(i) A Brief Historical Account of the Problem

The concept of 'virtue' occupies an important place in the history of Greek moral philosophy. Etymologically, virtue corresponds with French Vertu, Latin Virtus, German Tugend, Russian dobro and Sanskrit Virya. The Latin Vir and Sanskrit Vir mean a 'man' or 'hero' which imply qualities as manliness, bravery, power, energy, or excellence. The nature and classification of virtues engaged the attention of both the ancient and Medieval moral philosophers. The Ethics of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle has 'Virtue' as its central concept. Except N. Hartmann and Mandevelly, probably no recent ethical thinker has made an extensive study of the concept of 'virtue' in Ethics; and ultimately making Ethics as a theory of virtues. Laird studied Ethics from the point of virtues. He used Aretaics as 'theory of virtues'. Historically, the concept of 'virtue' was central in Greek Ethics; e.g., Socrates made the moving spring of 'virtue' as adequate 'knowledge of the good'; that of 'vice', ignorance of it, and from this he deduced his idea about the unity of virtues. The various virtues are only the manifestations of this single virtue as 'knowledge of the
good. Plurality of virtues is an illusion, according to him. The height of the virtues is in inverse ratio to their divisibility; that is, the greater the height the less they have to be divided on account of the participation by the many therein. Plato, in his famous Republic, distinguished the four cardinal virtues—Wisdom, Temperence, Courage and Justice. Aristotle, in his celebrated Nichomachean Ethics, investigated more fully the psychological nature of 'virtue' and defined it as "habit of the will" as distinguished from mere activity. The content of this 'will' is the 'golden mean' between the two extremes of excess and defect. The application of this doctrine to the details of moral life gives Aristotle his list of virtues under two categories—Intellectual and Moral.

The Medieval moralists followed Aristotle in his division of virtues into Intellectual and Moral. To the cardinal virtues of Plato, they added the theological virtues. The cardinal virtues were treated as Natural in the sense that these are acquired by human acts, the latter are Supernatural in the sense that these are infused by God; e.g. faith, hope and charity are determinants of Divine happiness. The Christian Church further added to the classical list of virtues such additional phases of character such as patience, humility and so on.

Again, the fundamental nature and value of virtues
were investigated by Stoics and Epicurions, the former regarded virtue as an end-in-itself (Sreyas), the latter as the most important means to happiness (Preyas).

The early British moralists were also concerned more with this problem, regarding the sanctions of virtues. Butler's contribution to this discussion is worth studying.

Hobbes (1588-1679) interprets the concept of virtue from the point of view of human nature. According to him, all human activities are self-oriented and hence all human virtues follow from this egoistic nature of human beings. All virtues, for him, are required to create a society in which people will be required to encourage both the spirit and the letter of the 'social contract' and prevent the outbreak of breaches of the peace.

Francis Hutcheson (1694-1747) made 'pure benevolence' as the essence of all virtues. According to him, virtue consists only in (a) a concern for the well-being of the other people; and (b) a concern for the moral character of oneself and others, the sort of character that produces motives of benevolence. His theory of virtue presents a conception of revolutionary novelty in European Ethics. It contradicts Hobbes' assumption that all rational desire is self-oriented. It also contradicts the Augustinian assumption that genuinely disinterested love of one's fellowmen is not possible for the natural man, but by only
a special infusion of Divine grace. 'Greatest happiness for the greatest number of persons' was his slogan which later on was accepted by all utilitarians in general.

Hume's concept of virtue is exposed by him in *A Treatise on Human Nature*. According to him, the concept of virtue is based on the human tendency to approve. "Virtue is whatever mental action gives to a spectator the pleasing sentiment of approbation. ..." In defence of this, he examines all the recognized virtues with the purpose of showing that the reason why they are approved lies in the fact that they are generally useful. He easily shows that benevolence is a virtue, but not in the Hutcheson's sense; it is a virtue because it tends to produce general happiness.

The ethical theory of Joseph Butler is propounded in his *Sermons* of 1726 and the *Dissertation upon Virtue* of 1736. He was one of the most outstanding proponents of classical Intuitionism. According to him, the knowledge of 'virtue' is determined *a priori* without the necessity of considering their consequences. Man, with his 'moral faculty' of conscience, makes a distinction between virtue and vice. Butler, like Plato, ascribed to human nature a certain hierarchical structure, the highest phase is conscience.

Butler's definition of 'vice' implies a "violation
or breaking in upon our own nature**, whereas 'virtue' is the opposite course of action; hence, virtue consists in following, and vice in deviating from it. According to him 'virtue' is obedience to one's own nature, it should come as a most effortless task; actually man is born to virtue. It consists in the following of one's true nature. Vice is more contrary to this nature than tortures or death. Hence, whatever is consistent with human nature is 'virtue', whatever is contrary to human nature is 'vice'. From this description, it appears that vice is a perversion of human nature, and virtue is the natural state of human being. 'Vice' results in social torment and misery of mankind in the world. Butler believes in 'virtue' as an end in itself, because 'virtue' is a natural propensity in man. The major virtues in moral life, according to him, are self-love and benevolence. These two factors are complementary and are in harmony with virtue. Self-love gives rise to individual virtues which are meant for the moral interests of the individual, benevolence gives rise to social virtues which are meant for the common moral interests of the society. Hence, self-love and benevolence are not antagonistic principles of human nature. They are perfectly coincident. This justifies the harmony of virtues.

But here one should make a distinction between self-love and passion; the difference is not one of degree, but one of kind. If passion prevails over self-love, the
consequent action is unnatural and hence is a *vice*, but if self-love prevails over passion, the action is natural, and hence is a sign of *virtue*.

Besides these thinkers, James Martineau, Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill; in religious Ethics Moses, Jesus, St. Paul, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas; in Evolutionary naturalism, ethical thinkers like Friedrich Nietzsche with his ethics of Power, Herbert Spencer, with his Ethics of survival; then, in the ethics of pessimism and existentialism; Arthur Schopenhauer with his ethics of pity, Soren Kierkegaard in his dialectical Ethics; in ethical Pragmatism ethical thinkers like John Dewey with his doctrine of ethical instrumentalism; the ethical relativity of Edward Westermarck, ethical naturalism of R. B. Perry; and lastly, Emotivism of A. J. Ayer, ethical scepticism of B. Russell, and non-cognitivism of C. L. Stevenson,—all these thinkers directly or indirectly try to determine in their ethical writings the nature of virtue from their own points of view.

On the oriental scene, the Ethics of *Rāmāyāna*, *Mahābhārata*, *Bhagavādgītā*, *Bhāgavata*, *Upaniṣads* have their ethical thoughts virtue-oriented. The ethical literature of the different religions of the world such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity, Islām and many others cannot be studied without a reference to the concept of 'virtue'. Similarly, the ethical views of the various
saints of Mahārāstra have put a premium on the moral preparation for the attainment of Ātmajñāna. According to them, the Highest is not anti-moral, but it is super-moral. Among saints, Jñānesvara's analysis of virtues is matchless and has become classical in the ethical thought of Mahārāstra saints. It is true that these saints have not written any formal treatise on Ethics, but their metaphysical literature indirectly contributes to the importance of ethical preparations which contribute towards the attainment of Ātmajñāna.

(ii) Virtue and Character

The importance of virtues as emphasized above lies primarily neither in the fact that they come with authority of the name of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and so on, nor in any claim to finality as the list of virtues which they have given, but rather these virtues represent the fundamental way of looking at the valuable qualities of character, the qualities which are worth acquiring. The Greek life is different in some respects from our life, and the classifications and interpretations of human excellences for their times and conditions may not be applicable to or even adequate for us. But there is, after all, what Chesterton has called "the everlasting man". The essential goodness of human nature does not change. While entirely new circumstances of life may bring out new rights and new duties and so enhance moral knowledge, yet in the total areas of
human virtues there are still some moral absolutes. Certain 'human' needs do not change. These are the ethical needs, such as, the need to be prudent, temperate, just, courageous, and so on. In the field of Ethics, there are some propositions which are closed and are incapable of reform because these express universal truths. 'Adultery is wrong', 'cruelty is wrong', are cases in point.

The above is the brief account of 'virtue' as it was interpreted in the history of ethical thought. In the present thesis, an attempt is made to study Ethics by treating it as a theory of virtues. The primary object of the work is to study the concept of 'virtue' in different ethical schools, and the relation of 'virtue' with some other concepts, e.g. duty, right, law, value, and ultimately emphasising the primacy of 'virtue'.

Throughout the work, I have tried to study the science of Ethics which is mainly concerned with goodness of character, which ultimately is composed of virtues. Bad character is composed of vices. Even though good character is composed of virtues, and bad character of vices, here we are primarily interested in the study of virtues, which make the ideal character, and it is only by negative implication that we come to know of vices; e.g., some of the virtues and their corresponding vices are the following:
Pharma (Virtue)
1. Parītrāṇa (Succouring the distressed)
2. Dāna (Charity)
3. Satya (Veracity)
4. Dayā (Kindness)
5. Śrāddhā (Piety)

Adharma (Vice)
1. Himsā (Cruelty)
2. Steya (Theft)
3. Mithyā (Mendacity)
4. Paradroha (Hostility)
5. Nāstikya (Impiety)

It is a fact that ethical systems differ from one another mainly because of the specific differences in their starting points. The ethical ideal differs from system to system. Yet whatever may be the view that is taken of Ethics in the variety of ethical schools, one thing is certain; and that is, ultimately, the ethical inquiry must result in giving us an idea of the highest ethical ideal which is worthy or unworthy of realization, so that we come to know what virtues are considered by the school in question. Whatever form of ethical ideal may be recognized by any particular school, some virtues, consistently following from that ideal, will have to be regarded as worth acquiring in that specific school. Hence, the nature of 'virtue' would be different from school to school, and even from one moral thinker to another. Thus, the study of Ethics as the theory of virtues is meaningful and central to the whole inquiry, whatever may be the viewpoint regarding the other theoretical problems of Ethics. To justify the study of Ethics
as the theory of virtues, it appears to me that Ethics could be studied from the point of view of the theoretical determination of the principles of good character. Ethics may not be primarily concerned with the practical problem of the development of character, but it determines the principles on a theoretical level. "Ethics is a theory of practice rather than practice itself." It is a theory of virtue rather than practice of virtue.

The different schools in Ethics have something important to state in their approach towards the nature of virtue. However, the social, relative, or instrumental value of virtues in these specific systems is highly exaggerating. Hedonism, egoism, Altruism, Relativism and so on support the instrumental value of virtues rather than the intrinsic one. They determine the concept of 'virtue' in terms of 'rightness of an action' and not in terms of 'the goodness of the person'. The subject-matter of Ethics is to study the goodness of human character in terms of virtues which reflect in good conduct. Of course, virtue cannot be understood in vacuum but always as a fountain spring of overt action. But ultimately, it is character, and not conduct, that is valued in terms of virtues, which are also called as character-values. It is in this sense that Ethics is to be studied as the theory science of 'what I ought to be' rather than a science of 'what I ought to do'. Ethically, being virtuous is more
valuable than doing our duties as such. In order to be virtuous the sanction is internal, in order to be dutiful, the sanction is external. The aim of Ethics is perfection of character. It deals with inner life. None of the above ethical theories take this inward aspect of human character, and emphasize partially the external conduct. In brief, Duty, Right, and Law externally determine human conduct, while virtues alone constitute the internal principles of human character. Goodness of human character alone constitutes the highest ethical ideal. All other matters, though of academic interests, are of subsidiary value in comparison with the concept of 'virtue'. Therefore, virtue is central to Ethics. It is in this sense that Ethics becomes the theory of virtues, the traits of good character which one should imbibe.

The above discussion raises another important problem: If virtues are to be self-imposed, then the question is: 'Is man non-virtuous by nature?' To this, different approaches are possible. It appears that some virtues may be spontaneous only in the sense of being naturally endowed dispositions. But some may have to be acquired through conscious efforts. And this is the wilful building of character. After a continuous practice of virtuous actions it becomes one's second nature, and such really virtuous persons have a natural tendency to express goodness in all their activities.
If Ethics is to be a study of man's ethical character, merely doing one's duty is not sufficient for the perfection of the ethical ideal. We must approach the whole problem of 'the greatness of character' through the various virtues. Of course, it is difficult to realize all the virtues because man's life is very short. But I think that the idea of 'greatness of character' is the idea of disposition to respect and to practice some virtue to such a degree as not to be willing to compromise with it on account of personal pleasure, comfort, security and sometimes even life itself. That alone is the test of a truly virtuous character. Even a single virtue is sufficient in itself to lead towards the highest ethical ideal. It can also express our notion of the intrinsic value of a virtue, our unselfish love for the virtue, our strength of will for 'virtue' to the highest degree. To become virtuous, the Bhagavadgītā's idea of Abhyāsa and Vairāgya could be of great help. Virtuous life is a sādhanā.

Hence, the truth in the Socratic saying, "an unexamined life is not worth living". Wisdom, temperance, courage, justice, truthfulness, desire for self-knowledge (Ātmajñāna), trustworthiness, steadfastness, patience, perseverance, sincerity, honesty, social consciousness, kindness, and many others are the determinants of a good character. Every single virtue, or a group of virtues, is capable of helping the individual to lead towards the perfection of his
character. The different virtues are not, as it were, the different parts of man's character. They are essentially linked. They live in unity. The various characters in Rāmāyana and Mahābhārata give the evidence that even a single virtue, if developed fully, may lead to the perfection of character.

(iii) 'Virtue' and Its Place in Ethics

It is true and indeed very unhappy to note that in the recent ethical thought and writings, the concept of virtue does not figure prominently. Such a depreciation of virtue has a measure of justification. Historically, to my mind, it was a reaction against the smugness of highly moral ideals during the Greek and the Medieval periods. Again, the depreciation of virtue in modern Ethics might be due to the result of growing sensitiveness to the self-defeating character of the pursuit of 'virtue for its own sake'. Hence, as Thomas McPherson points out, "in moral philosophy these days there is hardly any discussion of virtues".6

But compared to these points of justification for the depreciation of the concept of virtue, the recent developments in philosophy, and particularly the logical positivistic approach, is more responsible for the depreciation of 'virtue' in modern ethical thought. Linguistic philosophy is a technique for the clarification of
concepts, and consequently the task of a moral philosopher is to analyse the various moral concepts. The linguistic philosophers treat 'virtue' as an abstract concept, and treat it as *indefinable*, being unanalysable. But I think this is the limitation of the linguistic approach that it cannot define 'virtue' by its principle of empirical verification. Verification may be direct or indirect, and not necessarily direct as such. There are so many scientific laws which cannot be directly verified, but nevertheless to reject them would be the most unscientific attitude. Virtues, like some scientific laws, may be indirectly verified through one's conduct. A good character may be expressed in good conduct. If character is not expressed in conduct, then it is not good character in the true and ethical sense of the term. Again, analysis is not necessarily linguistic, it may be conceptual and if the latter, then, it is more useful for understanding certain abstract terms. Clarification is necessary but not sufficient for understanding and practising the various virtues of man's life. A truly ethical life is composed of the various virtues which could be understood on a conceptual level. And such a conceptual approach is primarily seen in the ethical writings of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, Kant and many others.

If we trace the history of moral philosophy, one cannot fail to note that Ethics was always treated as a
practical science. 'What I ought to do?' was supposed to be the central theme in Ethics, according to some moralists. But to my mind, the question 'what I ought to be?' is ethically more important than the question 'what I ought to do?' In both Greek and Christian Ethics the tendency is to put the emphasis on virtue. In both the 'good man' is the central conception. To be rather than to have or to do, character rather than possessions or actions, are given the primacy in ethical thought. Hence, as Leslie Stephen says, "the direction of moral development is from doing to being" and that the ultimate question for the moral agent is 'what I ought to be?'

Merely knowing and consequently acting according to one's duty does not reveal one's character-values. Life today may be a life of action, but we cannot achieve or realize anything without inevitably achieving also something that we call character. It follows that we still want to know what that character should be and what the self ought to become. Certainly Ethics must give a fundamental place to character-values, and for such type of Ethics the ideal of virtuous man must be central.

What should be the real ethical ideal? Virtue, duty or value? For a long period moral philosophy was thought to be either a valuational study of human conduct in terms of good or bad, right or wrong. But to my mind good and bad are value-terms, right and wrong are ethical terms,
while virtue and vice are aretological terms. Virtues are the excellences of character, the good traits of character. Courage, temperance, benevolence, truthfulness and so on are aretological terms. All other matters, though of theoretic and academic interest are only of subsidiary value from the point of view of the central subject-matter of the greatest practical importance, namely the virtues.

But what is the nature and the number of virtues? Whatever controversies there are about the nature and the number of virtues, yet all, except sceptics, mean by it some kind of 'excellence'. Scepticism as an ethical theory, in general, cannot be the final resting place of human thought. Ethical scepticism is one of the ethical theories, and any of the other ethical theories is preferable to any form of scepticism. According to the Bhagavadgītā utter scepticism necessarily ends in moral anarchy, leading ultimately to self-destruction; some faith is necessary to acquire the knowledge of virtues.

In brief, virtue is a kind of excellence, but again, all excellences are not virtues. Only some excellences can be treated as virtues. The word 'excellence' refers to the qualities of human character. "Virtues are the good traits of character, and vices are the bad traits of character." The various virtues are the human excellences having a moral nature which are attended with worthiness.
of praise or blame. Virtues are the praise-worthy qualities of character, and vices are the blame-worthy qualities of character, the former are ethically commendable and the latter are ethically condemnable.

It appears, therefore, that virtues are those excellences of human character which should be acquired and practised, if human beings care to live a good life. It is sometimes said that every man will not have the same virtues in virtue of his social situation and circumstances in life, but I think that a minimum basis must be fixed for all for their development of the goodness of character. The concept of 'Sāmānyā-dharma' in Hindu Ethics, as taught in the Dharmasāstra, justifies the above position. These constitute the 'Sanātana-dharma' of any society. What is pure, noble, just and human ought to be cultivated and practised unconditionally. These universally accepted excellences of man's character should be understood and developed in every man from his early childhood, for it is psychologically true that what a child takes unto himself in early days has a lasting influence throughout his life.

Some persons labour under the misapprehension that old age is the proper time for virtuous life. Youth, they say, is the time for enjoying worldly pleasure. Young people should not, therefore, be troubled with questions of morality, religion, virtues, values etc., but should
be allowed to enjoy pleasures freely. But is it desirable to subscribe to such a view? The evils of intemperance are well known. If the appetites and passions become very strong, man will ruin himself and ethically degrade the societies to which he belongs. In fact, one can hardly be expected to be virtuous in old age, unless he begins to practise virtues very early in his life.

Here we must guard ourselves against a possible misunderstanding. The above thought does not really mean that a virtuous man is not entitled to any amusement. Recreation also has an ethical value. In fact, it is one of the values of man's life. The virtuous man does not despise all pleasures and amusement. However he shuns all sorts of excess and follows the 'golden mean' as the guiding principle of his life. A truly virtuous life is a happy life. From the point of view of treating Ethics as a practical science, the investigation of the excellences of character and their corresponding expression in conduct is necessary. But, ultimately, it is man's character that is valued, when valued morally. Reference to the practice of virtues, though necessary, is secondary. Hence, the distinction between Agent-Ethics and Act-Ethics. The former refers to the character and the latter to conduct.

Again, what is virtue? Who is a virtuous man? How is he recognized? Is virtue one or many? These are the
fundamentals of Ethics. Generally, a virtuous man is recognized by his overt actions. But it may be the case that the outward action produces good consequences for himself or for the society. But shall we call him a virtuous man on this count alone? Throughout the present work I have maintained the view that the outward actions may determine sometimes the virtuous character of a man, but sometimes this may not work at all. When we say that 'X is virtuous', we should ultimately refer to his inner character. Hence, 'to be virtuous' and 'to be dutiful', are two different ethical phrases. Virtues refer to character, and duty refers to conduct. Character ought to be expressed in conduct. However, it is a moral paradox of human experience that character and conduct do not necessarily go together. A man may act from the sense of duty, e.g. one may fulfil one's obligations to one's family, community, nation etc. To be dutiful is not ethically sufficient for being virtuous. 'Sāmānya dharma' in Hindu Ethics, therefore, surpass the idea of 'Varnāsrama dharmas' as such. The former are universal, and the latter are to be practised corresponding to one's varna and āśrāma.

Discrepancy between character and conduct is a psychological fact of human life and experience. But ethically this is not desirable. Good character must be expressed in good conduct, almost habitually, and once it is habitually performed, conduct itself becomes just
secondary, and character gets the primary value. It is in this sense that Ethics is a 'theory of virtues' which ultimately ought to determine the 'greatness of character'. The 'virtue-consciousness' is the distinguishing feature of man and it is through its realization that man's life is perfected.

Lastly, different ethical systems try to interpret man's ethical ideal. But I think that all ethical theories try to interpret primarily human actions in terms of right or wrong, good or bad. They determine human conduct. And each theory has its own specific moral standard which determines the moral quality of man's conduct. No theory, however, tries to interpret the worth of human personality, e.g., Hedonism tries to interpret the value of those actions which yield pleasure. But hedonistic thinkers do not take into account the worth of man's character for whose pleasure actions are performed. Any ethical system without any reference to the self or the 'character' of the man, should be regarded as imperfect and artificial. Moral philosophy demands that the principles of character should emerge from the inner most 'self' the realization of which becomes the ideal of human life. And this makes Ethics enter into super-moralism. Sometimes it is said that super-moralism cannot be the ideal of Ethics. If Brahman is beyond virtue and vice, the realizer of Brahman must go beyond virtue and vice, good and evil, right and
wrong and so on. But this does not make ethical life redundant. Ethics must culminate into spiritualism. Moralism is nearer to super-moralism than anti-moralism. The way to the beyond is easier to be found through the virtues than through the vices; for even the customary and the conventional good represents certain essential and permanent features of the highest good, viz., the life in Brahman. To take only one example, there may be risk in speaking the truth and gain in telling a lie. But in the former case the man is at peace with himself and possesses on that account courage, fearlessness, joy and a sense of internal freedom. These are obviously the characteristics of Brahman represented howsoever in a fragmentary manner in human life—in the moral and the social spheres. So we can say in general that though the Brahman goes beyond morality the reflection of the over-good can be better found in the ethical virtues than in anything else.

Again, from the so-called criticisms against 'virtue', it is generally recognized that 'virtue' is a complex concept as it is variously translated and interpreted. To a certain extent, well, this is true. But this should not lead us into believing that it is a vague or ill-defined. Virtue may be indeterminate but not vague. "Indeterminateness does not preclude inner clarity, whereas vagueness is the opposite of clarity."  

The criticisms which we have observed against the
various interpretations of virtues must not blind us to the value of conduct and the qualities of man's ethical character they represent. Self-control, courage, wisdom, justice, benevolence, kindness, truthfulness, non-violence and many other virtues are as valuable as ever. In any society the qualities and the behaviour represented by these virtues will be present in no small degree. We have tried to make clear, however, that ultimately it is 'character' that is valued, when valued morally. And it is in this sense I have suggested that Ethics is the science of character-building, the super-structure of which is based on the acquisition of virtues.

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