**Value and Virtue Theories**

**“Theories of Quality and Virtue”**

**Learning objectives**

Knowledge:

* Understand the definition of virtue: desirable human qualities
* Understand the definition of vice: undesirable human qualities
* Understand virtue theory
* Understand the doctrine of the mean in virtue theory
* Understand the method of judgement in virtue theory
* Understand the difference between virtue theory and utilitarianism and deontology
* Understand the strengths and weaknesses of virtue theory

Skills:

* Apply virtue theory
* Critical thinking skills

Values and Attitudes:

* Professionalism
* The golden mean
* Mercy and Mindfulness
* The Seven Values

Important notes:

1. This learning resource is prepared for teachers of Senior Secondary Ethics and Religious Studies. Teachers are expected to make adaptation and enrichment according to the needs of their students. Moreover, after each learning activities, teachers should provide debriefing to students for their development of positive values and integrative application of generic skills.

2. The ERS curriculum is for S4-S6 SS students. This learning resource uses plain language as far as possible to explain theories of ethics, which, in some cases, are simplified to suit the learning needs of the students.

3. Cases, stories, movie plots, and classic moral dilemmas are included for the purpose of students’ reflection in the learning process. To illustrate moral dilemmas, some viewpoints in this material may seem exaggerated and critical. Teachers should always remind their students of the difference between these viewpoints and the reality in the present world. Judging the past with contemporary standard is not the intended perspective, rather, students should be guided to make contrast and holistic understanding of the relationship between these practices and their historic, cultural and social contexts.

4. The discussion questions, key points and knowledge content of the learning resource are suggestion in nature. Learning and teaching should not be limited to these suggestions. Teacher should use them flexibly for ongoing development of school-based resource according to the learning objectives of the curriculum.

**Suggested teaching period: 5 lessons**

**Teacher shall prepare:**

* Introductory Activity: Pick up the money on the ground; Making donation for relief work
* Knowledge Content of the Subject (1): Virtue Theory and Quality
* Knowledge Content of the Subject (2): Making Judgement in Virtue Theory
* Knowledge Content of the Subject (3): Comparison of Virtue Theory, Utilitarianism, and Deontology
* Knowledge Content of the Subject (4): Strengths and Weaknesses of Virtue Theory
* **Worksheet (1)**: Virtues of the Professionals
* **Worksheet (2)**: **The Doctrine of the Mean**
* **Worksheet (3)**: **Buddhist Virtues**
* **Worksheet (4)**: Seven Deadly Sins
* Case Study (1): Thinking with Virtue Theory in Daily Life
* Case Study (2): Mr Ho’s Cornea

Teaching process:

1. Teacher discusses “Introductory Activity: Picking up a banknote from the ground; Making donation for relief work” with the students.

* **Teachers can guide students to understand that same good actions can be based on different motives, and these different motives in turn reflect the inner qualities of different people. Therefore, looking at actions alone, we may neglect the good and bad inner characters of the actor.**

1. Teacher explains “Knowledge Content of the Subject (1) Virtue Theory and Quality”.

Teacher may ask student to summarize the key points of Virtue Theory:

* “Virtues” are desirable human qualities
* “Vices” are undesirable human qualities
* Virtue theory is concerned with the cultivation of individual inner character, rather than focusing on actions and principles of actions, just as consequentialism and deontology do.
* Virtue theory argues that morality is an individual's choice of action in a particular situation.

1. **Students shall finish “Worksheet (1)**: Virtues of the Professionals”, which explains modern virtue theory and introduces those virtues that can make all kinds of professions better.
2. **Divide the students in groups of 4-5 and ask** them **to discuss and finish “Worksheet (2)**: **The Doctrine of the Mean**”, which illustrates that in Aristotelian virtue theory, **both “too much” or “too little” are vices, and only staying in the “middle path” is the virtue.**
3. **Divide the students in groups of 4-5 and ask them to discuss and finish “Worksheet (3)**: **Buddhist virtues” or “Worksheet (4)**: Seven Deadly Sins”. Both worksheets introduce to the students some important religious virtues and help them to explore appropriateness of applying these religious virtues in the society today.
4. **Teacher explains “**Knowledge Content of the Subject (2): Making Judgement in Virtue Theory” and uses cases to illustrate the method of moral judgement in virtue theory.
5. **Divide the students in groups of 4-5 and ask them to discuss “**Case Study (1): Thinking with Virtue Theory in Daily Life”, helping students to further practice moral judgements with virtue theory.
6. Teacher explains “Knowledge Content of the Subject (3): Comparison of Virtue Theory, Utilitarianism, and Deontology” and uses cases to illustrate the differences in doing moral judgement between virtue theory and theories of conduct.
7. **Divide the students in groups of 4-5 and ask them finish “**Case Study (2): Mr Ho’s Cornea”. A representative of e**ach group shall present the results of their discussion. This activity is to illustrate** the differences in doing moral judgement between virtue theory and theories of conduct.
8. Teacher may conclude by explaining “Knowledge Content of the Subject (4): Strengths and weaknesses of Virtue Theory”.

**Introductory Activity**

Picking up a banknote from the ground

Someone left a hundred-dollar note on the ground in the school corridor. There are two possible scenarios:

1. Wing Man passes by and sees the note. He thinks he should not take it as his own, as it does not belong to him. So he picks it up and hands it over to the school office.
2. Wei Ching passes by, sees the note and picks it up. The idea of keeping it for himself just pops up in his mind. However, he also fears that should this act be discovered, he would face dire consequences. At last he decides to hand it over to the school office.

(fictional story)

Question for discussion:

Which one of the two persons do you think is more moral? why?

Making donation for relief work

Recently, a South Asian country is in urgent need of foreign help because of natural disasters. Aid agencies call Hong Kong people for donation. The following two people have different considerations after hearing the appeal:

(1) Even though Ming Lok does not have much feeling about this appeal, he thinks it is a human duty to help those in need. So, he takes $100 from his small saving and donates it to the victims.

(2) After hearing the appeal, Tsz Shan feels deeply saddened for the victims. So, she takes $100 from her small saving and donates it to the victims. (fictional story)

Question for discussion:

Which one of two persons do you think is more moral? why?

**Knowledge Content of the Subject (1): Virtue theory and Quality**

What is “virtue”?

“Virtues” are the good qualities of humankind. They constitute the good inner character of a person.

Specifically, virtues are some of our good and stable habits that shape our character, guide us to do good, and lead us to a better life. For example, you have developed the habit of “handling difficult or even dangerous tasks with perseverance.” Moreover, you always handle tasks this way instead of only once in a while. Then, you already have the virtue of “courage”.

On the contrary, “vices” are undesirable qualities. Specifically, people who have a vice have developed an undesirable habit.

Well-known examples of virtue are honesty, compassion, fairness, temperance, responsibility, prudence, courage, generosity and so on, while filial piety and loyalty are traditional Chinese virtues. Examples of vice are lies, cheating, selfishness, retaliation, jealousy, and more.

When we learned the theory of value, we understood that the things that we call “good” or “good” are valuable. Virtue is a good human quality, so it is a kind of value. Virtue is a unique form of value because it is limited to the quality of human character and does not even include the individual human acts. Therefore, we will not refer to non-human beings or things as virtuous.

Virtue Theory

Virtue theory (also known as “virtue ethics”) is the ethical theory that takes virtues as its core. It is concerned with the cultivation of individual inner character, rather than focusing on actions and principles of actions, just as consequentialism and deontology do.

Virtue theorists believe that actions are manifestation of inner qualities. Good people do good acts because they have good character; bad people do bad acts because they have bad character. This understanding seems to be in line with our general perception. For example, suppose you have a friend who often lies to other people, but he assures you that he will be honest to you. You may find it hard to totally trust him, not because he has deceived you, but because you judge that he is a dishonest person from his usual behaviour. In other words, there is no virtue of honesty in his character, but only the vice of cheating.

Virtue theory argues that morality is an individual's choice of action in a particular situation. The reason is that every situation we face is unique and it is difficult to have a general rule that gives an answer in advance. People with virtues will make judgments based on the specific circumstances of a situation by following the feelings, thoughts and views of their own habits, and then act accordingly.

Reference:

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-virtue/>

**Worksheet (1)**: **Virtues of the professionals**

Modern virtue theory holds that virtues can make all kinds of profession better. Please suggest the virtues needed for the following professions.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Professions | Virtues |
| 1. Medical staff |  |
| 1. Teacher |  |
| 1. Firefighter |  |
| 1. Military personnel |  |
| 1. Artist |  |
| 1. Merchant |  |
|  |  |

(Suggested answer)

Modern virtue theory holds that virtues can make all kinds of professions better. Please suggest the virtues needed for the following professions.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Professions | Virtues |
| 1. Medical staff | patience, prudence |
| 1. Teacher | patience, compassion |
| 1. Firefighter | courage, prudence |
| 1. Military personnel | courage, obedience |
| 1. Artist | courage, honesty |
| 1. Merchant | integrity, decisiveness, perseverance |
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**Worksheet (2)**: **The Doctrine of the Mean**

**The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle is one of the most important virtue theorists in the West. He argues in his writings on ethics that when we deal with things, both “too much” or “too little” are vices, and only staying in the “middle path” is the virtue. Aristotle agrees that it would not be easy to live and act correctly in accordance with the “middle path”. However, even if we do not reach the middle path, it is already good enough to be able to leave the extremes. He illustrates his point with the following metaphor: following the middle path is just like archery. While shooting at a target centre is not easy, it is already an improvement if we know we have been shooting too far to the right or to the left and move away from extremes and aiming at the center.**

**Below are some virtues related to different persons, what would you call the “too much” or “too little” of that character?**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Spheres of judgement** | **Deficit** | **Virtue（the mean）** | **Excess** |
| Confidence | Cowardice (lack of confidence) | Courage | Foolhardiness (too much confidence) |
| Pleasure |  | Temperance |  |
| Giving |  | Generosity |  |
| Honour |  | Proper pride |  |
| Anger |  | Good temper |  |
| Shame |  | Modesty |  |

Aristotle set up his academy, the Lykeion, in Athens. He liked lecturing while walking with his students in the covered walkways and garden on the campus, so his philosophical school was called the Peripatetic School. Aristotle’s teaching seemed easy, but he was described as the most erudite person. He was not only a philosopher, but also a scientist, musician and politician. On the campus, there are libraries, laboratories and rooms for collecting different animals and plants, so that apart from receiving training in thinking, students could also conduct scientific study together. He integrated different subject areas by his erudition and thus advocated the idea of the mean. He thought that animals and plants must keep themselves in the middle path so as to maintain their natures. His aesthetic principle also holds high the middle path. At the same time, he believed that an ideal city-state, just like aesthetics and animals and plants, must also practice the middle path so as to be self-sufficient.

Reference:

趙雅博，《西洋哲學的發展》 臺北: 臺灣商務印書館, 1994，頁92。

李蓓英，〈論亞里士多德的中道思想〉，《貴陽師專學報（社會科學版）》，2001年第4期。https://wenku.baidu.com/view/8b7517da50e2524de5187e69.html



Plato, teacher of Aristotle (on the left) and Aristotle (on the right)

Raphael, *The School of Athens*, frescoes, 500cm x 700cm, 1509-1510, in the Apostolic Palace in the Vatican.

(Suggested answer)

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Spheres of judgement** | **Deficit** | **Virtue（the mean）** | **Excess** |
| Confidence | Cowardice (lack of confidence) | Courage | Foolhardiness (too much confidence) |
| Pleasure | Insensibility | Temperance | Indulgence |
| Giving | Meanness | Generosity | Prodigality |
| Honour | Inferiority | Proper pride | Vanity |
| Anger | Over-suppressed | Good temper | Irascibility |
| Shame | Shamelessness | Modesty | Bashfulness |

**Worksheet (3)**: **Buddhist virtues**

Although Buddhism has precepts for regulating human behaviour, it also emphasizes the cultivation of human inner virtues.

1. Below are some well-known Buddhist virtues, please try to explain their meanings:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Virtues** | **Meaning** |
| Compassion |  |
| Non-attachment |  |
| Not killing |  |
| Mindfulness |  |

2. If you have to promote one of the above virtues in the society today, which one would you choose? Why?

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(Suggested answer)

Although Buddhism has precepts for regulating human behaviour, it also emphasizes the cultivation of human inner virtues.

1. Below are some well-known Buddhist virtues, please try to explain their meanings:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Virtues** | **Meaning** |
| Compassion | The wish and ability to bring happiness and joy to others and to transform and alleviate the suffering of others. |
| Non-attachment | To let go of one’s own desires, feelings and opinions, and not to ask others to agree or follow. |
| Not killing | To love human beings and all other beings and do not hurt them. |
| Mindfulness | The wish and ability to stay calmly in the present and to accept everything non-judgmentally. |

2. If you have to promote one of the above virtues in the society today, which one would you choose? Why?

For example: I will choose to promote non-attachment. In the society today, people are self-centred. In many cases, people cling to their own feelings and opinions. They demand others to identify with them, which will easily lead to disputes and make themselves unhappy. If they can cultivate the virtue of non-attachment and let go of their own views, they will be happier and human relationship will become more harmonious.

**Worksheet (4)**: **Seven Deadly Sins**

The Seven Deadly Sins are seven serious types of sinful behavior that humans are guilty of according to Catholicism. Since the 14th century, the Seven Deadly Sins have been a common theme for creativity for European artists, and are universally recognized by the people of later times. It is said that in the 4th and 5th century, the Roman Christian poet, Aurelius Clemens Prudentius, described in one of his poem the war between good and evil and mentioned the seven virtues corresponding to the seven sins

Reference:

<http://www.aquinasandmore.com/catholic-articles/the-seven-capital-virtues/article/247>

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Seven Virtues** | **Seven Deadly Sins** |
| Chastity | Lust |
| Temperance | Gluttony |
| Liberality | Greed |
| Diligence | Sloth |
| [Patience](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patience) | Wrath |
| [Kindness](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kindness) | Envy |
| Humility | Pride |

1. Describe the meanings of any four of above virtues

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| --- | --- |
| **Seven Virtues** | **Meaning** |
| Example: Chastity | The ability to control sexual drive and make appropriate judgments of appropriate sexual behavior. |
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2. If you have to promote one of the above virtues in the society today, which one would you choose? Why?

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(Suggested answer)

1. Describe the meanings of any four of above virtues

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Seven Virtues** | **Meaning** |
| Example: Chastity | The ability to control sexual drive and make appropriate judgments of appropriate sexual behavior. |
| Temperance | The ability to control oneself, moderate one’s behavior, and delay one’s gratification. |
| Liberality | The ability to give without the hope of getting applause and returns. |
| Diligence | The ability to live one’s life and to share one’s faith with passion. |
| [Patience](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patience) | The ability to tolerate and forgive others and to find the right solution for conflicts. |
| [Kindness](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kindness) | The ability to care for the needs of others with sympathy and without bias. |
| Humility | The ability to keep one’s behavior gentle and treat others unselfishly and respectfully. |

Reference: <http://www.aquinasandmore.com/catholic-articles/the-seven-capital-virtues/article/247>

2. If you have to promote one of the above virtues in the society today, which one would you choose? Why?

For example: I will choose to promote patience. In the society today, people are fond of instant gratification. It is easy for people to become dissatisfied when others do not act according to their wish. This will in turn lead to interpersonal conflicts. If they can cultivate the virtue of patience, they will be able to tolerate others and find out ways of doing things that are satisfying to both themselves and others.

**Knowledge Content of the Subject (2):**

**Making Judgement in Virtue Theory**

We can use the example of “Is lying moral?” to illustrate the method of making judgment in virtue theory.

Kant holds that lying is immoral because it cannot meet the requirements of the Formula of Universal Law. Act utilitarianism takes whether the act of lying can maximize the happiness of the people affected as the criteria of judgement. Rule utilitarianism claims that as “do not lie” has been recognized as a rule that can maximize happiness, lying is immoral.

Virtue theory is very different from the above theories of conduct. It is concerned with the character of the actors themselves and also considers the particular situations of the actors. In other words, lying can be moral in some situations and immoral in others. Here are two such situations:

**Situation 1**

Chi Ming wants to borrow money from his friends to buy his favorite things. He lies to his friend he will pay the money back soon although he knows he cannot do so. Chi Ming has already offended some friends before for borrowing money by lying.

Moral judgement: Chi Ming knowingly deceives his friends to satisfy his desires. This decision and act of lying is purely based on the bad inner quality of “selfishness”, so he is a person of vice.

**Situation 2**

Ho Tin’s brother is addicted to gambling. One day, his brother comes home and forces Ho Tin to tell where mother’s money is. Although Ho Tin knows where the money is, but according to his past experience, he knows his brother is going to take money to gamble. He does not want his mother and family to suffer a loss, nor does he want his brother to continue gambling, so he lies to his brother and says their mother has already taken away the money.

Moral judgments: Ho Tin deceives his brother by lying. His purpose is to protect their family. His decision and action are based on the virtue of caring (filial piety can also be included here) rather than selfishness, he is a man of virtue.

[Note: Ho Tin is actually facing a conflict of two virtues - caring and honesty. We will discuss the problem of conflicts of virtue later.]

**Case Study (1): Thinking with Virtue Theory in Daily Life**

Case 1: Grandfather’s Prejudice

During a family gathering, your grandfather tells a joke about ethnic minorities and then keeps saying how ethnic minorities have disturbed the public order and undermined the lives of Hong Kong people. Although you always respect your grandfather, you cannot agree with his views because what he says is different from what you learn in class. Other family members say nothing about the matter. What are you going to do?

(A fictional case)

1. What will you consider before making your decision? What virtues do these considerations expressed?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Your considerations | Virtues expressed |
| 1. I think what grandfather said is not true and is different from what I have learned in class. I feel uncomfortable after hearing his views. | Pursuit of truth |
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2. Based on the above considerations, how would you decide? Explain your thinking process.

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Case 2: Selecting the leading actor

Your school is preparing an annual musical and is now selecting the roles through audition. Both you and Lap Tin wish to be the leading actor. In the eyes of your classmates, both of you are suitable candidates for this role. However, the musical of last year was a great success, and you were the leading actor. At lunch time, the director of the musical this year tells you that you are the best candidate for the leading actor, so he will select you no matter what the recommendation of the selection panel will be. Will you agree with the director's decision?

(A fictional case)

1. What will you consider before making your decision? What virtues do these considerations expressed?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Your considerations | Virtues expressed |
| 1. |  |
| 2. |  |
| 3. |  |
| 4. |  |

2. Based on the above considerations, how would you decide? Explain your thinking process.

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Case 3: Your favorite cat in critical illness

Your favorite cat Coco is ill. After examination, the veterinarian tells you: “Coco’s disease has become incurable. According to our experience, it can only live for a few more weeks. You have two options: you can let it go naturally or you can end its life earlier with euthanasia.” The veterinarian assures you that euthanasia is painless and fast, and that you can choose to accompany it on its final journey. The vet also says that if you choose the natural way for it to die, she can give Coco some medicine to reduce its pain. In this way, Coco will still suffer a little pain, and it will sleep more and more, until one day it will not wake up anymore. How will you choose?

(A fictional case)

1. What will you consider before making your decision? What virtues do these considerations expressed?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Your considerations | Virtues expressed |
| 1. |  |
| 2. |  |
| 3. |  |
| 4. |  |

2. Based on the above considerations, how would you decide? Explain your thinking process.

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(Suggested answer)

Case 1: Grandfather’s prejudice

1. What will you consider before making your decision? What virtues do these considerations expressed?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Your considerations | Virtues expressed | |
| 1. I think what grandfather said is not true and is different from what have I learned in class. I feel uncomfortable after hearing his views. | Pursuit of truth |
| 1. People often discriminate against ethnic minorities. I think we need to be sympathetic to them. I think they are being treated unfairly. | Justice/Fairness/Sympathy | |
| 1. I respect my grandfather. My parents always teach me to respect elderly people. | Respect/Filial Piety | |
| 4. |  | |

2. Based on the above considerations, how would you decide? Explain your thinking process.

I will choose to tell my grandfather my different views. I value truth and justice. I will try my best to state my position whenever possible. I choose to voice out my different views, not because I do not respect my grandfather. In fact, I know that my different views may lead to opposition between us and even a small conflict. So, when I speak, I will try my best to do it calmly. I will also quote the knowledge I have learned about ethnic minorities, so as to enhance my persuasion.

Case 2: Selecting the leading actor

1. What will you consider before making your decision? What virtues do these considerations expressed?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Your considerations | Virtues expressed |
| 1. I like playing musicals very much and will definitely try my best to play the role well. | Passion/ devotion |
| 1. I am very grateful to the director of his appreciation | Gratitude |
| 1. Lap Tin should also have an audition, for it is reasonable to have a fair competition, or I will feel guilty | Justice/ fairness |
| 1. Secret decision that other students do not know or favoritism is a dishonest act. | Honesty |

2. Based on the above considerations, how would you decide? Explain your thinking process.

I will propose to the director that the choice of leading actor should be based on the result of audition. I will first express my gratitude to the director for his appreciation of me, which has a positive effect on me. However, I will also say that if Lap Tin does not get a fair chance and other students do not know the real situation, I will feel uncomfortable and will feel guilty in the future. Therefore, unless the students are informed that the selection method has been changed this year, otherwise the leading actor should be chosen by the result of audition. I will earnestly request the director to base his decision on our performance.

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Case 3: Your favorite cat in critical illness

1. What will you consider before making your decision? What virtues do these considerations expressed?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Your considerations | Virtues expressed |
| 1. I love Coco. I want to keep its pain to minimum. | Compassion/ love |
| 1. I value my time with Coco. With its company, I feel happy. I also feel it likes me and my family to accompany it. | Care |
| 1. I think nature has its own order. It is best to reduce our human intervention. Compared to euthanasia, pain-killing represents a smaller intervention. | Respect for nature/ Sincerity |
| 1. I know that no matter what choice I make, I may regret, but I am willing to bear the consequences. | Responsibility |

2. Based on the above considerations, how would you decide? Explain your thinking process.

I decide to let Coco to die naturally and use drugs to alleviate its pain. I value the relationship with Coco and enjoy the memory of its company in the past. I understand that euthanasia can immediately eliminate its pain, but in doing so, it is a human intervention to nature, Coco cannot make a choice for itself. Even though using pain-killing drugs is also an intervention to nature, it is relatively mild. Moreover, if I were Coco, I would also make the choice of spending time together in the final phase of life. I know there is uncertainty about this choice. Maybe when I will see it die slowly, I will be very sad. But I will face the consequences of my own thoughtful choice.

**Knowledge Content of the Subject (3): Comparison of**

**Virtue Theory, Utilitarianism, and Deontology**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Virtue Theory | Utilitarianism | Deontology |
| 1. Basic Concepts | * Emphasis on the human inner qualities (virtues) | * Emphasis on the consequences of the action | * Emphasis on the rightness or wrongness of the action itself （if it is in accordance with universal duty） |
| 1. Core Question | * “Which kind of person should I be?” | * “What should I do?” | * “What should I do?” |
| 1. Moral Judgement | * Making judgments based on the specific circumstances of a situation by following the feelings, thoughts and views of their own habits, and then act accordingly. | * Find out the action that can maximize the happiness of the affected persons. | * Find out the action that is the realization of universal duties (a duty is the responsibility required by moral principles) |

**Case Study (2): Mr Ho’s Cornea**

Mr Ho was a kind, public-spirited, life-loving young man in his twenties. Although he was worried about pain and disliked the sight of blood, he accepted the idea of organ donation, and believed that he had a responsibility to help others in need. Therefore, after careful consideration, he signed an organ donor card.

One day, Mr Ho sustained severe head injuries in a car accident, leaving him in a coma. Two days later, he became brain-dead and was put on a life-support machine to sustain his breathing, pulse, and other essential bodily functions. One month later, despite the doctors’ best efforts to save him, he died from organ failure.

The death of her husband broke Mrs Ho’s heart. However, she still remembered her husband had signed an organ donation card during his lifetime. So when the medical staff asked Mrs Ho about the donation of her husband’s organs, she expressed her respect for her husband's wishes in favor of helping those in need and agreed to donate all her husband's organs.

After detailed examination, the doctor came to the conclusion that Mr Ho’s vital organs had failed and were unsuitable for donation, only his cornea was to be transplanted to another patient. The doctor told Mrs Ho that the removal of the cornea from the body would be virtually undetectable to the naked eye, and would not damage the external appearance of the body.

However, Mr Ho’s father later found out about the proposed transplant and refused to give permission for his son’s organs to be donated to those in need on the principle of “keeping the body whole”.

After considering Mr Ho’s father’s opinion and thinking it over and over again, Mrs Ho finally decided to keep her original decision to donate Mr. Ho's cornea.

(Fictional story)

Question for discussion:

Do you think Mrs Ho’s decision is moral? Please comment and analyze her decision from the perspectives of virtue theory, utilitarianism, and deontology respectively, and fill in the table on the next page.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Virtue Theory | Utilitarianism | Deontology |
| Moral Judgement |  |  |  |

(Suggested answer)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Virtue Theory | Utilitarianism | Deontology |
| Moral Judgement | Virtue theory takes into consideration Mrs Ho’s character and the context she was in.   1. She loved her husband and respected his wish. 2. She was a reliable person as she insisted on completing what her husband had entrusted to her. 3. Facing great sorrow, she could still handle the donation of her husband’s organs in a courageous and calm way. 4. She was sympathetic in understanding the needs of other patients.   🡺 Therefore, Mrs. Ho demonstrated her virtues in agreeing to donate Mr Ho’s cornea according to his wish, and her decision was moral. | From the perspective of rule utilitarianism, Mrs Ho can choose between two rules:  Rule A: “To respect others” (Respect for the wishes of her husband / Mr Ho’s father)  Rule B: “To help people in urgent need” (to help patients awaiting organ transplant)   * In general, “to help people in urgent need” has a higher priority than “to respect others.” * Moreover, Mrs Ho must also respect the wishes of her husband / Mr Ho’s father   🡺 Rule B has a higher priority, so organ donation was moral.  From the perspective of act utilitarianism, Mrs Ho had two options:  Option A: Accomplish her husband's last wish and donate his cornea.  Option B: Follow the idea of Mr. Ho’s father, do not donate her husband's cornea.  If she chose option A,   * The happiness of Mrs Ho would increase since her husband’s last wish could be accomplished. * The happiness of the recipient and his/her family would increase because of the cure of disease. * The happiness of the medical staff treating the patient would increase as the eye disease of the patient would be cured. * Mr Ho’s father suffered as he could not keep his son’s body whole.   If she chose option B,   * The happiness of Mr Ho’s father would increase as he could keep his son’s body whole. * The pain of Mrs Ho would increase since her husband’s last wish could not be accomplished. * The potential recipient and his/her family and the medical staff would keep their happiness unchanged, or they might even become more painful because of disappointment.   🡺 Obviously, option A can increase the happiness of the persons involved than option B. Therefore, Mrs Ho’s act of donating her husband’s cornea is moral. | According to the formula of universal law of deontology,   * The principle behind Mrs Ho’s agreement to donate her husband’s cornea is: “To help those patients in need, I will donate my family members’ organs for transplantation according to their last wish after their death.” * Imagine a world where, to help those patients in need, everyone will donate their family members’ organ according to their last wish after their death. * The imagine world has no contradiction. Its existence is possible and it is what we would desire.   🡺 Thus, Mrs Ho’s decision to donate Mr Ho’s cornea according to his wish is moral. |

**Knowledge Content of the Subject (4): Strengths and Weaknesses of Virtue Theory**

**Strengths of Virtue Theory**

**Strength 1: Comprehensive consideration**

Unlike utilitarianism and deontology, virtue theory does not focus only on rational analysis. When making moral judgments, virtue theory emphasizes personal character, emotion and relationship, as well as the unique situation of the person involved.

**Strength 2: Focus on the actors themselves**

In contrast to utilitarianism and deontology, virtue theory does not focus only on action itself. Rather, it is concerned with the character and habits of the actor. Therefore, virtue theory can encourage people to be better persons than merely act according to moral requirements.

**Strength 3: Acceptance of the moral complexity**

Theory of conduct holds that moral principles can make clear moral judgment for action. Virtue theory argues that each person is facing a particular situation. Therefore, it allows people to make their own moral judgement according to their own good qualities.

**Weaknesses of Virtue Theory**

**Weakness 1: Limited to individual moral issues**

Virtue theory is only concerned with individual character and life. It cannot deal with larger moral issues such as wealth distribution in society.

**Weakness 2: Unable to makes absolute judgment**

Virtue theory does not have absolute principles of moral judgment and takes into consideration the unique personal traits and situation. Therefore, it cannot make absolute moral judgment.

**Weakness 3: Conflicts of Virtues**

When virtues are in conflict, virtue theory may not be able to set a clear priority of virtues. Therefore it cannot provide clear guidelines for action.

Reference:

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-virtue/>

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