

Strengths  
- good

- character-based  
→ but N.M.C



Weaknesses  
- opens moral psychology

- Hume's is-ought  
- public vs. William Barclay - people don't

(b) Analyse the reasons why Virtue Ethics may be considered the most persuasive of the ethical theories.

(20)

Virtue Ethics was first proposed in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* as an ethical theory which builds upon a human's innate pursuit of the good life, a state of human flourishing known as *eudaimonia*. Virtue ethics has considerable strengths, including its ~~came~~ societal approach, basis on an intuitive understanding of morality and desires as well as its focus on continual moral development. However, it can be critiqued using theories like Hume's moral psychology and is-ought gap as well as the idea that its exclusion of minority groups and women as coupled with its humanises humanity's innate desire for rules, for overall, as it finds its greatest strength as a tool of government - arguably the original intention of virtue theory.

Aristotle argued that every action a person makes is in the pursuit of a singular goal - his human happiness. This happiness can be achieved through the improvement of one's character via the development of moral and intellectual virtues. A main strength of virtue ethics is this focus on character. Alasdair MacIntyre highlights how ethical theories like utilitarianism and Kantian deontology have led to a selfish, egoistic society where the emphasis is on the pursuit of desires rather than the improvement of the self. For example, Kantian deontology like utilitarianism but no put no weight on the intent of a person. However, it is clear that we recognise an

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moral difference between someone helping a ~~se~~ opening a door for someone else because they have cultivated the moral virtue of kindness and ~~because~~ <sup>or</sup> when compared to doing it because they hope that person may do something for them in return. The utilitarian in fact prefers the second motivation because arguably there is a higher chance of maximising pleasure. This critique can be applied to Kantian deontology. Michael Stocker uses the example of a friend going to a dying friend's bedside because ~~the~~ it is your duty compared to because you place great value of friendships as emphasised in Aristotle's virtue ethics. Again, we clearly recognise moral value in intent. Virtue ethics, unlike Kantian deontology or utilitarianism, is able to account for this arguably making it a more persuasive ethical theory.

However, virtue ethics is ~~is~~ not the only ethical theory to make this distinction. Aquinas' natural moral law ~~theory~~ emphasises the difference between interior and exterior acts, with <sup>interior</sup> interior acts (acts that have good <sup>or bad</sup> intention) being ~~interior~~ ~~to~~ being the important factor as to whether an action as a whole is moral. Situation ethics also places great emphasis on character. Joseph Fletcher maintained that the most loving thing to do in a situation is the right thing to do and arguably acting out of agape love ~~is~~ is a worthier intention than acting out of virtues cultivated for one's own ends. In fact, virtue ethics does not compel a person to perform many acts we consider to be moral. For example, murder can be easily justified if part of cultivating ~~the~~ moral



virtues like courage in war.

A distinction could be made between situation ethics and virtue ethics using Bernard's concept of private and public morality, i.e. the ~~the~~ ~~most~~ ~~long~~ thing to do on an individual level can have negative wider societal implications. Alasdair MacIntyre praises the whole of society approach of virtue ethics where all ~~actions~~ <sup>virtues</sup> ~~virtuous~~ ~~actions~~ can cumulatively reflect the desired virtues of society. However, natural moral law also ~~is~~ ~~recognises~~ the impact of private morality on public morality. For example, the catholic catechism paragraph 2207 'the family is the original cell of the social life', is reflective of how natural moral law compells people to have children inside of marriage ties in order to fulfil the primary precept of maintaining ordered societies. The private morality of sex and procreation has an impact on the public morality. Bernard's ~~insistence~~ that people desire rules ~~can~~ can also be used to critique virtue ethics against natural moral law. People do not desire to be constantly making ethical decisions, instead Bernard says they wish for a clear framework that natural moral law offers in order to make their life easier and hence in these ways natural moral law can be considered a more persuasive ethical theory than virtue ethics.

However, this can be countered with the idea that the Nicomachean Ethics was originally intended as a book series of lectures on how to govern. It is clear that we would wish our politicians to be virtuous people who have cultivated both



applicable to all virtues unless NRMIL

intellectual and moral virtues. It does not we would expect this of them no matter its difficulty. Rawls' statement that it is better for a moral theory to be right than to be simple is applicable here. If surely the validity of the virtue ethics matter far more than ease of use, especially if we put it in the hands of government.

Arguably the main critiques of virtue theory are presented by David Gauthier. Gauthier's is-ought ~~fact~~ gap questions the idea of ~~virtue~~ the goal of eudaimonia. Gauthier says we cannot derive an 'is-ought' from an 'is'. Just because Aristotle observed that people seek a singular good does not mean they should. If ~~eudaimonia~~ the idea of telos is called into question then so does the need to develop virtues and hence virtue theory crumbles.

However, Patricia Churchland rebukes this. She says that Gauthier fails to ~~very~~ consider inductive reasoning. Virtue theory is derived from Aristotle's a posteriori investigation as he questioned the people on their goals and observed ~~that~~ states of flourishing in the natural world.

Gauthier's ~~the~~ motivation theory must also be considered. This is the idea that ~~reason~~ moral statements cannot be based on reason or ~~percept~~ promoted by Aristotle. When we express a moral opinion, we feel an emotion. Gauthier says it is this emotion that governs our moral opinion not reason.

Virtue theorist Bernard Williams counters this with the idea



that we can cultivate our emotions through habit in order to be in line with our reason. Jonathan Haidt uses the analogy of an elephant and rider. Like our emotions, the elephant is free to go wherever it pleases, but the rider, our reason, guides its path in the long-term.

Our virtue theory, successful rebuke of these critiques can be coupled with one of its greatest strengths: universality, to distinguish it from other ethical theories. Unlike the Aristotelian virtue theory, is undoubtedly ~~not~~ rooted in its place and time e.g. in its exclusion of women as moral agents. However, Alexander McInyre finds objective value in the virtues which ~~can~~ transcend ~~and~~ context. The virtues are reflections of how a society ~~can~~ can pursue eudaimonia. They can be adapted to new cultures in the same way Aristotle originally derived them - asking people about their goals. This universality <sup>and flexibility</sup> separates virtue theory from deontological approaches like Kantian deontology and religious approaches like natural moral law and oikharis ethics.

Therefore, it can be said that virtue theory's ability to account for moral character and development coupled with its flexibility makes it the most persuasive of all ethical theories. However, in line with Berdagi's critique, it is most effective as a form of government.



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