

Integrating Virtue Ethics into Public Management to Guide Moral Behaviour from a Metaethical Perspective

Le Song

Department of Language and Humanities Education, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM)

UPM 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

Maizura Yasin (Corresponding author)

Department of Language and Humanities Education, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM)

UPM 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

Marzni Mohamed Mokhtar

Department of Language and Humanities Education, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM)

UPM 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

Received: Sep. 5, 2025 Accepted: Nov. 6, 2025 Online published: Dec. 31, 2025

doi:10.5296/jpag.v15i3.23485

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5296/jpag.v15i3.23485>

Abstract

Based on a metaethical vision, this study aims to analyse the revival of virtue ethics in modern moral philosophy and its critique of deontology and utilitarianism, with particular attention to their limitations in ignoring human emotions and social attributes. The research questions focused on exploring how virtue ethics responds to the shortcomings of modern moral philosophy, highlighting the central role of emotions in moral behaviour and the reasonableness of virtue as a code of conduct. The researchers employed a qualitative method of literature analysis to systematically review the historical background of virtue ethics and its major schools of thought, including neo-Aristotelianism, emotionalism, and pluralism. The study's findings suggest that virtue ethics emphasises the value of emotions and noble qualities in moral behaviours, providing a new perspective on moral education and demonstrating the strong connection between virtues, emotions and moral behaviour. Future research should further explore the applicability of virtue ethics in different cultural contexts and its value to moral education, and it is suggested that the strengths of other types of ethical

theories should be incorporated into virtue ethics to form a more comprehensive theoretical ethical framework. Researchers have also emphasised the importance of integrating virtue ethics into government governance and public management practices. This not only promotes the development of moral emotions and personal qualities within individuals but also enhances the credibility of government and social institutions, providing meaningful solutions to the moral dilemmas encountered in public governance practices.

Keywords: modern moral philosophy, virtue ethics, metaethical, public management

1. Introduction

Virtue ethics can be traced back to the ethics of Aristotle in Ancient Greece and the philosophy of Confucius and Mencius in the East and is an ancient and traditional moral philosophy (Alzola et al., 2020; Hursthouse & Pettigrove, 2022). However, starting from the Age of Enlightenment, the status of this traditional ethical theory has been shaken and even marginalised by the modern moral philosophy represented by deontology and utilitarianism (Zhou, 2018). According to deontology, the moral behaviours of rational human beings conform to obligations or moral rules (Kant, 2012). In other words, people's moral behaviour can be done only when rational moral rules or norms guide them. Utilitarianism derives the basis for judgement of moral behaviour from whether the quantifiable consequences of an action are consistent with the principle of maximum utility (Mill, 2016). The disproportionate focus on rationality in modern moral philosophy has led to the natural exclusion of virtue ethics from normative ethical theories.

However, after the 1950s, modern moral philosophy gradually revealed shortcomings (Wen, 2021). Normative ethics, represented by deontology and utilitarianism, was no longer a satisfactory ethical theory (Zhao, 2022). Anscombe (1958) was the first to attack modern moral philosophy and launched a revival of virtue ethics. Virtue ethicists have also successively made powerful critiques of contemporary moral philosophy and promoted the development and revival of traditional virtue ethics (Chen & Zhou, 2022). Stocker (1976), for example, criticised that an essential mark of a person's ability to lead a good or happy life is the unity between reasons and motives of actions, but modern moral philosophy splits them. With the combined efforts of virtue ethicists, virtue ethics has been recognised as one of the three major normative ethical theories (Zhou, 2018; Sison et al., 2020).

Contemporary virtue ethics theory uses virtues and vices as a core concept (Hursthouse & Pettigrove, 2022) and has gradually developed three primary schools of thought: neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, emotionist virtue ethics, and pluralist virtue ethics, which take the paths of rationality, emotion, and the merging of rationality and emotion, respectively constructed their respective theories of virtue ethics (Li, 2022). The neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics argue that virtue is a noble character and virtuous people naturally do what they ought to do morally (Hursthouse, 1999). This school emphasises the importance of actors and virtues, constructs a relatively complete system of normative virtue ethics, and forms a complete chain from noble character to moral behaviours. It is important to note that the link between people's values and morals, motives, reasons and behaviours has always been interesting in metaethics (Sayre-McCord, 2023; Allan, 2015). Therefore, this study discusses

the rationality of virtue in guiding agents to behave morally based on the basic concepts of metaethics and further supports neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics.

In summary, deontology and utilitarianism face increasing criticism in modern moral philosophy, particularly for their weaknesses in dealing with human emotions and social relations. At the same time, modern moral philosophy has tended to emphasise rationality and universally applicable moral norms, neglecting the complexity of human beings as social animals and the role of emotions. Such limitations have prompted scholars to revisit the value of virtue ethics as a better reflection of human ethical practices and emotional experiences. This study aims to examine the contemporary value of virtue ethics and its significance in moral education. Specific research questions include how virtue ethics responds to the shortcomings of modern ethical theories and the role of emotions and virtues in guiding moral behaviour. The study will use metaethics as a basis for reviewing the major schools of virtue ethics and their theoretical contributions. It will also provide strategies and guidance on virtue ethics for moral education towards public.

2. The Weaknesses of Modern Moral Philosophy

Modern moral philosophy takes behaviour as the centre of theory and the basis of moral judgement and proposes moral norms with obligatory duties (Van Staveren, 2007; Gong & Chen, 2013). Deontology emphasises presuppositional norms and argues that right actions must be those that conform to moral rules; utilitarianism is more concerned with whether the outcome of an action conforms to the principle of maximum utility and that only actions that quantifiably conform to this principle are morally right in a moral judgement (Stewart, 2009; Li, 2022). However, as virtue ethicists have criticised, generalised moral norms have become increasingly exposed to obvious shortcomings in modern social life and communication.

Firstly, modern moral philosophy focuses on promoting rationality while ignoring human beings' social and real nature. However, since humans live in multiple communities of varying forms, human beings are, by nature, political animals (Güremen, 2018). Modern moral philosophy attempts to rationally establish universal moral norms and codes of conduct as the fundamental basis for moral judgment and equates moral behaviour with the extent to which behaviours comply with established moral rules (Zhao, 2022). In other words, in the view of modern moral philosophy, people can only act justifiably if they act according to universal rules; otherwise, they are wrong or immoral.

Based on the deontological view, rules of obligation are necessarily moral principles that precede actors' behaviour, and moral subjects' judgments and actions must conform to these primary rules of obligation (Li, 2022). People's behaviour is correct and moral when and only when it conforms to the prior moral principles. However, modern moral philosophy is purely rational critical thinking divorced from real situations, and the inconsistency between the reasons provided for people's actions and the subjects' motivations leads to the separation of motivation and reason (Stocker, 1976). Wolf (1982) argues that if people are bent on constraining their behaviour according to such rational moral norms, people are likely to become moral saints who make the pursuit of morality the sole goal of their lives and whose lives are completely dominated by the idea of improving the welfare of others as well as

society as a whole.

According to Paoletti and Ben-Soussan (2020), the behaviour of any individual is an outward expression of the person's self-awareness. That is to say, any action of an actor is a thought-out activity, a choice that the actor believes is best for themselves. For example, it is people's moral obligation and responsibility to donate materials to people suffering from disasters (Zhou, 2018). According to deontological principles, those who fail to provide donations violate moral principles and may be judged as immoral. Imagine a family that is already poor and cannot make ends meet must still fulfil this obligation. Is a faithful and honest father who loves his wife and children not a good person just because he does not make donations? Obviously, the act of not donating and being immoral is not equivalent in all cases.

The modern moral philosophy that requires people to act exactly according to moral rules ignores the reality of human beings. Realistic people have difficulty living in a purely rational world, much less as fully independent beings. Modern moral philosophy reflects the inconsistency between the "motivational reason" and the "normative reason" of the individual (Yang, 2020). MacIntyre (2013) argues that the rational principles of modern moral philosophy are all impersonal, purely logical arguments detached from specific historical contexts. It can be seen that modern moral philosophy ignores human attributes and human social relations and puts the yoke of purely rational moral rules on every natural person. According to Aristotle, the original purpose of ethics is to cultivate human beings with high moral sentiments and exceptional qualities (Crisp, 2014). In contrast to modern moral philosophy, virtue ethics emphasises the importance of basing morality on the rational desires of human beings, making ethics oriented to the real life of human beings and reflecting their social attributes.

Secondly, modern moral philosophy ignores human moral emotions and motivations and overemphasises the role of rationality (McElwee, 2024; Weiss et al., 2024). Zhao (2022) argues that modern moral philosophy's emphasis on the value of rationality while ignoring the moral emotions that make human beings human is an inherent attribute of modern moral philosophy. At the same time, moral evaluation should be derived from human nature and human life. However, based on rationality, modern moral philosophy tends to lack the individual's motivation, psychology, feelings, and willingness to ethical practice, as well as ignoring the issues of family relationships, friendships, and group identity (Foot, 2002; Held, 2005). Human emotions have equally important ethical values, and emotions and blood ties also provide people with motivations and reasons to act (Xu, 2007; Zhao, 2022). The moral norms should be derived from human social relations, but transcendent, purely rational laws that ignore real life are unrealistic moral ideals (Xiao, 2021). In short, modern moral philosophy cannot embody moral sentiments in human behaviour, and human beings have become rational machines.

Integrity, for example, is not only a deontological moral code but also advocated by utilitarianism (Hart et al., 2024). According to Kant, integrity is an obligation. Also, not harming others is a complete obligation, and promoting the well-being of others and

indirectly promoting their development is an incomplete obligation (Kant, 2012). Integrity expresses one's moral responsibility to others within a narrative in which one cannot avoid it (Kant, 2010). According to deontology, when a murderer questions a person who follows the rules of morality about a victim's hiding place, that person must be honest in describing the facts, no matter how much harm would be done to the victim. Most people cannot accept this purely rational narrative because they would rather violate those unsympathetic moral norms than believe that such a highly implausible ending would occur (Körner et al., 2019).

Moreover, honesty does not originate from purely rational moral laws but develops in people's real life based on emotions (Manning, 2018; Miller & West, 2020). People have found in practice that being honest with each other promotes the happiness and well-being of everyone (Valkenburg et al., 2021), and the moral value of honesty has been established. People live in a complex real world and cannot rely solely on rational ethics to make behavioural choices (Baier, 1985). Ethics originates from human culture and aims to regulate interpersonal cooperation and promote internal motivational consistency (Wong, 2023). Human behavioural choices are influenced by practical conditions and natural emotions, and it is difficult to act exactly according to rational rules. Ethics should explore rational moral theories based on human emotions and moral psychology (Zhao, 2022). Unthinking adherence to deontological and utilitarian moral principles in real life will likely leave people in moral dilemmas and emotional pain (Körner & Deutsch, 2023). In other words, although the moral norms advocated by deontology and utilitarianism allow people to obtain an objective moral evaluation of a certain behaviour, this normativity of behaviour based on rationality is divorced from the minimal emotional element of human beings.

Thirdly, modern moral philosophy asserts moral norms that are absolutist, whereas ethical theories tend to be relativist (Wong, 2023). They are also historical and local in nature (Zhao, 2022). In general, modern moral philosophy is based on human rationality and emphasises the absolute and strongly binding nature of moral rules (Hennig & Hütter, 2020). However, as Louden (1992) argues, the rational ethical systems of modern moral philosophers are also essentially created based on particular times, places, and cultures. They can hardly be universal moral norms or moral truths. In other words, any moral principle advocated is subject to different cultural and historical constraints. A universalist theory that draws inspiration from different moral theories is bound to fail (Macintyre, 2013). At the same time, moral judgments need to be contained within specific cultures, histories, and contexts, and the validity of moral principles is only relative to specific situations (Xu, 2007). This shows that it is difficult to apply the moral norms of purely rational modern moral philosophy to all people or every different cultural group (Louden, 2002). The moral principles or values of different individuals, regions and ethnic groups should be derived from the basis of their specific cultural traditions and living habits.

To sum up, all ethical theories should focus on improving human morality and social civilisation to goodness and happiness (Dewey & Tufts, 2019; Crisp, 2018). However, modern moral philosophies represented by deontology and utilitarianism have obvious flaws, such as detachment from the social and real nature of human beings, neglect of human moral emotions and motivations, and absolutist moral norms. If a particular moral philosophy

emphasises the moral norms towards the pursuit of a greater tendency to perfection, then this moral theory is intrinsically wrong (Xu, 2007). In other words, a moral theory based solely on purely rational discourse loses the fundamental purpose of ethics, ignores human moral emotions, and denies what makes people human. People live not only in the pursuit of moral principles, but they also actively pursue more non-moral goals.

At the same time, in real life, the behaviour of individuals is often influenced by emotions, thus making it usually difficult for actors to act ethically and correctly. Modern moral philosophy can thus not be called a perfect or satisfactory theory of ethics and has thus been criticised by contemporary ethicists. At the same time, Aristotle argue that human beings are human not only because of rationality (Crisp, 2014), but also because every human being is a self-aware individual, capable of being aware of their thoughts, feelings, behaviours and goals (Kreibich et al., 2020). Ethical theories should also be grounded in the lives and practices of individuals, focusing on their wishes, feelings, thoughts, sensitivities in practice, and social culture (Zhao, 2022). Therefore, in order to achieve the goal of the revival of virtue ethics, contemporary virtue ethicists, based on their commitment to critique modern moral philosophy, focus on the argumentation of personal virtues, behavioural motives, moral emotions, and other factors related to moral behaviour, and try to establish an independent, systematic, and perfect theory of virtue ethics.

3. Defence of Virtue Ethics Values

In order to overcome the shortcomings of modern moral philosophy, many Western ethicists have turned to the study of virtue ethics since the 1980s (Chen & Zhou, 2022). Contemporary virtue ethicists generally agree that the study of ethics should focus on actors, as well as their motives, wills, emotions, desires, commitments, demeanours, passions, and the moral life as a whole, in addition to focusing on ethical behaviours and moral norms (Gilligan, 1993; Nussbaum, 1999; MacIntyre, 2013; Zhao, 2022). In other words, the revival of contemporary virtue ethics is rooted in dissatisfaction with deontology and utilitarianism (Queloz & van Ackeren, 2024). At the same time, in order to resist the onslaught brought about by virtue ethics, many ethicists in favour of deontology and utilitarianism have made corresponding defences. These objections focused on three main aspects. Virtue ethics is not an independent ethical theory; the basic concepts of virtue ethics cannot be defined accurately, and virtue ethics cannot guide people to engage in moral behaviour.

For modern moral philosophers, only deontology and utilitarianism can be normative ethics, while virtue ethics can only serve as a complementary ethical theory (Zhou, 2018). For example, Rawls (1999) argues that ethics is based on exploring good behaviour and justification and that a moral person can infer from these two foundational concepts. It is obvious that virtue ethics, which is based on virtues, is significantly different from Rawls' view. Again, although Xu (2007) argues positively for the justification of virtue from a meta-ethical perspective, he also ends up treating virtue as a complement to normative ethics and denies that virtue ethics is a separate normative ethics. It is important to note that many commentaries on this issue make a mistake of conceptual confusion. Snow (2017) argues that virtue theory and virtue ethics are related but distinct concepts, with virtue theory examining

the nature of virtue and related concepts and that virtue ethics is a theory of normative ethics with distinctive attributes rather than simply having virtue as the object of study. In other words, the view that virtue ethics can only supplement normative ethics is to replace the concept of virtue ethics with virtue theory.

Normative ethicists have also argued that virtue ethics lacks a conceptual system of its own and that contemporary virtue ethics has not moved away from utilitarian and deontological conceptualisations (Chen & Zhou, 2022). Roniger (2019) argues that virtue ethics has left the concepts of rules and virtues confusing and unclear. Zhao (2020), while positively acknowledging contemporary developments in virtue ethics, also offers a critique of normative virtue ethics in his study. In his view, neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, although labelled as 'actor-centred', adopts the same concepts and strategies in its theoretical construction as modern moral philosophy (Zhao, 2020). At the core of these critiques is the fact that the theoretical system of contemporary virtue ethics is based on the concepts of modern moral philosophy. In the face of virtue ethics' inability to provide its conceptual foundation, MacIntyre (2013) argues that the main task of contemporary virtue ethicists should be the definition of virtue and its related concepts.

The inability of virtue ethics to guide people's moral behaviour has been the focus of modern moral philosophy's critique of virtue ethics (MacIntyre, 2013). It is undeniable that any complete ethical theory should contain actors and behaviours and care about people's moral behaviour (Deng, 2020). Deontology takes the ought and ought not of behaviour as its basic concept and the conformity with prior moral norms as the criterion for moral evaluation; utilitarianism takes the conformity of behavioural outcomes with the principle of maximum utility as the moral criterion (Tseng & Wang, 2021; Feess et al., 2022). However, virtue ethics focuses more on people's intrinsic values or noble qualities (Das, 2003), and it is difficult to provide intuitive rules of behaviour as deontology and utilitarianism do. In the face of this problem, a growing number of virtue ethicists have defined the justification of behaviour through the concept of virtue and have attempted to respond to accusations that virtue ethics cannot guide people's moral behaviour by providing a feasible account of what is right for virtuous actors (Mi et al., 2015).

It is clear that the criticisms of virtue ethics have focused on the lack of a distinctive conceptual foundation for virtue ethics, its inability to be an independent theory of normative ethics, and its inability to provide valuable guidance for people's moral behaviour. In the face of these critiques, contemporary virtue ethicists have offered valuable defences. The studies of Chen (2019) and Li (2022) argue that the concept of virtue in virtue ethics has provided a unique logical starting point for the theory of virtue ethics and that having an agreed-upon rule, an intuitive cognitive basis for virtue, and a psychological basis for human nature has distinguished it from modern moral philosophy and enabled the establishment of an independent theoretical system of virtue ethics based on it.

That is to say, compared with deontology, which emphasises prior rules, or utilitarianism, which emphasises the consequences of actions, virtue ethics has already demonstrated its fundamental uniqueness (Queloz & van Ackeren, 2024). Virtue ethics, as a philosophy of

actor-centred morality, focuses on the inherently noble qualities of actors (Morrell & Dahlmann, 2023). Using the actor and their character as the criterion for moral evaluation expresses the independence of virtue ethics and the key to its difference from modern moral philosophy, which uses behaviour as the criterion for moral evaluation (Dong, 2020). Based on the concept of virtue as a starting point, virtue ethics cannot only justify itself but also construct an ethical theory distinct from modern moral philosophy.

The adoption of moral norms in order for people to act morally and to act spontaneously out of their virtue is the difference between modern moral philosophy and virtue ethics. Aristotle argues that virtuous actions are not virtuous characters but are also because the actor chooses to act out of a defined, stable quality (Crisp, 2014). Virtue ethicists also generally believe that as long as people possess virtues, they will spontaneously and naturally make appropriate moral judgments and act morally and rightly (Das, 2003).

More importantly, virtue ethics' emphasis on virtues does not imply that virtues are merely a means to achieve one's moral behaviour. According to Aristotle, ethics aims to develop noble and exceptional human beings (Crisp, 2014). The central purpose of virtue ethics is to guide people in how they should live and what kind of person they should be (Wen, 2019; Fowers et al., 2021). That is to say, virtue itself is worth pursuing for everyone, and living a happy life is living a virtuous life (Dong, 2020). The practice of virtue and the concept of virtue are related to the complexity of people's lives rather than originating from purely rational moral codes or behavioural norms (Han, 2019). Therefore, virtues are moral norms originating from human nature and experience (Wen & Li, R., 2021), which not only have stronger stability and moral value for people's moral behaviour in practice but are also more advanced than the bottom-line rules of modern moral philosophy.

4. Contemporary Virtue Ethics Developing in Twists and Turns

Contemporary virtue ethics can be categorised into three main schools of thought: neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, affectivist virtue ethics, and pluralist virtue ethics (Li, 2022). Virtue ethicists have coincidentally given different explanations of the path from virtue to the realisation of moral behaviour, proving the characteristics of virtue ethics and defending the status of making virtue ethics independent of normative ethics. In other words, contemporary virtue ethics not only agrees that virtues can guide people's moral behaviour but also vigorously defends the circularity and subjectivity problems that virtue ethics may incur (Wen, 2021). To emphasise the focus of this study, the main discussion of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics will be placed in the next section.

Emotionalist virtue ethics is represented by Michael Slote, whose theory focuses on agents based on virtue ethics (Wen, 2021). Slote (2001) argues that whether or not an agent's moral behaviour is directly related to their motivation. Further, while an actor's intrinsic qualities or virtues are at the core of moral values, an actor's intrinsic emotions or psychology are the motives for their actions, which are key to externalising an agent's virtues into moral actions (Slote, 2001). In other words, the moral judgment of an agent's behaviour is evaluated through their motives. At the same time, the evaluator's moral judgment of the agent's behaviour is usually expressed as approval or condemnation, and the evaluator's subjective

feelings in making the approval or condemnation are either warming or chilling (Slote, 2004). This view expresses the importance of the affectivist school of virtue ethics on emotions. Virtuous people will warm people, while evil people will chill them.

If one follows Michael Slote's view, an agent's moral behaviour is motivated by their internal emotions, with virtue taking a secondary place. Li (2022) argues that affectivist virtue ethics, while using virtue as a central concept, is not understood as a basis for moral behaviour and a source of value for all moral behaviour. Suppose one takes a moderate approach to understanding the affectivist view of virtue ethics. In that case, this school of thought takes the agent's intrinsic emotions or motivations as the mediator between virtue and behaviour. While derived from virtue, an agent's moral behaviour depends on the actor's intrinsic motivation. Aristotle argues that virtue is a long-term, stable character. In the theory of affectivist virtue ethics, the emotion of an internal state is the motivation for action, and good motivation is referred to as an agent's most important virtue (Crisp, 2014). Although affectivist virtue ethics attempts to build a complete theoretical system, it deviates from the fundamental line of virtue-based theory by exaggerating the agent's intrinsic emotions or motives.

Christine Swanton points to target-centered virtue ethics (Galvagni, 2023) and constructs a pluralist theory of virtue ethics. Swanton (2021) argues that virtue is a good intrinsic state of being and that explanations of an agent's moral behaviour should not emphasise intrinsic motivation, nor should virtues be used solely as moral norms for agents. Pluralist virtue ethics advocates defining virtue as a psychological disposition to respond in a sufficiently superior way to complex factors in one or more domains (Swanton, 2021). Li (2022) argues that pluralism characterises pluralist virtue ethics and that this plurality is manifested not only in the type of subject's response but also in the object to which the subject responds. In other words, although moral behaviour is based on the outcome of an agent's intrinsic virtue, virtue is not constituted by a single factor. However, it results from a multiplicity of factors from practice working together. Similarly, an agent's moral behaviour in an objective situation is driven by a multiplicity of factors and is not limited to a particular virtue of the agent.

Pluralist virtue ethics emphasises the concept of virtue in the complexity and context of people's moral lives. A virtue is an excellent moral quality and a good way of being aspired to, and a justified act hits the target of a virtue (Wen, 2019). That is to say, in a practical situation, a moral act or a good act of an agent should be related to a virtue but not absolutely to an act of a particular virtue. Virtue ethics should resolve arguments about specific virtue claims based on the specific context in which the agent's behaviour occurs, as well as the narrative of life (Swanton, 2020). Thus, pluralist virtue ethics draws on the strengths of rationality and emotion and is a reconciliatory theory of virtue ethics. In the narrative of moral life, pluralism emphasises the subjective consciousness of agents and subjective decision-making but denies the rationality of virtue as a norm. As Chen and Zhou (2022) argue, contemporary research in virtue ethics should follow the path of one normative ethics and achieve useful complementarity and integration with other normative ethics. Thus, this theory ultimately goes beyond the basic scope of virtue and fails to defend virtue ethics as a normative ethic effectively.

It follows that virtue ethics realises the unity of virtue and moral behaviour (Swanton, 2021). The fact that those who possess virtues can act morally based on virtuous norms is a fundamental difference between virtue ethics and deontology, in which knowledge precedes action, and utilitarianism, in which action precedes knowledge. The neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics also demonstrates a shift in normative ethics away from the moral behaviour of the actor and toward the actor's justification (Morrell & Dahlmann, 2023). While still criticised by modern moral philosophers, virtue ethics is no longer on the fringe of modern moral philosophy (Mi et al., 2015). In particular, neo-Aristotelianism, represented by Hursthouse, for the virtue-to-behaviour hermeneutic provides evidence for virtue ethics as a normative ethic (Crisp, 2015; Chen & Zhou, 2022), thus allowing virtue ethics to serve as a norm to guide people in their moral behaviour.

5. The Rationality of neo-Aristotelian Virtue Ethics for Guiding People's Moral Behaviour

The neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics is one of the main paradigms of contemporary virtue ethics, which develops action and motivational theories of virtue ethics based on cleaning up and criticising modern moral philosophy (Li, 2021a). Aristotelian virtue ethics upholds the connection between the theory of happiness and virtue by focusing the theoretical value on qualified agent virtue ethics (Zhao, 2022), also using virtues and vices as basic concepts (Hursthouse & Pettigrove, 2022). The most significant contribution of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics is the Virtue-Rules theory proposed by Hursthouse (1999), which established a theory of normative virtue ethics. The formulation of this theory allowed normative ethics to form a rational and complete chain from the agent's virtue to moral behaviour. In order to explicate from a meta-ethical perspective that Aristotelian virtue ethics can guide people to engage in moral behaviour, this study discusses several important categories of Aristotelian virtue ethics, including virtues, emotions, motives, and behaviour.

Firstly, the basic framework of neo-Aristotelian ethics is an inheritance and reconstruction of Aristotelian ethics (Wen & Li, 2021). That is to say, neo-Aristotelianism is still a kind of Aristotelianism in the vein of thought (Li, 2021b). According to Aristotle, human practices and choices aim at goodness, and the highest human goodness is eudaimonia, which is to live well or to do well (Crisp, 2014). Meanwhile, human goodness is the virtue of the excellent state of the soul, moral virtue is when a person exhibits stable emotional responses and goal preferences in their behaviours, and rational virtue is a truth-seeking rational thought (Crisp, 2014). Within the framework of Nicomachean Ethics, the supreme good and happiness are the extreme purpose of human life, the human being or actor is the centre of ethics (Komu, 2020), and the noble qualities or virtues of an individual are the basis of ethical study (Kaushik, 2022). In the same vein as Aristotle's ethics, neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics also adheres to well-being. Hursthouse (1999) argues that modern moral philosophy has neglected the central topic of the goal of ethics, which is not only to guide behaviour but also to focus on the flourishing of the human being, which is to live well and to do well.

Secondly, Aristotelian ethics also emphasises the role of moral emotions in the moral behaviour of agents. According to Aristotle, natural human emotions are often not fully

consistent with rationality and require prudence and coordination with practical wisdom to achieve good outcomes (Crisp, 2014). Hursthouse (1999) argues that although feelings of empathy, compassion, kindness and love motivate people to do things to help others, they are simple psychological phenomena that do not always ensure the rightness of behaviour. Pleasant emotions do not produce virtue or serve as motives for moral behaviour. However, they are nothing more than what the person who possesses virtue feels when they act, a state in which rationality and desire reach unity in the virtuous person (Hursthouse, 2006). At the same time, this school of thought affirms the value of emotions in normative virtue ethics. For example, the role of emotions throughout an actor's moral behaviour, the role they play in insoluble moral dilemmas, and the use of emotions as a breakthrough for proper moral education (Zhou, 2018). Thus, although neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics endorses the strong correlation between virtue, emotion, and rationality, it still upholds the spirit of rationality in ancient Greek philosophy and emphasises the centrality of rationality in moral judgment.

Thirdly, virtuous actors act morally out of rational motives (Hursthouse, 1999) rather than out of emotion, obligation, desire, or will. Aristotle argues that rationality is a virtue for adults and is a necessary prerequisite for acquiring perfect virtue (Crisp, 2014). By continuing to be educated about morality and improving their moral practices as they grow up, adults know how to be a good person or a moral thing to do (Hursthouse, 1999). Liao (2020) argues that the ability to use rationality to make appropriate moral judgments results from learning and practising the Logos for all who have not lost the ability to be virtuous. In other words, practising wisdom is necessary for virtue to be generated (Li, 2022). The neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics inherits the ancient Greek Logos and Nous and emphasises the central value of practical rationality in moral behaviour (Zhou, 2018). That is to say, actions made by people lacking rationality or originating from irrationality are inherently devoid of moral attributes, and only actions originating from the actor's rationality can be endowed with a reasonable moral evaluation. Thus, normative virtue ethics, unlike affective virtue ethics with its bias against rationality, subscribes to the view that virtues need to be cultivated through the evolving practical wisdom of agents.

Fourth, Hursthouse (1999) argue that virtue ethics can tell people how they should behave and how it is good to behave. She asserts that every virtue is a moral directive and proposes the Virtue-Rules theory to break the stereotype that virtue ethics neglects to instruct people to behave morally (Hursthouse, 1999). This theory demonstrates that virtue ethics focuses on behaviour and is equally capable of giving guidelines about the right behaviour (Li, 2021c). In other words, Aristotelian virtue ethics bridges the path from human virtues to moral behaviour and possesses a rational justification that can be defended against deontology and utilitarianism. Virtue-Rules' rational justification borrows from the rule system of modern moral philosophy. It shows that virtue ethics can not only have its rule system but also be more instructive than deontology and utilitarianism's rule system (Zhou, 2018).

According to the Virtue-Rules by Hursthouse (1999), the normative rules of virtue ethics consist of three main points.

(Definition) The Virtue-Rule is defined as an action that is right when it is typical of the

behaviours that a virtuous actor would adopt in that situation;

(*Condition 1*) A virtuous actor possesses and practices a virtue;

(*Condition 2*) Virtue is a certain character trait.

The Virtue-Rules is the core category of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics that explains the relationship between virtue and right behaviour on the part of the actor. It aims to combine virtue ethics with rule ethics in order to provide normative guidance for people to behave properly. According to The Virtue-Rules, people's behaviour is right and moral when, and only when, it is consistent with the typical behaviour of virtuous actors in a given situation (Hursthouse, 1999). It asserts three core concepts: virtuous actors, typical behaviour, and particular situations. This means that a moral judgement about an act being right or moral is not only related to the behaviour but relies more on the character traits of the actor rather than just focusing on the outcome of a behaviour or the moral rules followed. At the same time, each virtue generates a basic moral command and a specific set of typical behaviours or moral rules that guide the rightness of an actor's behaviour. For example, the virtue of integrity generates moral commands about how to act integrally and prohibits vices that go against integrity. An actor who possesses or understands the virtue of integrity will consciously engage in moral behaviour based on integrity in specific situations.

In addition, The Virtue-Rules emphasise the importance of specific situations, allowing for a flexible and contextualised approach to moral assessment and moral judgement in virtue ethics. Hursthouse (1999) argues that the rightness of behaviour is relative and depends on how a virtuous actor would behave in a given situation. An actor's application of Virtue-Rules may vary in specific situations. When assessing the rightness of behaviour or when making moral judgements, actors need to situate themselves in specific situations to think about how a virtuous actor would behave in the same situation. This situationally oriented way of thinking helps actors to make more flexible choices in complex moral situations and reflects the importance of actors' practical wisdom in specific situations. At the same time, The Virtue-Rules provide a more flexible moral guide for responding to moral dilemmas. Actors often need more complex moral considerations when faced with complex moral choices, especially in tragic moral dilemmas (Hursthouse, 1999). Universal moral rules make it difficult to resolve complex moral dilemmas, and virtue ethics is better equipped to deal with moral dilemmas, enabling actors to make more ethical decisions.

In summary, neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics brings together the strengths of traditional virtue ethics and modern moral philosophy and constructs a relatively systematic theory of normative virtue ethics. According to Aristotle, virtue ethics aims to shape human character and inquire into the kind of person one ought to be (Crisp, 2014). This school of thought absorbed valuable elements from Aristotle's philosophy to construct normative virtue ethics. As Liao (2020) argues, virtuous people act morally and care about what is right from the motivation or justification that virtue provides them. Agents' moral behaviour and moral judgments are also determined by the virtues possessed by virtuous people (Wen, 2019). The proposal of The Virtue-Rules proves that virtue ethics can serve as independent normative ethics but also shows that virtue ethics can provide guidelines for moral behaviour (Zhou,

2018). neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics stands for rationalism, which establishes the relationship between virtues, emotions, motives, and behaviours and provides people with moral norms and behavioural guidelines based on virtues.

6. Discussion

This study explores the advantages of virtue ethics and responds to the shortcomings of modern moral philosophy, providing theoretical support for the construction of a governance system with sociality and realism. According to Nicomachean Ethics, virtue is understood as excellence, and human goodness is the virtuous activity of the soul (Crisp, 2014). In other words, virtuous people can be called excellent, and their noble character is expressed in acting under virtues. What is meant by virtue is also not just some particular quality of virtue but virtue in the sense of what it means for man to be people (Li, 2022). Virtue ethics emphasises an ethical life that centres on how one should live or what one should be (Wen, 2012; Fowers et al., 2021). Meanwhile, virtue ethics promotes the idea that people should do what is morally right, but the motivation for this behaviour does not come from an objective, rational moral code. It stems from people's intrinsic virtues and is a concrete expression of their emotions and moral qualities.

Neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics prove that virtue ethics can guide people's moral behaviours. Virtue ethics focuses on virtues and related concepts, developing virtues, and character education among actors (Jordan & Kristjánsson, 2017). According to Hursthouse (1999), the Virtue-Rules apply to virtuous people and can also develop those who lack virtue. In other words, an actor's virtues can serve as guiding principles for their behaviour and make moral choices naturally in daily life. General actors can also become virtuous by cultivating and practising virtues through observing and imitating the behaviour of virtuous people. Hursthouse (1999) argues that motivation precedes action and that affective experience is crucial in the course of action. The right emotional experience should accompany the right behaviour, and the cognitive abilities of the actor and the external environment influence the choice of this experience.

People will fully utilise their moral emotions in specific moral choices and moral dilemmas based on the Virtue-Rules. That is, people will pay attention to the influence of moral emotions, especially the moral and emotional factors in moral dilemmas, on their moral behaviours and use moral emotions as a breakthrough for moral education (Zhou, 2018). At the same time, virtue ethics provides useful guidance for moral education, and contemporary theories of virtue ethics provide methodological, ontological, epistemological and moral foundations for Aristotelian moral education (Curren, 2016).

Although scholars believe that educating students about virtue ethics and character is essential, many educational institutions have neglected this issue (Lamb et al., 2021). The neglect of character development and emotional education for individuals in the field of public administration also reflects the shortcomings exposed by modern moral philosophy. As a moral theory derived from human nature, virtue ethics is more stable and morally valuable in guiding moral behaviour than modern moral philosophy, which derives from pure reason. Contemporary virtue ethics, especially neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, demonstrates greater

vitality in respecting human and social relationships and emphasising emotions and moral character. In other words, public governance currently faces numerous challenges, such as the abstract nature of moral norms, which are difficult to adapt to complex and diverse social environments and individual differences. Virtue ethics emphasises the combination of individual emotions, life practices, and historical and cultural contexts, which can more effectively guide the moral behaviour of social members.

Virtue ethics emphasises the interconnection between “emotions, virtues, and behaviour,” providing a new theoretical foundation for the development of government management capabilities. Especially in the areas of moral education for social members and public management, the introduction of virtue ethics theory can encourage the public and government managers to focus on individual moral emotions and personal cultivation, transcending superficial rule-following behaviour, and promoting the formation of intrinsic moral motivation. This shift in ideology can not only cultivate citizens with empathy, a sense of responsibility, and social responsibility but also stimulate the intrinsic motivation of social managers, enhance their personal qualities, service quality, and governance capabilities, thereby further advancing the fairness, inclusivity, and sustainable development of social management and social systems.

7. Contributions

This study illustrates the significant value of virtue ethics theory in guiding individual moral behaviour from a meta-ethical perspective. On the one hand, virtue ethics offers governments and managers a novel approach to public management, pointing the way forward for lifelong and moral education among social members. Virtue ethics emphasises the cultivation of self-character and moral emotions, which helps individuals continuously develop moral capabilities and make ethical judgments and behaviours in complex social contexts. Integrating the concepts of virtue ethics into educational practices for social members can effectively enhance the moral literacy and sense of social responsibility of individuals, thereby strengthening the intrinsic moral emotions and motivations of all practitioners. This approach facilitates lifelong learning and moral development. Such an education method, centred on virtue ethics, aligns more closely with individual practice, achieving a transition from skill training to character development.

On the other hand, the principles of virtue ethics also offer valuable insights for enhancing government credibility. Public management should be people-centred. Virtue ethics emphasises social relationships, emotional connections, and situational judgements, providing a pathway for public governance to break free from the constraints of rational rules, thereby enhancing the flexibility, adaptability, and practicality of public management. A training system based on virtue ethics can stimulate the intrinsic motivation of government staff and social service personnel, thereby enhancing managers' moral sensitivity and responsibility. In the practice of public management, the emphasis placed by governments and managers on virtue ethics can strengthen emotional connections between people, promote transparent, inclusive, and responsive governance, and provide the public with a more inclusive value orientation, thereby further enhancing public participation and recognition of

social systems. This approach enhances government credibility, improves the justice of the system, and promotes the harmonious development of society as a whole.

8. Conclusion

This study adopts a meta-ethical perspective to systematically analyze the growing shortcomings of modern moral philosophy, such as an excessive emphasis on the role of rationality while neglecting individual emotions, social attributes, and moral motivations. It highlights the crucial role that virtue ethics can play as an independent moral philosophy in guiding individuals to engage in moral behaviour. Virtue ethics places greater emphasis on individual emotions, social relationships, and the characteristics of situational judgment, offering meaningful solutions to moral dilemmas in the practice of public management in modern society. This helps establish a more flexible, inclusive, and people-centred social governance model. Additionally, for government administrators and the public, integrating virtue ethics into individual moral education and professional training can both foster the growth of intrinsic moral emotions within society and enrich individuals' understanding and adaptation to complex social realities. This strategy helps address the shortcomings of modern moral philosophy in practical applications, driving government and management institutions toward more inclusive and human-centered directions. It aims to cultivate leaders with social responsibility, as well as citizens with a sense of responsibility, empathy, and moral integrity, thereby promoting social harmony and sustainable development. Future research and practice should further explore the application of virtue ethics in different cultural contexts, combine the advantages of modern ethical theories, and promote the continuous deepening of moral development in the field of public administration, laying a solid foundation for cultivating social talents with noble character and effective governance capabilities.

References

- Allan, L. (2015). *Meta-ethics: An introduction*. Retrieved from <http://www.rationalrealm.com>.
- Alzola, M., Hennig, A., & Romar, E. (2020). Thematic symposium editorial: Virtue ethics between east and west. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 165(2), 177–189. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45283908>
- Anscombe, G. E. M. (1958). Modern moral philosophy. *Philosophy*, 33(124), 1-19.
- Baier, A. (1985). *Postures of the mind: Essays on mind and morals*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Chen, Z. (2019). Why virtue ethics is not a mistaken category. *Moral and Civilization*, 38(5), 5-12. <https://doi.org/10.13904/j.cnki.1007-1539.2019.05.001>
- Chen, Z., & Zhou, W. (2022). Review and prospect on the contemporary virtue ethnics. *Jiangan Tribune*, 65(6), 66-73.
- Crisp, R. (2018). The methods of ethics. *Phenomenology and Mind*, (15), 48-58.

https://doi.org/10.13128/Phe_Mi-24971

Crisp, R. (2015). A third method of ethics? *Philosophy and phenomenological research*, 90(2), 257-273. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1933-1592.2012.00607.x>

Crisp, R. (Ed.). (2014). *Aristotle: Nicomachean ethics*. London: Cambridge University Press.

Curren, R. (2016). Aristotelian versus virtue ethical character education. *Journal of Moral Education*, 45(4), 516-526. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2016.1238820>

Das, R. (2003). Virtue ethics and right action. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 81(3), 324-339. <https://doi.org/10.1080/713659702>

Deng, A. (2020). Can virtue ethics become an independent type of ethics? In Wang, X. X. (Ed.), *Can virtue ethics become an independent type of ethics? In Chinese economic ethics yearbook* (pp. 117-119). Nanjing: Nanjing Normal University Press.

Mill, J. S. (2016). Utilitarianism. In: Cahn, S. M. (Ed.), *Seven Masterpieces of Philosophy*. (pp. 329-375). London: Routledge.

Dewey, J., & Tufts, J. H. (2019). *Ethics*. Glasgow: Good Press.

Dong, B. (2020). Who needs moral saints——On the perfectionism of modern virtue ethics. *Education Research*, 41(03), 36-46.

Feess, E., Kerzenmacher, F., & Timofeyev, Y. (2022). Utilitarian or deontological models of moral behavior: What predicts morally questionable decisions? *European Economic Review*, 149, 104264. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.euroecorev.2022.104264>

Foot, P. (2002). *Moral dilemmas: And other topics in moral philosophy*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Fowers, B. J., Carroll, J. S., Leonhardt, N. D., & Cokelet, B. (2021). The emerging science of virtue. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 16(1), 118-147. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691620924473>

Galvagni, E. (2023). Christine Swanton, target centred virtue ethics. *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, 20(1-2), 187-190. <https://doi.org/10.1163/17455243-20010011>

Gilligan, C. (1993). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Gong, Q. & Chen, Z. (2013). *Studies on contemporary western ethics*. Beijing: Peking University Press.

Güremen, R. (2018). In what sense exactly are human beings more political according to Aristotle? *Filozofija i društvo*, 29(2), 170-181. <https://doi.org/10.2298/F1D1802170G>

Han, Y. (2019). On the primitive concepts of virtue ethics. *Morality and Civilization*, 38(2), 44-50. <https://doi.org/10.13904/j.cnki.1007-1539.2019.02.006>

- Hart, W., Cease, C. K., Lambert, J. T., & Witt, D. E. (2024). Integrity and moral flexibility. *Journal of Individual Differences*, 45(1), 46-52. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1614-0001/a000403>
- Held, V. (2005). *The ethics of care: Personal, political, and global*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hennig, M., & Hütter, M. (2020). Revisiting the divide between deontology and utilitarianism in moral dilemma judgment: A multinomial modeling approach. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 118(1), 22. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspa0000173>
- Hursthouse, R. & Pettigrove, G. (2022). Virtue ethics. Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu>
- Hursthouse, R. (1999). *On virtue ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hursthouse, R. (2006). Are virtues the proper starting point for morality? In: Dreier J. (Ed.), *Contemporary debates in moral theory* (pp. 99-112). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Jordan, K., & Kristjánsson, K. (2017). Sustainability, virtue ethics, and the virtue of harmony with nature. *Environmental Education Research*, 23(9), 1205-1229. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2016.1157681>
- Kant, I. (2010). On a supposed right to tell lies from benevolent motives. In: Li, Q (Ed.), *Kant's collected works* (Vol. 8). Beijing: China Renmin University Press.
- Kant, I. (2012). *Groundwork of the metaphysics of morals*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kaushik, G. (2022). Aristotelian concept of ethics. *Prayagraj Law Review*, 1(1), 25-36. <https://doi.org/10.61120/plr.2022.v1i125-36>
- Komu, S. S. (2020). Pleasure versus virtue ethics in the light of Aristotelians and the utilitarianism of John Stuart Mills and Jeremy Bentham. *Al-Milal: Journal of Religion and Thought*, 2(1), 37-56. <https://doi.org/10.46600/almilal.v2i1.57>
- Körner, A., & Deutsch, R. (2023). Deontology and utilitarianism in real life: A set of moral dilemmas based on historic events. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 49(10), 1511-1528. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672221103058>
- Körner, A., Joffe, S., & Deutsch, R. (2019). When skeptical, stick with the norm: Low dilemma plausibility increases deontological moral judgments. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 84, 103834. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2019.103834>
- Kreibich, A., Hennecke, M., & Brandstätter, V. (2020). The effect of self-awareness on the identification of goal-related obstacles. *European Journal of Personality*, 34(2), 215-233. <https://doi.org/10.1002/per.2234>
- Lamb, M., Brant, J., & Brooks, E. (2021). How is virtue cultivated? *Journal of Character Education*, 17(1), 81-108.
- Li, J. (2022). New development of normative theories concerning contemporary western

virtue ethics. *Studies in Ethics*, 21(6), 72-80. <https://doi.org/10.15995/j.cnki.llxyj.2022.06.012>

Li, Y. (2021a). What kind of character trait can be called as a virtue?: On Rosalind Hursthouse's Neo-Aristotelian theory of virtue standard. *Journal of East China Normal University (Humanities and Social Sciences)*, 28(6), 44-52. <https://doi.org/10.16382/j.cnki.1000-5579.2021.06.005>

Li, Y. (2021b). A theory of motivation in virtue ethics: Reconstructing Hursthaus's neo-Aristotelian. *Jianghai Academic Journal*, 28(5), 41-48.

Li, Y. (2021c). The theory of action in virtue ethics: Its misunderstandings and responses. *Academic Research*, 37(5), 9-17.

Liao, S. (2020). In what sense can we be "Εἰδαίμων"? An outline of interpretation based on Nicomachean Ethics. *Journal of Yunmeng*, 04, 50-58. <https://doi.org/10.16740/j.cnki.cn43-1240/c.2021.04.006>.

Louden, R. B. (1992). *Morality and moral theory: A reappraisal and reaffirmation*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Louden, R. B. (2002). *Kant's impure ethics: From rational beings to human beings*. New York: Oxford University Press.

MacIntyre, A. (2013). *After virtue*. London: A&C Black.

Manning, R. (2018). *A practical guide to ethics: Living and leading with integrity*. London: Routledge.

McElwee, B. (2024). Right and wrong: Assessing scalar consequentialism. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 27(5), 707-724. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10677-022-10344-2>

Mi, C., Slote, M., & Sosa, E. (2015). *Moral and intellectual virtues in western and Chinese philosophy: The turn toward virtue*. London: Routledge.

Mill, J. S. (2016). Utilitarianism. In. Cahn, S. M. (Ed.), *Seven masterpieces of philosophy* (pp. 329-375). London: Routledge.

Miller, C. B., & West, R. (2020). *Integrity, honesty, and truth seeking*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Morrell, K., & Dahlmann, F. (2023). Aristotle in the Anthropocene: The comparative benefits of Aristotelian virtue ethics over utilitarianism and deontology. *The Anthropocene Review*, 10(3), 615-635. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20530196221105>

Nussbaum, M. C. (1999). Virtue ethics: A misleading category? *The Journal of Ethics*, 3(3), 163-201. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1009877217694>

Paoletti, P., & Ben-Soussan, T. D. (2020). Reflections on inner and outer silence and consciousness without contents according to the sphere model of consciousness. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 1807. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01807>

- Queloz, M., & van Ackeren, M. (2024). Virtue ethics and the morality system. *Topoi*, 43(2), 413-424. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-023-09964-9>
- Rawls, J. (1999). *A theory of justice*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Roniger, S. J. (2019). Virtue without law? A problem and prospect for virtue ethics. In. Grimi, E. (Ed.), *Virtue ethics: Retrospect and prospect* (pp. 125-145). Cham: Springer.
- Sayre-McCord, G. (2023). *Metaethics*. Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu>.
- Sison, A. J. G., Ferrero, I., & Redín, D. M. (2020). Some virtue ethics implications from Aristotelian and Confucian perspectives on family and business. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 165(2), 241-254. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-019-04307-4>
- Slote, M. (2001). *Morals from motives*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Slote, M. (2004). Moral sentimentalism. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 7(1), 3-14. <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:ETTA.0000019982.56628.c3>
- Snow, N. E. (2017). *The Oxford handbook of virtue*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Stewart, N. (2009). *Ethics*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Stocker, M. (1976). The schizophrenia of modern ethical theories. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 73(14), 453-466. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2025782>
- Swanton, C. (2020). Virtue ethics and narrative virtue. In. Ulatowski, J., & van Zyl, L. (Eds.), *Virtue, narrative, and self* (pp. 19-34). London: Routledge.
- Swanton, C. (2021). *Target centred virtue ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tseng, P. E., & Wang, Y. H. (2021). Deontological or utilitarian? An eternal ethical dilemma in outbreak. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(16), 8565. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18168565>
- Valkenburg, G., Dix, G., Tjldink, J., & de Rijcke, S. (2021). Expanding research integrity: A cultural-practice perspective. *Science and Engineering Ethics*, 27(1), 10. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11948-021-00291-z>
- Van Staveren, I. (2007). Beyond utilitarianism and deontology: Ethics in economics. *Review of Political Economy*, 19(1), 21-35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09538250601080776>
- Weiss, A., Burgmer, P., Rom, S. C., & Conway, P. (2024). Taking the moral high ground: Deontological and absolutist moral dilemma judgments convey self-righteousness. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 110, 104505. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2023.104505>
- Wen, X. (2019). A Virtue ethical illustration of right actions. *Philosophical Trends*, 41(3), 110-119.
- Wen, X. (2021). On virtue ethics as a normative theory based on the explanation of right action. *Modern Philosophy*, 37(3), 104-111.

- Wen, X., & Li, R. (2021). What is new about neo-Aristotelianism? *Study & Exploration*, 43(10), 15-23.
- Wolf, S. (1982). Moral saints. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 79(8), 419-439.
- Wong, D. B. (2023). *Moral relativism and pluralism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Xiao, G. (2021). On John Dewey's critique of Kant's deontology. *Studies in Ethics*, 67(02), 88-94.
- Xu, X. (2007). *Self, others, and morality: An introduction to moral philosophy*. Beijing: Commercial Press.
- Yang, S. (2020). Normative reasons: Internal reasons or external reasons? *World Philosophy*, 60(4), 77-87.
- Zhao, Y. (2022). Criticisms of agent-based virtue ethics. *Philosophical Trends*, 44(4), 104-114.
- Zhou, Y. (2018). *Hursthouse's normative virtue ethics*. Shanghai: Orient Publishing Center.

Copyright Disclaimer

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).