

## 1. What do you understand by 'virtue ethics'? Discuss the contribution of Aristotle in the field of virtue ethics.

### Introduction

Virtue ethics is a broad term for theories that emphasize the role of character and virtue in moral philosophy rather than either doing one's duty or acting in order to bring about good consequences. These traits derive from natural internal tendencies, however, once established, they become stable.

### Body

Virtue ethics is currently one of three major approaches in normative ethics. It may, initially, be identified as the one that emphasizes the virtues, or moral character, in contrast to the approach that emphasizes duties or rules (deontology) or that emphasizes the consequences of actions (consequentialism). Suppose it is obvious that someone in need should be helped. A utilitarian will point to the fact that the consequences of doing so will maximize well-being, a deontologist to the fact that, in doing so the agent will be acting in accordance with a moral rule such as "Do unto others as you would be done by" and a virtue ethicist to the fact that helping the person would be charitable or benevolent.

### Contribution of Aristotle in the field of virtue ethics:

- In the West, virtue ethics' founding fathers are Plato and Aristotle, and in the East it can be traced back to Mencius and Confucius. It persisted as the dominant approach in Western moral philosophy until at least the Enlightenment, suffered a momentary eclipse during the nineteenth century, but re-emerged in Anglo-American philosophy in the late 1950s.
- It is not easy to get one's emotions in harmony with one's rational recognition of certain reasons for action. I may be honest enough to recognise that I must own up to a mistake because it would be dishonest not to do so without my acceptance being so wholehearted that I can own up easily, with no inner conflict. Following (and adapting) Aristotle, virtue ethicists draw a distinction between full or perfect virtue and "continence", or strength of will. The fully virtuous do what they should without a struggle against contrary desires; the continent have to control a desire or temptation to do otherwise.
- The ordinary usage, or the reliance on motivation by inclination, gives us what Aristotle calls "natural virtue"—a proto version of full virtue awaiting perfection by phronesis or practical wisdom.
- Although all standard versions of virtue ethics insist on that conceptual link between virtue and eudaimonia, further links are matters of dispute and generate different versions. For Aristotle, virtue is necessary but not sufficient—what is also needed are external goods which are a matter of luck.

For Plato and the Stoics, virtue is both necessary and sufficient for eudaimonia (Annas 1993).

### Conclusion

Though virtue ethics comes with its own set of objections like self-centredness, failure of practicality and lack of lawfully guided principles, the constant self-awareness, self-development and knowledge building that a person inculcates as a result of virtue ethics cannot be overlooked. Emotional intelligence along with practicality where required will make a wholesome combination for an individual's growth and help her/him contribute essentially to the society.

## 2. What were the ideas of Confucius on morality and human character? Discuss.

### Introduction

“What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.”

The quote summarizes the entire Confucian philosophy which calls for egalitarian and just treatment of human beings which is the basis of human character and morality.

Confucian moral education aims at a noble person who is characterized by superiority of mind, character, ideals or morals. Confucius insisted chiefly on the four virtues of sincerity, benevolence, filial piety and righteousness.

### Body

#### Ideas of Confucius:

Confucius gave 5 principles to adapt in life to develop a noble character and live with morality.

- Ren: compassion, or simply goodness which makes us human. It includes loyalty, Benevolence are virtues which should be inculcated in children by governments, parents and teachers.
- Li: these are the good manners to be adopted in life carving a virtuous human character.
- Shu: it is the principle of reciprocity which is the social obligations to the family, work and the society. The actions are moral only as long as they don't affect or cause untoward harm to others.
- Xiao: concept of filial conduct. This is the root of all relationships in Confucianism creating at once the good child or parent as well as the good citizen and the virtuous man.
- Wen: refers to the arts of the sage. These include music, poetry and art. Confucius felt that these were arts of peace and were symbolic of true virtue. These develop human character.

Human character must have ever-lasting perseverance for standing up and doing the right things. One must have belief in self to be successful. Confucius observed

“Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.”  
“It does not matter how slowly you go so long as you do not stop.”

Confucius emphasized the role of family and social harmony than on just spiritual values which made Confucianism humanistic. He relied on wisdom and knowledge which would shape human character and make the actions of human moral. He observed

“Wisdom, compassion, and courage are the three universally recognized moral qualities of men.”

### Conclusion

Confucius was deeply involved in thinking about the concepts of human compassion and the development of a character. His ideas are true even today and can be applied in ethical judgement of an action. The Confucius teachings can be summarized into social and political philosophy with emphasis on education, social harmony which develops individual character.

NOTE: write 4-5 quotes of moral thinkers which summarize their philosophy (around 20 moral thinkers) and revise them frequently.

E.g. Confucius:

“Wisdom, compassion, and courage are the three universally recognized moral qualities of men.” (humanity/Virtue ethics).

“What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.” (reciprocity and morality).

“Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.” (perseverance).

“If we don’t know life, how can we know death?”(focus on present than on afterlife).

“Everything has beauty, but not everyone sees it” (Virtue ethics).

### 3. Examine the contributions of early French philosophers in the field of democratic thoughts and principles.

#### Introduction

Early French philosophers were critical in articulating the ideas of democracy, liberty and rule of law. This led to the ‘Age of Reason’ or Enlightenment. Enlightenment thinkers in France questioned traditional authority and embraced the notion that humanity could be improved through rational change.

#### Body

Different ideas by philosophers and thinkers in the field of democratic thoughts and principles –

- **Hobbes's social contract** – Hobbes argued that the supreme power must be vested in a single authority to make laws and in return, the people get their rights.
- **Rousseau** – He emphasized on liberty and said that social agreement should be based on liberty and general will.
- **Voltaire** – He propounded the idea of tolerance, freedom of speech and religious beliefs.
- **Montesquieu** – Idea of separation of power to prevent the consolidation of power in a single organ of the government. The separation of power became the base of the U.S. constitution and the theme in democracy as 'Checks and balances'.
- **Locke's natural rights** – Locke criticized the monarchy and supported the idea of self-government, life, liberty and property. Locke's idea of the Government by popular consent inspired the struggles for liberty in Europe and America.
- Ideas about the rule of law have been central to political and legal thought since at least the 4th century BCE, when Aristotle distinguished “the rule of law” from “that of any individual.”
- **Auguste Comte** – He was the founder of the discipline of sociology and the doctrine of positivism. Comte developed the positive philosophy in an attempt to remedy the social malaise of the French revolution, calling for a new social paradigm based on the sciences. Comte offered an account of social evolution, proposing that society undergoes three phases in its quest for the truth according to a general 'law of three stages'. Comte's stages were - the theological, the metaphysical, and the positive.

### Conclusion

French philosophy, here taken to mean philosophy in the French language, has been extremely diverse and has influenced Western philosophy as a whole for centuries

### 4. What is deontological moral theory? Elaborate with the help of suitable examples.

#### Introduction

Deontology is an ethical theory that uses rules to distinguish right from wrong. Deontology is often associated with philosopher Immanuel Kant. Kant believed that ethical actions follow universal moral laws. Deontology falls within the domain of moral theories that guide and assess our choices of what we ought to do (deontic theories), in contrast to those that guide and assess what kind of person we are and should be (virtue theories).

It doesn't require weighing the costs and benefits of a situation. This avoids subjectivity and uncertainty because you only have to follow set rules. Those who

subscribe to deontological theories of morality stand in opposition to *consequentialists*.

### Body

- Deontology – the ethical system in which morality is determined by duty or laws. A simpler example of deontological ethics would be Christianity, in which moral acts are those that obey the Ten Commandments.
- Deontology is duty ethics, so it compares a person's actions against some duty or imperative. An example is Kant's Deontology, which has the Categorical Imperative that all persons must be ends in and of themselves and may never be used as means. Deontology emphasizes the character of the actions.
- This is generally the philosophy of most of the organized religions. Bhagwat Geeta says that your duty is important rather than the consequences. The five vows of Jainism too are based on deontological ethics.
- According to Mahatma Gandhi also, wrong means cannot lead to a right end.

### Merits of Deontology

- By applying ethical duties to all people in all situations the theory is readily applied to most practical situations.
- By focusing on a person's intentions, it also places ethics entirely within our control – we can't always control or predict the outcomes of our actions, but we are in complete control of our intentions.
- There are absolute principles, like do not cheat, do not steal etc. which apply to everyone.
- There are things you have to do, even though you know they are wrong, such as shooting that intruder to protect your family.

### Limitations of Deontology

- It is seen as strongly opposed to utilitarianism as it ignores what is at stake in terms of consequences. Kant, for example, argued it would be unethical to lie about the location of our friend, even to a person trying to murder them!
- Bioethical decisions in areas such as abortion, euthanasia, cloning, organ harvesting, end-of-life decisions, etc. are against the ethics of a medical practitioner, yet practiced for the greater good.
- It can produce results that can be unacceptable to most. For example, suppose you're a software engineer and learn that a nuclear missile is about to launch that might start a war. You can hack the network and cancel the launch, but it's against your professional code of ethics to break into any software system without permission. And, it's a form of lying and cheating.

Deontology advises not to violate this rule. However, in letting the missile launch, thousands of people will die

### Conclusion

The rigidity of deontology can be done away by using threshold deontology, which argues we should always obey the rules unless in an emergency situation, at which point we should revert to a consequentialist approach.

### 5. What is the meaning of Karma? From where does the Karma philosophy originate? Discuss.

#### Introduction

Karma is an important element of Indian philosophical tradition. It believes in the actions of women/men and tries to establish relations between actions and their results. According to it, a person reaps what she/he sows and thus asks people to act just. Destiny of a person is decided more by her/his actions than others.

#### Body

- Philosophically, Karma is the universal causal law by which good or bad actions determine the future modes of an individual's existence. Karma represents the ethical dimension of the process of rebirth (samsara), belief in which is generally shared among the religious traditions of India.
- The doctrine of karma thus directs adherents of Indian religions toward their common goal: release (moksha) from the cycle of birth and death. Karma thus serves two main functions within Indian moral philosophy: it provides the major motivation to live a moral life, and it serves as the primary explanation of the existence of evil.
- In life, the main aim of discharging our duty properly leads to peace of mind, harmony and ability to enjoy what we have, independent of all other objects of so-called pleasure which we do not have. Subordinate aims are wealth, position, rank, name and fame.
- For instance in a game of sports, the main benefit we get is that of getting physical fitness and the subordinate benefit can be winning. Even if we lose, the main benefit is not going waste. Both winner and loser get physical fitness.
- Karma simply means action. Every action has consequences. Conscious choice-making is the most effective way of creating future consequences of karma. Karma creates the future, but it is also an echo from the past.
- As per the infallible theory of karma, one will definitely have good results for good work done. But the moment one tries to be selfish and work only for money or position, it can lead to trouble. So the Bhagavad Gita's message is: 'Do your best always, do not be utterly selfish and have no ego'. That indeed is the art of karma yoga.

- The idea of Karma first appears in the oldest Hindu text the Rigveda (before c. 1500 BCE) with a limited meaning of ritual action which it continues to hold in the early ritual dominant scriptures until its philosophical scope is extended in the later Upanishads (c.800 BCE – 300 BCE). The term gains a more philosophical weight when the consequences of actions are attached to it. Thus karma gains a moral or ethical dimension.
- In Hinduism, the theory of karma is more dominant in the Vedānta School. For some schools like Mīmāṃsā, the role of karma is almost negligible. Most traditions agree on three types of karma: prārabdha, saṃcita, and kriyamāṇa which mean karma to be experienced in this lifetime, latent karma which we have not yet reaped, and karma that will result in our future lives, respectively.
- In later Hindu traditions which are primarily theistic, the grace of God plays an important role in overriding the karmic implications or completely relieving one and thus leading to mokṣa.
- In Buddhism, essentially there is no soul. The unresolved karma manifest into a new form composed of five skandhas (constituent elements of a being) in one of the six realms of saṃsāra. The eventual nirvāṇa (salvation) comes through the annihilation of residual karma which means the ceasing of the alleged existence of being.
- The actions with intention (cetanā) carried out by the mind, body and speech and which are driven by ignorance, desire and hatred lead to implications that tie one down in saṃsāra. Following the eightfold path - the set of eight righteous ways of thinking and acting suggested by Buddha - one can attain nirvāṇa.
- In Jainism, karma is conceived as a subtle matter pervading the entire Universe in the form of particles. These extremely subtle particles cling to the soul obscuring its intrinsic pristine form. It is sometimes described as the contamination that infiltrates the soul and taints it with various colours.

### Conclusion

Though the ordinary meaning of Karma is action, at a more comprehensive level it also connotes the motivation behind the action and the objective set of consequences following from it. Thus, the concept of Karma represents one of the prime themes in Indian philosophical speculations and social life where it definitely indicates the prevalence of the belief in a universal harmonious pattern.