

THE TRANSITION WITHIN VIRTUE ETHICS IN THE CONTEXT OF BENEVOLENCE

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This paper explores the value of benevolence as a cardinal virtue by analyzing the evolving history of virtue ethics from ancient Greek tradition to emotivism and contemporary thoughts. First, I would like to start with a brief idea of virtue ethics. Greek virtue theorists recognize four qualities of moral character, namely, wisdom, temperance, courage, and justice. Christianity recognizes unconditional love as the essence of its theology. Here I will analyze the transition within the doctrine of virtue ethics in the Christian era and afterward since the eighteenth-century thinkers are immensely inspired by this Christian notion of love consider universal benevolence as the cardinal virtue. Later, Hume introduces an emotivist turn by considering the moral worth of sympathetic emotions in his ethical doctrine. In this paper, I aim to discover the cardinality of the virtue of benevolence following the evolutionary history of virtue ethics.

Keywords: virtue, benevolence, cardinal virtue, Greek theorists, self-regarding virtues, Christianity, other-regarding virtues, emotivist turn, Neo Aristotelean era.

INTRODUCTION

Virtue ethics is the most ancient form of moral philosophy as its origination is rooted in the ancient Greek tradition. In contrast with the normative notion of obligatory rules, virtue ethics emphasizes building one's virtuous character. Virtue can be understood as the state or disposition of a person (Anas 2006). Here, the sole focus is on building the agent's virtuous character as it is intuitively believable that a person who is characterized by certain virtues will always be disposed to act in a virtuous manner. Virtues are morally distinguishable from one's merely psychological character traits or mere habits. A character trait with the attribution of moral value can be regarded as a virtue, such as benevolence is not only a character trait but also a virtue. This doctrine requires a moral understanding on the part of a virtuous person to judge and conceive inner character traits. Virtue ethics holds a distinguished agent-focused approach as it emphasizes essentially and entirely on developing the moral excellence of an agent's overall character (Slote 1997). Virtues, being different from mere habits, consist of the disposition to act in a certain way for a specific reason. This

disposition arises from the proper internalization of one's reasonable moral understanding, which is the source of one's moral judgment and moral decision-making.

BENEVOLENCE AS A CARDINAL VIRTUE

The word 'cardinal' comes from the Latin word *cardo*, which means hinge. St. Ambrose of Milan was the first moral and allegorical thinker who invented the term 'cardinal virtues' (Houser 32 2: 188, n.3). He connects the four cardinal virtues, named temperance, justice, prudence, fortitude, or courage, with the teaching of Jesus. Metaphorically cardinal virtues are the hinge virtues on which all the other virtues depend or swing. From St. Ambrose's allegorical point of view, cardinal virtues are those four hinges upon which moral life swings.

Greek classical virtue ethics identifies certain specific virtues which are regarded as the most necessary, prime, or fundamental virtues for one's full flourishing moral development. These are considered cardinal ones. There are some specific criteria based on which virtues are regarded as cardinal. Firstly, cardinal virtues are the most essential and necessary virtues for an individual's completely flourished moral excellence. Secondly, cardinal virtues are regarded as the highest and supreme ones in so much as these are considered to be sufficient constituents for the complete account of one's full flourishing moral excellence. Each of the cardinal virtues is necessary for one's moral excellence, and conjointly these four are sufficient for one's fully flourishing moral excellence. For example, courage is a necessary virtue for everyone, which directs us to overcome any fear and obstacles and remain determined in our will. However, courage is not sufficient; it also needs wisdom and justice to make our courageous behavior reasonable and just. So, all the four cardinal virtues are conjointly regarded as sufficient constituents for the complete account of one's full flourishing moral excellence. Finally, all other non-cardinal virtues (moral, theological, religious virtues) can be derived from the cardinal virtues or included under cardinal virtues. Wisdom or prudence can be regarded as the prime or fundamental of all virtues since each of the other virtues, regardless of courage or temperance or even friendship or love, is dependent and derived from the prime virtue of wisdom or prudence. Only a prudent person can be just, courageous, and benevolent based on her reasonable wisdom. The person who can make a wise and good decision is the person who has the knowledge of distinguishing virtues from vices, good from bad. So, a prudent person can make a virtuous decision and act virtuously. Accordingly, Greek virtue theorists Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle recognize four qualities of moral character, namely, wisdom, temperance, courage, and justice, as the cardinal virtues. This tradition is followed in early Christian morality by St. Augustine and Aquinas. Christian ethics also regard another three chief virtues, namely faith, hope, charity, and the traditional four, and accepted all of the seven as cardinal virtues. Christianity recognizes unconditional love as the essence of its theology. We can experience a huge transition in the doctrine of virtue ethics in the Christian era and afterward. The Eighteenth-century thinkers are hugely inspired by the Christian notion of love, considering universal benevolence as the cardinal virtue. They replace the

traditional four ones and regard benevolence as the highest cardinal virtue for an agent's complete moral excellence. Later, Hume introduces an emotivist turn by considering the moral worth of sympathetic emotions in his ethical doctrine. The definition of virtue has been redefined and reemerged accordingly following several transitions in the history of virtue ethics. In this paper, I aim is to discover the cardinality of the virtue of benevolence following the evolutionary history of virtue ethics.

Ancient Greek Concept: Benevolence for Self-enlightenment

Plato primarily admitted four traditional cardinal virtue of Greek moral philosophy, namely, courage, temperance, wisdom, and justice. These four virtues are regarded as cardinal as the stable position of all of these virtues are considered to be the necessary and sufficient conditions for the complete account of one's moral excellence. However, in his *Protagoras* (Plato et al. 1961). we find the influence of the Socratic view in Plato's moral philosophy where following Socratic, he admits knowledge or wisdom is the highest cardinal virtue and all other virtues can be controlled and maintained by wisdom. For Plato, human psychology consists of the tripartite of mind, soul, and body where the body is the locus of all kinds of physical satisfaction such as eating, drinking, and receiving pleasure and pain. In addition to these bodily appetites, mind and soul provide us the intellectual virtue of wisdom which should govern the whole of human nature. In this regard, human beings can be virtuous only if the mind or intellect governs the other bodily parts. Temperance is the virtue by which our will disciplines our bodily appetite and passions, and courage is the exercise of will, which controls and disciplines appetite and bodily passions according to our reason and will and wisdom are the reason and will. Hence, wisdom, being the intellectual virtue of mind or will, controls and subordinates all other virtues like courage, temperance. Nevertheless, Plato regards each virtue equally, but he maintains that being virtuous for an individual is being the just human nature, and an individual is considered to be just only when her bodily pleasure or appetite is governed by her intellect or wisdom. Just human nature means the proper proportion of bodily pleasure and intellectual virtue within one human soul, which can be regarded as an organic whole and as the state of moral excellence. Such just distribution is not only applicable to the human soul, but it is an essential necessity within individuals and society.

Aristotle shares his teleological thoughts in his *Nichomachean Ethics* (Aristotle 1925), where he holds that every action and choice is determined to serve some specific goal and human beings by nature and should be properly motivated towards specific goals. The good is defined in terms of this very nature in Aristotle's ethical doctrine (Everson 1998). Our intellect should always choose something which is worth pursuing as some desired end or good. Virtue is the good habit of action by which humans can achieve their final *telos* or final good, which he named Eudaimonia.

According to Aristotle, the ultimate end for any human's life is a state of eudaimonia. Eudaimonia is often translated as happiness, prosperity; however, it holds some specific connotation here. It is quite different from the utilitarian notion of

happiness and any materialistic conception of a good and prosperous life. Eudaimonia is the final good for everyone's life to be desired. For an agent, it is the continuous state of being virtuous. Such good, virtuous living is the highest and supreme end for everyone. Hence, the ultimate good for any human is living and flourishing through one's whole life by the continuous exercise of virtues as the necessary and sufficient component of living and securing such a good life. Although virtues are the necessary and sufficient constituent for achieving one's good life, virtues are intrinsically valuable for their own values (MacIntyre 1981). Accordingly, virtue holds two kinds of value, one is instrumental to achieving the ultimate good life or eudaimonia, and the other is intrinsic as they are valuable for their own sake. A human who has always lived virtuously can distinguish virtues from vices and other mere habits as the person becomes morally educated by her continuous virtuous living, which has guided the person to be capable enough to judge and act virtuously.

The activity which only human beings can perform is intellectual; it is the activity of the highest part of the soul (the rational part) according to reason. Aristotle (1925, Book II) distinguishes between the intellectual virtue and other moral virtue of actions and passion and regards that it is our intellectual virtue of practical wisdom which controls and directs other moral virtues to achieve the final end of eudaimonia. Human happiness, therefore, consists of the natural process of the individual acting and living according to reason. Thus, happiness consists of the action of the rational part of man that is the soul, and so happiness can only be attributed to a wise and virtuous person. This action must persist with continuity throughout life to make true happiness. The highest happiness of a human being is a life of reflection, but secondary happiness is achieved through ethical virtue. Ethical virtue can be defined as a habit disposed to action by deliberate choice and defined by reason as a prudent man would define it. Virtue is not simply an isolated act but a habit of acting well. The virtuous action is a mean between two extremes in each specific position. Ultimately, prudence is necessary for ethical virtue because it is the intellectual virtue by which a mortal is capable of finding the mean specific to each occasion.

Aristotle primarily discussed the four traditional cardinal virtues of wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice. Among them, he regards practical wisdom as the highest intellectual virtue along with justice, whereas courage and temperance are considered bodily passions. Through practical wisdom, one can acquire the knowledge and skill of virtue which help individuals to judge and choose moral decisions by differentiating virtues from vices.

Later, he also adds some other virtues; among them, friendship is one where he discusses one's sharing relation of well-being with other beings. For man, as a social being, friendship is necessary for a happy and good life. Despite having all other goods in life, no one would choose to live without friends. In his word, 'for what is the use of such prosperity without the opportunity of beneficence, which is exercised chiefly and in its most laudable form towards friends? Or how can prosperity be guarded and preserved without friends' (Aristotle 1925, 192)? Aristotle put his altruistic position by claiming that regardless of one's prosperity and adversity, friends are necessary to live a good and virtuous life. Friendship evolves between people who wish well to each other, and the well-wishers are recognized by each other's concerns. Aristotle (1925, Book VIII) differentiates between three kinds of friendships based on

usefulness, pleasure, and love and holds that friendships based on usefulness and pleasure may not last long since they only last as long as each party derives the usefulness or pleasure, they desire from the relationship. This genuine friendship is necessary for self-knowledge and helps both friends to grow in virtue. The virtue of a friend is to love. The relationship one shares with his friend is like the harmonious relationship between the different parts of the soul of a virtuous man. Perfect friendship is the friendship between people who are good and alike in virtue. Friendship is not a state, but it is an activity, a habitual act of love by which both the friends can interact beneficently with each other. The virtue of friendship stands as proof of one's benevolent disposition towards others. Due to this benevolence, one seeks the well-being of other people regardless of one's own well-being since, for Aristotle, one's overall well-being becomes incomplete without the inclusion of genuine friendship, more precisely without the beneficent interactions with others. Here it should be noted that Aristotle recognizes beneficence as an essential virtue of a good person who acts beneficently to others out of their natural benevolent nature. He also regards benevolence as a natural disposition of human beings and accepts beneficence as the virtue through which good people interact and share their well-being. Moreover, he mentions that we can directly interact beneficently with our near ones but cannot interact beneficently with the far ones due to distance, but we are always disposed to perform the act of beneficent for the far ones as a gesture of true friendship. This disposition towards the act of beneficence that springs from our true friendship is called benevolence.

Christian Concept of Benevolence as Other-regarding Virtue

Christian ethics conventionally adopts seven virtues after Pope Gregory released the list of seven deadly human sins during 590 AD. These virtues named chastity, temperance, charity, diligence, patience, kindness, and humanity are identified in opposition to human's seven deadly sins (pride, lust, greed, sloth, wrath, gluttony, envy). Christianity prescribes to acquire and practice these virtues to protect one against temptation from the deadly sins, and accordingly, practicing these seven virtues develop whole human conduct. Christianity finds the four cardinal virtues of the Greek virtue theorists as the natural virtues that spring from the common endowment of humanity. These four virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance), following Greek tradition, are regarded as the cardinal ones as all other virtues can be included and derived from these four. The uniqueness and novelty of Christianity lie within the other three theological virtues. The other three virtues are theological, which are specially prescribed in Christian theology in that they are the habits by which we properly relate ourselves to God. These virtues do not just come as special gifts, but are due to God's grace and grace is based on faith. These three virtues are faith, hope, and love. The classification of natural and theological virtues has been adopted by the Apostle Paul¹, who distinguishes the three theological virtues as specifically the Christian virtues and regards unconditional love or *agape* as the chief and prime cardinal virtue among all within Christianity. Here, we can perceive a major transition from ancient Greek virtue ethics where human's natural virtues such as prudence or

justice are considered as the prime one to Christianity that regards and establishes love as the ruling and prime virtue by which all else can be included and derived.

The early Christian theologian St. Augustine (1958) believes in spiritual benevolence and love for the almighty God and all of His creation, including His best creation, the human race. According to him, human beings should always maintain a habitual disposition of this benevolence in their heart, which prevents entering evil thoughts and evil dispositions within one's heart and make them pure and nearer to benevolent almighty God. Wisdom guides us to come out from the sinful lusts of worldly temptations. Moreover, wisdom can reveal our true spiritual sense only through the divine grace of God. For Augustine, one cannot recognize one's true self without understanding one's relation with her own creator. Augustine illustrates that God flows His divine love and grace to His every creation; among them, the best is human beings with whom He shares a unique form of love. Humans can identify their true selves through the proper realization of this unique divine love that God shares with His best creation. Humans respond through love, respect, and gratitude towards their creator God. The great Christian commands such as, 'Love Thy God' and 'love your neighbor as yourself' implies that, God's love is universal for all humans; consequently, humans should extend their love towards all, as only this way humans can express gratitude towards their creator. He implies these two commands in a manner which demonstrates that the command of love for other-beings presupposes self-love, 'In [the two commandments] man finds three beings to love, namely, God, himself, and his fellow man, and knows that he is not wrong in loving himself so long as he loves God. As a result, he must help his neighbor (whom he is obliged to love as himself) to love God' (Augustine 1958, 321). So, he interprets the Divine commands in a manner where he does not find any confrontation between self-love and love for others, but for him, following the Divine commands, love for others presupposes self-love.

However, Augustine is aware of human's limited ability of benevolence due to an individual's embodied and temporal existence. He talks about friendship which occurs with the blessings of God. For him, God plays a central role in the establishment of friendship by developing a relation within different individuals. In his own words, 'Blessed whoso loveth Thee, and his friend in Thee, and his enemy for Thee. For he alone loses none dear to him, to whom all are dear in Him who cannot be lost. And who is this but our God' (Augustine 199, 55). He believes that true friendship is mediated and cultivated by an omniscient God. Augustine realizes the love of friendship through the love of God and vice versa. We love friends by seeing God in them and love God by seeing the true love of friendship towards God. He understands self where individuals are connected with true friendship through the divine love of God. He maintains equal importance and respect for individuals who are fully constituted as the creation of almighty God and connected respectfully via true friendship with His divine love. Augustine's doctrine of friendship and benevolence flourish from the divine love, respect, and faith towards our creator of almighty God and through the recognition of God's creative presence in friends. Thus, we can cultivate the Christian value of *agape* or universal love or benevolence towards all.

Following Christianity, Thomas Aquinas also believes that God is the creator of the universe and of all the limited beings, including humankind. God, being the

supremacy of power, love, benevolence, is regarded as the exemplar of all things, all sources, and foundations. The ultimate happiness of humans is found in the salvation that is the state of unity with God. In order to achieve salvation, human beings should follow the disposition of virtues to build a perfect human nature who unconditionally loves the supreme God and all his fellow beings.

He, following Aristotle, considers the gradation of hierarchy among different virtues (Kirchner 1986). In his *Summa Theologica* (Aquinas 1912), he accepts that virtues are aimed to reach some other object or some superior end. Moral virtues are directed to object theological virtues and aim for the final end, which is directed to unite with God. He considers three theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity. Among these three theological virtues, charity is the highest one. He regards charity as the preeminent and highest virtue among all as faith and hope to depend on charity. Charity is the infused virtue that unites humans with God via love. Charity includes love for the divine supremacy and all His fellow-creations. Faith and hope are directed to charity, whereas charity is directed to the final end to unite with God through the all-inclusive love for all. Thus, charity guides other virtues to reach the final end.

Aquinas also accepts four moral virtues: justice, prudence, temperance, fortitude, and one cardinal virtue: practical wisdom. Moral virtues are guided by the cardinal virtue of practical wisdom. All virtues are directed to achieve the final end, which unites one with God. Charity is immediate after this final end. So, charity is the highest among all other virtues, which direct all other virtues towards the final end. Human beings hold a natural disposition of charity by divine God's grace which stands as a symbol of unity, love, and friendship with divine supremacy. Love for God includes love for God's favorable creation, i.e., human beings who are capable of imitating God's divine grace. Our love for God can be extended to our love for our neighbors through the virtue of charity within our surroundings.

Famous Christian moralist Paul Ramsey (1950) establishes nothing else than love as the basic moral principle in Christian theology. He maintains that all-inclusive love or *agape* is the primitive idea and fundamental notion in Christian ethics. In contrast to Greek ethics of self-interested enlightenment theory, where love is always considered after prudence, Ramsey, following the Biblical code of the *New Testament*, establishes love as the fundamental and central moral motive of all actions. Following Biblical norms, Ramsey's theory establishes its other-regarding motive to serve selflessly and disinterestedly one's neighbor's need is higher than the claim of one's own self. Following this theory, one should always be ready to serve others, regardless of the thought of how 'just' it may be or regardless of one's own claim or self-interest one dedicate own self to serve for the other out of love, and here within is the central idea of Christianity. There are two different aspects of *agape*; firstly, following divine command, one should always be ready to help others in their need due to love for all regardless of what value or worth one perceives in the person. Another aspect of *agape* is there is no such preconceived set of values or principles and no discrimination between higher and lower goods. Accordingly, there is no discrimination between one's self-realization by acquiring higher ethical virtues and seeking self-pleasure following hedonism in Christianity. Christian ethics is primarily other-regarding. The second commandment follows from the greatest commandment, i.e., love your neighbor as yourself. Following this, self-love that includes others is the best love

which Aristotle called the virtue. Again, one should love oneself and others as God loves the human self in each of us. Perhaps, then, Divine love is so profoundly other-regarding for the sake of dignity and worth in all selves that God's other-regarding love is the foundation of love within and for all created reality. Hence, the prime moral principle in Ramsey's Christian theology is love, as all other virtues can be included within this supreme all-inclusive love.

Hence, following Christian theology, love is the only one, and ultimate cardinal virtue as any other virtues follow under this all-inclusive moral value of love and can be regarded as different forms of love. Following the *New Testament*, love has two aspects, love for almighty God and love for neighbor. These two can be interpreted by some other thinkers as gradually love of complacency and love of benevolence since none of our actions can benefit almighty God. Here, the love for our neighbor is identified as the love of benevolence for our neighbor following the golden command of 'love thy neighbor as yourself.' Frankena (1973) distinguishes the love of God as a religious virtue in contrast to the love of benevolence for other-beings. Accordingly, any human-related virtue in agapistic ethics of virtue can be regarded as one and not many, and that prime cardinal virtue is love. The notion of extensive or universal and disinterested benevolence follows from the Christian conception of unconditional agape or all-inclusive love. 'Benevolence is extensive in the sense that it not only includes the self but reaches out to others, and that it manifests a concern for others that is equal in degree to concern for self' (Reeder Jr. 1998, 48). However, during the 20th-century process, theology emerges as a contrast to classical theology. This theory was inspired by the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, whose Gifford Lectures were published as *Process and Reality* during 1929. Here God is understood as the part of a larger creative process, and His power is persuasive rather than coercive, and He both influences and is influenced by the other parts of the creative process. So, this theory subordinated God's power under the larger creative process. Hence, this theory distinguishes between God's primordial nature and God's consequent nature and allows human love to affect and increase God's consequent nature lovingly.

We can observe a considerable transition of virtue ethics from the reason-based self-enlightenment Greek notion towards the universal benevolence after the worldwide influence of Christian love. The other-regarding trends occupy the central area in this Judeo-Christian tradition of virtue ethics. Virtue theorists following Christian agape appeal to the core of heart of every human for every fellow-beings. Here the sole emphasis is on the virtue of love and benevolence rather than reason or self-enlightenment. We can find this similar significant development upon benevolence as the primary secular virtue within the eighteenth-century thinkers like Cumberland (1672), Hutcheson (1725), Butler (1869), Edward (1989), and Hopkins (1811), who regard the universal notion of benevolence as the supreme virtue. This concern for other-beings is different from the Hobbesian (1651) egocentric interest for maintaining peace with others or only for establishing a Platonic, just society. This concern is something more that is deeply rooted in our core of humanity.

Hutcheson's (1725) universal notion of benevolence seems inspired by the Christian concept of universal love or *agape*. Such universal benevolence derives from the concept of extensive love for other-beings as God loves us. He regards universal

benevolence as the highest cardinal virtue as intrinsically good. All other virtues or actions are regarded as morally good only if they are inclined to universal benevolence or follow from this universalistic notion of benevolence. All other virtue and virtuous actions can be subsumed under the extensive all-inclusive notion of universal benevolence, as here morality is defined in terms of universal benevolence. Hence, Hutcheson regards the notion of universal benevolence as the highest cardinal form of human virtue. Cumberland (1672) also combines common good with individual good by virtue of benevolence. Butler (1869) also finds no confrontation within self-love and social-love or benevolence since, for him, self-love derives from the rational part of human conscience, and such a rationally guided self-love is different from mere passion and always act in accordance with social-love or benevolence. Edward (1989) and Hopkins (1811) elevate the notion of benevolence by identifying it with the pure holiness of divinity and beatitude.

Hume's Concept of Benevolence- an Emotional Virtue

A major turn of ethics occurred through a non-cognitive emotivist theory by David Hume. He distinguishes natural virtue from artificial ones. He recognizes benevolence as a natural and social virtue that one can naturally possess and dispose of to help others when we perceive their trouble. Such benevolent disposition is prior to any thought of moral obligation or beneficial consequences. Hume regards benevolence as the most prime and natural virtue in contrast to the artificial virtue of justice. Humans are not naturally disposed to be just. They are just because they are morally obligated to do so. Unlike the natural virtue of benevolence, the artifice of justice should always be governed by the strict sense of right and obligation. However, due to its strict obligatory governance Hume, unlike Hutcheson, sometimes gives precedence to justice over benevolence. However, he never denies the utility of benevolence as a social virtue as it is useful for the general happiness and well-being of all. In his words:

Upon the whole, then, it seems undeniable, that nothing can bestow more merit on any human creature than the sentiment of benevolence in an eminent degree; and that a part, at least, of its merit arises from its tendency to promote the interests of our species, and bestow happiness on human society. (Hume, 1963, 182).

Hume, in his *Enquiry* (Hume 1975), holds benevolence as a general tendency of humans, which he establishes as the foundation of moral philosophy. Here, he points out that humans possess a natural disposition of benevolence or social good, as well as they, hold as essential any self-regarding tendency (Albee 1897). In his early *Treatise* (1975) days, Hume accepts benevolence as a mere impulse of sympathy to an objective standard of morality. Later he regards benevolence as a natural disposition of human nature implanted in one's character and is directed to the welfare of other-beings. This natural human disposition of benevolence will naturally flow for others' well-being regardless of any such association of suffering instances or regardless of any necessary

direct concern or little concern or even no concern for them. In *Treatise* (1975), sympathy reflects a kind of self-interest that arises from the perceived suffering in others through the mirror impression of moral communication, whereas, in *Enquiry* (1907), benevolence is a general natural desire for the well-being of others irrespective of others suffering.

Hume establishes this natural friendly benevolence feeling of humankind as the foundation of morality in his *Enquiries* (1963). Hume also considers that benevolence is partial among near ones such as family, friend, neighbor. However, justice serves public utility by considering that everybody must get fair due even when benevolence does not prompt others to give it. Thus, benevolence complements justice. When benevolence cannot provide social utility due to its partial inclination to serve near ones, justice ensures that social utility is served.

In early Greek ethics, virtue was regarded as objective and could be achieved alone by education or wisdom. Virtues are associated with truth, and so regardless of any situation, it is objectively good in itself. However, Hume introduces two distinctive features of virtue. Firstly, virtues are made for social purpose, and so these are exercised only in reference to other human beings. The second feature follows from the first one that virtues are referential or contextual. Virtues depend on what is expedient to others in their social context. Hume redefines good, which entirely depends on context and opinion, and by this contextual version of virtues. He proposes the modern version of moral relativism. This contextual version of virtue breaks the reason-based domination of ancient tradition and is considered the situational disposition or characteristic that leads to the overall good. Hume's social utility-concern virtue ethics influences Bentham's early utilitarian thought (Bentham 1781) of combining social good in accordance with individual good. His hedonistic doctrine of morality is entirely focusing on the highest beneficial consequences of any action, which leads to maximum pleasure. Moreover, after Hume's psychological emotivist turn, we find a new trend of emotivist thinkers who regard empathy, sympathy, compassion, care as the most important traits of human beings and argue for their moral worth in the domain of morality. We also find contemporary virtue theorists like Nussbaum (2001), Stocker (1976), who prominently accept the moral worth of sympathetic emotions in their ethical doctrine of virtue.

Yet, the psychological connection of emotions with virtue ethics was stated by Aristotle (1954) in his *Rhetoric*, where, unlike Plato, Aristotle regards the moral worth of proper emotional responses along with its intellectual component of virtue. Although unlike Hume, we do not find any detailed elaboration regarding this in his doctrine, here he indicates the moral worth of compassion. According to Aristotle, virtues can also be understood as human traits with their connection between actions and passions. This psychological connection can be seen between a particular virtue with its relation to a particular passion or emotion. Among them, some virtuous actions hold similar names with their particularly disposed of emotions, such as compassion and gratitude. Moreover, according to Aristotle, virtues should always be disposed of in the right proportion, i.e., neither too much nor too less but balanced. Here, the emotion of compassion will be regarded as a virtue when its disposition maintains this balanced margin between two extremes. Compassion can be genuinely regarded as a virtue when it is satisfied three conditions: firstly, it should be directed to someone

who is in genuine suffering; secondly, the person should empathize or feel a similar way with the sufferer or, in some sense, can identify herself with the sufferer or being in the same vulnerable situation with the sufferer; finally, the person should feel the desire to help to alleviate the sufferer from her present condition; this desire motivates the person to help the other-being who is suffering. So, it can be said that the virtue of compassion should be felt at the right time, for the right person, and motivated for the right action, which directs to help or do beneficence for the person. Thus, Aristotle identifies the psychological emotions, such as pleasure or pain after performing an action, as the index of the presence of virtue (Roberts 1989). Kristjánsson (2018) explains the moral value of Aristotelean emotions and considers them as a crucial component of a flourishing life. He argues that emotions are either intrinsically valuable by being an indispensable component of eudaimonia or at least instrumentally good in the path of human flourishing. He analyses six emotional virtues; among them, gratitude or feeling thankful is a way to a benefactor for a benevolently intended benefaction, and the emotion pity holds instrumental value to acquire the virtuous emotion of compassion.

Contemporary Reinterpretations of Benevolence as Virtue

One of the most renowned contemporary Neo-Aristotelian virtue theorists Martha Nussbaum (2001), identifies compassion with the notion of pity and describes it as a unique and distinct moral emotion of human beings. She regards compassion as one of the highest virtues of humanity. Her doctrine of compassion is inspired by Aristotle's view of compassion. The painful emotion is caused by perceiving the suffering of others which is not deserved as the person is not liable for the misfortune, and one is equally vulnerable to similar suffering. Aristotle coins the Greek word *eleos* for this emotion which Nussbaum translates as pity or compassion. Nussbaum develops her view on compassion from Aristotle's doctrine. However, she identifies its restrictiveness and modifies it by herself. Firstly, she emphasizes the third belief of Aristotle; however, she does not accept it as the necessary condition of compassion. She introduces eudaimonic judgment by adding a fourth belief that 'this person, or creature, is a significant element in my scheme of goals and projects, an end whose good is to be promoted' (Nussbaum 2001, 321). This promotion of good meets our notion of the principle of beneficence even if it is defined for an end of a person to achieve eudaimonia. According to her, the cognitive components of the emotion compassion consist of these beliefs or appraisals along with the belief that another's well-being is as important as one considers it for her own end. She is dedicated to showing the possibility of 'non-conscious compassion' in her book. She continues that one can have these beliefs or judgments without experiencing the 'upheaval of the painful emotion itself' (2001, 324). The emotion of compassion becomes 'part of [one's] cognitive repertory' (2001, 324) in such a way that an individual's pattern of belief, e.g., pain, affects the observer's pattern of belief and action. She clarifies that it is not necessary to experience the same pain to believe the judgments of compassion; however, it only requires full acknowledgment of others' painful conditions along with the three composite beliefs of compassion.

This notion seems to imply the full acknowledgment of upheavals. She sees the full acknowledgment of the requisite evaluative belief, which involves mental pain; however, she does not characterize the experience of pain as a necessary component of pain. What matters for one's scheme or goal to help others is nothing but the thought or belief that something miserable happens to the other person. Thus, Nussbaum implies beneficence, or the motivation to help others, comes from the full acknowledgment of the notion of compassion. Her notion of compassion implies that the three components of compassion are sufficient to raise the motive to help others who are suffering seriously, undeservedly, and not for their own faults and with the belief that we are equally vulnerable within a similar situation.

However, her notion of compassion is also restrictive to higher cognitive apparatus since we can immediately feel compassionate to small creatures, such as a baby bird falling from the tree, without believing in such complex appraisals. Nussbaum accepts compassion of such appraisals as prior to the construct of the belief judgment, or it can be called as non-linguistic, which does not require any complex three-fold beliefs, but it occurs only and immediately by perceiving the other person's misery. Moreover, the problem arises from her second belief that it seems we cannot feel compassion towards the person who is suffering for her own mistakes as she claims that compassion requires the object of the judgment of one's 'cognitive upheavals' suffers undeservedly as the person is not accountable for her misfortune. She argues that 'insofar as we believe that a person has come to grief through his or her own fault, we blame and reproach, rather than having compassion' (2001, 321). However, we still feel compassionate with the person's suffering, which occurs from her own mistake. For example, I can feel compassion for a person who is suffering from liver damage, even if I know that the person's lust for unhealthy fast foods is accountable for this condition. According to Weber (2005), Nussbaum fails to distinguish between intrinsic, constitutive norms and extrinsic rational moral norms. Whenever we feel compassion for those who are responsible but not so in the sense of guilt, compassion occurs for the concern of the person, but such compassion is not an intrinsic but extrinsic part of moral compassion.

Nussbaum demonstrates that compassion occurs from the intrinsic concern for other people only when the person is not responsible for her own misery, so the misery is not deserved. Nussbaum introduces mercy for these people who are themselves responsible for their own misfortune but not compassion. According to her, mercy 'is defined as the inclination of the judgment toward leniency in selecting penalties' (2001, 365). She explains that a merciful person will consider the person's situation and background with great sympathy and always be sensible with the fact that although it has resulted from the person's own fault, now he is suffering from misfortune. In this regard, she acknowledges that we feel compassionate to the person's misfortune which is resulted only due to her age of adolescence. The parents 'may feel compassion for the mess an adolescent child has gotten into, yet think that it is the child's own fault' (2001, 314).

However, we can see in the tradition of Christianity and Buddhism where it is possible to keep aside the question of guilt and feel full compassion towards the misfortune of the person who is fully responsible for a serious fault. In the doctrine of Buddhism, all sentient beings are in a state of suffering as they are ignorant of the

reality of nature and desire for materialistic attachment. Accordingly, in Buddhism, all humans who suffer are partly responsible for their suffering, and so, according to Nussbaum, they do not deserve compassion but mercy even if it is too harsh for everyone. In Christian tradition, Jesus, who is the father of unconditional love and compassion, finds wrong in some people due to their deformed actions but urges them to change their wrong path and tries to help them with His unconditional love and compassion. In this regard, I would like to mention the key gospel words from Luke, whose gospel is regarded as the closer to the original Aramaic of Jesus when he says: ‘Be Compassionate as Your Heavenly Father is Compassionate’ (CEB, Luke, 6:36). Richard Gula interprets that the term ‘compassion’ arrives from the Aramaic word ‘womb’, and he also said that Elizabeth Jonathon recognizes divine compassion like the compassion of a mother who feels compassionate out of concern for the child of her own womb. So, divine compassion can be realized with the metaphor of female mothers as God. This approach promotes our feeling compassionate for someone as if the person was the child of your womb. ‘This translation of Luke certainly brings out the all-encompassing, impartial love which God has for all, both the just and the unjust, and which is to be the model for human behavior’ (O’Meara, 2014, 50).

Nussbaum’s third component of compassion implies that one will not feel compassion unless one does not believe to be equally vulnerable with similar misfortune. However, even if, fortunately, till now, I did not experience or feel vulnerable to the devastating war situation of Syria, I still feel extremely compassionate with the Syrian children who are suffering unimaginable misery. One wealthy person of the first-world country who never experiences the misery and suffering of the inhabitants of poor third-world countries can feel immense compassion for the miserable people by perceiving their sufferings, which motivates us to help the deprived sufferers. It is possible to emerge our compassionate disposition for all by developing our genuine moral concern for other-beings and love for humanity, even if one does not feel vulnerable to similar misfortune.

According to Neo-Aristotelian Hursthouse (1999), to be fully virtuous, one should always internalize the virtuous components rather than merely performing duty. A fully flourishing virtuous person is capable of maintaining her virtuous position in all situations despite the presence of rival inclinations due to her wholehearted internalization of being moral. Kantian duty-based theory is only concerned with distinguishing duty by excluding emotional inclination while performing any action. In contrast, Hursthouse claims that a fully virtuous person is capable enough, based on their natural characteristics of rationalism, to distinguish such virtues from mere inclinations. Hursthouse, following Aristotle, claims that emotions are essential components of the soul and should not be cut off. A fully virtuous person, unlike a mere continence person in Aristotle’s sense, only chooses virtuous actions, which presuppose that she does not face such dualism between virtue with rival inclinations within her character, and Hursthouse regards only such person as a fully moral being.

A different kind of argument appears from MacIntyre’s (1999), who argues that human beings need to acquire virtues to grow themselves towards independence and help others flourish in a similar way. For him, each human life flourishes within

reciprocal indebtedness. An individual flourishes only insofar as others make his good their own, helping him especially through periods of weakness and disability so that he can acquire the virtues that constitute such flourishing. So, we need to acquire the virtue of 'acknowledged dependence' by practicing gratitude, courtesy. Thus, for MacIntyre, as dependent rational beings, humans need to practice reciprocal benevolence and gratitude in order to flourish.

Again, another contemporary Neo-Aristotelian virtue theorist Philippa Foot (1997), differentiates between intellectual virtue and virtue of justice and benevolence as the last two are directly connected with the welfare of other people. According to her, wisdom is the intellectual virtue that has the capability of acquiring knowledge through which we can develop the ideas of rights, rules, and obligations which are the constituents of justice. On the contrary, natural virtues like benevolence spring as natural human traits that require correctives under justice and wisdom as she defines virtue as 'correctives in relation to human nature in general' (1997, 171). She holds that natural virtue like benevolence or charity "cannot be the whole of virtue this is because a kindly . . . disposition could be disastrous without justice and wisdom, and because these virtues have to be learned, not because natural virtue is too easily acquired" (1997, 171). For example, charity can lead one to act badly when someone helps a friend for the friend's sake, despite knowing that the friend is willing to do an act of injustice. For Foot, all one needs for virtuous living is the proper management of virtues through discipline in relation to human nature. She clarifies her position with an illustration. Wisdom always operates as a virtue; however, prudence does not, but prudence which directs many of us for careful living. Again, prudence is not a virtue to anyone when it is dominated by the role of over-anxious concern for safety. So, all is important, according to Foot, for virtue is the corrective of human nature. Although she is not inspired by the Aristotelian *telos* of final end or eudaimonia as the state of well-being for which virtuous persons act, her notion of corrective seems to be inspired by the golden mean of Aristotle where Aristotle holds that an agent should understand the measurement between two extremes of excess and deficiency and this leads one to acquire the correctives of human nature in practical situations which Foot holds as the only necessary criterion for any virtues.

On the other hand, we find a different position held by another renowned contemporary virtue ethicist Michael Stocker (1976), who establishes his position regarding the moral worth of sympathetic emotions against the reason-based deontic notion of morality. Stocker points out the problem of modern rule-based theories lies in their universal rule-based approach for every action as they consider the same reason as the motive for morally right actions in every context, even if such universal reason or rule-based motive should not be our motive for morally right actions in a certain context like beneficence. He argues that a person devoid of any sympathetic emotions while performing the duty of beneficence should be regarded as morally deficient. Moreover, he claims that the absence of these essential emotions indicates that the person may be motivated by anything but moral intention. Hence, the reason-based duty should be the only moral motivation for every context of morality, and we need to have the proper emotions in the fullness of our moral actions.

CONCLUSION

I want to conclude this discussion by commenting that we can find evolution in the history of virtue ethics from the ancient to the modern era. The ancient Greek tradition of virtue ethics gives enormous importance to wisdom or prudence for developing the moral excellence of an individual. Socrates identifies virtue with wisdom and vice in its absence. Plato's reason-based ethics regards justice as the highest cardinal virtue where the relation with other fellow beings is considered merely external for maintaining peace in a just society. We do not find any prominent discussions on other-regarding virtues in the ancient era, as thinkers did not realize the enormous importance and significance of other-regarding virtues within the domain of moral philosophy. However, Annas (1993) points out that Aristotle introduces the ethical importance of 'friends' or 'philia' where he states our concern for others, so ancient theory is not self-regarding; however, here the question is how far this concern should extend. Aristotle talks about close ones, family, and dear friends; however, he clarifies the limitation of the equal concern for the farthest neighbors. Nevertheless, the farthest neighbor is also an ethically important component from an impartial point of view; hence, Stoics make their base for the ideas of justice and community life. Afterward, Aristotelians are forced to adopt the importance of ethical impartiality and related justice into their stream where the virtues are meant to be other-directed. However, it is complicated by its application to societies, institutions, and individuals, and Annas indicates the difficulty of giving a conclusive account of justice since it is related to eudaimonism.

The situation has been changed after the worldwide Christian influence as a new trend has emerged in the doctrine of virtue ethics. In this Judeo-Christian tradition, the notion of unconditional love or *agape*, which is the essence of Christianity, has started to be regarded as the highest virtue of humanity. Although this tradition starts as an influence from the Christian religion, it emerges in its secular form in the domain of moral philosophy. Moral thinkers start to discover the immense significance of the value of benevolence as other-regarding virtue within the domain of ethics. Benevolence has started to be regarded as the prime, fundamental virtue of human beings, which lies as a natural disposition within the core of humanity. This evolutionary realization identifies that ethics is not only for one's own self-enlightenment or confines within one's own moral excellence, but ethics is primarily other-regarding. A moral agent should also think about others' welfare- other than one's own self.

Another huge transition we can perceive following the emotivist notion of Hume where he establishes benevolence as the natural virtue of human beings. It introduces a new era of moral psychology where emotions like sympathy, compassion, care are regarded as the undeniable moral features in the domain of morality (Pandit 2021). This sympathetic emotional involvement as a moral component is specifically prominent within the deontic notion of beneficence and benevolence.

NOTE

1. The Greek word Apostle means 'person sent'. Here this denotes any of the twelve disciples chosen by Jesus Christ. Sometimes through this term, it denotes Paul

who converted himself into Christian a few years after the death of Jesus Christ (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Apostle>) Last accessed: December 28, 2021.

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