

*Article*

## Role of Virtue Ethics in Social Reformation

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**Abstract:** The present article throws light on an interpretative study of Aristotle's Virtue Ethics and its role in the upgradation of society and human character. The article focuses on the fundamental principles of the theory and its key tools. People regard justice as the main principle of institutions in the contemporary world. Accepting the role of justice, Aristotle foregrounds the Virtue of Character and asserts that proper justice can be achieved by acquiring a virtuous character. While defining Justice, Aristotle mentions that virtue can be achieved when citizens act in a justified way and desire only what is just. The individual should be aware of inborn virtues and vices, which form the core values. The virtues and vices are transparent, and anyone can possess them through practice.

**Keywords:** Virtue Ethics; Justice; Aristotle; Citizens; Moral Character

### Introduction

The great Greek philosopher, Aristotle, introduced the term 'Virtue Ethics' in his immortal book 'Nicomachean Ethics', which changed the mindset of ordinary people, and its implications are still relevant in the modern age of unrest. As a social scientist, Aristotle was not satisfied with the contemporary popular ethical theories, such as deontological ethics and teleological ethics. He introduced the popular theory of 'Virtue Ethics', which had a significant impact on learned scholars and changed the viewpoints of social thinkers. Through the theory of virtue, Aristotle asserts that virtue is the prime value that can reform individuals, society, and government. He emphasises the cultivation of virtue for a pleasant and peaceful life, as well as the positive social construction. The pioneers of Virtue Ethics believe that virtue can be acquired through repeated action and constant practice. When people choose virtuous actions habitually,

it develops nobility of character. The soul spirit of Virtue Ethics is that a righteous person can make the right decision in critical times and situations. Distinguishing ethical virtue into two categories: intellectual virtue and moral virtue, Aristotle prefers the latter. In Nicomachian Ethics, Aristotle emphasises four cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, temperance, and courage. The Virtue Theory of Aristotle is psychoanalytical and socio-ethical, and it can play a vital role in the management of stress, depression, and social conflict. Aristotle highlights several prominent practices for acquiring virtue and morality, and research on these practices is highly needed in the present time.

- (a) Practice to be moral
- (b) Practice being honest
- (c) Practice to be just
- (d) Practice being brave

### Aims and Objectives of the Study

The theory of Virtue Ethics plays a significant role in social reform and personal development. The research article is written with the following aims and objectives.

- To make a deep study on the Virtue Ethics of Aristotle
- To make a study on the role of Virtue Ethics in Social Reformation
- To make a study on the relevance of Virtue Ethics in contemporary times
- To find a formidable solution to the research problems and arrive at a conclusion

### Research Problems

Degradations of human thought, perception, and character have collapsed the core values of the individual and society. It has drastically affected human thought, culture, and relationships. For lack of Socio-Ethical Value, the world has become a hub of terror and conflict. It has not only changed the social system and individual outlook but also changed literary content. The research article will offer solutions to contemporary challenges and provide effective remedies for character development. The central issue of Aristotle's virtue ethics emphasises the moral conduct of the individual. Aristotle's four cardinal virtues—prudence, justice, temperance, and courage—can boost the minds of people struggling with depression. For the growth of materialism, the world has become a scattered, broken house in religion, nationalism,

### Research Problems



and caste. The study will provide a solution to both personal and social problems from an ethical perspective.

### Virtue Theory and Social Reformation

In the pursuit of a moral life, Aristotle defines that people should be honest, gentle, brave, and sincere to cultivate their character. He firmly believes that life is a complex phenomenon and that no principle is perfectly capable of guiding one through different life situations. He thinks that only a man of noble character can make the right decision in challenging conditions. The character is the most valuable asset that develops personality and virtue. His virtue ethics is wholly based on a character-based approach, which emphasises the perfection of moral character. The significant aspect of virtue is that anyone can acquire it through the practice of nobility. Mahatma Gandhi, the father of India, was a man of noble character who took an unconventional path, such as non-violence, non-cooperation, the Swadeshi movement, and fasting, to oust the mighty British from India. His noble leadership was instrumental in the organisation's success. Mahatma Gandhi himself is an example that human moral character is superior to any other force. In Buddhist mythology, Angulimala, a vicious robber, was unable to touch the monk Buddha due to his power of virtue. The power of character is the most potent force that develops all positive energies hidden in the inner mind.

### The Golden Mean and Virtue Ethics

The Golden Mean is the parameter of judging virtue, which he mentions in his book Nichomachean Ethics. He asserts that virtue remains in the middle path between the two extremes of vices of Excess and Vices of Deficiency. The vice of excess makes people extremely bold, over-smart, and leads to a superiority complex. The vice of deficiency makes people cowardly and mean. Defining Courage, Aristotle points out that courage is a noble virtue, but an excess of it makes one reckless, and a lack of it makes one cowardly. He opines that a courageous person fears only the thing to be feared and uses his bravery in proper measure. The middle path is the safest as it maintains a safe distance from both deficiency and excess.

Vice of Deficiency	Vice of Excess	Virtue Ethics
Cowardice	Over smart	Smart
Vanity	Humility	Regard
Enmity	Flattery	Friendship
Depression	Day dream	Ambition
Anti-Nationalism	Orthodox Nationalism	Nationalism

Inferiority Complex	Superiority Complex	Gentle
Absent minded	Passionate	Self-control

### **Virtue Ethics and Individual Ethics**

The individual is the fundamental component of society. Aristotle places the highest emphasis on the character of people and asserts that character can be shaped and refined through practice. He writes in his book 'Nichomachean' that people should be moral, honest, just, and brave. Great Indian Saints Valmiki and Angulimala had reformed their vicious character and acquired divinity by hard practice. Many people indeed possess virtue by birth. However, perfection of human character depends upon the practice of noble virtues. The Aristotelian theory is highly significant in the contemporary situation. Jane Austen was an ardent supporter of Virtue Ethics, and all her central characters reform their deficiencies in the course of the plot development. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Darcy and Bingley overcome their pride of social status, and Elizabeth overcomes her sense of intellectual superiority and prejudice. Jane Austen exposes some flaws in her central characters, and the excellence of virtues is revealed in their attempts to overcome deficiencies.

### **Eudaimonia and Phronesis**

Aristotle's concepts of eudaimonia and phronesis remain highly relevant today. Eudaimonia is a state of perfection in which people live a pleasurable life. He asserts that Eudaimonia should be the ultimate state of a happy life. Eudaimonia is contrary to modern approaches, including materialism and commercialisation. In Aristotelian Ethics, Phronesis is defined as an intellectual virtue that enables one to make proper decisions in a specific situation. The Phronesis is based on virtuous decision-making. Most prominent writers, such as William Wordsworth, William Shakespeare, Jane Austen, and Charles Dickens, emphasise Eudaimonia and Phronesis in their literary works. Eudaimonia develops the state of mind and outlook. Phronesis develops practical wisdom and mental ability to face any challenge. In William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Hamlet suffers from depression due to a lack of both ethical virtues. In Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Bennet overcomes all the struggles for her possession of Eudaimonia and Phronesis. Aristotle's Eudaimonia and Phronesis are interrelated virtues that can develop the inner strength of an individual to enjoy the divine pleasure of the uncertain world.

### **Conclusion**

Virtue Ethics can play a significant role in the development of society, art, literature, and all aspects of human life. The proper implementation of virtue ethics can help individuals reach an elevated level of sublimity, and literary critics and researchers should explore this theory for greater welfare and the discovery of truth.

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