Abstract: Virtue ethics has standardly been defined against other ethical theories like utilitarianism and deontology. These rivals are said to differ from virtue ethics in their reliance on general rules for prescriptions and assessments of morality. Hence, they are said to provide content for morality and to maintain that examining actions is sufficient for evaluating morality. Virtue ethics, in contrast, is frequently criticized for its inability to tell us how to be moral because of its focus on the agent’s character, which is particular and inaccessible to formulation in general rules. Because of the intimate connection between social justice and human rights practices to universal laws expressing duties, critics of virtue ethics maintain that its lack of universal laws and deontic concepts make social justice and human rights practices challenging. Comparing Aristotle’s and Confucius’ ethics as representatives of virtue ethics, I examine if they are susceptible to the charges of lacking universal laws, not providing content for actions, and lacking the resources for dealing with social justice and human rights practices. If they are not, I propose to revise the way by which
virtue ethics has commonly been characterized. A comparison of Aristotle’s and Confucius’ ethics is especially helpful because their common orientation toward the virtues will alert us to what a theory of virtue ethics requires, and their differences can alert us to the strengths and weaknesses in each. Ultimately, I gesture toward how their virtue ethics can provide resources for the first generation civil and political rights and the second generation economic, social and cultural rights.