

**“WHAT I OUGHT TO DO”, “WHAT I OUGHT TO BE” AND
“WHAT SORT OF COMMUNITY OUGHT WE CONSTRUCT?”:
A DISCOURSE OF “MORAL PRINCIPLES”
OF VIRTUE ETHICS IN ARISTOTLE AND PHILIPPA FOOT
AND ITS RELEVANCE TO EDUCATION**

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Abstract

The high rate of vices among students has caused great damages and disorder in the educational system in Nigeria. The vices have created an atmosphere of insecurity and frustration not only to the individual, but also to the society. It is a result of this that the study proposes virtue ethics as a remedial approach to character and good moral values formation among Nigerian students. This work therefore, is an exposition of virtue ethics. Unlike most ethical theories, rather than help us determine “what we ought to do”, virtue ethics asks how “we ought to be” and “what sort of community ought we construct?” Virtue ethics therefore, is concerned with those traits of character that make one a good person. Such traits of character include: generosity, kindness, patience, loyalty, obedience and so on. These are among the traits of character traditionally known as virtues. When these traits are unusually well developed, the individual who possesses them are often regarded as heroes or even saints. On the contrary, people can also exhibit bad character traits. For example, they can be tactless, careless, boorish, stingy, vindictive, disloyal, lazy, or egotistical and we regard them as sinners. The aim of this study therefore, is to focus on an aspect of ethics known as virtue. Virtue as an aspect of ethics encourages us to develop the good traits and get rid of the bad ones. Through the method of analysis and rigour, this study explores, works of Aristotle and Philippa Foot in virtue discourse. While the former holds that virtues help a person to live a good life. The latter holds that virtue in some general way, is beneficial. Human beings do not

get on well without them. Also, it is both ourselves and our community that benefit from our having certain virtues, just as having certain vices harms both ourselves and our communities. This work contributes to knowledge by it emphasises on the complementarity between virtue and moral rule to achieve a good community. In so doing, through qualitative research this work concludes that though virtues should precede moral rule, however, virtue and ethics should end in the good of the community, in this way, there will be check of vices in the society, especially in educational sector.

Keywords: Ethics, Intellectual, Morality, Virtues, Aristotle, Philippa, Virtue, Education

Introduction

One of the fundamental questions of ethics is, “What should I do?” or “How should I act?” In this case, ethics is supposed to provide us with “moral principles” or universal rules that tell us what to do. A moral principle focuses primarily on people's actions and doings; For example, the moral principle of utilitarianism holds that the action that produces the greatest good for the greatest number is the moral choice. It therefore, recommends that everyone is obligated to do whatever will make them achieve the greatest good for the greatest number. Thus, for Utilitarianism, an action is judged to be right if among all possible alternative actions, it will produce the greatest balance of good over evil for all the persons affected by it¹. In the same everyone is obligated to act only in ways that respect the human dignity and moral rights of all persons. However, critics have pointed out that the moral principles of actions and doings have made us to worship rules, as if the moral life was a matter of scrupulously checking our every action against a table of do's and don'ts. Fortunately, this obsession with principles and rules has been recently challenged by several ethicists who argue that the emphasis on principles ignores a *fundamental component of ethics--virtue*. These ethicists point out that by focusing on what people should do or how people should act, the “moral principles approach” neglects the more important issue--what people should be. Thus, the fundamental question of ethics is not just “What should I do?” but also, “What kind of person should I be?”² And “What sort of community ought we to construct?”

This paper is not against obeying rules, since without observance of the law makes the society chaotic. This work criticises the rating of the “What should I do?” over

¹ Tannsjo, T. *Understanding Ethics*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), p.2.

² Manuel Velasquez, Claire Andre, Thomas Shanks, S.J., and Michael J. Meyer, “Ethics and Virtue” Available online at: <https://www.scu.edu/ethics/ethics-resources/ethical-decision-making/ethics-and-virtue/> Accessed on 10th June, 2022.

“What kind of person should I be?” while the former is interesting in the obeying the letters of the law and the latter is about the character of the individual by making a person virtuous. The virtuous person is one who is habitually disposing to doing the right. It is habitual because, it has become the second nature to the person who possesses it. A virtuous person is exemplified with a person of integrity. We define integrity as “*doing the right thing even when no one is watching.*” But a person, who merely obeys the law without building a good character habitually, may only obey the law for admiration of people or to escape from the punishment of the law. Consequently, this work argues that much as it is important that ethics responding to the fundamental question “What should I do?”, the questions on fundamental component of *ethics—virtue*: “What kind of person should I be?” and “What sort of community ought we construct?” is very vital for to the individual as well as the community. Hence, morality is concerned not only with the actions that a person takes, but also a person's character. People make differing moral decisions based on “who they are,” which includes their values, spirituality, and habits. Morality is concerned with answering three questions: “Who ought we be?” “What ought we do?” and “What sort of community ought we construct?” To achieve the aim of this inquiry, this work is divided into five parts excluding the introduction. The first part focuses on the nature and meaning of *ethics and morality*. In the second part, we look at the meaning of virtue and justify what makes an action or a person virtuous. The third part considers the notion of virtue ethics as moral philosophy that emphasizes that the moral life is about developing good *character*. In the fourth part, we deal with Aristotle nature of virtue, which emphasis on human nature to attain *excellence*, which couldbe: *intellectual virtues* and *moral virtues*. His definition is also critically analyzed in four components were deduced from his definition of virtue as: *virtue is a State of Character, virtue is concerned with choice, virtue and the Mean, the mean determined by practical wisdom*. In the fifth part we made an evaluation of the three fundamental questions of virtue ethics “What I ought to do”, “what I ought to be” and “What sort of community ought we construct?” In the sixth part, In the sixth part is the evaluative conclusion on the contemporary relevance of *virtue ethics*, projecting that in spite of the relevance of law, the character is utmost importance, since a person with good character is likely to be more law abiding than one who just merely keeps the law because it is obligated.

An Explication of Ethics and Morality

Etymologically, the word ethics derives its English form from the Greek *Ethika*, a variation of *ethos*, which means “character or customs.”³ Put differently, the word ethics comes from the Greek *ethos*, meaning something like 'morals.' Ethics is thus, defined as the systematic reflection on what is moral. From this perspective, Bourke

³ Cayne, Bernard S., *The New Webster's Dictionary of the English Language*, (New York: Lexicon, 1992), p.321.

Bernard defines ethics as the intellectual habit that treats information derived from man's natural experience of the problems of human life, from the point of view of natural reasoning. He equally describes it as the philosophical study of voluntary human action, with the purpose of determining what types of activity are good, right, to be done; or bad, wrong, to be avoided, that man may live well. Therefore, ethics is concerned with the principles or standards of human conduct, sometimes called morals.⁴ It deals with custom or way of doing, acting or behaving. Joseph Omoregbe defines ethics as a branch of philosophy which deals the morality of human actions or the branch of philosophy which studies norms of human behaviour.”⁵ We can distinguish two kinds of ethics. The *descriptive ethics* is involved with the description of existing morality; it is about facts. Descriptive judgments are therefore true or false. On the other hand, there is the *prescriptive ethics*, also known as the *normative ethics*. This branch of ethics actually judges morality. Normative judgments are therefore value judgments: they indicate whether something is good or bad. Ethics are important because we face moral choices every day.”⁶ In ethics, we meet posers as: Is there a moral law? Are there really such things as good and bad, right or wrong? And if there are, what is that makes one thing right and other wrong?

On the other hand, the word “morality” etymologically derives its form from the Latin word *moralis* a variation of the word *mores* which coincidentally means customs. This implies that ethics and morality are both inseparable, and, by extension, the study of such principles or standards is sometimes called 'moral philosophy'. The field of ethics (or moral philosophy) involves systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong behaviour.

According Anthony Echekwube, morality bases its judgment on the rational nature of man and his final destiny which make his actions morally right or wrong. That morality applies to all rational persons makes clear that sense of “morality” being defined as that which guide to conduct that applies to all rational persons.

In this way, morality which implies, judgment of right or wrong actions, is only applicable to rational beings.⁷ Morality therefore, is concerned with answering three questions: “Who ought we be?” “What ought we do?” and “What sort of community ought we construct?” It is concerned not only with the actions that a person takes, but also a person's character. People make differing moral decisions based on “who they are,” which includes their values, spirituality, and habits.

⁴ Bourke, V.J., 'Ethics' in *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, (Washington D.C., 1967), p.570.

⁵ Omoregbe J., *Ethics A Systematic and Historical Study*, Lagos: Joja Education Research Ltd., 1993, pp.3-4.

⁶ Rae B. S., *Moral Choices An Introduction Ethics*, USA: Zondervan, 1960, p. 12.

⁷ Echekwube, A. “What is Ethics? Definition, Principles, Theories and Relationship to Other Disciplines” in Iroegbu P. & Echekwube A. (eds.), *Kpim of Morality, General, Special and Professional*, (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 2005), p.32.

What is Virtue?

Etymologically, the word *virtue* originally came from the Latin “*vir*” or “*virtus*” and referred to “strength”, “manliness.”⁸ It also had connotations of “honour”, worthiness of deferential respect, and civic duty. The word ‘virtue’ has different interpretations; but, can be a trait or disposition of character that leads to good behaviour. In the study of religion, ‘virtue’ is defined as a habit or permanent disposition which inclines a person to do well and to avoid evil.⁹ In this fashion a Christian would see virtue as a spiritual habit or personal quality that helps individuals to choose that which is morally appropriate, to avoid sin and evil, and to live as faithful followers of the gospel of Jesus of Nazareth.¹⁰ According to Todd Furman and Mitchell Avila, virtue is a morally excellent quality of an individual’s character; virtue ethicists hold that actions are good insofar as they flow from the character of a virtuous person; primarily associated with Aristotle’s ethics, the opposite of a virtue is a vice.¹¹ Someone with virtue displays wisdom, courage, kindness, good manners, courtesy, modesty, generosity, and self-control in their life.¹² Accordingly, William Earle defines virtue as a positive characteristic, or excellence, of a thing or person. A virtue is sometime more narrowly defined as a good habit.¹³ To say virtue is a “good habit”, means that virtue is habitual. “*A single rain does not make a raining season*”, says an old adage, so it is with virtue. A single act of kindness, for example, does not make one a virtuous person. Barbara Mackinnon defines a virtuous person as a morally good person.¹⁴

Virtue should be consistent in a person. In other words, virtues are habits. That is, once they are acquired, they become characteristic of a person. For example, a person who has developed the virtue of generosity is often referred to as a generous person because he or she tends to be generous in all circumstances. Moreover, a person who has developed virtues will be naturally disposed to act in ways that are consistent with moral principles; thus, a virtuous person is the ethical person.¹⁵

⁸ Milton Gonsalves, *Fagothy’s Right and Reason*, 9th ed. (Columbus, OH: Merrill, 1989), P. 201.

⁹ Trese, L.J. *The Faith Explained*, (Lagos: Criterion Publishers, 2007), p.131.

¹⁰ EKSTROM, R.R. *The Concise Catholic Dictionary*, (Numbai: St Pauls, 1995), p.267.

¹¹ Furman, T.M. and Avila, M. *The Canon & Its Critics*, (Boston: McGraw Hill Higher Education, 2004), p.579.

¹² Jack Wellman, “What Does Virtue Mean? A Biblical Definition of Virtue or Virtuous” August 19, 2015 Available online at: <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/christiancrier/2015/08/19/what-does-virtue-mean-a-biblical-definition-of-virtue-or-virtuous/> Accessed on 2nd June, 2022.

¹³ Earle, W.J. *Introduction to Philosophy*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1992), p.298.

¹⁴ Barbara MacKinnon, *Ethics Theory and Contemporary Issues*, (Belmont: Thomson Wadsworth, 2007), P.110.

¹⁵ Manuel Velasquez, Claire Andre, Thomas Shanks, S.J., and Michael J. Meyer, “Ethics and Virtue” Available online at: <https://www.scu.edu/ethics/ethics-resources/ethical-decision-making/ethics-and-virtue/> Accessed on 10th June, 2022.

Virtues are developed through learning and practice; an ancient philosopher Aristotle, suggested a person can improve his or her character by practicing self-discipline, while a good character can be corrupted by repeated self-indulgence; just as the ability to run a marathon develops through much training and practice, so too does our capacity to be fair, to be courageous, or to be compassionate.¹⁶

What is Virtue Ethics?

Moral philosophy that concentrates on the notion of virtue is called a virtue ethics. 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 which emphasizes duties or rules (deontology) or that which emphasizes the consequences of actions (consequentialism). For virtue ethics, the moral life is about developing good *character*.¹⁷ According to “virtue ethics”, there are certain ideals, such as excellence or dedication to the common good, toward which we should strive and which allow the full development of our humanity. These ideals are discovered through thoughtful reflection on what we as human beings have the potential to become.¹⁸ Virtue ethics deals with a person rather than action based: it looks at the virtue or moral character of the person carrying out an action, rather than at ethical duties and rules, or the consequences of particular actions. Virtue ethics, the primary goal is to be a good person. In other words, virtue ethics teaches that moral behaviour is directly linked to a virtuous life. An act cannot be ethical if it is performed by a corrupt character, and a virtuous person will naturally perform virtuous acts. Thus, *virtue ethics* is a character-based ethic which holds that moral actions are right and good insofar as they flow from virtuous character¹⁹.

It pertinent also to state here that *virtue ethics* is different from and *act-oriented ethics*. Some of the main differences between virtue ethics and act-oriented ethics are an emphasis on being rather than doing, an emphasis on who a person should become more than what a person should do, the importance of following people with exemplary behaviour instead of following moral rules, an emphasis on a person's motive in place of action, and a stress on developing character more than simply obeying rules; virtue theory is an ethic of character, not duty.²⁰

¹⁶ Manuel Velasquez, Claire Andre, Thomas Shanks, S.J., and Michael J. Meyer, “Ethics and Virtue” Available online at: <https://www.scu.edu/ethics/ethics-resources/ethical-decision-making/ethics-and-virtue/> Accessed on 10th June, 2022.

¹⁷ Ibid. P.111.

¹⁸ Manuel Velasquez, Claire Andre, Thomas Shanks, S.J., and Michael J. Meyer, “Ethics and Virtue” Available online at: <https://www.scu.edu/ethics/ethics-resources/ethical-decision-making/ethics-and-virtue/> Accessed on 10th June, 2022.

¹⁹ Todd M. Furman and Mitchell Avila, *The Canon & Its Critics: A Multi-Perspective Introduction to Philosophy*, (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2000). P. 332.

²⁰ Scott B. Rae, *Moral Choices: An Introduction to Ethics*, (New York: Zondervan Press, 1995), P. 91.

Unlike other secular schools of thought, virtue ethics explains exactly what is needed to perform a morally upright act. To be virtuous, a person will develop three specific characteristics, named using three Greek words.

First: *Arête* is excellence in character that naturally exemplifies goodness, honesty, self-control, and other virtues. *Aristotle defines* virtue theory which is also called *aretaic* ethics (from the Greek term *Arête*, “virtue”), holds that morality is more than simply doing the right thing. The foundational moral claims made by the virtue theorist concern the moral agent (theperson doing the action), not the act that the agent performs.²¹

Second: *Phronesis*. The word and concept “*phrónêsis*” is Greek. Its traditional rendering in English is “prudence”, from Latin: *prudentia*. Currently, however, “practical wisdom” or “judgement” is more common. The historical source for the current concept of *phronesis*, is Aristotle (384-322 BC), in particular his Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.²² *Phronesis* is moral or practical wisdom that knows the right course to take in any circumstance.

Third: *Eudaimonia*. The concept of *eudaimonia*, a key term in ancient Greek moral philosophy, is standardly translated as “happiness” or “flourishing” and occasionally as “well-being”²³. In other word, *Eudaimonia* is about a good, flourishing life. Virtue ethics teaches that, by careful living, a person can develop all three qualities, thus embodying a character that is naturally moral, although external forces may damage or destroy *eudaimonia*²⁴.

Aristotle's Definition of Virtue

Aristotle was one of the earliest writers to ground morality in nature, and specifically human nature. His ethics or moral theory also stressed the notion of virtue. For Aristotle, virtue was an excellence of some sort. He defines virtue as:

a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e., the mean relative to us, this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it²⁵.

²¹ Scott B. Rae, *Moral Choices: An Introduction to Ethics*, (New York: Zondervan Press, 1995), P. 91.

²² Olav Eikeland, “Encyclopedia of Action Research: *phronesis*” 2014 Available online at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/277262856_Phronesis Accessed on 3rd June, 2022.

²³ Sandford Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2016, Available online at: [https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-virtue/#:~:text=Virtue%20ethics%20is%20currently%20one,consequences%20of%20actions%20\(consequentialism\)](https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-virtue/#:~:text=Virtue%20ethics%20is%20currently%20one,consequences%20of%20actions%20(consequentialism)) Accessed on 3rd June, 2022.

²⁴ “What is virtue ethics?” Available online at: <https://www.gotquestions.org/virtue-ethics.html> Accessed on 2nd June, 2022.

²⁵ Aristotle, “*Nicomachean Ethics*”, Translated by W.D. Ross, Chapter 2:6 in Lawhead W.F. *The Voyage of Discovery: A Historical Introduction to Philosophy*, (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2002), P.82.

Therefore, in analysing the above definition of virtue by Aristotle, it is important to state that for Aristotle, there are two basic types of excellence or virtues: *intellectual virtues* and *moral virtues*. *Intellectual virtues* are excellences of mind, such as the ability to *understand* and *reason* and *judge* well. For Aristotle, these traits are learned from teachers. *Moral virtues*, on the other hand, *dispose us to act well*. These virtues are learned not by *being taught* but by *repetition*.²⁶ For instance, by practicing courage or honesty, we become more courageous and honest. Just as repetition in playing a musical instrument makes playing easier, so also repeated acts of honesty make it easier to be honest. The person who has the virtue of honesty finds it easier to be honest than the person who does not have the virtue. It has become *habitual* or *second nature* to him or her. The same thing applies to the opposite of virtue, namely, *vice*. The person, who lies and lies again finds that lying is easier and telling the truth more difficult. One can have bad moral habits (vices) as well as good one (virtues). Just like other bad habits, bad Moral habits are difficult to change or break. Aristotle list of virtues includes courage, temperance, justice, pride, and magnanimity.²⁷ Hence, John Rawls asserts that “Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought”²⁸.

Now, let us return to the above definition of virtue by Aristotle. A lot of components can be drawn from that definition:

First: *Virtue is a State of Character*: By this he means that a morally good person is not simply one who performs morally right actions; but one who has developed a habit or disposition to do what is right.²⁹

Aristotle holds that the qualities of the human soul are of three kinds: *passions* (emotions), *faculties*, *character traits*.³⁰ He concludes that if virtues are neither *passions* nor *faculties*, all that remains is that they should be *states of character*.³¹ We can imagine someone tells the truth on his income tax form but after he struggles with the temptation to cheat. By contrast, the truly moral person is one who tells the truth *readily, happily*, and without struggle. Hence, a well-formed character manifests itself not only in what we do but, in our desires, our likes and dislikes. For this reason, Aristotle says that a good person “delights in virtuous actions and is vexed at vicious ones, *as a musical man enjoys beautiful tunes but is pained at bad ones*”³².

²⁶ Barbara MacKinnon, *Ethics Theory and Contemporary Issues*, (Belmont: Thomson Wadsworth, 2007), Pp.110-111.

²⁷ Barbara MacKinnon, *Ethics Theory and Contemporary Issues*, (Belmont: Thomson Wadsworth, 2007), Pp.110-111.

²⁸ J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p.3.

²⁹ J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p.3.

Lawhead W.F. *The Voyage of Discovery: A Historical Introduction to Philosophy*, (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2002), P.82.

³⁰ Stumpf, S.E., and Fieser J., *Philosophy History and Readings*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), P79.

³¹ Todd M. Furman and Mitchell Avila, op. cit., P.335.

³² Aristotle, “Nicomachean op. cit., P.82.

Second: *Virtue is concerned with choice*: Aristotle stresses that being moral involve choice of a certain kind. For example, suppose I take care of an aged aunt only because I hope to inherit her fortune. This is a good action, but it is done for a despicable reason. In this case can I be praised for being a virtuous person, for being moral involves knowing what is good and choosing it for its own sake.³³

For Aristotle, for an action to be a genuine choice and thus capable of moral praise or blame, the action must be voluntary. Thus, he clarifies the notion of voluntary action and moral responsibility by looking at cases in which an action is not voluntary. He thinks that there are two classes of involuntary action or actions for which we are not morally responsible. These are all actions that are done under compulsion or out of ignorance.

Third: *Virtue and the Mean*: Aristotle is probably most well-known for his position that virtue is a mean between extremes. Aristotle says that virtue is choice “lying in a mean.” This became known as his famous “doctrine of the mean.” The “mean” referred to here is the intermediate position between two extremes or vices. That is to say Aristotle's specific virtues derive from his concept of the *mean*³⁴. He is perhaps best known for this way of describing the virtues, popularly known as the “golden mean.” A virtue is the mean between two extremes of behaviour or emotion, usually between the extremes of excess and deficiency³⁵. He observes that moral virtue is “concerned with passions and actions, in which excess is a form of failure, and so is defect, while the intermediate is praised and is a form of success”³⁶. In other words, the virtuous person is one who finds the correct balance or the mean between the extremes. That is “Virtue lies at the middle”³⁷.

Fourth: *The mean determined by practical wisdom*: Obviously, the mean is not identical to mathematical average. If giving all my money to a charity is excessive and giving none is stingy, it does not follow that giving away half of my life savings is the correct amount to give. Even if we know the correct moral principles, how do we know what is right to do in a specific case? Aristotle can only say that it is “determined by a rational principle and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it”³⁸. It is at this point that moral virtue links up with the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom. A person who has moral virtue will know which goals are the right ones for human life (the balance among her various desires and emotions). But she also needs practical wisdom to know how to achieve those goals. This involves the intellectual activity of deliberating correctly. Aristotle offers little else in the way of guidance except to say that practical wisdom “is concerned not only with universals but with particulars, which become familiar

³³ Lawhead W.F. op. cit., P.83.

³⁴ Romans Cessario, *The Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics*, (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), P.128.

³⁵ Scott B. Rae, op. cit., P. 94.

³⁶ Aristotle, “Nicomachean op. cit., P.82.

³⁷ Lawhead W.F. op. cit., P.83.

³⁸ Aristotle, op. cit., P.84.

from experience”³⁹. Hence, though practical wisdom is an intellectual virtue, the person who has learned how to make decision from practical experience is most likely to exemplify this form of wisdom.

“What I ought to do”, “what I ought to be” and “What sort of community ought we construct?”

As mentioned above, morality is concerned with answering three questions: “What ought we do?” “Who ought we be?” and “What sort of community ought we construct?” In this section, we shall be discussing each of these three questions and their relevance both to society and to the individual.

First: “*What I ought to do?*” One of the fundamental questions of ethics is, “What should I do?” or “How should I act?” Generally, ethics is supposed to provide us with “moral principles” or universal rules that tell us what to do. Morality therefore, deals with standards of right or good conduct. In other words, morality speaks of a system of behaviour in regards to standards of right or wrong behaviour. A society without rules and regulations of human actions and activities is banned to be chaotic. It will lead to *Hobbesian State of Nature* wherein life is said to be “*solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short*”. Therefore, the purposes of morality: (1) to ensure fair play and harmony between individuals; (2) to help make us good people in order to have a good society. It deals with *Our CHOICES FOR ACTION*- the (right and wrong) decisions, judgments, and behaviour that make up our lives.

Second: “*Who ought we be?*” As already mentioned, morality is concerned not only with the actions that a person takes, but also a person's character. People make differing moral decisions based on “who they are,” which includes their values, spirituality, and habits. Thus, we say “Virtues” are attitudes, dispositions, or character traits that enable us to be and to act in ways that develop this potential. They enable us to pursue the ideals we have adopted. Honesty, courage, compassion, generosity, fidelity, integrity, fairness, self-control, and prudence are all examples of virtues⁴⁰. Here we talk of *Our CHARACTER*-the kinds of persons (good or bad) we are. Morally good person is not simply one who performs morally right actions; but one who has developed a habit or disposition to do what is right⁴¹. Virtues are habits. That is, once they are acquired, they become characteristic of a person. For example, a person who has developed the virtue of generosity is often referred to as a generous person because he or she tends to be generous in all circumstances. Moreover, a person who has developed virtues will be naturally disposed to act in ways that are consistent with moral principles. The virtuous person is the ethical person⁴². Virtue

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Manuel Velasquez, Claire Andre, Thomas Shanks, S.J., and Michael J. Meyer, “Ethics and Virtue” Available online at: <https://www.scu.edu/ethics/ethics-resources/ethical-decision-making/ethics-and-virtue/> Accessed on 10th June, 2022.

⁴¹ Lawhead W.F. *The Voyage of Discovery: A Historical Introduction to Philosophy*, (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2002), P.82.

⁴² Manuel Velasquez, Claire Andre, Thomas Shanks, S.J., and Michael J. Meyer, “Ethics and Virtue” Available online at: <https://www.scu.edu/ethics/ethics-resources/ethical-decision-making/ethics-and-virtue/> Accessed on 10th June, 2022.

ethics seems more personal, it involves not knowing about what to do or doing them but habitual disposition to doing what is good.

Third: “*What sort of community ought we construct?*” According to Manuel Velasquez, Claire Andre, Thomas Shanks, and Michael Meyer:

At the heart of the virtue approach to ethics is the idea of “community”. A person's character traits are not developed in isolation, but within and by the communities to which he or she belongs, including family, church, school, and other private and public associations. As people grow and mature, their personalities are deeply affected by the values that their communities prize, by the personality traits that their communities encourage, and by the role models that their communities put forth for imitation through traditional stories, fiction, movies, television, and so on. The virtue approach urges us to pay attention to the contours of our communities and the habits of character they encourage and instill⁴³.

Thus, the essence of ethics or law is not just about itself, but for the good of the society or the community. This explains why Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theological* defines law “as an ordinance of reason promulgated for the common good from he/she who has the care of the society”⁴⁴. Law therefore should end in common good. Speaking of the importance of virtue, a British philosopher, most notable for her works in ethics, Philippa Ruth Foot (3 October 1920 – 3 October 2010), she was one of the founders of contemporary virtue ethics, inspired by the ethics of Aristotle. Philippa a contemporary moral philosopher stressed the importance of virtue⁴⁵. She developed a type of neo-naturalistic virtue ethics. She believes that the virtues are “in some general way, beneficial. Human beings do not get on well without them”⁴⁶. According to Foot, it is both ourselves and our community that benefit from our having certain virtues, just as having certain vices harms both ourselves and our communities⁴⁷. This means that virtues in some general way, is beneficial. Nobody can get on well if he lacks courage, and does not have measure of temperance and wisdom, while the communities where justice and charity are lacking are kept apt to be wretched to live⁴⁸.

⁴³ Manuel Velasquez, Claire Andre, Thomas Shanks, S.J., and Michael J. Meyer, “Ethics and Virtue” Available online at: <https://www.scu.edu/ethics/ethics-resources/ethical-decision-making/ethics-and-virtue/> Accessed on 10th June, 2022.

⁴⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Fathers Of The English Dominican Province, trans. (Ohio: Benziger Bros. Edition, 1947), P.1329.

⁴⁵ See, for example, the collection of articles in Christina Hoff Sommers, *Vice and Virtue in Everyday Life* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985).

⁴⁶ Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁴⁷ Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices, and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: University of California Press, 1978), P. 5

⁴⁸ Barbara MacKinnon, op. cit., P.122.

According to Philippa, courage, temperance and wisdom benefit the man who has these dispositions and other people as well; and moral failings such as pride vanity, worldliness, and avarice both their possessor and others⁴⁹. Some virtues such as charity, however, seem to benefit mostly other.

The Relevance of Virtue Ethics to Educational System

In this present section, we shall critically discuss the relevance of virtue ethics to an individual, education and society. We shall commence this section by briefly looking at the meaning of education. The concept of education or the definition of education is not an easy task to tackle because educators have not unanimously come out with “the” definition or “clear-cut” concept of education. Etymologically, education has its root from the Latin word *educare* which means 'to make or mould.' It is in line with this etymological meaning of education that George Kneller opines that education can be viewed from two senses. These include the Broad sense as well as the Narrow/Technical sense⁵⁰. In its broad sense, education deals with the act or experience that helps to create a formative effect on the mind, the behaviour or character of a person or the physical ability of, a person or an individual. In its technical or narrow sense, education is the process by which any society through schools, colleges, universities and other institutions deliberately transmit its cultural heritage that is, its accumulated knowledge, values, skill, from one generation to another⁵¹. Education is therefore concerned with the moral, physical, mental, societal, cultural, intellectual and spiritual adjustment of an individual⁵².

From the above, it should be noted that for education to have any impact, it must possess what is worthwhile to those that are committed to it. The worthwhileness of education is seen in the virtues that a student should possess. The worthwhileness is taught through education and then the student exhibits it. This explains why Samuel Meroyi, posits that education entails the development to learners intellectually and morally, that is expected to result in the positive transformation of the individual⁵³.

According to Plato, education should deal with morality as it is what enables an individual to show the right conduct to other members of the society. Aristotle, on his part, however, believes that education makes an individual develop a sound mind in a sound body'. He is of the view that education impacts both the mind and the body.

⁴⁹ Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices, and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: University of California Press, 1978), P. 5.

⁵⁰ Kneller, G.F. *Introduction to Philosophy of Education* (London: John Willey and Sons, 1964), p.20.

⁵¹ Kneller, G.F. *Introduction to Philosophy of Education* (London: John Willey and Sons, 1964), p.20.

⁵² Azenabor, G.E. *Sustainability of University Education in Nigeria: A Philosophical Discourse on Problems and Revival Strategies, An African Studies Monographs*, (Lagos Onosomghehowho Ogbinaka Publishers Ltd., 2005), p.5.

⁵³ Meroyi, S.I. “Nigeria's Educational Process and Ethical Re-Orientations” in *Nigerian Journal of Educational Philosophy*, vol.22, No.2, 2011, p.22.

Similarly, Rousseau holds that education is the development of the individual from within by interacting with the natural environment with the aim of fitting properly into the society. Nyerere conceives the goals of education as:

To transmit from one generation to the next the accumulated wisdom, knowledge, skills, values and attitudes of the society...to enable the young live in and serve the society and to prepare them for the future membership of the society...it involves the active participation of the maintenance and development of the society⁵⁴.

The foregoing definitions indicate that education has three basic foci: *information*, *formation* and *reformation*. Virtue ethics can be aligned to the above three foci of education for the good of the student and society. It is informative because it has to do with the communication of ideas and facts that are meant for some definitive goals and objectives. It is formative since the facts given in information are fashioned to constitute the mental and personality structure of the recipient. They prompt one to behave in a more controlled and reasonably regulated manner that affects a person's way of life. It is reformatory because it may help to adjust an already structured pattern or behaviour. Education thus, possesses the capability to reconstruct a personality⁵⁵. This point is aptly reiterated by Babs Fafunwa who states that education is the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to the society in which he lives⁵⁶. Therefore, education to respond and act in the three fundamental questions of ethics: "What should I do?" "What kind of person should I be?"⁵⁷ and "What sort of community ought we construct?"

Conclusion

From the discourse thus far, it is important to state that the moral life, then, is not simply a matter of following moral rules and of learning to apply them to specific situations. The moral life is also a matter of trying to determine the kind of people we should be; and, of attending to the development of character within our communities and ourselves⁵⁸. The moral life is one that seeks to cultivate and practice virtue. Hence, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: "A virtue is an habitual and firm disposition to do the good; and, it allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself"⁵⁹.

⁵⁴ Nyerere J, Ibid

⁵⁵ Iroegbu, P. "Philosophy of Education: Ethics of Teaching profession" in Iroegbu P. and Echeke A. (eds.), *Kpim of Morality, General, Special and Professional*, (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 2005), p.220.

⁵⁶ Fafunwa, A.B. (ed.), *Education in Africa: A Comparative Survey*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1972), p.11.

⁵⁷ Manuel Velasquez, Claire Andre, Thomas Shanks, S.J., and Michael J. Meyer, "Ethics and Virtue" Available online at: <https://www.scu.edu/ethics/ethics-resources/ethical-decision-making/ethics-and-virtue/> Accessed on 10th June, 2022.

⁵⁸ Manuel Velasquez, Claire Andre, Thomas Shanks, S.J., and Michael J. Meyer, "Ethics and Virtue" Available online at: <https://www.scu.edu/ethics/ethics-resources/ethical-decision-making/ethics-and-virtue/> Accessed on 10th June, 2022.

⁵⁹ (CCC, no. 1803)

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