



A) 'Explain virtue theory with reference to the beatitudes' (20)

Virtue Theory is an ethical theory based on developing someone's character traits and was first developed by Aristotle in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century B.C in his book *Nicomachean Ethics*. It is a relative ethical theory as it accepts that what is deemed a good character trait may change depending on culture. It is also teleological as it uses virtue as a way to cultivate 'Eudaimonia' as an end goal in society.

A key feature of virtue theory is that it is agent centred not act centred. This means that how to be ethically 'good' looks at whether or not a person is in the habit of being good, as opposed to just completing a good action. Unlike Divine Command Theory which bases 'goodness' on a particular set of rules, virtue theory focusses on being a good person. For example, it is better for someone to be in the habit of being good, rather than a bad person doing one good deed such as giving to charity.

Another feature of virtue theory is that it focuses on developing a person's character. Because a virtue is a good characteristic, virtue theory encourages the agent to develop and flourish over time. Aristotle himself compared this to a drawing; at first a character may be nothing but an outline or a sketch, but after sometime they will be a full watercolour. This shows that people are allowed to make mistakes in order to develop into better people. An example of this could be that a child may do some bad actions when they are younger, but this doesn't matter as they may develop into an adult who has learnt better habits.

In order to understand what exactly what a 'virtue' is, Aristotle developed the Golden Mean. This is a way of discovering the balance between the vice of deficiency and the vice of excess. Whilst Aristotle maintained that the four 'cardinal' virtues (cardo being Latin for 'hinge') are Temperance (the ability to moderate), Justice (the ability to seek equality), Prudence (the ability to judge rationally between actions) and Courage (the ability to be brave), he also used the Golden Mean to discover a plethora of other virtues. An example could be that the golden mean between the excess of bashfulness and the deficiency of shyness would rest in the virtue of modesty.

A final development of Virtue Theory came much later in Christian thought through Jesus' beatitudes. Despite virtue theory not being religious by nature, many Christians seek to use Jesus Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 to know which characteristics to develop. Whilst Jesus' eudemonia is found in heaven, his beatitudes are characteristics which he asks Christians to develop. For example, Jesus said 'blessed are the meek...blessed are the poor in spirit...blessed are the peacemakers'. Again, these aren't individual actions but character traits so again fall in line with an agent centred approach to ethics.