

AN EGOISTIC ARISTOTELIAN?:

VIRTUE ETHICS V. EGOISM

By

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Virtue Ethics v. Egoism Objection

Introduction

Aristotelian Virtue Ethics has commonly come across objections relating to it being egoistic in nature. This objection poses some legitimate issues for the theory as a whole, but these issues will be addressed and countered in this piece. The concerns raised against the theory have to do with a vagueness in explicit rhetoric regarding altruism and what I will call misconceptions of the theory's motivational and reasoning structures.

Virtue Ethics

It is integral to the success of this piece that we have a thorough and clear understanding of virtue ethics. For our purposes, we will focus on Aristotelian virtue ethics, which he delineates within his work, Nicomachean Ethics. For all intents and purposes, Virtue Ethics is quite a simple theory.

Moral theories aim to posit a structure of thought through which one can strive to act in life. Virtue ethics tells you not only just how to act, but what sort of person to be. Aristotle begins his analysis of morals by posing the question of what the highest good is. After eliminating alternative options and justifying that the good he sought was a good necessarily for humans, for what is good for a deer or Martian,

might not necessarily be good for humans. This good needs to be something that is good for all humans, as well as sought for its own sake, not for the sake of anything else, as well as self-sufficient, once obtained there is nothing else to want.

For things that have a function, their good lies within that function. Humans have a function and the good of humans must reside within their function. Aristotle deems the human function to be excellent rational activity. A function is something's characteristic activity within the world. There are different types of functions. A thing can be a functional part of a whole, i.e. a heart's function is to pump blood within the whole entity of a body. Humans, not being a part of a whole, must have a different kind of function. For all things that have a function, their good lies within that function. Humans' function is rational activity. To cultivate this capacity to the highest of its capability would be to engage in excellent rational activity. Therefore, the highest good of a human is to engage in excellent rational activity. As humans have the use of higher faculties that enable us to think critically and engage with our world in ways that other animals cannot, rational activity, engaging in our function excellently is what brings us closer to the ultimate realization of our human highest good. Actually attaining what Aristotle calls eudaimonia can only happen through a full and complete virtuous life.

Happiness, "more than anything, seems complete without qualification. For we always choose it because of itself, never because of something else" (Aristotle Book I - 1097a-b). Happiness is therefore identified as something that is self-sufficient, because "when all by itself it makes a life choice worthy and lacking nothing" (1097b 15). This sort of happiness Aristotle identifies is slightly different

than the contemporary notions we hold today, i.e. the sort of temporal and sentimental sensations upon kicking a goal or having ice cream. This Aristotelian sort of happiness can more aptly be referred to as eudaimonia, an over-arching type of life achieved by living and striving to be best and most cultivated person one can be, i.e. cultivating virtue.

The next question is how to attain this happiness we have now identified as an effect of virtue. Aristotle deems happiness a "principle; for [the principle] is what we all aim at in all our other actions" (1102a 2). "It is an activity of the soul in accord with complete virtue" (1102a 5). Clarification: Complete virtue is the same thing as that rational excellence mentioned earlier. This virtue mentioned and that which we are concerned with is "human virtue" that is a "virtue of the soul," rather than being some sort of virtue of the body (1102a 15).

Also, it is important to note Aristotle's emphasis on an agent's reasonable appetites towards rational activity and virtue. Within Aristotle's discussion on the soul he deductively comes to the conclusion that it has two parts that, though distinct are inseparable. One part has reason and the other is nonrational. Aristotle employs an analogy to describe the two parts' roles better. As the nonrational part "listens" to reason, the reason side "gives" reason. I see this more as a distinction between the impulsive and instinctual part of the soul and the rational and critical part of the soul. What Aristotle means by drawing this distinction is that both parts of the soul adhere to and have the capabilities to follow reason. As both sides have the capabilities, their appetites for doing so necessarily need to be appropriate for a virtuous person. Simply put, our emotions and appetites are responsive to reason,

making reason and the cultivation of virtue all the more important to live a happy and fulfilled life, for they can aid in controlling emotion, hunger, etc. Reason tells us not to put our hand on a hot stove due to the fact that the fire burns flesh, from there we develop in the non-rational side of the soul to not even desire to do so.

Now that we understand the role of virtues, we must understand what they are in and of themselves. Virtues are states, states that develop propensities toward certain dispositions. More particularly, virtue is a disposition. That is to say, it is different than a state of emotion or state of physical health. Virtues are dispositions that lead to a tendency in behavior, a tendency towards the highest of good behavior. It might be better expressed in example. Courage is virtue. We, as humans, have a capacity to be courageous. Let us see it this way, we have feelings, feelings of fear and confidence and these feelings lead us towards dispositions to act in certain ways combined with feelings to do so as well in any given situation. Virtues are excellent dispositions. This capacity is developed through habituation and is then expressed through our actions and activities. The cultivation of these virtues happens through habituation. "We are by nature able to acquire them, and we are completed through habit" (1103a 25). Just as practicing any task, the doer will become better and attain an improved aptitude towards the completion or performance of said task, such is similar to virtues.

Eudaimonia is commonly understood as the goal towards which virtuous agents work, a life full of exercised virtuous activity. This understanding is where the heart of the objections to be responded to will find their origins. It has been described and translated into contemporary notions many times and in many ways,

including 'happiness' and as a form of flourishing. I like this notion of flourishing and it will come up quite a bit throughout this piece. Just as animals can flourish, so can humans but it is not just a feeling, but expression of a state of personal excellence, as understood by most. I will utilize this term of flourishing in the future to refer to this sort of excellent rational activity. Excellence and flourishing may be understood to be mutually synonymous from here on.

In order to flourish, we must cultivate virtue by acting in such a way as to hone their aim. Aristotle presented only a few virtues and they are as follows; Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, Courage, Benevolence, Temperance, Magnanimity, and Magnificence. Now, it is time to discuss the literal cultivation of virtue. All virtues have corresponding excesses and deficiencies. When an agent enters a situation one must "aim" for the mean between these excesses and deficiencies. For example, if an aspiring virtuous agent came into a situation where they were faced with a group of teenagers violently bullying another younger child, they would aspire to act as courage demands so as to cultivate their virtue of courage. An excess for the virtue of courage in this situation might be considered "rashness," where the agent would immediately run into the confrontation without care for their own life or the facts in the situation, such as whether the teenagers have weapons, among other salient concerns. Conversely, a deficiency of confidence or excess of fear would be considered "cowardice," when an agent walks on by without doing anything to resolve the confrontation.

Let us quickly draw a distinction that will become relevant later on. Some take issue with those virtuous agents who have cultivated their golden mean and

virtues to their greatest extent and those virtuous agents who are in the process cultivating. There have been complaints that these two types of agents may not have the same motivations. At this time, it is only important to point out that Aristotle makes a great point about the activity of agents on their virtues. After all, they are tendencies toward action, they would not be much without action. Aristotle uses an example of the sleeping man and how regardless of whether he has cultivated and perfected his virtues, he cannot be happy in his unconscious state, for it is only when he is exercising his virtues that he is happy. This distinction will be key later in this piece due to both cases' apparently different motivations. For intuitively and logically, a moral theory should hold consistency across the board for the motivations of its agents.

Over time and through practice, an agent is to hone their aim and obtain Aristotle's famous "golden mean." While living one's life, engaging in excellent rational activity, i.e. aiming virtuously in every opportunity to do so, one cultivates virtue, engages in virtuous activity and, thus, works to attain eudaimonia. Thus, these sorts of efforts delineated yield a flourishing agent and, as will be discussed, more.

Egoism

Given that the objection in question is birthed from the moral theory of egoism, it is essential that we understand what egoism, in fact, is. Let us begin with ethical egoism. It is normative moral theory that makes a statement about how an agent "ought" to act. Within this theory, an agent "ought" to act *only* in a way that maximizes their own self-interest. Given ethical egoism's normative claim about

how one "ought" to act, let us look to deductively identify the motivations behind an action the theory would deem right. When we extrapolate the theory's statement on motivational factors, we see the *sole* motivational factor for acting must be found within an effort to maximize the agent's self-interest. Some would hold that given ethical egoism's mere normative claim about the right action maximizing an agent's self-interest, that it leaves no issue with virtue ethics, for cultivating virtue seems to be within the agent's best interest. I beg to differ and hope to explain why the two part ways way before this point. Furthermore, not only does ethical egoism deem actions that solely consider its agent's maximized self-interest morally permissible, it mandates that they act in such a manner. For example, an agent should drive on the shoulder of a traffic-ridden freeway to make a meeting on time, while others sit in the traffic and wait.

Another kind of formulation of egoism is something deemed psychological egoism. This is a descriptive claim about how humans act. It states that all actions humans ever do is motivated solely from their own self-interest. Others have tried to pose quandaries for the theory by proposing scenarios where it appears the agent is acting for others. For example, if an agent were to retrieve a cat from a tree for an elderly woman, one might say that is certainly not an action that was solely motivated by maximizing the agent's self-interest. Psychological egoism counters to this have been explained by stating that saving the cat had solely to do with eliminating the screaming of the elderly lady for aid because her screaming caused the agent displeasure, among a slew of other haphazard reasons. I will not cast judgment on these reasons, but it is important to point out that different forms of

egoism are known for positing their moral theory as not only normative, but, also, in some formulations, an account of an innate and natural human behavior. We will later look into the validity of claims, such as the aforementioned, but for now, we have an adequate understanding of what egoism is.

Objection

The objection, simply put, holds that virtue ethics is an egoistic theory, i.e. that in a virtuous agent's acting to cultivate their own virtuous character they are actually motivated from ethical egoism and have no other reason to act than their own self-interest. The objections to be addressed in this piece will be delineated through formal objection published by Hurka and take issue with virtue ethics reasons for action and motives for action, among others.

The objection puts forth an understanding that holds virtuous agents to be egoistic, i.e. selfish. It makes a claim about the motivational powers behind the actions of virtuous agents, claiming them to be derived from motivations to solely improve one's own self-interest. As this piece combats this objection, it will use the works of several philosophers to explicitly draw out the objection at hand, so as to clarify the points being countered within. Ultimately, the objection holds that virtue ethics uses of the concept of flourishing combined with Aristotle's vagueness at times leads to an ethical egoistic framework for action - in other words, acting in a way as to cultivate the virtuousness of the agent, by the agent, in order to find motive within the realm of self-interest. This thesis will prove the contrary.

Not only does this conflict with one's intuitive notions of virtues and virtue ethics as mentioned previously, but it conflicts with Aristotle's conception of virtue

ethics. Nowhere does Aristotle state that one is to solely take into account the agent's self-interest, in fact there is a plentitude of areas in his works that discuss effects outside of the agent, as well as in his conceptions of virtues that point to virtues' nature of ends in themselves. Additionally, eudaimonia is a type of activity sought for its own sake as well. It is implausible that the attainment or the process towards the attainment of the over-arching good in this life would be selfishness or self-interested moral motivations. It appears necessary for a distinction to be made between self-interested actions and actions that happen to better their agent. Self-interested actions are ones that are born from a desire to promote one's personal interest and no one else's. This is necessarily selfish and obviously undesirable by virtue ethics.

I would like to take a moment to introduce a philosophical theory that will carry weight both here and later on. Bernard Williams' essay entitled "Egoism and altruism" draws a distinction between I-Desire statements and Non-I Desire statements. This distinction is one that hinges on the propositional content of a desire and one that, when used in the discussion of virtue ethics and the egoist's objection lends unique perspective on the motivational content of the agents at hand.

To better understand the theory, allow me to explain it quickly. An I-Desire statement is a statement that in the propositional portion contains the subject of the agent. For example, an I-Desire statement would be something like, "I want that I be the owner of an iPad." Whereas, a Non-I Desire statement would be something like, "I want that John win the lead role." The former is worrisomely egoistic in nature in

its agent-driven proposition, while the latter rests easy without worry of egoistic motivation due to the propositional content of the statement being found outside of the agent themselves.

This theory best enables us to identify, through Williams' mechanism, the disjunct between any two statements, as well as the ability to distinguish statements that are clearly altruistic and/or egoistic in nature later on. It appears that we can distinguish an altruistic action from an egoistic one by looking at where the propositional content of a statement rests. For the iPad statement above, the propositional content rests solely within the agent and taken nothing else into account, but their ownership of a piece of electronics. Herein lies the main focus of this distinction. The iPad represents the agent's self-interest and that is all. The shallowness of this desire within the statement itself is where this tool will be found useful later. This is clearly egoistic and can fall under both psychological and ethical egoism. Whereas the latter statement wishes for something outside of the agent and something that does not directly impact the agent.

Issues to be Addressed

Now that both virtue ethics as theory, egoism as a theory, and the objection to virtue ethics have all been drawn out and explained, there are quite a few issues to address and it is here where I will delineate the approach to answering these concerns.

Evidence will first be offered in support of Aristotle's overall thoughts on community and friendship that will illuminate his mindset on the matter giving us a

more appropriate understanding of how virtue ethics was intended to function with regard to altruism where Aristotle failed to expand.

There is vagueness with virtue ethics' structure of reasoning that will be addressed through a fusion of an imperative model developed by Rosalind Hursthouse in her book On Virtue Ethics in the chapter entitled "The Virtuous Agent's Reasons for Action" and Bernard Williams' essay "Egoism and altruism."

Ultimately, an understanding of virtue ethics contrary to the one of most objectors will be introduced and will prove quite resilient to the egoism objection. Understanding the flourishing as a side-effect of the cultivation of the highest good a human can achieve alleviates most all of the pressure applied by the egoism objection. This will be further explained as we continue.

Aristotle On Others, Politics, and Friendship

The mindset of a theorist is something that is highly underestimated today. However, I feel that the other works of authors often lend themselves to insight into the author's mindset on other topics and other sentiments can be appropriately extrapolated to aid one's cause. In this case, Aristotle's other works will prove useful for understanding the intentions of virtue ethics where Aristotle maybe does not necessarily expand enough upon some grey areas. I hold that some of these sentiments to be shown allow insight into Aristotle's thoughts with regard to the role of others in a virtuous life, thus lending traction to some future assumptions about the virtuous agent and their motivations. There are a few points that I would like to highlight and present as evidence to support my contention that virtue ethics

is in no way a form of ethical egoism, as well as my further assertions on delineation of some explicit virtue ethics restructuring.

Let us look into Aristotle's Politics in the hopes of illuminating his views on the community and government with regards to moral action. In doing so, we set out to show Aristotle's sentiment to community leaves no room for the egoism objection to hold ground. In the piece's opening Aristotle states, "Every state is a community of some kind, and every community is established with a view to some good; for everyone acts in order to obtain that which they think good" (Aristotle 1). For this to prove as useful as it appears on first read, we must look at how to understand the clause Aristotle uses, "which they think good." One way is to understand it as directly pointing to a collective effort towards the attainment of one goal, communal flourishing, or the ideally thriving community. This understanding would include both the good of the agent and their community, which seems to combat the objection of egoism quite well, for what "they" think good would necessarily be constituted by some communal state of affairs, i.e. virtue. If we look back at Williams' Non-I Desire mechanism here, it proves useful in seeing the altruistic motives involved in Aristotle's meaning here. An example statement might be something like, "I want that the community flourish." Though the agent is a member of the community the propositional content of the statement there rests in the community, thus outside of the agent at hand. For what we consider good, in this case, must be a good that is so for the community as a whole. The way the statement is structured the community serves as the derivative locale of this good, which bodes well for grounds for a counter to the objection. At this point there arise

alternative interpretations of the change: perhaps every virtuous agent within the community will work to better themselves in order to bring this about, i.e. an interpretation from the home base of ethical egoism. However, Aristotle does not explicitly open that sort of behavior for possibility. Notice, he states, "everyone acts in order to obtain that which they think good." "They" may be understood as the community, not necessarily the agent and as they act "in order to obtain" the good that we understand as communal in nature, this points directly to a communal, non-ethically egoistic approach to virtue ethics. Of the two ways to interpret the use of the term "they" within the quotation, neither understanding hurts the purpose of this piece. One way, would be to see the quote referring to the community members acting in a way that has the communal betterment as its motivational power. The other way would hold that all community members act in a way to better themselves. Regardless here, the good Aristotle means to be pursued is one that will ultimately hold the community's good at the forefront of their motivations. This is easily understood through the context of the statement. Ergo, if anything, this only furthers the argument at hand in favor of the counter against egoism.

Furthermore, Aristotle states that "... all communities aim at some good, the state or political community, which is the highest of all, and which embraces all the rest, aims at the good in a greater degree than any other, and the highest good" (1). This hypothetical illuminates Aristotle's thoughts and conceptions about communal aims towards flourishing. It points directly to a notion of greater aim, outside of the self, more importantly, outside of the agent. Aristotle was focused on a communal effort towards improving on a grander scale than simply the agent themselves. This

"highest" good referred to must be better understood in order to proceed with this as material for the counter to the objection. Highest here is used in such a way as to refer to the same sort of innate characteristics of virtue, excellent rational activity. It is not the highest due to its sheer reach of community members, but because of the content of its worth, its desirable nature in and of itself, its virtuousness. Within political activity is where the agent can fully realize their greatest potential, for it allows them to engage at the highest level to express an agent's virtue. This highest level does not translate to some quantitative numerical superiority, rather is it a qualitative statement about the caliber of good to be sought. Too often do we get swept up in these ideologies relating size and quantity as equivalent to and synonymous with quality. It is not coincidence that the same diction is found in Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics in his discussion of virtue as the highest good as there is here in Politics when he discusses the aims and the highest good of communities and political states. Political community is the condition that is just right to promote the best environment to best express and cultivate virtue.

There exist a couple passages within Aristotle's Politics that seem to play into Aristotle's commendation of a psychological egoism within political structure. Aristotle states with regard to communal property that "For that which is common to the greatest number has the least care bestowed upon it" (23). He goes on to expand on this notion when he states that "each citizen will have a thousand sons who will not be his son individually, but anybody will be equally the son of anybody, and will therefore be neglected alike" (23). This might, at first, look to damage this piece's goal of asserting a communal approach to virtue ethics that combats the

egoism objection, but, in reality, it does not follow that Aristotle makes a claim about the role of community in virtue ethics and its motivations for action. Moreover, it seems a statement about economics and human nature that must be accounted for within economic systems. We may still be altruistic and demonstrate altruism with our friends and children, but there necessarily exists difference in economic matter and others. These statements do not preclude that. In fact, we might understand this as a mere scope of altruism for Aristotle. He is not outlawing the existence of it, nor positing its necessarily overarching reach and it makes sense. It is plausible to understand one's investment and desire to give and support one's friends and family. Outside of them, one's propensity to do so dwindles, but does not necessarily disappear either. Rather, this is statement about the plain and simple truth of human capability. Even in a community comprised of 15 houses all with one child, a human's ability to contribute in an impactful and qualitative manner is slim to none. Ultimately, this just demonstrates what Aristotle thought on economic activities, which does not necessarily translate into all activities. Who is to say he is wrong here? Regardless, we are concerned with matter of morality and virtue, not economics.

With regards to property in particular, Aristotle states that, "Property should in a certain sense be common, but, as a general rule, private; for, when everyone has a distinct interest, men will not complain of one another, and they will make more progress, because everyone will be attending to their business" (26). Thus, property and personal endeavors, such as businesses, must be private. However, within the community, there is a vested interest by all in its survival. This draws a distinction

between what necessarily needs to be personal and what role the community plays within the virtuous agent's life communally and personally. This notion of certain things necessarily being "private" opens up some room for discussion. I think this touches on some ideas of autonomy. There are responsibilities due to the community and I think Aristotle would agree with that. But, there are also certain piece of one's autonomy as a person that necessarily must exist. That is not to say that one is to give a weaker effort towards the betterment of his own children over the community, or vice versa. But, it is to say that within a sort of economic mentality, having certain responsibilities that solely belong to one person ensures their performance, i.e. there are instances when more than one person working on something is counterproductive. Aristotle uses the example of children. He states that if children were communally raised, they would be neglected and raised improperly. Not only do private businesses bolster community in patronage from other community members, it also bolsters personal esteem of the owner. Suppose, there is a baker and a basket weaver. We necessarily have mutual interest in patronizing each other. One needs bread and has baskets. The other has bread, but has no baskets. The two exchange and both help one another and bolster community. This seems to further the notion that there are things that are to remain within the agent and things that necessarily remain outside of the agent. For, given the statements above, interests lie in the business and commerce of others within the community, but the rearing of one's children is to remain with the agent themselves. This duality of interests and motivations only strengthens assertions against ethical egoism for virtue ethics, for it appears that the virtuous agents

interests lie both inside and outside their own selves and not solely within themselves. For, the agent has motivating forces to support their family, be a virtuous person, cultivate community and some of these given the economic example above necessarily take place inside and necessarily take place outside of the agent themselves.

The *Politics* have offered unique and worthwhile insight into Aristotle's views on community as a whole and how political structure should support/augment the community's progress. The community needs to push themselves forward, but also acknowledge the importance of everyone's flourishing and ensure it.

Now that the *Politics* have been thoroughly fleshed out, let us transition our focus onto friendship, what Aristotle says about it, and how that might lend us the insight we are searching for in this piece. Before we proceed, it is a necessary understanding that friendship is an essential and universally experienced relationship that all humans have. Aristotle goes as far as to say that it is "most necessary for our life" (1155a 5). That being said, Aristotle makes a distinction between types of friendships. Aristotle holds there to be three types of friendship, those being ones that wish good unto each other only in so much as they love one another for their own sake, ones that love each other for the utility of the other, and those for their own pleasure. A friendship that is complete, however, must have both agents mutually wishing for the good of the other for the other's sake and both parties must acknowledge this mutual reciprocation. The friendships from pleasure are said to be mostly had by youth, for emotion and sentiments guide their decisions. Both friendships for their pleasure and utility of the other are both done

out of a selfishness that brings the agent pleasure, thus these are not types of friendship we seek.

Let us turn our attention to the Bernard Williams I-Desire/Non-I Desire theory described earlier. I bring this theory up presently to point to the usefulness it might have in understanding the incomplete and undesirable types of friendship that Aristotle discusses. Within a friendship of pleasure, the agent would have I-Desire statements that contain propositional content that relates to their pleasure, temporal and shallow as it may be, ergo undesirable. For a nice collegiate example, a friendship based solely on physical attraction to the other is something that is shallow and will fade quickly in time. The I-Desire statement for this friendship would be, "I want to sleep with Party B." The propositional content relates solely back to the agent and only proves the objectification of the "Party B" in this case.

The same goes for friendships of utility. A great example of a friendship of utility would be a community with a basket weaver and a baker. The baker needs a basket for bread and the basket weaver needs bread to eat. So, they enter into a friendship of utility. This friendship is not built on compatibility of character, morals, conviction, etc. Rather, it is based on the utility of what both parties bring to the table. Going back to Williams, there is no case where within a friendship of utility, an agent would hold propositional content in their motivational maxim that was not an I-Desire statement. Aristotle deems these sorts of friendships to be short lived, for their pleasure and utility lack the completeness that enables them to ensure longevity or even desirability in the long-run, i.e. produce as much pleasure and/or utility as they are going to produce and burn out like a light bulb. This sort of

completeness is referred to, again, in the qualitative sense. Complete friendship is higher, fulfilled, and engaged friendship that is desirable in and of itself for its excellence. We, as agents, must pursue complete friendships, for there is no reason to seek or maintain anything that is incomplete. Thus, in our pursuit Aristotle must explain why one not only desires complete friendships, but how they better their members. Furthermore, Williams' Non-I Desire model illuminates a larger concept at play here, as will be shown, the desirable friendship is one where agents hold Non-I Desire beliefs about each other. Thus, more support surfaces behind Aristotle's notions of others and their significant role in the ideal life.

This Williams theory also helps combat the validity of psychological egoism. For, wherein lies the innate egoism that psychological egoism posits to exist in every action within a Non-I Desire statement? Nowhere. Let's take an example, "I want that Derrick Williams win NBA Rookie of the Year." There lies no propositional content within that statement that relates to any egoistic desire on the part of the agent. Derrick's winning of the award yields nothing to the agent. The psychological egoist might claim some sort of hedonistic desire about the agent gaining pleasure by seeing Derrick perform, but that is a discussion that unfortunately falls out of the realm of discussion with regard to virtue ethics, for hedonism is in no way a part of virtue ethics and quite obviously holding something to be desirable on its pleasure increasing capabilities is not consistent with the moral theory of virtue ethics as has been discussed throughout this piece. Additionally, hedonism is in no way apart of a virtuous life and thus, fails to hold ground in an objection against virtue ethics. Therefore, there is no worry here of an egoistic desire. It is a completely benign and

altruistic desire. Revealing this mistake of psychological egoism blatantly shows its proposed existence within virtue ethics as quite weak and easily combatable using the Non-I Desire argument.

In regards to the “complete friendship,” Aristotle goes much further. These two agents are good for each other without qualification. Aristotle compares friendship to virtue, such as when he states that “complete friendship is the friendship of good people similar in virtue” (1156b 7). This is so because of the way they wish things for the other, i.e. they wish things for the other’s sake, not their own. They become good for themselves over time; it becomes some sort of hybrid symbiotic relationship where the components act for the benefit of the other because of the other. This point opens up as potential support for the counter I attempt to establish to the egoism objection to virtue ethics, for Aristotle establishes what a good party within a friendship desires, and why they desire it.

The section fleshes out Aristotle’s notion of motive, which is then applicable to his entire ethics, for it gives great insight into his notions of others and community. Aristotle states, in relation to friendship, that “it is a virtue, or involves virtue” (1155a 1). This is extremely illuminating. For, if friendship involves virtue, it necessarily means virtue involves valuing others for themselves and not their utility or in an instrumental manner. Thus, this is the very basis of my counter to the objection at hand. Additionally, it is important to mention that time is also something that Aristotle placed some emphasis on, these friendships do not occur over the course of one evening, but rather over time. This is similar to and characteristic of virtue in that it takes time and habituation to cultivate.

Aristotle continues to address the topic of selfishness, which I felt lent some relevance to the topic at hand as well. Aristotle brings about the point that we are to love ourselves and wish for our best, for we naturally have a vested interest in our happiness. This seems an intuitive point, but one that many overlook when discussing selfishness. We see selfishness as strictly a vice or character flaw. Perhaps it is, but that is not to rule out all actions for self. Aristotle states, most interestingly, that "since one is a friend to himself most of all... he should also love himself most of all" (1168b 9). This further aids in this piece's efforts to highlight Aristotle's overall sentiments with regards to the agent and others. As was mentioned earlier, there is absolutely a portion of Aristotle's works that points to focusing on the agent themselves, as well as others. Distinguishing how much and in what way will be the task of this thesis. However, as is characteristic of Aristotle's virtue ethics, he seems to emphasize a moderation or mean between extremes, which intuitively makes sense as to why he mentions the overly selfish person leading to being so self-centered that one's actions become base and harm others. Let us also take note of the difference between self-love and self-indulgence, for this will be key later on. One can love oneself, without overly indulging themselves to a fault, to an unvirtuous end. It seems virtues, temperance in particular, embrace self-love and hold it in great esteem. To have the appropriate love of self in self-esteem is necessary to live a full life, a eudaimonic life. What kind of virtuous life would one have if it were plagued by self-loathing? The appropriate cultivation of temperance in self-esteem does not equate to self-indulgence, for this is clearly a lack of temperance, an excess of impulsive gratification that does not align with virtuous

activity. There is more on self-indulgence and its place in the discussion of virtue ethics to come.

Aristotle continues to make a distinction between one with the power to reward himself with things that he is not deserving of and one with the knowledge and understanding of what he is deserving. However, the one statement that seems to silence any doubt is one that states, "...when everyone strains to achieve what is fine for the common good, and each person individually will receive the greatest of goods, since that is the character of virtue" (1169a 9). All will flourish through virtuous activity, if everyone is working toward the common good, a good that includes valuing others and themselves in the appropriate ways discussed. That is in and of itself the essence of the counter to the egoism objection.

Motivation

I would now like to turn to the biggest issues at hand, motives and reasons. The philosopher Thomas Hurka delineates the issues within virtue ethics pertaining to motives and reasons for action well within his book Virtue, Vice, and Value, chapter "Against Virtue Ethics." I would like to use his chapter as a sort of guideline for responding to the objections at hand. Hurka holds there to be two things, in particular, that are issues for virtue ethics as a theory. First, he holds there to be difficulties for the theory with the virtuous person's motivation behind action. Secondly, he holds there to be issues concerning the ultimate source of reasons for acting. It is important to quickly distinguish these objections, for they seem similar for those unfamiliar with the difference between motives for action and reasons for

action. Motivation is psychological cause; whereas, reason is the justification as to what makes an action reasonable or right.

Let us begin with motivation. Hurka highlights "Flourishing Virtue Ethics" as being egoistically motivated. Hurka's "Flourishing Virtue Ethics" and the virtue ethics discussed and supported in this piece do not align. As will be shown, Hurka's understanding of "flourishing" leaves open the flood gates of objections to virtue ethics. If he were to tweak his understanding, he might find a bit sturdier of ground to stand on with the theory. I have no objections to his assertions against the theory he describes, for a flourishing-based notions of virtue ethics that holds flourishing as the end-goal for virtuous agents are, indeed, egoistic. However, I do contend that to think of flourishing as the end-goal in virtue ethics is a mistake. Even Hurka states that "this egoistic motivation is inconsistent with genuine virtue" (Hurka 246). If flourishing-based virtue ethics is, as was described above, then it is clearly egoistic and inconsistent with virtue. Hurka also asserts that if flourishing-based virtue ethics was to respond to this objection by stating that one must have virtuous motives and aiming at flourishing is not a virtuous motivation or, essentially, by stating that the agent does not act on the required motives for virtue ethics, he holds the theory to be self-effacing, i.e. attempting to bring about consequences by not aiming at them. Hurka goes on to say that if virtue ethics is going to reject the egoistic and self-indulgent motivations it "must" be self-effacing. But, this is not the case, in flourishing-based, self-effacing virtue ethics, the thought that is said to be effaced is that "I am motivated by my own flourishing, but I cannot aim at that in order to attain it," "I can't think I am happy doing this." However, this line of

thinking is counter to the virtue ethics that has been discussed throughout this piece. This is the wrong line of thought. The real focus here is the manner in which one understands eudaimonia. It is the foreseen consequence of cultivating the virtues and is probably best explained shortly with the introduction of the double-effect theory.

One does not cultivate virtue to be happy, but because it is the highest good. One might object to this statement on grounds that Aristotle identifies eudaimonia with the highest good. However, the ultimate distinction being made here is the source of motivation, highest good, not happiness. Thus, the statement aligns nicely with flourishing being a side-effect of virtue cultivation.

It is the function of a human to engage in intellectual activity and virtuous activity is the highest quality and ideal intellectual activity. Flourishing is a side-effect of this cultivation, it is a mere happening as a result of a human engaging in their highest good. Virtues are to be sought for their innate worth in and of themselves. In this understanding of virtue ethics it is clear that the issue of not only self-indulgence, but self-effacing are both null and void. Additionally, the corruption of motivation is not something to be concerned with, for the virtuous person is not be swayed by something so fickle. It seems no issue to say, "Virtues are to be sought simply for their innate value and a side-effect of their cultivation is the complete flourishing of one's person." The value of virtue trumps any blatant disregard for it in a rogue agent's desire for flourishing and flourishing alone. More importantly, I am not saying don't aim for flourishing, if you do, you won't attain it. I am saying that it is a side-effect of cultivating the virtues. A better understanding might come

from what some call the double-effect theory. This theory basically draws a distinction between intended and foreseen consequences. For example, if I make a surprise breakfast for my father before wakes up, I intend to feed him, give him some happiness in the surprise of the meal and potentially display affection or love. The unforeseen consequences in that surprise breakfast are that I might wake him up too early and thus, make him sleepy all day. I might not cook the meal effectively and cause him digestive issues. There exist many possibilities, but the important thing is that there is a distinct difference between intended consequences and unforeseen ones. Where the virtuous agent acts virtuously, flourishing and happiness are not their intended goal in doing so. However, eudaimonia is a foreseen consequence that is obviously desirable, but not necessarily actively sought in the moment of action. For, it cannot be obtained through active or direct pursuit in the moment of action, that motivation undermines the innate value of virtues. Thus, in the moment of action, one aims are the golden mean of virtue, knowing that eudaimonia will come from it, but not aiming towards its attainment, for its attainment rests in the cultivation of virtue with does not permit such motivations for action.

Another troublesome spot that virtue ethics has, as per Hurka, is that virtue ethics cannot "explain why self-indulgence is objectionable" (247). Hurka derives this view from a scenario he developed that appears to have contradicting statements on what is of greatest concern for the virtuous agent within any situation. He holds there to be a claim that holds true for all moral theories, that being that "it is best to care more about what has greater value" (248). The scenario

he uses explains a person who is "contemplating" giving pleasure to another person. He holds that virtue ethics only allows her to do so by "virtuously acting from a desire for the other person's pleasure" (248). Thus, the true issue afoot here that Hurka is drawing attention to is that it appears an agent can favor their own pleasure over that of the other's, even when it seems objectively that the other's matter more. However, the other person's pleasure holds less significance to the person giving pleasure, than their own pleasure. Thus, the theory Hurka holds, fails to disprove self-indulgence. This is true, but for a misguided understanding of "flourishing-based egoism" that I have already condemned and conceded its failings. If we peer back into the discussion of friendship, we would necessarily see value and significance in another's pleasure. Before I address this objection further, it is necessary to first understand what we hold "self-indulgence" to be. I hold "self-indulgence" to be actions that are motivated solely from self-interest. As for demonstrating virtue ethics' explanation of how self-indulgence is objectionable, unacceptable, and, ultimately, unvirtuous, allow me. Temperance is a virtue. Self-indulgence, in this case of thinking, a deficiency in the virtue of temperance, as is exemplified in statements like, "I am *so* virtuous." Simply put, thoughts like this are thoughts that the virtues are not disposed to bringing about. One may hold the appropriate thoughts about their self-realization of a virtuous and happy life, but they will never be embodied in statements that exude pompous and self-indulgent implications about the character of the agent. Instead, a virtuous person might say, "I am content in my cultivation of the virtues." Anything further than that, the agent leaves the realm of temperate thought about self, humility. Thus, it is evident that

motivation is not only becoming clearer, but we are discovering that there lies motivation away from egoism or egoistically motivated action. In finding motivation that rests outside of egoistically motivated actions, it proves a legitimate counter to ethical egoism objection against virtue ethics, for ethical egoism is a theory based solely on maximizing the self-interest of the agent. The virtuous agent has been shown to have motivations outside of themselves and is therefore not "solely" self-motivated.

It is now time to shift attentions to a connected objection to the one at-hand, that being one that takes issue with a differing form of motivation between those cultivating their virtues and those who have already perfected them. On the surface, this appears a valid criticism, for what is one to do once their virtues are fully cultivated to their absolute best? It seems evident that the virtues maintain their innate value and the agent maintains their desire to hone them due to their inherent value. By "hone," we are meant to understand a sort of maintenance, for one cannot hone something that is already perfect, but to exercise the virtues and not allow them to stagnate or regress is a better understanding of my word choice here. However, moving on, there is no depreciation in value upon ultimate cultivation of the virtues. Both categories of virtuous agents seek the virtuous action because of its highest good. There changes nothing within the agent's motivation for cultivating virtues. Aristotle even discusses habituation at length in the Nicomachean Ethics and, in doing so, illustrates how over time these dispositions towards virtue become commonplace and ingrained character traits of the agent at hand. Their own ensured maintenance comes about through their obtainment. This seems off track

from the egoism objection discussion, but, indeed, points to the inherent value of the virtues and the motivation of agents to cultivate them. It is important to note that virtues are not to be sought as a means to eudaimonia here. The innate characteristics of virtues would forbid their cultivation by a means of using them as a means. This fact alone indicates their uniqueness and alludes to their intrinsic value within.

Virtues are to be cultivated because of their intrinsic goodness, not merely from the desire to maximize the agent's pleasure or self-interest, for virtues sometimes pose virtuous action that is not concurrent with maximizing the agent's self-interest, i.e. in matters of communal flourishing, courage, or justice, it is entirely possible that a virtuous disposition would lead to a golden mean of action within a virtue that injured the agent or otherwise contributed to the interest of others over the agent themselves.

Reasons and Structure

This leads to the next topic, "reasons," which is in a sense a discussion about the structure of thought within virtue ethics. We are led to reasons at this point in the conversation by the mere fact of the matter that ethical egoism holds reasons for action to be solely self-interested and as the objecting platform, virtue ethics must combat the proposed existence of self-interested reasons for action within the theory. Let us, once again, look at Hurka in order to have a better understanding of the objection. He addresses an example of a virtuous agent presented with a situation where a person has "most reason" to benefit another by giving them pleasure and there then being lack of explanation as to why he had this "reason." He

draws a distinction between his “flourishing-based” theorists response of the action leading to the agent’s most flourishing and how intuitively that is not the right explanation as to why to act here. He holds the only correct answer is that it “will make the other’s life better” (248). How right he is! This is somewhat unfair to assess an objection of his conception of flourishing-based virtue ethics, since we have already delineated a more appropriate understanding that alleviates much of the egoism objections. However, let us illustrate why and how the understanding of flourishing as a side-effect of virtue ethics, rather than the desired aim, prevails as a counter to the egoism objection.

Turning back to the reasons objection, Hurka uses a case where the agent has “most reason” to give pleasure to another person. As we stated, he hold that the only acceptable reasoning behind doing so is that “it will make the other’s life easier” (248). The next question is, what is inconsistent with “I want that this person have an easier life”? I see no issue here. It seems completely consistent with virtuous activity to want an easier life for another. Tying in motivation, the virtue of benevolence, indeed, lends the reasoning as to why to give this person pleasure. Moreover, this virtuous action, this virtuous cultivation, is lending to the flourishing of both parties involved and is in no way ethical egoism. Moreover, to address I-Desires within virtue ethics, they pose no issues either, for a virtuous agent can want that they have justice in a court case and still maintain accordance with virtue ethics.

Hurka addresses a response by Dr. Annas where she responds to issues of the locale of rationale behind flourishing egoism, and it states that “flourishing-

based virtue ethics 'does not imply that its forming part of my good is the reason why I should care about the good of others. I care about others for their own sake. Their good is a part of my own final good' " (248). This seems to answer the issue quite well. She holds that there is something innate and to be valued in life and in the lives of others. This is entirely true. However, Hurka responds by stating that Annas addressed the motivation for action, but not the "philosophical source of [the virtuous agent's] reasons for action" (249). However, it seems that Annas addresses both motivation, in part, as well as, philosophical origins of justification. It is the intrinsic value within virtuous activity that the virtuous acts from and the reason behind said actions must necessarily involve the virtues themselves.

The most explicit and clear formulation of virtue ethics' reasoning for action is found within Rosalind Hursthouse's book On Virtue Ethics in her chapter "The Virtuous Agent's Reasons For Action." She, essentially, formulates virtue ethics' equivalent to Kant's Categorical Imperative. Allow me to explain. Whereas most philosophers rest on their tried and true staple phrases such as "from duty," "from principle," and "from a thought of rightness," Hursthouse puts forth the notion that the phrase "from virtue" carries the same level of motivational weight. Hursthouse puts it distinctly as "acting from virtue – from a settled state of good character" (Hursthouse 123). This is important to note, because this sort of derivation is what Hurka is looking for, something like duty to justify one's action. The character portion of that statement plays an important role in the way that she fleshes out her meaning when she states that this "from virtue" motivation "goes far beyond the moment of action" (123). By "far beyond" she is alluding to the "claim about what

sort of person the agent is" (123). Moreover, role of importance that the state of the character plays in this counter to the egoism objection is significant and should be understood as a primary combatant. This state of the character only empowers the notions of virtue's intrinsic value and justifies the correctness in the ultimate cultivation of the human function through virtuous activity. Hursthouse's address of both the range of reasons and the fixed state, as will be delineated, serve in a role that contains both motivation and reason. The "fixed state" alludes to the source of an actions motivation. A fixed and virtuous state is to what she refers and from it there is a motivation to cultivate the virtuous and engage in the highest of goods, excellent rational activity. The range of reasons represent, quite bluntly, the reasons for any given virtue.

Hursthouse delineates a set of conditions she formulates as necessary for virtuous action, the most important being one referring to "reasons." An agent must have the "right reasons" when acting for that action to be virtuous (124). She continues to hash out the explicit formulation of such a condition referring to actions "for their own sake" meaning that the "virtuous agent chooses virtuous actions for at least one of a certain type or range of reasons, X" (127). This range, Hursthouse says, refers to the given virtue at hand. But, this notion leads to the question as to "what the right reasons are?" Hursthouse goes on to draw a distinction between acting "because one thought it was right" and "acting from the right reasons." The following is a quotation framing the main questions at hand,

"So could we say that, if an agent does a V act for an X reason, she has, in effect, acted 'because she thought it was right' or 'on principle' or even 'from (a sense of) duty'? She hasn't acted merely from desire or inclination; she hasn't acted under compulsion, she has acted for a virtuous reason, not an improper or ulterior one – what more could one ask for in the way of 'moral motivation'?" (132).

This goes back to one of the conditions mentioned alluding to the agent "knowing" what they are doing. Hursthouse draws an example of someone doing an action "because they thought it was right," while just the next day condemning someone for doing the same thing. This appears blatantly contradictory, indeed it is, for this point touches on the theme of "intent." Though virtuous agents act in ways as to cultivate virtue and the golden mean, it is not a consequentialist theory and this is how Hursthouse illuminates that point. We look for and need deeper understanding of action when deeming it "right." This is nothing new or strange, in all moral theory there must be a fully rational motivation for an action that deems it "right," other than, perhaps, ethical egoism based on what the agent "feels" will maximize their own self-interests.

To round out Hursthouse's approach, she formulates a sort of universal Aristotelian principle by which virtuous agents must act. "The Neo-Aristotelian ideal agent chooses a V act for X reasons, from a fixed and permanent state – from virtue" (136). This principle, just as Kant's categorical imperative and its good will, has groundwork in the conditions discussed throughout this piece. But, this formulation allows the virtuous agent a clear and concise explanation for moral motivation against those objections of it not containing any.

Hursthouse lays out a logical and formulaic approach toward providing virtue ethics with its own categorical imperative to utilize in debates of this sort defending the honor of virtue ethics when it is taken under siege by objections to its reasoning for action clarity. The conditions dispel any confusion or convoluted notions of potential wrong or harmful virtuous action to the theory at large. The final formulation and her conditions prove extremely useful in fending off objections similar to Hurka's about the theory's motivation and reasoning.

Conclusion

As has been shown, virtue ethics is a complex and seemingly evasive theory and it is so based on what some may hold to be vague founding documents. However, Aristotle's objectors have had a couple thousand years to poke holes in his theories. Give this leg-up, I feel the theory still has proven resistant to such objections as the egoism one addressed and counter within this piece.

Aristotle's other works outside of the *Nicomachean Ethics* served greatly useful in discovering some potential implications Aristotle may have had about community, others and their roles within the virtuous agent's life and moral theory. Some potential fodder for a other objections was also shown to be unfounded.

Diving into the realm of reasons and motives, virtue ethics came out clearer and more refined. We found that understanding virtue ethics in a purely flourishing-based manner not only fails to demonstrate the true meaning of the theory, but somewhat tarnishes the intentions of Aristotle. Hurka's flourishing virtue ethics was undoubtedly and incontrovertibly egoistic, but it was necessarily so by his

conception of it. It was shown that when understanding virtues in a different light, that these apparent openings for attack actually dissipate.

Virtues are to be sought for their own innate value and propensity to bring about certain actions and character in the agent who obtains them. These virtues are not sought for reasons of maximization of self-interest, rather their own intrinsic worth.

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