Character-based ethics is more useful in making moral decisions that rule-based ethics. Discuss - 35 marks

Most ethical theories are concerned with what is right or good, and they often attempt to find this by applying a rule or several rules that seem to fit with outcomes that we most commonly find are "good". For example, a situation ethicist's rule would be to seek the action that has the most loving consequence, a utilitarian's would argue for the greatest amount of happiness, a Kantian's rule would be to follow the categorical imperative, and in Natural Law, we do what is in accordance with the purpose of what it is to be human. There are also moral theories that suggest there are no rules, and that morality is simply an expression of feeling, such as emotivism and prescriptivism. Virtue ethics, with it's roots in Greek literature and championed by the great philosopher Aristotle, rejects these approaches of asking what is right and wrong, and instead asks what would make you a better person. Instead of defining good actions and consequences, virtue theory defines good people and qualities. Virtue ethics underwent a big revival in the 1960's after an article published in Philosophy magazine by G.E.M Anscombe, who claimed that modern moral philosophy had become misguided in associating good with actions rather than people. It has also been heavily supported by Alasdair MacIntyre. It is the prime example of character-based ethics, and is very different from rule-based ethics, such as Kantian, Natural Law and Utilitarianism.

*Good opening paragraph which sets the scene well. Make it clear that it is* *rule utilitarianism* *which is rule-based, as generally utilitarianism is simply consequentialist.*

Aristotle thought that everyone was aiming towards the final end of eudaimonia; flourishing and excellence - a successful and happy life. The way to reach this goal is to practise phronesis, practical wisdom, in moral dilemmas not just moral dilemmas, could be any situation we face, until the most wanted virtues for a person to have eventually became instinct. Aristotle himself wrote "As men become builders by building, we become just by doing just acts". He thought that people became heroes by doing heroic acts, that we could not just follow rules in order to become moral. We have to prove and then improve our morality and virtuousness by being moral and virtuous.( In contrast, Utilitarianism focuses on which action would produce the greatest amount of happiness. This places no importance on what the person is like, what they have done before or what they could become in the future. The act in itself is what is good and what should be weighed up in our minds.) While the assumption is made by Aristotle that we are indeed purposive beings with rational goals in life, something that would be rejected by someone like Richard Dawkins, applying this theory in life does make sense in places where other theories seem to fall down. In the example of the crazed knife wielder who asks whether our friend is hiding upstairs, the classic pitfall of a rule-based Kantian is that they would have to tell the truth, and in doing so, hand our friend upstairs a death sentence. Virtue ethics argues that we would instinctively know to lie to protect our friend, and we would know this by applying phronesis to the situation we found ourselves in, not by arbitrarily following a deontological and absolute rule we have imposed on ourselves. In this way character-based ethics is much more useful that rule-based ethics. It is holistic, it involves emotions and makes use of the fundamental human function of reasoning. We understand good virtues and we find ourselves wanting to be good, virtuous citizens. Rule-based ethics - particularly that of Kant - seems to go against our instinct and dismisses natural need to think about a situation before making a decision. It discounts feelings and for this reason is not entirely realistic, as we cannot change the fact that we are emotional human beings.

When faced with moral dilemmas, which approach, rule-based or character-based, we decided to take is very important in terms of what the outcome will be. For example, a man caught speeding says that he was only speeding because his wife is in hospital giving birth in the next city. For a Kantian policeman, the categorical imperative would insist that he should hold the driver up further by giving him a ticket, as if everyone was allowed to speed if they could produce a valid reason (which may not be true anyway), then roads would become very unsafe. A situation ethicist would argue however, that the most loving thing to do would be to let the driver on his way, causing minimal delay. This would create the most loving consequence for the man and his family. A virtue theorist might come across some problems. On the one hand, to show mercy and compassion, both desirable virtues, would require that the policeman let the driver go. However, to show integrity and justice, also desirable virtues, the policeman would be obliged to give the driver a ticket, and as a by-product cause him more delay in reaching his wife. This outlines one of several problems with virtue theory - conflicting virtues that demand different actions. It seems sensible that a top virtues list should include ‘just resentment' and ‘forgiveness', but how far can we go trying to do both? *Excellent contrast, beautifully expressed, going to the heart of the difference between character and rule-based theories.*

Although Aristotle believed we are all aiming at excellence, it cannot be said that all of us reach it. He said "not by nature do the virtues arise in us, rather we are adapted by nature to receive them". This states that it is up to us to develop or "receive" virtues, that we are not automatically born with them. This in turn begs the question of whether everyone is indeed capable of eudaimonia, as we can all think of people that are missing significant moral virtues and who lead troubled and unsuccessful lives. Rule-based ethics skips over this problem completely, as the question is not even applicable to it. If we reduce morality to simply following certain rules, all we have to do in order to leave moral lives is follow those rules. This makes morality simple, perhaps far too simple, but less complicated than virtue theory. Of the actual virtues themselves, the classic four found in within the Greek culture are prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude. Aristotle acknowledged that the virtues would differ from culture to culture, but he developed these Greek virtues and made a longer list of what he saw as the most desirable virtues. To cultivate them we must find the mean, controlling our emotions and behavior towards others, keeping the mentioned virtues in proportion. Referring back to the example of the speeding father-to-be, we should not exercise excessive amounts of justice, nor a disproportionate amount of sympathy - we should find the "golden mean". The golden mean is the appropriate balancing point of a virtue which lies between two vices; one of deficiency and one of excess. It should not be conceived as simply a moderate amount in the middle between both vices, because the mean changes from situation to situation. For example, the golden mean between intolerance and naivety would be tolerance. *This last point is well made by Robert Arrington (see extracts on the website), so why not quote him directly?*

In terms of motivation, we use phronesis to practice virtuous behavior because we have an idea of a flourishing life, and our motivation for developing as moral beings in this way is the resulting fulfillment of this life. This is a much more positive motivation than most rule-based theories, whose motivation can somewhat disappear from view entirely. Such is the case with Kant; why should we be moral if we are only doing it for our so called ‘duty'? If we are truly autonomous beings, the ‘duty for duty's sake' approach to live is unreasonable and frustrating. Kant said only two things fill him with wonder; "the starry heavens above me and the moral law deep within me". There is though, seemingly a huge and illogical jump from a feeling of a moral law within us, to a rule that states we must do our duty and follow a categorical imperative and never think or try to reason with a moral problem again.

Aquinas said that every human action is a moral action. What we do is what and who we are. In this way, virtue ethics encompasses human life as a whole - it is very different and quite refreshing from rule-based ethics, in that it sees every moment as the possibility for acquiring or developing a virtue, and that this is what we should be seeking, rather than any particular action that will either lead to a good outcome, or that is simply intrinsically good. It's alternative route looks at the fundamental issue of what it means to be human, and avoids the pitfalls of ethical systems that espouse moral absolutes and then struggle with the consequences of those absolutes. However, criticisms have risen against the value of virtue theory when dealing with genuine moral problems. Moral virtues have only instrumental or derivative value if you're going to use a word like instrumental and so virtue theory relies on the concept of duty and responsibility for acting in a certain way. In this sense, far from replacing the arguments about moral duty and absolutes, virtue theory depends on them. Also, as a theory, it doesn't provide any answers to specific problems such as euthanasia, whereas a rule-based theory like Natural Law does. Neither does it provide a list of intolerable acts such as murder or rape, which we could argue should be condemned outright. It also raises the issue of motives - Aristotle believed that in order for an act to be moral, we have to enjoy doing that act. However, external acts that may appear virtuous, done by people who we perceive to be virtuous and moral, may have doubtful inner motives - and vice versa.

There are then, a number of problems that character-based ethics presents when applied, and these must be overcome if it is to be practised in everyday life. Rule-based ethics may be, in modern society, the easiest, quickest and most clear solution to the question of morality. However, rule-based ethics raises the importance of the person above the acts and consequences, and therefore works on a more human level as a guide to right and wrong, where rule-based ethics become robotic, stiff, and frankly, mundane.

*Generally very well written, though your paragraphing is weak and needs to be worked on, otherwise the analysis can appear disjointed in places, or rather indigestible in other places. I like the fluid style.*

*Use of examples is excellent, and particularly good is the way you think through examples and work them out in the text to illustrate your points - a key analytical skill which examiners love, because it shows real understanding and ability to address the question and bring it alive.*

*Analysis and evaluation is very strong, with the implications of theories clearly spelt out and contrasted. Points are made, explained fully and then illustrated with relevant examples.*

*You also use some quotes from original sources or from academics, but as indicated in the red comments above, you could have introduced some more, and bounced your discussion off these quotes.  It's worth learning foour or five for each topic, but keep them short so you can learn them (say, not more than 8 words).*

*The essay scored 32/35 A\**