what the right time, object person and so on is. It is a virtue of reason. The main intellectual virtue concerned with living. Our passions are susceptible to reason. These can be right and wrong ways to

feel passions and the right way to feel passions is determined by reason. If we feel our passions irrationally - at the wrong times, towards the wrong objects etc., then we do not live well. Thus, Aristotle concludes, a virtue is a state of character concern withchoice, lying in the mean, i.e. the mean relative to us, this being determined by a national principle, and by that principle by which the person of practical wisdom would determine it.

ACQUIRING VIRTUES AND BEING VIRTUOUS:

After know about what virtues are now Aristotle explains the process of acquiring it. He argues that we acquire virtues of character through 'habit', in particular, the habit from during our upbringing. Aristotle argues to defend his claim, that virtues are not acquired just through teaching. If virtues could be taught directly like a skill, it should be possible for there to be an adolescent 'moral genius' as there can be with other skills like mathematics or gymnastics.

Secondly, he argues that we are not virtuous by nature. Aristotle points out that for what we can do naturally, we first have the potentiality and then exhibit the activity. We are not naturally virtuous, but we are naturally capable of becoming virtuous, just as we are not born musical but can become so. At first, the virtues we get by exercising them, as also happen in the case of the arts as well. For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them.

Aristotle concludes that whether or not we can lead a good life depends a great deal on the habits we form when we are young - in our childhood and early adulthood. Furthermore, because our character is revealed by what we take pleasure in, we need to learn to take pleasure in the things that we should take pleasure in, and be pained by what should pain us. For him, a fully virtuous action is one in which the agent knows what they are doing, chooses the act for its own sake, and makes their choice from a firm and unchangeable character. As we develop in virtue, we understand more about what is good and develop a moral character, so we are more able to meet the conditions for fully virtuous action we will also

need to develop practical wisdom.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q3: What is a virtuous action according to Aristotle? Is there any similarity between Aristotle and modern concept of virtue?

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Activity 5.2

2. Describe the process of acquiring virtue according to Aristotle?

Ans: .....

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After know about what virtues are now Aristotle explains the process of acquiring it. He argues that we acquire virtues of character through 'habit', in particulaVirtue: Past and Present

There are so many similarities between Aristotle's concept of an arete of character and our modern concept of virtue. Both of them are the grounds for calling someone good or bad, for praising or blaming them for what they feel and do. Both are clearly dispositions of feeling and closely related to the sorts of choices people make.

However, there is at least one very important difference between the two. Aristotle's concept of eudemonia is different from acting 'morally' as would understand the term. And so that the virtues he thinks are necessary

for a good life do not match, and ever sometimes conflict with the moral virtues that we might accept. Aristotle has a sense of the best life involving 'cutting a figure' in society, achieving a certain recognition and 'honour'. Morality has since become more closely associated with self sacrifice, and the traits we recognize as virtues more focused on securing welfare for others than recognition for ourselves. Whether this is a good or bad development in the history of ethics can be debated.

5.4.1: Virtue: The Key to Good Life

According to Plato and Aristotle our goal in life is to achieve personal well-being and happiness. Aristotle says that we achieve this through functioning well as human beings. In order to function well something needs to possess all the necessary qualities or virtues that will enable it to do so. For example: for a plant to function well it needs those qualities that enable it to successfully grow, flower reproduce etc. According to both Plato and Aristotle, a human being functions well through developing and refining the virtues that enable us to flourish as human beings. This focus on virtues has led to Plato and Aristotle's moral theories being labeled as 'virtue ethics'.

Both of them identify reason as the primary character of the human soul. Therefore, reason takes a central place in their theories of what human should be properly doing with their lives. However, their concepts of soul differ slightly. Plato's theory of the soul is divided into three clear parts with reason the key to living a good life. On the other hand, Aristotle sees human psychology in more complex terms. There is a rational and non-rational side to our soul. These sides are subdivided into many parts, each of which has a corresponding excellence of virtue and each of which is important and necessary for our proper functioning.

Plato explains how virtue or excellence, in a human depends upon all the elements being in balance and each part of performing its purpose functioning. For Plato, this could happen if and only if reason was in control of all aspects of the soul. Thus, spirit guided by reason carefully drives us to

action, and desire when tempered by reason, motivates us and enable us to live a healthy and satisfied life. So, for Plato when reason is in control these are three virtues corresponding to each of the three parts of the soul. They are -

Reason - wisdom

Spirit - courage

Desire - temperance (or self-control)

When all of these three virtues are in place, then a fourth virtue emerges i.e. justice. As such, for Plato behaving morally or justly follows from developing our virtues by ensuring reason moderates our desires and our spirit. Justice is the most important virtue, because it readies us for action.

Aristotle agrees with Plato that in order to function well we need to be virtuous in all aspects of the soul. Moreover, Aristotle believes that there are many virtues corresponding to the different parts, not just three as Plato maintained. As for Plato, the crucial thing for Aristotle is that the rational parts of the soul are in control, and this is the key to becoming virtuous. Aristotle analyses in great detail the many aspects of ourselves that need to be performing at the peak of their capacity if we are to function well as human beings. Aristotle also goes further than Plato in describing in detail what moral virtue or excellence of character is and how we might acquire it. It is a type of characteristic, a personality trait, which we develop through practice, like learning to play the guitar. We are not born virtuous or excellent but we became virtuous through developing good habits.

Moreover, Aristotle argues that someone who is virtuous is someone who tends to avoid the extremes of overreacting or failing to react in a particular situation. It means that when confronted with a situation we do not bottle up our emotions or suppress our drive for action, but nor do we let our feeling come flooding out and completely over-react. Instead, we have to judge how far we should let a particular emotion affect in this particular situation, and consider what would be the most appropriate response to

this situation.

This description of the virtuous person is famously known as Aristotle's doctrine of the Mean. Here 'Mean' refers to 'middle'. But he does not said that we should take the 'middle way' in every situation or act moderately in every situation. Aristotle believed that if you look at the behavior of a virtuous person over their whole life, they will tend to avoid over-reacting or under-reacting.

Thus, for Aristotle, we became virtuous by becoming relative, rational creatures and considering in each situation, what is the appropriate thing to do here? This means drawing on both moral and intellectual virtues. Aristotle believes that through moral education we are able to develop the wisdom that we need to make the judgment of what is the right thing to do. Through hard experience, practice and by looking towards people we admire the role models, we can develop and fine-tune our decision making capacities. Admittedly it is difficult to develop all these virtues, but Aristotle argues that it is only by doing so that we are able to live a properly good life and flourish.



LET US KNOW

- Both Plato and Aristotle identify reason as the primary character of the human soul.

5.4.2: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PLATO AND ARISTOTLE

Both Plato and Aristotle, in their philosophies developed a significant account of human virtue. Plato provides his doctrine of virtue in his two different works- the Protagoras and the Republic. Through Socrates, in the Protagoras, Plato argues that virtue is knowledge. The argument begins with the premise that everyone wants what he or she believes to be good. It follows that when a person does something wrong or bad it cannot be

because they want to do it, knowing it is bad, it must be that they want to do it, believing to be good. What separates the virtuous person from the un-virtuous is not a desire for what is good, everyone desires what they think to be good, but rather the knowledge of what the good really is. In this view, Plato's conception of human virtue basils down to knowing the good, and being able to correctly choose the action that bring about the most good.

Plato's another account of virtue, found in the Republic, looks upon first glance, to have nothing in common with the view offered in the Protagoras. But after further consideration it can be seen to be in accord with the concept of virtue as knowledge. Plato begins with an argument concerning the human soul. He contends that these are at least three distinct components of the soul and calls them reason, appetite and spirit. Appetite is the part of the soul that is animal like lusting for bodily pleasures and itches, reason that which is concerned with calculations and rational thought and spirit the part associated with emotions. After having established the various parts of the soul, then Plato makes the claim that virtue lies in keeping the components of the soul in the correct relations. Reason should guide the soul, making decisions and determining what is wrong and right, spirit should follow reason and provide motivation and appetite should obey. On this account virtue seems to be nothing but a magic proportion or some soul of balance of the soul, having nothing to do with knowledge or decision making. Taking this point of view, Plato argues that only through a state of the soul in which reason is ruling and which appetite and spirit are in their complying roles can knowledge of the good and hence, virtue is acquired. Then we again find that virtue is knowledge, according to Plato.

Aristotle spells out his account of virtue in the Nicomachean Ethics. Beginning with a discussion about what people mean when they use the notion of virtue in their everyday language and then expending these ideas to the general case. Aristotle contends, the virtue of something is whatever makes the thing do its essential action or function, well. The essential function or action of a particular object is simply that which makes the object what it

is. Aristotle explains that the characteristic action of humans, the action that is unique and essential to being human is living a human life in accordance with reason. He goes on to show that what enables a human to perform his action well, that is, what enables humans to live in accordance with reason well, is a certain state of being or of character. According to Aristotle, this state of character has to do with a person's responses to pleasures and pains under various situations. The virtuous person knows the best course of action takes this course of action and feels pleasure or at least no pain, as a result of taking this action. For Aristotle, human virtue is then this state of the human soul that is the state of the human soul such that the person in this state chooses the correct actions, at the correct lines, for the correct means.

After the discussion of these thinkers view about virtue it is marked that both of them are same in some points. First of all we can see that for Plato and Aristotle virtue is thought of as a stable or unchanging fact of the individual. For Plato, virtue consists in his knowledge of the good. Someone possessing knowledge of the good is able to determine the good in all decisions at all times and thus will be virtuous unconditionally. Thus, according to Aristotle virtue is also seen as an overall properly prescribed to the individual who is virtuous. Plato believes that in order to gain virtue your soul must be in some sort of balance, reason guiding thought and action, with appetite suppressed. And he says that for the achievement of correct balance one must have the correct upbringing. Therefore, for Plato acquiring virtue requires practice and control which lead to the correct proportions of the soul. And Aristotle believes that in order to truly become virtuous one must do the virtuous actions and also take pleasure in the virtuous action that they choose. He explains in the Ethics that exhibiting moderation in nearly every aspect of life and action as though one were already virtuous. It is the ultimate read to the virtuous state. In this way we have seen that along with Plato, Aristotle believes that virtue must be gained through practice and a form of self control.

Besides these similarities, these two views are different in some points. Firstly, the source of virtue for the two philosophers is completely different. For Plato, virtue comes from the form of the good. Virtue is only thought of as a characteristic of the person in so much as they are close to, or come to know the good. Plato leads us to the picture that virtue is an altogether separate existence from the virtuous person. On the other hand, Aristotle stated that virtue is intrinsically intertwined with the virtuous person. Actually virtue is a state of being which aids the person living according to reason.

Another point of difference is in the limiting case. Plato's deep connection of virtue with the form of the good actually makes it impossible for a human being to become virtuous. The human soul can only comes to know the forms truly, including the form of good, after death. Moreover for Aristotle, we find that the virtuous person is indeed possible. If a person is in the state in which they are better to live in accordance with reason, they are virtuous by definition. The fact that human virtue can be actualized is a living human being. Aristotle's conception of virtue is sharp contrast to the Platonic concept.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q4: State two similarities between Plato and Aristotle regarding virtue?

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5.5: CARDINAL VIRTUES: PLATO

Cardinal virtues are the fundamental virtues and the other virtues are based on them. According to Plato, there are four types of cardinal virtues. They are- prudence, justice, temperance and courage. These virtues are also often translated as, wisdom, fairness, restraint (also called moderation) and fortitude. Plato explains all the four virtues in his work

'Republic' and 'Protagoras'. Prudence is a person's ability to judge his own actions as appropriate or inappropriate. For Plato it is the special virtue of the ruling class. It is deliberative and directive and indispensable for wise government. Justice is the ability to act with fairness and without bias towards others. Temperance is the ability to act with moderation and self control. It is the special virtue of the trends. Courage or fortitude is the power of resisting the fear of pain and the temptation of pleasure. It is the special virtue of the fighting class. And justice includes them all. These virtues were later adopted by St. Augustine as the four cardinal virtues of Christianity.

He is realized when the rulers govern wisely, the soldiers fight bravely and the craftsmen and traders work with energy and thrift. They are also the common cardinal virtues of an individual. Such as wisdom is the virtue of the rational part of the soul. Courage or fortitude is the virtue of the emotional part. Temperance is the obedience of the desires to reason. Justice is the harmonious functioning of intellect, emotion and desire under the guidance of reason.

Prudence is the most important of the four cardinal virtues. The most important part of prudence is knowledge. It is not theoretical knowledge, such as philosophical wisdom, but practical knowledge. It is not only concerned with universal and unchanging truths, but with the singular, unique and variable things of daily life also. Aperson who possesses prudence cannot early impart to other his art of making good decisions. Even he cannot always explain his own processes of thought, but after a long practice he has a feeling or what he should do. Justice is the social virtue. It concerns right relations with others in society. Justice is the virtue whereby we give to each person what is due to him, and we do this consistently promptly and pleasurably. Fortitude is synonymous with courage and bravery. It must be based on justice. The purpose of fortitude is to remove obstacles to justice. Courage and temperance are self-regarding virtues, which bear directly on the life of the individual. Coverage is the power of the will to resist the fear of pain. The virtue of temperance governs our appetites for pleasure. By

nature we desire the pleasure that is suitable to us. A lack of temperance undermines prudence, and if prudence is destroyed all the virtues are undermined.

According to Mackenzie, Plato's cardinal virtues can be accepted as the basis and adapted to the requirements of the modern society. The virtue of wisdom includes care, foresight, prudence and decisiveness of choice. Courage should include both velour and fortitude in which velour is active courage and fortitude is the passive courage. Faith and hope are closely connected with velour and fortitude. Justice is the performance of social duties which includes honesty, love,benevolence, cheerfulness and good humour. All the virtues are the forms of practical wisdom. In this way Mackenzie has established his view about Plato's cardinal virtue.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q5: Fill in the blanks:-

a) Plato discussed _____ types of cardinal virtue.

b) The most important part of prudence is _____.

c) Fortitude is synonymous with _____ and _____.

d) _____ is a social virtue.

5.5.1: Aristotle's Classification of Virtues

According to Aristotle, virtues are of two kinds. They are moral virtue and intellectual virtue. Aristotle says that moral virtues are not innate, but they are acquired by developing the habit of exercising them. Intellectual virtue belongs to the rational soul and includes theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge. And moral virtue belongs to the irrational but conscious part of the soul, and consists in subordinating emotions and desires to reason. Aristotle stated that a morally virtuous action requires an individual to be able to choose how to respond to his or her own thoughts and feelings.

Hence the concept of moral responsibility implies that an individual has some freedom to choose his or her own actions. For him, an individual becomes truthful by acting truthfully or becomes unselfish by acting unselfishly. Aristotle notes that it may be difficult for an individual to become virtuous if he or she has not acquired the habit of acting virtuously.

For Aristotle, the moral virtues include courage, temperance, self-discipline, moderation modesty, humility, friendliness, truthfulness honesty and justice. Temperance is a moral virtue and consists in control of the emotion of fear by reason. Moral virtues are habits of deliberated choice for the realization of the good. They are the mean between two extremes. Justice as a moral virtue includes lawfulness and fairness. Fairness requires that the privileges and responsibilities of persons in a given situation be distributed proportionally and equally. Virtue is also a principal of temperance and moderation. It achieves a mean between the vice of excess and the vice of deficiency of a moral quality. Thus, bravery as a moral virtue achieves a mean between recklessness and cowardice. Generosity as a moral virtue achieves a mean between wastefulness and greed.

According to Aristotle, the intellectual virtues include scientific knowledge, artistic or technical knowledge, intuitive reason, practical wisdom and philosophic wisdom. Scientific knowledge is knowledge of what is necessary and universal. Artistic or technical knowledge is knowledge of how to make things, or of how to develop a craft. Intuitive reason is the process that establishes the first principle of knowledge. Practical wisdom is the capacity to act in accordance with the good of humanity. Philosophic wisdom is the combination of intuitive reason and scientific knowledge. Moral virtues may be combined with intellectual virtues. For example: an individual or society may be combine practical wisdom and justice, or may combine artistic knowledge and moral truthfulness. Aristotle takes the four cardinal virtues of Plato in a narrower sense. Socrates indentified virtue with knowledge. Plato preferred contemplative live to active life and regarded wisdom as the highest virtue. On the other side Aristotle regards virtue as

knowledge and habit both, and virtues and practical insight as inseparable. He regards moral virtue as due to the control of emotions and desires by reason. For Aristotle, that highest good consist in a perfect activity of reason.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q6: What are the virtues according to Aristotle?

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5.6. INDIAN VIEW OF VIRTUE

In Indian ethics, the concept of virtue occupies an important place. In a general sense, virtue means perfection of an operative faculty. These faculties are the intellect (theoretical and practical), the will the faculty of the irascible tendency. The Latin term 'virtue' comes from the Greek 'Arete' that means excellence, capacity, and worth. It also comes from 'Vir' (man) and refers originally to virility. And both of them refer to the excellence of man as such. According to the virtuous ethical life is life. The human virtues can be intellectual or moral. The intellectual virtues inhere and perfect the speculative or practical reason. The moral virtues perfect the will and the sensitive tendencies.

Indian theory of virtue means 'Purusartha'. The Purusarthas integrate and subordinate the worldly life to the moral and spiritual life. They enable a man to make his all round development and satisfy all the elements of human nature on the principles of righteousness and morality. There are four types of Purusarthas. They are Dharma, Artha,Kama and Moksa. As a moral value Dharma contains all the principles required to sustain and uphold human existence in its fullness. It implies man's biological, social and psychological sustenance and nourishment. To achieve the higher levels of human existence, 'restrain in order to rise', is the first lesson of Dharma. Dharma means righteousness, goodness, truthfulness and purity in thought,

speech and action. It is the foundation of life. Simple living and high thinking is the basis of Dharma. It acts for the welfare of all creation and holds the entire, universe together. Aristotle is the objective and virtuous pursuit of wealth for livelihood, obligations and economic prosperity. Kama indicates sexual pleasure, but it is not to be exclusively identified with sex only. It is a value provided it is pursued in accordance with moral and social norms. Moksa is the fourth and the highest Purusarthas in Indian virtue ethics. It stands for spiritual principle. It means perfect liberation or eternal happiness. Moksa means freedom from bondage, sufferings, attachment to the objects of desires etc. it is the attainment of perfection through right knowledge and right conduct. It is also the self-realization and god realization which liberates the man from the fear of pains.



5.7: LET US SUM UP

- Aristotle states that virtue is something that can be learned through constant practice of it.
- Naturally virtue and duty are related to each other. Because virtue is the excellence of the inner character and duty is the external expression of a good character. Hence virtue is the excellence of character which is the result of the habitual performance of duties.
- More knowledge or moral insight does not constitute virtue. It must be accompanied by habit.
- Happiness consists in a complete life according to virtue. Thus, Aristotle said that happiness is the principle of actions and the cause of all good things.
- The chief point of Socrates theory of virtue is that "Knowledge is virtue". For him virtue can be taught as it is related with 'will' and 'will' become virtuous byhabit and practice.
- Plato considered virtue to be an excellence of the soul.

- Aristotle defines virtue as - virtue is a disposition, or habit, involving deliberate purpose or choice consisting in a mean that is relative to us, the mean being determined by reason, or as a prudent mean would determine it.
- Aristotle said that we can acquire virtue of character through 'habit' in particular, the habits from during our upbringing.
- Past and present views of virtue are similar
- Aristotle and Plato recognize virtue as the key to good life.
- Aristotle classifies virtue as - moral and intellectual.
- The Indian notion of virtue is consists in the concept of "Purusartha".



5.8: FURTHER READING

1) Chatterji, Phanibhushan, 1952. Principles of Ethics. Beadon Streit, Calcutta.
2) Sinha, Jadunath, 1973. A Manual of Ethics. New Central Book Agency. Calcutta 9.
3) Thilly, Frank, 1956, A History of Philosophy, Central Publishing House, Allahabad.
4) Lilly, William, 1964. Introduction to Ethics, Methuen.



5.9: ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans. 1: Virtue and happiness are related to each other. According to Aristotle, a virtuous man must be happy. For him happiness is found in fulfilling the function of a man properly. Man is different from other animals because of the characteristic function of reason. And happiness is to be found in the right exercise of reason. A life of reason implies a settled virtuous character. That virtue is always accompanied by happiness. Hence both are related to each other. Virtue is not happiness itself; rather happiness is the index of virtue.

Ans.2: Yes, virtue and habit are related to each other. According to Aristotle virtue is habit. Because,mere knowledge of good and duty in a concrete situation does not make for virtue. Knowledge must lead to actions.

Ans.3: According to Aristotle a virtuous action is one in which the agent knows what they are doing, choose the act for its own sake and makes their choice firm and unchangeable character. Yes, there is a similarity between Aristotle's concept of virtue and modern concept of virtue. As both of them are the grounds for calling someone good or bad, for praising or blaming them for what they feel and do. Again both the views are clearly dispositions of feeling and closely related to the sorts of choices made people.

Ans.4: Regarding virtue, Plato and Aristotle are same in some points. They are -

a) For them, virtue is thought of as a stable or unchanging fact of the individual.

b) Both Plato and Aristotle believe that virtue must be gained through practice and a form of self control.

Ans.5: a) 4 (four)
b) Knowledge
c) Courage, bravery.
d) Justice.

Ans.6: Aristotle classified virtue as two types. They are moral virtue and intellectual virtue.



5.10: MODEL QUESTIONS

A. Very short Questions

Q1: What is virtue?

Q2: What is the nature of virtue according to Aristotle?

Q3: In which book, Plato discussed the theory of virtue?

Q4: What do you mean by cardinal virtue?

Q5: How many virtues are there according to Aristotle?

B. Short Questions (Write in about 100-150 words)

Q1: Is there any relation between virtue, habit and knowledge? Explain.

Q2: Write short note on:

a) Virtue and happiness.

b) Cardinal virtues.

Q3: Briefly point out some difference between Aristotle and Plato's concept of virtue.

Q4: What do you mean by Aristotle's doctrine of MEAN?

Q5: 'Past and present view of virtue is similar'- Discuss.

C. Long Questions (Write in about 300-500 words)

Q1: According to Plato and Aristotle, Virtue is the key to good life, how? Explain.

Q2: In what way Aristotle represents his concept of virtue? Discuss.

Q3: What are the similarities and difference between Plato and Aristotle regarding virtue?

Q4: Explain the nature of four kinds of cardinal virtues of Plato?

Q5: Discuss Indian views of virtue

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