ETHICAL CONCEPT OF BEING HUMAN

The world is entrenched in a difficult and seemingly irreversible calamity- the calamity of immorality in many areas of human life. In this sense, we have to consider the various moral ways in which human life can be lived more fully.

MORALITY –Principles concerning the distinction between right and wrong or good and bad behavior.

WISDOM –

DIGNITY-

MOTIVE-

DUTY-

**1. Aristotle’s Concept of Man**

**-** Aristotle taught that man is in pursuit of his end or finality.

- Aristotle says, “In general, people seek not the ways of their ancestors, but good” (Politics, 1269a)

**1.1 Human Nature**

Is the seat of control

Commands the body on what to do

The instrument

**Intellect**

- Determines human action

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Deals with human Emotions and Desires.

Deals with the body’s organic growth.

**-**For Aristotle, morality consists of morally virtuous acts.

*What are moral virtues?*

He says *“Virtue, then, being of two kinds, intellectual and moral,* ***intellectual virtue*** *owes its birth and growth to teaching (for it requires experience and time), while* ***moral virtue*** *comes about as a result of habit”*

The key to explaining the above comes from Aristotle’s doctrine of the mean, which implies that the human being must seek the **middle** when he acts. The **middle comes as a matter of choice**.

He says, *“Virtue, then, is a state of character concerned with choice lying in the mean, i.e. The mean relative to us, this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle through which the man of practical wisdom should determine it.”*

Our virtues are not mental faculties. Rather, these are character traits. It is the human being’s ability to see to it that his or her action is neither excessive nor inadequate, and as such, is geared towards finding some form of harmonization. It is something that one masters, and thus forms part of a good character.

**1.2 The Good Life**

For Aristotle, “the good” is a question about what it means to flourish. The idea of human flourishing is connected to the notion of living well as the ultimate end of human life.

For Aristotle, the ultimate end of human life is *eudaimonia* or the state of “living well”. The good life for each individual consists of kind of life that each values because it is one that flourishes with noteworthy human activity.

Some things matter to its achievement for Aristotle writes, “it is evident that eudaimonia stands in need of good things from outside, as we have said: for it is impossible or difficult to do fine things without resources” (1099a 31-3)

Basic social goods possess real value for the individual since these help the person achieve the highest end of human life, which is eudemonia.

Aristotle also meant to say that living well is not being in a static condition. Eudemonia is something that is fullly expressed in dynamic human activity. Thus, the good life should be assessed in terms of what the person is actually able to do and to be.

Living well, in this sense, is connected with doing or being able to act. We can make an analogy between living well and good athletic conditioning or the active life of an artist. Like good athlete or a good artist, a man who lives well fulfills dynamically certain things. An athlete competes and succeeds in his games and an artist produces a work of art with a quality that makes him excel in his fields,

Living well therefore is something that speaks of a person’s self-perfection and self-realization. It is actually the realization of a person’s full potential. For instance, some women are deprives of the chance to flourish or express themselves creatively because they lack education and other imaginative activities.

Living well is man’s self-perfection or self-realization. It is thus the achievement of man’s ultimate fulfillment. It refers to “excellence,” or arête, of how man is able to live to the fullest to extend of his capabilities as a human being.

**2. Immanuel Kant**

Each man, according to Immanuel Kant, can legislative for himself the good as a rational being. Moral obligation, Kant says, is universal and excuses no one. It is supreme and fundamental law of human nature. This moral obligation is called *duty.*

**2.1 The Rational Nature of Man**

Kant believes that moral law is grounded in human rationality. Human reason gives the individual the capacity to make judgments regarding the good. In this way, the human being should follow the dictates of his rational nature.

Thus this empirical knowledge can tell people how to do a certain act, it does not, according to Kant, provide the individual the basis on how he or she ought to act.

The moral “ought” here refers to the supreme and fundamental moral principle governing the goodness of an action. Kant’s argument is that the moral law requires that people be rewarded proportionately to the virtue.

Since man endowed with dignity, morality must be the basic respect for human dignity.

For Kant, human rationality makes individuals autonomous moral beings. *Auto* is a Greek word for “self” while *nomous* is a Greek word for law. In this sense, autonomy means “self-rule”. Morality, which for Kant, proceeds from the autonomy of the will, implies self-regulation. This means the individual performs the moral ought in accordance to the inner law of the will. All good emanates from the moral ought, which for Kant, is not a description of the good, but an authoritative principle that dictates human action.

For Kant, the essence of morality is to be found in the motive from which the act is done. This motive proceeds from a pure or autonomous will.

The “autonomy of the will” gives the moral agent the capacity to legislate the moral law within. The meaning of this is that human rationality gives the individual the ability to determine the good, and such, he is morally required to do the good accordingly,

Otherwise, the individual would be violating his capacity for self-rule, thus, for Kant, “nothing is good, without qualification, except a good will.”

Kant views the good will as in itself and is something not dependent on anything outside. Thus, we pursue the good life not because we desire certain values it gives to us, but because we have duty to fulfill the moral law within.

An act is moral on the basis that it is the right thing to do. This righteousness proceeds from an unimpeded good will.

The external incentives of a reward would not qualify for Kant’s requirements of a good will; the ultimate motivation of the individual in his act must only be the will to do good itself. Meaning to say, a good act is performed because as a rational beings, we know that we are duty-bound to do so. In this sense, Kant would require that individual do not perform good acts because they are primarily motivated by the happiness or utility brought by public recognition or benefit from a monetary reward.

Duty is good not because of some favorable consequences, but because it is good in itself. Morality proceeds from a good will, not an outside motive. The sole intention of the actor must doing the act for its own sake. A good act has no other purpose except the fulfillment of duty, which is the internal moral law of human being.

We can compare motivation to duty with other sorts of motives. For Kant, when the individual does something for the sake of his happiness or for the sake of being recognized, these things do not express goodwill. The reason is that the individual seems to do things only to be praised, and this does not correspond to a good will. The moral good does not promote any external ends like self-promotion. Its sole motive is to do the act on the basis that the human subject is duty bound to do so.

**2.2 Man as an End**

An act that has the self-interest for recognition or promotion is hypocritical and is not really an expression of a good will. Kant would argue that the goodness of an act does not come from any other motive except the fulfillment of the intention of a good will. Some actions may be praiseworthy, but they can be rendered immoral if they are tainted with self-serving motives of personal satisfaction or benefit. What determines the moral worth of an act is nothing else but the desire to do good and not the desire to gain something from doing good.

The ethics of duty is grounded in Kant’s Categorical Imperative commands that the human being must act as if the principles of his actions are universal in nature and that the individual must always treat his or her fellow human being as an end in itself,

First, universality means that a moral act is unconditional in nature. This means that any act must be morally justifiable in all places at all times. Universality means that when put in the same situation, any individual would act in the same manner. An example can be illustrated in making a promise. For instance, can the act of “breaking a promise” be morally justifiable in a universal sense? The answer is no. the reason being is that doing so would destroy the essence of a promise. People make promises based on the idea of trust. If breaking a promise is morally justifiable in a universal sense, nobody would trust anyone.

Second, the idea that the human being is an end in itself emanates from the fact that each person has dignity and that each human person is inviolable. Things and other instruments are used to achieve some goals. Things are means to an end. For example, when one might want to get wealthy, he can use his diploma in getting a good paying job. However, the person, being an end in itself, cannot be used to satisfy the goal of anybody who wants to acquire wealth. For instance, some people will take advantage of others by not giving them the exact benefits of employment in order to gain more profit. Such would reduce the person into a means to an end; thus violating the dignity of the human person.

**3. Martha Nussbaum**

Martha Nussbaum proposes an ethics of human development suggesting how a person can achieve a fully human life, based on the notion of *eudaimonia*, following Aristotle, merging it with Sen’s notion of capability. In the social realm, this is achieved by way of a social minimum. What this threshold provides is a sufficiently adequate level or a decent kind of life and well-being worthy of the dignity of the human person.

**3.1 The Concept of Being Human**

In Nussbaum’s book, *Women and Human Development,* she asserts the need for an account that shoes what is essentially ‘human’ in human life, which she characterizes as a thick theory of the good. This thick notion of the good, which prescribes some features of human life as universal, can be the ground for what is truly “human” in human development. Here, she maps out a human form of life, one that is fully informed in dignity, and possessing a broad consensus on what is essential to human life.

This essentialist view of what is truly human tells us that there are features, which account for a good life. These features, as the above tries to put forward, must be universal. For Nussbaum, these features refer to the set of central human capabilities. The lack thereof or the inadequacy in any of these central human capabilities is a failure of human life. The presence or absence of these essential features, according to Nussbaum, can be used “to measure the quality of human life.”

**3.2 Central Human Capabilities**

Nussbaum names the features of a fully human life in her list of Central Human Capabilities. For her, human life can only function well and can be lived more fully if each of the ten central human capabilities is satisfied. The Central Human Capabilities are as follows.

1. Life (Being able to live for the span normal for the species)
2. Bodily health (Being able to have good health and in order to obtain this, adequate nourishment and shelter)
3. Bodily integrity (Being able to be physically secure, and with rights over one’s own body. e.g. not forced to lose capacity for sexual satisfaction or forced to conceive or bear children)
4. Senses, imagination, and thought (Being able to use the senses, imagine, think and reason, and to do this in a truly human way: adequately educated, informed and free from repression)
5. Emotions (Being able to have attachments for other people and things)
6. Practical reason (Being able to form a conception of the food and to engage in critical reflection for the planning of one’s life)
7. Affiliation (A. Being able to interact well with other people, and to imagine and empathize with their situation; B. Having the social bases for self-respect and non-humiliation; not being subject to discrimination on the grounds of race, sex, etc.)
8. Other species (Being able to live with concern for the natural world)
9. Play (Being able to play and laugh)
10. Control over one’s environment (A. Being able to participate in political processes; B. Being able to have possessions and seek employment)

The central human capabilities are essential for a life that is fully human. As an Aristotelian essentialist, Nussbaum is saying that a life that lacks any one of these, no matter what else it has, will be lacking in humanness. The point is that a life that is truly human can only be lived if it is has all these universal values, for removing any of the above can severely alter how one lives his or her life. For instance, women must be allowed self-creativity in terms of their thoughts, emotions, and imagination including that of practical reason in order to live truly well. They need to be heard, choose their own career, and plan the kind of life they want to live.