Social Virtues Essay, Research Paper

Social Virtues

What is being Social, and what virtues do you need to possess to become sociable? Throughout your life you are going to being interacting, and communicating with just about everyone who is living around you and working with you. In my paper I am going to be talking about some of the major virtues you will need to acquire to become a ethically wise and social person according to the three leading ethical philosophers; Aristotle, Kant, and Mills. I chose this topic because I think one of the biggest faults that I have is really not being that social to everyone. I also chose this topic because and a communication major I can learn from all the ideas that I will be reading and experiencing. One of the most powerful thoughts that you must possess when dealing with others basically comes down to the all mighty Golden Rule, “Do to others as you want others to do to you.”

Aristotle discusses that a person with good character has virtue. These virtuous characteristics only come from experience, training, and the ability of always doing good. One of the virtues that Aristotle talks about which deal with the social virtues is the virtue of Friendliness. Friendliness deals with treating everyone equally and with the thought of good in mind when it comes to friends, enemies, old acquaintances, and family. I think that one of the major issues that Aristotle talks about is the meaning of happiness. A good definition of friendliness that I came up with is the transferring of one’s happiness to another. Friendliness is all about passing on a part of your happiness to someone that you meet. A good example of this is when you are walking some where and you pass someone that you don’t even know and they give you a great big smile and a hello. I don’t know about others but when someone smiles at me the only thing that I think of doing is smiling myself. Friendliness is just making someone happy, and passing on your good to others.

One of my experiences that I have benefited from that dealt with Friendliness isn’t a recent one, but something I will always remember. Coming from a catholic high school we were able to do some service activities, which we did through our religion class. During one of our quarters of religion class we were able to pick some sort of service that would help our surrounding community. The service that we pick is that each weak we went to one of the local retirement homes and got to interact with some of the people that lived at these homes. I really wasn’t looking forward on doing this because I had this idea that these people really didn’t want us there.

When I got there I was pleasantly surprised of how many nice people I met there and how much I’ve learned from this experience. When we got there we would do different activities with them like playing cards, and different games, and just talking and watching TV with them. Each week you could see how much happier they were when they had us around to talk to and interact with. You have to understand how lonely they get at these places and how they are just surrounded by older people. I could see I how passed on some of my happiness to them by having different conversations with them of the simplest things I have done during the week. It was also interesting hearing all those older stories that they told us of how things used to be. Just by having us there we brought some of their life back and some of the happiness that they used to have outside of the retirement home.

Another social virtue that Aristotle touches on is Truthfulness. When dealing with someone, there has to be that feeling that he or she really is as genuine as they say and present themselves. Aristotle talks about those boasters who build themselves up to be someone who they really aren’t. Another bad issue is those who really say some nice things about you, but really don’t care about you at all. It is not morally right to say something or do something that you really don’t want to say or do. Kant I guess touches on truthfulness when he talks about someone’s motivation to do something.

In one of Kant’s major formulations he says “Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means.” If one performs a moral action, but has immoral intentions, that person should not be considered morally right. Kant believes that you absolutely cannot put up a front to someone and take advantage of him because he or she really doesn’t know your motivations for your actions. “Do your duty”, Kant says, your duty is to do good. The duty is a part of an action in which you do it with the respect of your morals and also the morals of others. All of your reasoning should come from your maxim, a maxim that you have to keep true too.

A great maxim that I have just experience dealt with the duty of doing good, or you could say the duty to shoveling mulch for my dad. A week ago a got a call from my

dad who ask me to give him a hand at home over the weekend to do some mulching. I gladly said I was willing to help him and told him that I would be home Friday. After my

brief conversation with my dad I immediately received a phone call from one of my buddies from school. In this phone call he ask me to join him and a couple other of my friends on a trip to Canada. This situation set up a pretty big maxim for me.

After reviewing what we learned in class you could say that I set up some categories for myself. The generalized description of my maxim was that my dad asked me for some help and I gladly volunteered myself. My policy statement or promise is that I guaranteed my dad that I would be there for him and that I would return home from school. I guess my reason for my choice is that I had to perform my duty. The duty was that I told my dad I was going to do something, and it is not morally right to lie to someone that you had promised something. The next morning I called up my buddy and told him that I could not make it this time because I had some stuff to do at home.

A similar virtue of truthfulness is the virtue of trust. Trust is what develops from the use of truth in a social environment. In our society today I think that trust is one of the big ideals that people are missing. If you really think about it, they’re really aren’t to many people that you can trust now a days. If you would think about yourself and the people you trust you could probably only come up with a few people, which would probably only include your family and possibly one of your good friends.

When dealing with Mills and the ideal of Utilitarianism you are pushed into dealing with everything by looking at the whole picture. Utilitarianism deals with how your actions affect not just you but how much happiness is brought to everyone around you. Mills talks about the pleasures in life and how you should deal with different situations by measuring how much pleasure and pain is dealt with. Truth and Trust seem to be turned around when you start to think about Utilitarianism. Mills states that all of your actions should be based upon the “greatest happiness Principle.” This principle says that ethical and moral actions result in the greatest amount of happiness for the most number of people.

Utilitarianism was one of the harder ideals that I tried to grasp. I couldn’t come up with a situation in which I personally experienced utilitarianism but I come up with one. This deals with a child who is diagnosed with a fatal disease that causes him to be restricted to only a few more weeks of living. The big question that you are faced with is what should you tell this child. Mills and Kant take two different stands on this due to their believes. Kant says you should tell this child that he is dying and not hold back anything from him. Mills on the other hand measures the pleasures and happiness that will come to this child with what you tell him. Mills believes that you shouldn’t tell him that he has a certain amount of days to live because it will bring happiness to him as well as to others. Truth in this situation can be slightly adjusted due to the amount of pain that this child would have if you told him the facts.

After reading these three different idealists you can insert the same rule into each theory. The Golden Rule is a very powerful ideal to live off of. When it comes to all of the social virtues if you can keep the Golden rule in the back of your head there is no possible way that you could not gather the virtues that you need. When it comes to making ethical decisions you always have to factor in what your actions are producing, you actions should always produce the good in your life as well as the lives of others. Friendliness, Truth, and trust are some of the basic virtues that you should posses if you want to be an ethical and socialable person.