



## Aristotle's Virtue Ethics as a Solution to the Problem of Corruption, Political instability and Bad Governance in the Developing Countries

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### ABSTRACT

The focus of this study is on the contribution of Aristotle's virtue ethics on dealing with the problem of corruption, political instability and bad governance in the developing countries. Aim or objective of this study is to establish how Aristotle's virtue ethics can be a solution to the problem of corruption, political instability and bad governance in the developing countries. Nowadays corruption, political instability and bad governance have been a cause of concern for many countries around the world, more especially the developing countries. Experiences tell us that corruption, political instability and bad governance can have a disastrous impact on an economy. This study suggests that virtue ethics as an ethical system can be a solution to those problems, having in mind the concept of virtue ethics as it is presented by Aristotle is more about the good end as the aim of human life, therefore virtuous life guides human being toward the ultimate goal of human life. Corruption, political instability and bad governance does not take human being to the good end, they are against the ultimate goal of human life. Therefore, in this study we want to see how Aristotle's virtue ethics can be a solution to the problem of corruption, political instability and bad governance in the developing countries.

**Keywords:** Aristotle's virtue ethics, governance, political instability.

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### INTRODUCTION

Aristotle defines virtue as a trait of character of a person manifested in the usual action which help to perform a particular role well, that means to perform it with excellence. It is not just a feeling about what is good, or a mere ability to make a correct choice, according to Aristotle virtue ethics is above all, it is an active, voluntary, and diligence disposition to practice good in all circumstances and not sporadically, this can be cultivated by practice and teaching, it is not a conditional reflex, it is an inner personality or habit directed by reason, controlled by practical wisdom or prudence and perfected by experience. This work suggests that, Aristotle's virtue ethics should be a solution to the problem of corruption, political instability and bad governance facing developing countries. Aristotle's virtues of justice, courage and prudence gives a good solution to those problems and direct the economic development process in developing countries towards good as a goal of human life.

#### 1.1 Aristotle's Virtue of Prudence as an ethical Solution to Bad Governance and Political Instability

Prudence is the intellectual habit that sensibly assesses the means necessary to accomplish the end at which you are aiming, and the end should be good in itself. Another more common word for this might be wisdom [1]. Prudence and ethics in general invites us to consider these means, to have the capacity to make wise judgments in complex situations to the political governance. This is a critical habit to develop for those seeking a more sustainable world. Sustainability means meeting the needs of the present generation as well as to enable the future generations to meet their needs. Prudence properly begins with the individual's own well-being and then extends to the world in which the individual is enmeshed [2]. It is generally required, therefore, that the rules, roles and expectations governing that wider world are such as will support rather than impend individual wellbeing, so that prudential action can be focused more fully on the larger goals of government [3].

Prudence play a great role in the governance and political stability, as it prepares leaders who are virtuous and act according to the situation, leaders who are guided by reason. Prudence is a very important component of good governance and political stability because the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented or not implemented require elegance of thought and the identification of priority areas for the good and

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (New York: Hackett Publisher, 1999)89.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 89.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 89.

wellbeing of the people [4]. As an ethical-philosophical concept, prudence enjoys multi-faceted bearing and application, including in our personal lives, the economics, politics and governance, in fact, in Aristotelian parlance, prudence is the greatest good, it precludes mediocrity, nepotism, corruption, waste of human resources and time, and focuses on the good, wellbeing and happiness of the people as well as the ability of getting things done well in the governance. It includes accountability, transparency, frugality and practical wisdom [5].

However, an in-depth reflection on developing countries reviews that, the greatest challenge to the process of economic development is not human and material, resources to achieve a strong and virile economy, and advance the development of the country, but bad governance and political instability in most of the developing countries, this is due to the ineffective and imprudent management of affairs and resources to make a good governance. From Aristotelian perspective, this work argues that, developing countries need prudence combating the problem of bad governance and political instability, most of the wars and violence in those countries is due to the imprudent decisions made by their leaders. This paper argues that the virtue of prudence is mostly needed for the part of leaders and citizens alike as a tactic for urgent rescue of a country, particularly from economic distress and underdevelopment [6].

It is not difficult to see how prudence can play a very important role in the achievement of economic excellence and national development of the developing countries. Imprudent leadership is the greatest problem hampering economic excellence and national development. Prudence is a pillar of good governance and political stability that enable man to achieve higher values that will enhance the achievement of trustworthy and sustainable national development. Prudence, or practical wisdom as Aristotle calls it, is the virtue he attributes to a successful economy and leadership, it is the basis for his claim that politics is the master science of the goods of all other arts and sciences. Prudence is the virtue that offers technical knowledge about what exist in the political circumstances and ethical knowledge about what is good for humans generally, therefore prudence combats the problem of bad governance and political instability to the developing countries. Prudence requires foresight, the capacity to estimate, with a sure, dependable and accurate direction for the future [7].

Prudence helps leaders and people engaging in economic activities to escape judgmental actions. Perhaps saying wisdom makes it clearer for them to make right choices and therefore ethical decisions. People needs the insight to explain what the future needs to look like, what actions will be successful and what actions should be avoided. While exercising a bit of discretion clarifies decisions, options and essential obligations. Discretion shows good judgment and clear ability to discern the right place for success. Wise leaders decide and guides actions, political instability needs prudence as a solution, prudent leaders are good and they are capable of applying moral behavioral concepts to overcome doubts and accomplish success. Being careful means knowing goals, what is important in the long run, and what actions make all this possible. People in the leadership or any political system understand how they can make the right call in all circumstances take on a wise leader's persona. Leaders who concentrate on the future have to make choices and who show good judgment when dealing with people are really the wise leaders we all need [8].

A prudent leader is conscious whether a particular action will lead to the realization or actualization of the good or not. This means that imprudence leads to inaccurate prediction of the consequences of action. A prudent leader's motive for any action begins with his general concept and understanding of the human good developed through pursuing the right kind of well living. A prudent leader is supposed to tailor the technique of acquiring wealth to the service of human good for the betterment of the whole society, he supposed to be a good leader who uses public wealth to serve the good of the people and not personal interest, he limits the resources or amount of wealth generated for the common good.

According to Aristotle, a prudent person or leader knows not only how much wealth is conducive to the good of the household and state but also desires only that amount of wealth required. This means that prudence has moral and economic components. The role of moral virtue in prudence is to make sure that the irrational part of the soul, the will, submits to the authority of the intellect. This suggests that intellectual and moral components are required to enable prudence to fulfil its ruling function. It is an intellectual virtue that cannot be exercised without moral virtue. Hence, imprudence results if the rational side does not have an accurate knowledge of what is good or if the irrational side is not conditioned by habit to follow the rational side's dictates [9].

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<sup>4</sup>Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 89.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. MaraizuElechi, "Prudence as Basis for Economic Excellence and National Development: The Aristotelian Paradigm" *An African Journal of Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 17 no. 1(September 2016): 4.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. Elechi, "Prudence as Basis for Economic Excellence," 6.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 91.

<sup>8</sup>Cf. Elechi, "Prudence as Basis for Economic Excellence," 7.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Elechi, "Prudence as Basis for Economic Excellence," 8.

For Aristotle, moral virtue is the only practical road to effective action, is a practical road to the good governance, to the political stability what the person of good character loves with right desire and thinks of as an end with right reason must first be perceived as beautiful. Hence, the virtuous person sees truly and judges rightly, since beautiful things appear as they truly are only to a person of good character. It is only in the middle ground between habits of acting and principles of action that the soul can allow right desire and right reason to make their appearance, as the direct and natural response of a free human being to the sight of the perfect end [10].

The economic component of prudence pivots on the fact that prudence requires skills and good judgment in the management and utilization of resources. A politician or leader must therefore have constant vision of what are good for the people overtime and even in the face of changing circumstances, he plans and pursues anintelligible project and programme of action. He holds to the good end, believes it and consistently pursues it overtime. According to Aristotelian standard, a prudent leader ensures that his means to the end must be consistent with the general principle of the good. A prudent leadership requires moving the political environment in a particular direction, a direction that provokes loyalty and support from a variety of followers, he cannot afford to be admired rather than followed in the right direction, having such kind of leadership will be the end of the problem of bad governance and political instability in the developing countries and therefore will boost up the economic development [11].

According to Aristotle, prudence is a function of education, experience, and nature. This means that politicians and leaders need to have experienced circumstances that prepare them to be prudent in the position they occupy, they must always learn from experience. When a leader fails to learn, when he fails to understand the realities of his political environment, when he fails to reveal wisdom and experience in dealing with such realities, it is important for the citizenry to ask question because one who holds ends or uses means that do not fit reality securely cannot hope to change circumstances for the better. Prudence from Aristotle's perspective is the ability to understand circumstances, understand the likely consequences of alternative courses of action, and to make better choices for the good of the people. A prudent leader must be able to identify the best possible good in changing circumstances [12].

Prudence as a philosophical product plays a vital role to the development of a nation through the inculcation of a wide knowledge that enhances sound judgment and good decisions in constructing national priorities and objectives. This is done through its demanding qualitative and logical training of the human mind, and the proper alignment and civilization of the citizenry. It helps the leader in arriving at good judgment through the method or process of critical thinking or reasoning (a crucial part of decision making) [13]. For instance, in questioning and analyzing one's ideas or assumptions and those of the others, the leader needs to clearly analyze and discover good reasons or points for his decisions or choices of actions. As politicians and leaders, Aristotle believes that we ought to be more concerned with the wellbeing of the members of the society for money making is beneath the attention of the virtuous man or ruler.

Aristotle's conception of prudence has the merit of eliminating bad governance and political instability which are the sources of problems in developing countries. Prudence according to Aristotle is at the central place of reason, especially in shaping our activities including economic activities all times. Our actions are behavioral expression of the way we reason, each aspect of that affects the practical expression of ourselves as individuals. The fact that reason tells us that we must be morally upright, and avoid wasteful spending, corruption, misappropriation of public fund, lying and deceiving the populace is basically because these do not spring from a good motive. This is so, because they cannot substitute moral uprightness of our being. Reason simply tells us that our actions or any action so to speak must be done without prejudice or bad motive; all actions should be done with good motives [14].

What we intend to point out here is that, Aristotle's conception of prudence has the relevance of educating our leaders and politicians that they must live up to the expectation of the people and by good example, an action that springs from reason or rationality or good motive. Lack of reason or ideology has been a serious problem with leadership in developing countries. The consequence of this is that the leaders tend to gobbledygook on issues, with persistent policy failures or instability which nobody wants to be held responsible for them. For a leader to be taken seriously, he has to put confidence in the mind of the people by behaving himself and taking responsibility for his actions and procrastinations. The fact is that no leader can successfully govern well in a vibrant society without an ideological compass.

## **1.2 Aristotle's Virtue of Justice as an ethical Solution to Corruption**

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Elechi, "Prudence as Basis for Economic Excellence," 9.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Kane John, "Prudence and the Politics of Public Management" *Journal of Academia*, 6 no.14 (January 2003):14.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. John, "Prudence and Politics," 15.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 92.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. MaraizuElechi, "Prudence as Basis for Economic Excellence and National Development: The Aristotelian Paradigm" *An African Journal of Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 17, no. 1(September 2016): 5.

Aristotle identified justice as the complete virtue and he writes this in his Book V of the *Nicomachean Ethics* discussing what it means to be a just person. Aristotle categorizes between universal justices which is the complete or perfect virtue from particular justice, which is a moral virtue on par with courage, temperance among others [15]. We always discuss about universal justice which is concerned with laws abidingness and acquiescence with rules. The main function of law according to Aristotle's framework seems to help the cultivation of the virtues, as the core or at least the condition for private and public happiness, for Aristotle, particular justice is the virtue by which a person lives in right relation with his neighbor [16].

Justice constitutes seeking goodness and essentially a part of the nature of citizens as ethical beings, and the pre-conditions that citizens live the ethical life, and this is necessary so, Aristotle conceives justice as character which enables human beings to perform virtuous actions of justice. Just human beings are certain to act justly and want to do what is just; they will actively make the possibility to have things done following justice wherever justice is needed, and also solidly prove in practice they are just, so that their just conduct constitutes the political life of just men. Justice as character not only produces just actions but makes justice come into truth in political science. The virtue of justice prods moral agents to obtain it through doing just actions. According to Aristotle, just as men become builders by building houses, they become just persons by practicing just actions and self-controlled persons by practicing self-control, therefore economic development process needs just men who would build well the economy of a country [17].

Justice is the ultimate of the government and the order of political society and a just citizen possess all virtues out rightly. Here in following virtues not only in our economic activities, but also in political community towards others. That means justice is the most perfect virtue because perfect virtue is implemented within the goal towards the good end, what is the end of economic development process is not the maximization of wealth but it's a well life living, that is what Aristotle considers as a virtuous life in the whole process of economy. Justice as a virtue will guide the government so as to decide what is just in the economic development process and what unjust actions that would subordinate the economy. Aristotle knows that everywhere and, in all cases, laws have not been regulated to provide people's prosperities and society's contentment [18]. So it is probable that laws are being legislated to benefit some special groups or royalties. Thus, if any slackness has been occurred in regulation, it doesn't yield good results. Instead of the possibility of negligence in legislation, he defines justice in general sense as respecting laws and enforce them. He considers it as the noblest virtue, this indicates the assumption that in regulating laws any laxity has not been occurred and it has been legislated aims at providing fortunes of people and society where all goodness is visible in it; since he doesn't consider justice in this regard as a part of moral virtue [19].

Justice is an animated point not just for leaders or people engaging with economic activities but for all people. All want justice for themselves, and for others. All want to be treated fairly, without refinement or prejudice. Literature shows that integrity is a most important point for ethical leadership in economic development process, if our behavior and actions are misleading, then no one would be recognized as an ethical person in whatever activity. Everybody expects frankness and constancy in all aspects of human life. Justice requires leaders in economic development process and other activities to represent, to support those who need shoring up knowledge and expertise to improve their careers. And the leader would never obstruct an employee's advance, because they need them to remain alongside them. A single leader adores their staff in succeeding because it speaks well of the chief. The just leaders, creates working environment where by everyone is treated fairly and done in an honest fashion, and an atmosphere full of honest people [20].

To employ Aristotle's justice as an end for collective goodness in the developing countries as a moral solution to the problem of corruption; it is important to indicate that corruption describes breaking, destroying, distracting, and distorting life; the community, and society [21]. Therefore, corruption impends the collective good of the society by elevating the minority and making the majority live a life of deprivation, threatens economic development process in the country. Basing on Aristotle's conception of ethics, corruption does not bring man to the good end, here the virtue of justice as presented by Aristotle would help the society to have just leaders, leaders who does not work on their own interest but for the interest of the nation as a whole, legal justice for instance would insure that there is preservation of law and responsibilities in the society.

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<sup>15</sup>Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 67.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Kevin Kuhumba, "Aristotle's Virtue of Justice as an Ethical Solution to Political Corruption: Analysis and Reflection" *Al-Milal: Journal of Religion and Thought* 10, no.2 (April 2020)129.

<sup>17</sup>Cf. Kuhumba, "Aristotle's Virtue of Justice"120.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 67.

<sup>19</sup>Cf. Augustine Adeyika, George Ikioumoton and Fibainmine Paulley, "The Concept of Justice in Aristotle's Philosophy: Implications for Social –Political Life in Nigeria" *Nigerian Journal of Social Studies*, 20 no.2 (October 2017): 155.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Purnima Laurence, "Role of Ethical Leader in Sustainable Business: An Aristotelian Virtue Ethics Perspective" *International Journal of Business* 19 no. 2 (January 2021) 201.

<sup>21</sup>Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 67.

The perfect virtue for Aristotle is justice, which serves as a measure of the economy, he does not see any need for justice, as is the case with socialism, because unequal should not be made or treated as equal. According to Aristotle, there must also be a harmonizing justice, which recompenses for illegitimate distributive results [22].

Corruption become as the source of other evils in the developing countries, countries which are corrupt will be faced by economic problems as well. We can observe Aristotle's response to the vices of corruption at the inception of *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle argues that human life can be judged good when it is shaped by a relatively regular pursuit of ends that are themselves good [23]. That is to say, Aristotle's moral reflection advocates for determining the nature of the good that people should see, and what people should see is not a pleasure gained by the utility as many economists would support it. Corruption begin with one's desire to have too much prosperity and taking what is unjust. The virtue of justice as employed by Aristotle will make a perfect society by guiding the economic development process towards the good end and not on the base of utility.

Aristotle's entire understanding of morality is built upon the principle that a good life is one devoted to the pursuit of good purposes or ends, this has to be applied also in leadership that if a particular leadership does not aim towards a good end, then it is not moral. One of Aristotle's most considerable conclusions was that a good life is concerned with goods shared with others, the collective good of the larger society of which one is a part, economic development should be for collective good of the country. The good life of a single person and the quality of the common life persons share with one another in society are linked. Thus, the good of the individual and the collective good are intimate, the whole community or country focuses on the end as the goal. The collective good of the community should have preeminence in setting a direction for the lives of individuals, for it is a higher good than the particular goods of private persons, for any country whose citizens will live in such a manner will build up a perfect society in which there will no longer be corruption [24].

Legal justice in Aristotle's moral framework designates lawfulness, it deals with the legislation of laws in human society. Legal justice is thought to be the good of another, because it is a relation to our fellow men in that it does what is of advantage to others, not only that but also its aim toward the good end as Aristotle's ethics insists. Legal justice standardizes all proper conduct within society in the relation of individuals with one another, and to some extent even the proper attitude of an individual towards himself as well as towards the end. Legal justice as the highest virtue bring up the cultivation of the virtues, as the core or at least the condition for private and public happiness. On this note, Aristotle considers legal justice as leading to human brilliance and encouraging the common good [25].

This underneath can be incorporated as a foundation for legal frameworks to fight corruption in the developing countries. These laws should aim at the common good. Justice as the virtue prods the moral agent to act for the sake of another's wellbeing, rather than just working for personal wellbeing. Thus, cases of corruption are unjust and vice, since corruption aims at enriching few individuals at the expense of the majority. In this way, corruption threatens the wellbeing of society and hampers human prosperous for the majority. So, in reduction corruption there is a need to integrate legal institutions to articulate laws against corruption. These laws should be based on Aristotle's ethical footings that laws ought to enable human beings to realize flourishing in society.

To apply Aristotle's justice as a virtue, it is important to remind ourselves what it means to be a just person in Aristotle's moral theory to be more precise, Aristotle explicates virtue as a character, the virtue of justice is therefore also a state of a character [26]. Aristotle argues that what all men mean by the term justice is a moral state such that in consequence of it men have the capacity of doing what is just and here would say what is just in the economic development process. The virtue of justice is fundamentally a part of the nature of citizens as ethical beings and the pre-conditions that citizens live the ethical life. This means that the citizens with the character of justice do just actions as by the light of nature [27]. Here, we argue that justice as a virtue could serve as a underpinning for responsible leadership, in the economic development process distributive justice function well towards the human end and bring together justice and responsible leadership as a moral solution to the problem of corruption, it is important to define economic development process under the guideline of Aristotle's virtue of justice to fight the problem of corruption [28].

Therefore, the practice of Aristotle's virtue of justice will fight the problem of corruption as it is understood that being just requires constant practice of just actions, that is what Aristotle insist, good leader should be a virtuous person

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<sup>22</sup>Cf. Johan Graafland, *Economics, Ethics and the Market: Introduction and Applications* (New York: Routledge, 2006) 229.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 70.

<sup>24</sup>Cf. Kuhumba, "Aristotle's Virtue of Justice"129.

<sup>25</sup>Cf. Kuhumba, "Aristotle's Virtue of Justice"130.

<sup>26</sup>Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 71.

<sup>27</sup>Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 71.

<sup>28</sup>Cf. Kuhumba, "Aristotle's Virtue of Justice"129.

has to be honest and responsible as a virtuous person, good leader requires loyalty in performing acts which portray honestly and accountability by such practices will surely end the problem of corruption in the developing countries, therefore the virtue of justice is important in the practice of leadership in any country, emphasis on performing these virtuous acts would help in forming citizens who are honest, accountable, just, and citizens with a moral sense for the wellbeing of others. These efforts would help in the fight against corruption, there is a problem of injustice in most of the developing countries, bad governance and political instability, all these evils lead a way to the damage of country's economy.

### **1.3 Aristotle's Virtue of Courage as a Solution to Corruption**

Courage is also described as fortitude or bravery, courage is among the three virtues that play a major role in most of the versions of Greek ethics, it enables a person to face the danger without flinching, as temperance moderates' behaviors. Courage guides a man or woman to choose means appropriate to the end that will indeed succeed reaching the end, courage frees us from fear [29]. When a courageous person realizes that whatever or whoever is to be confronted is indeed frightful, the hostility is still appropriate because reason has indicated that it is a lesser evil that must be dealt with in order to obtain a true good, to act courageously means acting bravely, does not mean that all fear has dissolved, a brave man may act with fear but in spite of it faces the danger. The virtue of courage challenges us to move beyond our negative feelings and focus on what kind of person, we want to be, what kind of character will help us to face a certain problem, live out our commitments [30].

This kind of hope, rooted in our habit of mind and heart, is precisely what we need to bring to situations where environmental injustices are being executed [31]. Courage can give us the persistence to struggle for justice in the face of dissuasion. The virtue of courage can work well as a solution to the problem of corruption, leaders expected to have the virtue of courage so as to fight the problem of courage. Aristotle's concept of courage is not only the strength but also the power to make certain decision even in hard situation, this manifest itself in the action, that means what make a person to be courageous is not making a decision in just one circumstance or situation but as a virtue have to do more with the practices [32].

Courageous leaders are expected to act in a virtuous way always and not only ones, the problem of corruption in developing countries is the root of many other evils. Corruption may bring bad leaders into power and causes political instability or bad governance, a truly courageous leader act from a rational motive and directs his energies, skills and bluntness toward the end that must be attained at any cost developing countries need courageous leaders, leaders who are able to fight against the problem of corruption and live a virtuous life, life that is defined by the ultimate goal of human life. What the person of courage loves is right desire and thinks of an end with strength and right reason no matter of the circumstance or the situation, the virtue of courage is a solution to the problem of corruption because it give the strength and right reason to fight against all the situations that would cause corruption to occur, as it is very common in politics, most of the developing countries suffer from the problem of corruption [33].

### **CONCLUSION**

The problem of corruption, political instability and bad governance are commonly in the developing countries, corrupt leaders will never take their country to the promising destination, will only concentrate to their personal gain. One problem can be the root cause of the other, Corruption may bring bad leaders into power and causes political instability or bad governance. Therefore, if people does not deal with one problem will surely cause other problems to occur, in most of the developing countries there is a problem of corruption of which gives a way for the other problems to take place and make poor country even poorer. The life of virtue will surely combat these problems, this work aimed at giving Aristotle's virtue ethics as a solution to the problem of corruption, political instability and bad governance.

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<sup>29</sup>Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 45.

<sup>30</sup>Cf. David Ross, ed., Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics* (New York: Noble Publish, 1964), 89.

<sup>31</sup>Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 45.

<sup>32</sup>Cf. Pup Anca, "Virtue Ethics: New Coordinates for Economic Development" *Journal of Research Papers in Economics*, 10, no.4 (June 2010): 306.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Pup Anca, "Virtue Ethics: New Coordinates for Economic Development" 306.