

Greek Family Virtues Across Time: Reflections of Classical Ethics in Ghanaian Society

Emmanuel Teiko (PhD), Benedicta Akoto-Bamfo (Doctoral Researcher)

Department of Classics & Philosophy, University of Cape Coast

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.91100280>

Received: 10 November 2025; Accepted: 20 November 2025; Published: 06 December 2025

ABSTRACT

This article explores the lasting family virtues rooted in classical Greek society and their reflection in contemporary Ghanaian society. It highlights the fundamental role of the family (*oikos*) in ancient Greece, emphasizing virtues like loyalty, respect for elders, piety, and social responsibility. Using historical analysis and literature synthesis, the study compares Greek family ethics with the value systems of contemporary Ghanaian families. By contrasting Greek historical and philosophical perspectives with Ghanaian societal norms, the study shows how family values serve as enduring frameworks for social identity and moral behaviour across time and cultures, continuing to influence social cohesion, moral upbringing, and community harmony in Ghana. Although grounded in Ethics and Classical studies, this paper adopts a multidisciplinary approach that combines historical and comparative cultural analysis. By examining these cross-cultural continuities and changes, the article highlights the ongoing significance of family values as a social and moral foundation in diverse cultural contexts.

Keywords: *Oikos*, Family, Virtues, Values, Greek Society, Contemporary Ghana

INTRODUCTION

The enduring relevance of classical philosophy provides a valuable perspective for analyzing contemporary societal structures and moral values. This article compares Aristotelian ethical principles regarding the *oikos* (household) with traditional family values in line with contemporary Ghanaian society. The study rests on the idea that a set of core virtues related to community living, hierarchy, and interpersonal duty is crucial for human flourishing (*eudaimonia*), both in ancient Greece and contemporary Ghana (*NE*, I.7, 1097b). Although the socio-political contexts of 4th-century BCE Athens and 21st-century Ghana differ greatly, both cultures fundamentally view the family or extended kinship group as the foundation of the state (Gyekye, 1996; Aristotle, *Politics*, I.2, 1253a). This study aims to discuss key Aristotelian household virtues and examine how they are expressed, adapted, or preserved within the Ghanaian socio-cultural environment, particularly in themes such as respecting elders, community solidarity, and the relationship between the individual and the group.

It is an undisputed fact that the foundations of Western thought and social organization are deeply rooted in the ethical and moral principles that originated in ancient Greece. Among these, the concept of the *oikos*, commonly understood as the household or family, served as a basic and core unit for the nurturing and developing individual virtues, social responsibilities, and communal harmony. The concept of family has long served as the foundation of human societies across different eras and cultures. Examining how family values have evolved reveals that certain ethical principles transcend geographic and historical boundaries, linking civilizations and periods.

As a working definition of *virtues* in this study, virtues in classical Greek ethics, like those described by Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics*, are practically defined as habitual excellences of character (*areté*) developed through practice. These virtues highlight moderation (*sophrosyne*), courage (*andreia*), justice (*dikaiosynē*), and wisdom (*phronesis*) within the household (*oikos*) (Georgas, J., Berry, et al. 1996). Conversely, in contemporary Ghanaian society, virtues are reflected in community practices such as respect for elders (which extends filial piety, similar to Greek *eusebeia*) and reciprocity. These are observable behaviours within extended kinship networks where individuals prioritize collective well-being over individual interests (Dzramedo, J. E., et al. 2018). Comparative analysis reveals operational similarities: Greek virtues highlight rational self-control within nuclear-like

households, while Ghanaian virtues demonstrate this through interdependent rituals, like naming ceremonies, which foster communal solidarity akin to Aristotelian *philia* (friendship virtues).

It is undeniable that classical Greek society, with its unique ethical and familial structures, offers a rich source for understanding the dynamics of kinship, responsibility, and social unity. These ancient values, focused on duty, honor, and communal well-being, still resonate in modern social practices worldwide. Meanwhile, according to Osei-Tutu et al. (2025), they posit that contemporary Ghanaian society, rooted in a strong tradition of extended family systems and communal values, reflects many of these virtues in everyday life. Therefore, traditional Ghanaian society values the family as a fundamental social institution where kinship ties, communalism, honour, and respect for elders are deeply ingrained. Although Ghanaian values have changed due to modernization, shifts in education, economy, and technology, core elements such as respect, humility, and communal harmony remain essential.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a multidisciplinary approach integrating historical analysis, literature review, and comparative cultural analysis. Primary ancient Greek texts, scholarly articles, and some contemporary sociocultural research on Ghana are examined. Critical interpretation is employed to assess the trajectory and applicability of the virtues today. Here, in this study, we employed a qualitative methodology based on a comprehensive literature review of primary and secondary sources related to classical Greek family virtues and contemporary Ghanaian family values. Comparative cultural analysis is applied to identify overlaps and differences between Greek and Ghanaian family ethics.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study examines how classical Greek family virtues, namely prudence, justice, temperance, and courage, have extended beyond their original context to reflect within Ghanaian family ethics, emphasizing the family as a key moral institution essential to individual and social development. Drawing from Aristotle's virtue ethics, the family is viewed as the "first school" of moral education, where virtues are learned through habituation and mentorship as posited in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (*NE*, II.1, 1103a17-18; II.6, 1107a1). Greek family virtues emphasize the development of moral character within the household, guiding individuals to live well and promote social harmony.

Admittedly, the family symbolizes nature in its clearest manifestation. From an Aristotelian perspective, family is an amoral institution (Cf: Fawcett, Hawkins, & Yorgason, 2013; Fowers, 2000) in that every family must address fundamental matters of right and wrong, of responsibility, and of human virtue (*NE*, 2001c; VI.1144a). According to Aristotelians, the essential domain of social science is to investigate human "matters of significance" and understand their role in social life. These matters of significance include elements that are particular to humanity, such as "moral goodness, evil, dignity, the sense of worth, the various forms of human love, and so on" (Taylor, 1995).

In the Ghanaian context, family ethics or values similarly highlight virtues such as respect for elders, communal responsibility, self-discipline, and courage as values that resonate with Greek virtues (Anderson & Inusah, 2023). Ghanaian moral systems view the extended family as a key agent for transmitting these virtues through cultural practices, such as proverbs, storytelling, and rites of passage. This amalgamation corresponds with Alasdair MacIntyre's (1990) idea of traditions as practices that embody virtues within communities.

The framework thus posits that:

1. Classical Greek family virtues parallel Ghanaian familial virtues in moral education and social cohesion.
2. The family functions as the mediating institution through which virtues are cultivated and sustained across generations in both cultures.
3. Despite cultural and historical differences, there exists a shared ethical emphasis on virtues that enable both personal excellence and communal well-being.

This approach enables a comparative analysis based on virtue ethics, showing how classical ideas reveal the continuity and flexibility of family virtues across different cultural settings. Understanding these insights enhances modern debates on moral development and social responsibility in Ghana.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The classical Greek family, or *oikos*, functioned as a fundamental social, economic, and ethical unit, central to Greek identity and civic life. Pomeroy articulates how the *oikos* combined public and private roles, governed by the *kyrios* who wielded authority over family members, slaves, and property, positioning the family as a microcosm of societal hierarchy. Greek family values focused on fulfilling responsibilities, upholding honor, and guiding children as carriers of tradition. Contrasts emerge between city-states such as democratic Athens, with a nuanced domestic-public divide, and militaristic Sparta, where family served state interests (Pomeroy, 1996).

Aristotle argued that families were the fundamental social unit of society (*NE*, I.1252b) because they have a transformative effect on individuals and on the larger body politic. A major reason for this, he explained, was that family teaches responsibility, a virtue necessary for a just and good society. Sharing sexual partners and children results in less care being given to each, a foreshadowing of the modern concept of the tragedy of the commons. Aristotle (2001f) argued:

For that which is common to the greatest number has the least care bestowed upon it. Everyone thinks chiefly of his own, hardly at all of the common interest, and only when he himself is concerned as an individual. Besides other considerations, everybody is more inclined to neglect the duty which he expects another to fulfill. (*NE*, II.1261b)

From an Aristotelian perspective, the family is defined as a moral institution (Cf: Fawcett, Hawkins, & Yorgason, 2013; Fowers, 2000), insofar as every family must address fundamental issues concerning right and wrong, responsibility, and human virtue. This paper proposes a definition of family that aligns with the Aristotelian framework.

Family is a multigenerational institution of mutual responsibility, defined partly through stories that are developed and passed down by its members, and centered on cultivating virtue in the lives of its members as well as guiding both collective and individual movement toward a conception of the good.

According to Aristotle, at the family level, a man is superior to a woman, and therefore it is through this nature for the man to be a ruler over the woman (*Politics*, I.13, 12601ff). The same applies when it comes to age; the elder has the priority to rule over the younger because the former is more 'complete,' mature, and full of experience compared to the latter, whom he considers to be 'incomplete' with little or no experience in ruling matters. In another place, Aristotle appreciates, uplifts, and complements a woman with the argument that though women are not rulers over men, as men are naturally rulers over women and over the entire family, women have been gifted through nature with the ability to control the man. She must control a man (a wife, for example, must control his husband) not only to get what they want but also, more importantly, to strengthen, perfect him in his function (*Politics*, I.12, 1259b1-15, cf. Johnson 2015).

Aristotle describes the *polis* as a community composed of many free citizens who enjoy equal rights and together create the city-state (*Politics*, III.12). He views humans as naturally meant to belong to this community. In his view, people are connected to their society, while the community itself relies on each free person, as it is formed by many individuals. The study of Greek family values reveals a rich historical path rooted in classical ethics and cultural traditions that continue to influence contemporary social practices both in Greece and abroad. Classical Greek family life was deeply connected to the *oikos*, the basic household unit governed by clearly defined ethical roles, especially the *kyrios*, the male head responsible for economic, legal, and social authority (Brewminate, 2025). These structures were supported by Aristotelian virtue ethics, which emphasized *philia* (familial love), respect for hierarchy, and social responsibility, thereby framing the ethical basis for individual and collective well-being in the *polis* (i.e., city-state).

In classical Athens, the society greatly valued individualism; the upbringing and cultural teaching children experienced within the family were crucial in preparing them for their responsibilities as adults. Even amid these changes, core values like honouring elders, loyalty to family, and supporting the community continue to hold significance, demonstrating the enduring nature of traditional ethical principles despite social transformations. Historically, Ghanaian fatherhood was defined by a patriarchal model, where the father wielded unquestionable authority over the household and primarily functioned as the economic provider and disciplinarian. Ghanaian fathers exercised control through the strict enforcement of family rules, with mothers and children expected to obey unconditionally. The father was regarded as the symbol of family unity and the key figure responsible for the psychological and economic well-being of the household (Otu, 2015).

In contemporary Ghana, research on what drives fathers to take part in early child care is scarce, even though there is a growing body of work on this topic in Western countries (Heers & Szalma, 2018). Applying Western research findings directly to the Ghanaian context is challenging due to differences in cultural practices. Traditionally, Ghanaian fathers are seen primarily as providers of financial support and moral guidance for their children, regardless of where they reside. There is limited understanding of the factors that encourage Ghanaian fathers to engage more actively in early child care beyond these established roles. This traditional view confines fathers mostly to the role of breadwinner (Nyarko, 2014), with less emphasis on direct caregiving involvement.

The late 20th century in Ghana witnessed major social and economic transformations driven largely by increased educational opportunities and economic empowerment for women, particularly through policies supporting their access to higher education (Otu, 2015). These changes contributed to a gradual shift in how fatherhood is understood, moving away from rigid, patriarchal roles toward more cooperative and flexible models of parenting. Thus, fatherhood has changed from being mostly about exercising one's authority and providing financial assistance to a more balanced role that includes caregiving, emotional support, and sharing household tasks, influenced by social changes, migration, and movements for gender equality.

Ghanaian family values are fundamentally anchored in communalism, respect for authority, and intergenerational solidarity, with extended family structures playing a crucial role in social support and identity (Osei-Tutu et al., 2023). Despite the impact of modernization and urbanization, which introduced new values such as formal education and individual achievement, traditional principles that emphasize respect, hospitality, and collective well-being continue to exert significant influence. The dynamic nature of Ghanaian family values reflects ongoing negotiations between ancestral customs and contemporary societal demands, particularly in relation to family structure shifts, educational aspirations, and economic realities (Nukunya, 2003).

The Ghanaian family system has traditionally been patriarchal, with clear gender-based roles assigned to both fathers and mothers. Fathers in Ghana have historically been viewed as the heads of households, wielding authority and responsibility for economic provision and decision-making within the family. This is reflected in Otu's (2015) description of the father's role as a disciplinarian and provider, often equated metaphorically to a "Headmaster" who commands obedience and enforces family rules (Otu, 2015). The father's primary responsibility is economic provision, ensuring that essential needs such as food, clothing, education, and shelter are adequately met (Otu, 2015). Fathers are expected to maintain family unity and discipline, and their absence creates a significant vacuum in familial stability.

Broadly speaking, in Ghana, the mother's role complements that of the father, with mothers primarily responsible for caregiving, nurturing children, and managing household duties. Traditionally, women and their families handle daily tasks such as child-rearing, household chores, and passing on cultural values. However, their role goes beyond emotional and physical care, as many women also contribute economically to their households. Changes in the roles of both fathers and mothers have taken place due to modernization, economic shifts, and migration. While men still typically serve as the main providers, women's financial contributions are growing, especially in urban areas, thereby changing household dynamics. This evolution points to a version of fatherhood that balances material support with emotional involvement, influenced by social, economic, and legal factors, particularly in diaspora settings.

Moreover, in Akan culture, the idea of community as an extended family, along with customs like taboos regulating natural resource use, supports sustainable living, reflecting a system akin to the Greek frameworks that

guided family and resource management. This collective approach maintains strong social bonds and cultural continuity (Boamah, 2015). However, modern influences such as Western education and religions have transformed some aspects of the Akan worldview. Still, the core *Oikos*-like principles of communal responsibility, respect for natural and human relationships, and spiritual stewardship continue shaping family and societal values in contemporary Ghana (Boamah, 2015). Religious upbringing, fear of God, worship, and importance of God in everyday life, as well as commitments to religious virtues, were described as traditional Ghanaian values (Osei-Tutu et al, 2023).

To expatiate on the point noted above, there is a clear parallel between classical Greek family virtues and traditional Ghanaian values in their mutual focus on the well-being of the community, moral duties within family relationships, and respect for hierarchical authority. Both cultures view the family as central to maintaining social order, imparting moral education, and shaping cultural identity, illustrating universal themes expressed through distinct cultural practices. Additionally, religious and ethical beliefs in contemporary Ghana reflect the Greek blending of devotion and family responsibilities, linking the earthly life to spiritual continuity through honouring ancestors. This shared cultural ethic helps preserve family values consistently over time and across different societies. This understanding is supported by Ghanaian social structures, where the family serves as the core of identity and responsibility, with elders and traditional leaders maintaining authority within a patriarchal framework, while caregiving is a collective effort within the community. Such systems reinforce social cohesion and ethical responsibility, similar to classical Greek family and societal norms (Osei-Tutu et al., 2023).

Ultimately, this comparative lens enriches understanding of how family values are not static but are continuously reinterpreted through historical change, cultural exchange, and evolving moral priorities. It underscores the value of cross-cultural dialogue in appreciating both unique and shared human experiences of family ethics. Integrating insights from classical Greek ethics with contemporary African moral traditions offers a robust framework for investigating family values as foundational ethical systems shaping social cohesion and individual flourishing (Osei-Tutu et al., 2023).

On the whole, the collection of works herein cited highlights that both cultures prioritize collective well-being and moral behaviour within the household. Classical Greek ethics stress honour, intergenerational duties, and social roles coexisting with personal virtue and community harmony. Likewise, Ghanaian family values emphasize respect for elders, communal living, and fostering moral character at home, reflecting a comprehensive approach to social cohesion grounded in family relationships. This shared focus reveals how distinct cultural expressions converge in their commitment to sustaining ethical family life and social bonds over time and space.

The Developmental and Social Foundations of Virtues

Virtue begins as a premoral sensibility in early childhood characterized by an intuitive awareness of others' needs, feelings, and goals. According to Aristotle, virtues are developed through habituation, where individuals practice virtuous behaviours until they become ingrained as part of their character. Virtue lies in finding the *mean* between excess and deficiency, a concept known as the doctrine of the *mean*. The excellence of character results from habit...the word *ethike* is a slight modification of *ethos* (habit). Just as one becomes better at a skill, one is perfected in virtues through habit (*NE*, 1103a). A reasonable explanation that proffers an understanding of the literature on virtues is that, according to Aristotle, virtues and character set in motion all aspects of one's private, professional, and political life by controlling our feelings and actions. "Each virtue concerns the pursuit of an objective valued for its own sake (pleasure, life, wealth, or honor, for example), and regulates that pursuit in the light of a higher norm" (*NE*, 1100b10-11).

Historically and socially, in classical Greek thought, the family served as the main place for developing virtues vital to citizenship and ethical life. Philosophers like Plato and Aristotle highlighted the family's role in fostering moral character and civic virtue through practical involvement and education. The virtues taught, such as piety, courage, and temperance, aimed to support the individual's place in society and the stability of the polis (*NE*, Book II).

Similarly, in Ghanaian society, the transmission of virtues remains a communal activity where family and extended kin networks teach moral values integral to social cohesion and mutual respect. Elders and parents

actively engage children in practices and narratives that underline the virtues of respect, honesty, and community responsibility. Thus, the Greek model of virtue education, centered on familial and social participation, finds reflection and adaptation in Ghanaian moral education traditions (Kwamena-Poh, 2022). Hence, this study examines how virtue develops through early relationships and is nurtured within the family setting. By comparing ethical ideas from ancient Greece and Ghana, it shows that while the basis of virtue is rooted in social connections everywhere, the ways it is expressed and taught vary across cultures.

Household Virtues in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*

According to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, people are not born wicked or virtuous (*hexeis*); rather, they don't come into the world with fixed moral qualities. This is because character consists of stable tendencies or habits, whether good or bad, and children are not yet developed enough to possess such established traits. Aristotle described character as a set of firm and lasting dispositions that form a steady part of who we are (*NE*, 1105a34). The family plays a vital role in guiding ethical learning and moral growth. Loyalty within the family often contrasts with fairness outside it because different virtues address different moral needs. Here, the term "solidarity" connotes the sense of connection and shared feelings that bring people together as a community. This connection within families helps form a foundation for moral values, which then extend to broader social principles beyond the home.

Aristotle believed that nature had already designed the ideal order for a community, and changing this order would harm the community. He argued that, unless a man is weakened by physical, mental, or biological limitations, it is natural for the man to have authority over the woman. Similarly, the elder is considered more fully developed than the younger, who are naturally less complete (Aristotle cited in Reeve, 1998). According to Aristotle, within a society, men are naturally superior and hold the role of rulers, while women are naturally subordinate and governed (*Politics*, 1254b13-14):

In Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, household virtues are implicitly present within his broader ethical framework, where virtues are states of character that enable individuals to live flourishing and happy lives (*eudaimonia*). The virtues concerning household life emphasize moral excellence in relationships, duties, and practical wisdom that sustain the family as the basic unit of society. Aristotle identifies two types of virtues: (i) intellectual virtues, gained through teaching, and (ii) moral virtues, developed through habituation and practice in everyday life, including within the household. In Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, virtues like justice, temperance, courage, and prudence are all relevant to household life. Justice ensures fair treatment among family members, temperance moderates desires, and *phronesis* (practical wisdom) aids in making sound decisions for household well-being.

For Aristotle, the household is where individuals first learn and develop virtues, especially through roles and relationships: the head of the household embodies leadership and responsibility; the wife and children take on roles that promote harmony, mutual care, and proper behaviour (*Politics*, 1252b12-14 and 1259b18-1260b7; *NE*, 8.11-12.1161a10–1162a33). A key aspect of household virtues is building moral character through consistently practicing virtuous actions. Moreover, Aristotle emphasizes the importance of friendship (*philia*) within the household, especially the kind of virtuous friendship based on mutual respect and shared values. For instance, the marital relationship vividly reflects this friendship, encouraging cooperation and moral development. Mothers, in particular, are believed to demonstrate unique virtues associated with loving care and friendship, which are essential for nurturing character within the family.

Moreover, 'justice' governs fair treatment among family members, temperance mediates desires, prudence ensures sound decision-making for household welfare, and courage supports facing difficulties in family life. The household is where individuals first learn and practice these virtues through relational roles: the head of household governs responsibly, while wives and children contribute to harmony and mutual care. Virtuous friendship (*philia*) is central within family relationships, particularly marriage, ideally based on mutual respect and shared virtues. Mothers demonstrate particular virtues linked to loving care and nurturing character, which are essential for moral development within the family.

Aristotle's Household Ethics with Ghanaian Familial Practices

The family unit acts as a fundamental element in many cultures, reflecting broader ideas about virtue, responsibility, and social harmony. By examining Aristotle's household ethics alongside Ghanaian familial practices, we observe both shared commitments to nurturing virtue and different cultural expressions of family roles. Aristotle's philosophy depicts the household as a small version of the state (*NE*, 1160b22-4 and 1160a31ff.), organized by hierarchical relationships that support personal well-being and societal stability. In contrast, contemporary Ghanaian family practices often focus on communal responsibility and respect rooted in cultural values. Comparing these viewpoints shows how cultural context influences ideas of virtue, authority, and social responsibility, highlighting both universal themes and culture-specific ways of family life.

Therefore, it becomes clear that both Aristotle's household ethics and contemporary Ghanaian family practices emphasize the importance of virtues, social duties, and clearly defined roles within the family. However, these systems are also shaped distinctly by their cultural environments. Aristotle conceives the household (*oikia*) as the core social unit, characterized by inherent hierarchies such as those between spouses, parents and children, and masters and slaves. While Aristotle considers the household a natural and vital part of society, he advocates for a paternal authority rooted in age and perceived natural superiority (*Politics*, 1259b11-1259b18). Although relationships within the household are generally unequal, Aristotle views the marital bond as the closest to equality (*Politics*, 1259a-b). The cultivation of virtue within the household is viewed as essential for maintaining societal order and fostering moral development.

A key household virtue is fidelity, particularly in marriage, which Aristotle upholds as an important tradition essential for maintaining social stability. Adultery is condemned not merely as a moral failing but because it undermines the trust essential to the household's integrity. Aristotle frames this within his broader virtue ethics, which holds certain acts like adultery, theft, and murder as always wrong, underscoring the household's role in upholding ethical norms foundational to the polis (*NE*, 5.10, 1136b20-30). Prudence, or practical wisdom, is an essential virtue connected to managing a household. It helps people make good decisions about daily affairs and family matters, balancing everyone's needs to create a peaceful home living (*NE*, 6.5, 1140a15-20). This quality allows the household leader to demonstrate ethical conduct, guide those under their care, and ensure fairness within the family.

Conversely, Ghanaian familial practices, particularly among the Akan, emphasize virtues such as generosity, kindness, respect, and a strong sense of community. Morality is viewed as relational and shared among members. Although elders and parents are respected, authority is typically exercised through dialogue and group agreement rather than by a single figure's command. The family serves as a multigenerational unit that promotes mutual responsibility and ethical growth, emphasizing care and compassion more than strict hierarchies (Gyekye, 1992). This approach fosters individual well-being through collective harmony and socially rooted virtues.

Therefore, it becomes clear that both traditions (i.e., classical Greeks and contemporary Ghanaians) regard the family as essential for nurturing virtue and maintaining social stability. However, Aristotle's approach emphasizes a clear hierarchy with authority and specific roles tied to the functioning of the political city-state. In contrast, Ghanaian family practices focus on maintaining harmony, mutual support, and decision-making through dialogue. While Aristotle sees household virtues as a foundation for civic virtues, Ghanaian ethics views family virtues as deeply connected to communal life and the formation of moral character.

Greek *Oikos* and Contemporary Ghanaian Kingship (Parallels)

Here, in this study, we observe that the classical Greek concept of the *Oikos* provides critical insights when reflected upon in the Ghanaian context. Ghanaian family virtues, which emphasize respect for elders, communal responsibility, and intergenerational continuity, resonate with the Greek ethical model, which also prioritizes the welfare of the household as a moral and social unit. The Ghanaian extended family system echoes the Greek emphasis on kinship and household as the foundation of societal ethics. More so, the moral virtues guiding family relations in Greece, such as duty, honour, and hierarchy, are similarly evident in Ghanaian social norms and values, suggesting a cross-cultural reflection of classical ethics in family structure and virtues.

In other words, both classical Greek households (*oikos*) and contemporary Ghanaian families value family highly, but they differ in their structure, social roles, and cultural priorities owing to their distinct historical and cultural backgrounds. In each setting, the family remains the fundamental unit of society. The Greek household was traditionally patriarchal, with the male head, usually the father, exercising authority over family members, property, and religious duties. Historian Mogens Hansen (2006) argues that traditionally, “a state is principally a territory, a *polis* is principally a people... a community of men ready to defend their society.”

Similarly, many Ghanaian families continue to honour patriarchal leadership, though its influence varies among ethnic groups and between urban and rural areas. Though existing studies have concluded that generally, if a spouse has more resources than the other, the power will also be greater (Korner R, Schutz A, 2021). It is instructive to note that studies have shown that women in marriage may have more power if they effectively control communications and sexual negotiations to request additional rewards in exchange for love, status, money, and influence (Traeder, C. K., Zeigler-Hill, V. 2020). Nonetheless, both cultures (i.e., classical Greece and contemporary Ghana) emphasize respect for elders, loyalty, and the significance of lineage, with family honour playing a vital role.

The parallels between the Greek and Ghanaian family systems highlight universal ethical values around family unity, intergenerational duty, and social harmony. The classical virtues of prudence, fidelity, respect, and responsibility remain deeply relevant in Ghana’s ethical framework, shaping societal norms and behaviours through practices rooted in the household and extended kin networks. Thus, the Aristotelian model of household virtues offers valuable insights for understanding how classical ideals continue to resonate and evolve within contemporary Ghanaian social structures, representing a cross-cultural foundation for virtue ethics centered on family as the cornerstone of ethical life and social order (Sarpong, 2018).

Classical Greek Family Virtues and Their Influence on Contemporary Ghanaian Society

Household virtues form the moral foundation of family life and significantly influence societal stability and ethical development (Nussbaum, 1991). In classical Greek society, virtues such as *aretē* (excellence), piety, moderation (*sophrosynē*), and justice (*dikaiosynē*) embodied the virtues expected of individuals within the household, shaping their role within the polis (Kraut, 2018). These virtues emphasized harmony, loyalty, respect for elders, and communal responsibility, fostering moral excellence in both familial and civic contexts (Goldman, 2002). For example, Plato’s laws advocate for virtues that promote social order, reflecting the Greek ideal that family virtues serve as a microcosm for societal virtue (Plato, trans. 2003).

Additionally, classical Greek family virtues, particularly those rooted in the concept of the *oikos*, continue to influence modern Ghanaian society, albeit adapted within distinct cultural contexts. The Greek *oikos* emphasized the family as a foundational social and economic unit, led by patriarchal authority, and instilled virtues such as respect for elders, fidelity, prudence, and communal responsibility. Similarly, Ghanaian family values strongly prioritize family cohesion, respect for elders, loyalty, and the collective welfare of the extended family, often arranged through matrilineal or patrilineal descent systems (Sarpong, 2018).

Aristotle’s household virtues closely align with Ghanaian values, which emphasize family unity, respect for elders, and communal responsibility as the basis for ethical behaviour and social harmony. The Greek idea that moral development starts within the family matches Ghana’s tradition of passing down values and virtues across generations, making Aristotle’s views highly relevant. The responsibilities of maintaining household peace, marital fidelity, and wise family leadership reflect modern Ghanaian attitudes toward family life, including personal duty, respect, and social justice. Additionally, Aristotle’s focus on developing virtues through regular practice parallels Ghanaian communal rituals and moral teaching, highlighting a shared, timeless foundation for virtue ethics (Karuzis, 2015).

Arguably, classical Greek families were generally small and patriarchal, centered on the nuclear family with a strong emphasis on legitimate descent and limited roles for women, who mainly focused on household duties (Cf: Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* 9.2-10; Lysias 3.6; Demosthenes 57.40). The father held authority over family members and was responsible for decision-making. In contrast, contemporary Ghanaian families tend to be extended, including wider kinship ties that form a robust social support system. Women in Ghana have more active social

and economic roles compared to their classical Greek counterparts, though traditional gender roles and respect for hierarchical leadership remain important in both cultures (Adom, 2013). This comparison highlights differences in family structure and gender roles while noting the persistence of hierarchy and respect within the family unit. These differences demonstrate how classical virtues are reinterpreted in contemporary Ghanaian society to fit local cultural and modern social realities.

Variations in Aristotelian Patriarchy with Ghanaian Gender Norms

In Ghanaian gender norms, patriarchy is deeply embedded but infused with local cultural practices and beliefs shaping gender relations. Ghanaian patriarchy constructs distinct gender roles: men are providers and heads of households, while women are expected to marry, bear children, nurture the home, and be sexually available to their husbands (Sikweyiya, 2020). However, these roles are not uniform; they vary across ethnic lines, religious affiliations, and urban-rural contexts. For example, in patrilineal societies, men dominate inheritance and decision-making more rigidly than in matrilineal ones, where women may have more authority (Nartey et al, 2023).

While Aristotelian patriarchy is prescriptive and universalizing in nature, Ghanaian patriarchy is contextually negotiated and reinforced through customary practices such as bride price, wife inheritance, widowhood rites, and proverbs that normalize male superiority and women's marginalization. Notably, Ga proverbs in Ghana explicitly encode the dichotomy of men as the "Self" and women as the "Other," legitimizing male dominance culturally (Kubi, 2023). This performative aspect aligns with Aristotelian ideas but roots authority in indigenous cultural symbols rather than purely philosophical argumentation.

Moreover, evolving gender dynamics in Ghana have seen women respond to patriarchy using strategies influenced by womanist and feminist theories, sometimes contesting traditional roles through dialogue or resistance. This negotiation contrasts with Aristotelian patriarchy's fixed hierarchy. However, in both frameworks, male dominance tends to legitimize control over women, often justifying violence as a means of maintaining order (Sikweyiya, 2020). Aristotelian patriarchy provides a core philosophy of male dominance that resonates with Ghanaian practices, yet in Ghana, it adapts through local customs, social expectations, and gender roles shaped by the country's varied communities. These elements create a flexible enactment of authority, distinct from the more uniform Aristotelian model. This cultural adaptation highlights how traditional male privilege operates amid Ghana's diverse societal contexts.

The conflict between long-standing male dominance and evolving gender roles in Ghana reveals a complex mix of traditional beliefs, colonial history, and modern social developments. Historically, male authority, based on clear gender roles, has shaped Ghanaian society, positioning men as heads of families and community figures. Yet, current changes in gender expectations, driven by global human rights ideas, national laws, and the growing involvement of women in the economy, challenge these established norms. This struggle differs depending on local family systems, whether matrilineal or patrilineal, as well as the distinctions between urban and rural settings and various religious communities, reflecting the country's rich cultural diversity.

Traditionally, Ghanaian society aligns with patriarchal norms that emphasize male authority and control over family and economic resources, maintaining women's subordinate and dependent positions. Cultural practices such as wife inheritance, dowry payments, and widowhood rites are shaped by gendered norms favoring men, reinforcing power imbalances deeply rooted in both law and custom (Nartey et al, 2023). These patterns mirror Aristotelian ideas of male superiority and women's roles as caregivers, largely confined to the domestic sphere. Despite these patriarchal systems, Ghana advances gender equality via its 1992 Constitution, including Article 17, which ensures equal rights and bans discrimination. Yet, entrenched cultural biases toward male dominance and weak institutional support hinder consistent enforcement.

LESSONS FOR CONTEMPORARY GHANAIAN SOCIETY

The classical Greek conception of family virtues, particularly those espoused by philosophers such as Aristotle, emphasizes virtues like moderation (*sophrosyne*), justice (*dikaiosyne*), piety (*eusebeia*), and filial piety, which

played a fundamental role in fostering a cohesive and morally upright society (*NE*, 1104b). These virtues, which originate or are cultivated within the family, form the essential basis for creating social unity, nurturing moral growth, and encouraging a sense of civic duty, principles that remain highly important for contemporary Ghanaian society. Aristotle believed that the family is the starting point where virtues like self-control and fairness first develop, and only later do these virtues extend to the larger community. This view highlights how important it is to foster moral character within the family to help build a stronger society (*Politics*, 1252b). For contemporary Ghana, with its rich family traditions and close community relationships, embracing these virtues can help maintain social stability amid ongoing social changes and urban growth.

We cannot ignore the fact that classical Greek family values, especially those highlighted by thinkers, particularly Aristotle, provide timeless insights for contemporary Ghanaian society, focusing on developing moral character and social unity. Thus, we hold the view that Aristotle's idea of *paideia*, which is, the process of shaping a virtuous and flourishing citizen for a polis (city-state) through a comprehensive education of mind, body, and character, emphasizes raising children with virtues like self-control, fairness, and bravery within the family as the foundation for raising and nurturing good citizens (*NE*, Book II, 1104b-1105a). In contemporary Ghana, where maintaining social order and fostering moral growth are ongoing concerns, these virtues highlight the need to build ethical behaviour starting at home to help prevent social and moral degeneration, especially among Ghanaian youths.

Furthermore, Greek virtues such as *philia*, brotherly love, or friendship, highlight the importance of fostering bonds of mutual respect and loyalty within families, which are essential for social cohesion (Kraut, 2018). In Ghanaian culture, extended family ties and community connections play a vital role, showing that strengthening these relationships can support national social harmony and ethical accountability, especially among political leaders. On the other hand, we hold the firm belief that classical Greek values tend to focus on personal achievement and reason, which may sometimes miss the essence of the common good or national interests, and emotional bonds essential to Ghanaian communal living.

CONCLUSION

Exploring Greek family virtues through the lens of Ghanaian society reveals a striking continuity and transformation of Classical ethical values across diverse cultural settings and eras. Although their origins and social environments differ, both uphold essential virtues like loyalty, respect, responsibility, and care for the community, highlighting their broad significance. We hold the view that this comparison demonstrates the critical idea that these virtues remain essential cornerstones for developing moral character and fostering social harmony. It is gainsaying that the lasting influence of Greek family virtues (or values) in Ghanaian traditions confirms their important role in shaping ethical identities and strengthening social bonds.

Moreover, this study has shown that the lasting influence of Greek family virtues in Ghana emphasizes a meaningful connection between ancient ethics and modern cultural ideals. Without question, the values discussed in this study reflect a universal desire to maintain close family bonds and uphold moral principles. Examining these virtues in different contexts demonstrates that the foundation of ethical family life transcends time and place, offering important lessons on how societies build balance and strength through enduring customs. Thus, the dialogue between the past and present highlights the connection between Greek philosophy and Ghanaian traditions, deepening our understanding of the common human pursuit of virtuous family living.

In light of the above discussions, it is therefore essential for scholars and researchers to recognize that classical Greek ethics remains relevant to modern family life, especially in Ghanaian contexts. Ultimately, this perspective provides a meaningful way to address current moral issues such as weakening community ties and declining values. Greek virtue ethics encourages cultivating good character by consistently practicing virtues within the family and community. Today, Ghanaian families could benefit from embracing virtues like loyalty, respect, and self-control to promote stability amid rapid social changes. Undoubtedly, this integration will strengthen moral character and social harmony and show that ancient Greek wisdom continues to serve as a valuable source for ethical guidance and cultural growth in diverse family settings.

REFERENCES

1. Adom, K. (2013). "Recognizing The Contribution of Female Entrepreneurs In Economic Development In Sub-Saharan Africa: Some Evidence From Ghana." *African Journal of Social Sciences*, 3(3), 160-171.
2. Anderson, George. & Inusah, Husein. (2023). "Virtue Ethics as a Model for Addressing Moral Decline in Ghana." *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* Vol. 4 No.3, 170-180.
3. Alasdair, MacIntyre. (1990). The virtue of Tradition. *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, Vol. 7, No. 1.
4. Aristotle (1988). *The Politics*. Trans. by C. D. C. Reeve. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing.
5. Aristotle. (1995). *Politics*. E. Barker & R. F. Stalley, Trans. Oxford University Press.
6. Aristotle. (1996). *The Politics and the Constitution of Athens*. (Ed.) by Stephen Everson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
7. Aristotle, & Rackham, H. (1926). *The Nicomachean Ethics*. (Rev. ed.). Harvard University Press.
8. Barnes, Jonathan. (2000). *Aristotle: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.
9. Boamah, D. A. (2015). Akan Indigenous Religio-Cultural Beliefs and Environmental Preservation: The Role of Taboos. *Master's Thesis*, Queen's University, Kingston, ON, Canada.
10. Curzer, Howard J. (2012). "Aristotle on the Cultivation of Virtue." In *Aristotle and the Virtues*, Chapter 5.
11. Dery, I. (2023). "Baby mamas" in Urban Ghana: Masculinity and fatherhood. *Studies in Men and Masculinities*, 8-12.
12. Dzamedo, J. E., et al. (2018). The state of the extended family system in Ghana: Perceptions of some families. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 8(24), 45-51.
13. Georgas, J., Berry, et al. (1996). Acculturation of Greek family values. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 27(3), 329-338.
14. Gyekye, K. (1995). *An essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*. Philadelphia Temple University Press. 144-145.
15. Gyekye, K. (1998). Person and community in African thought. In P.H. Coetze & A. P. J. Roux (Eds.), *Philosophy from Africa*, 317-336.
16. Heers, M., & Szalma, I. (2018). *Determinants of non-resident fathers' involvement with their children: Individual and policy factors - What matters most?* University of Lausanne.
17. Karuzis, J. (2015). On Proper Action and Virtue: An Essay on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics." *IAFOR Journal of Ethics, Religion & Philosophy*, 2(1), 3-7.
18. Korner R, Schutz A. (2021). Power in romantic relationships: How positional and experienced power are associated with relationship quality. *J Soc Pers Relat*; Vol. 2(13):1-25.
19. Kraut, Richard. (2002). *Aristotle: Political Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
20. Kraut, Richard. (2018). *The Quality of Life: Aristotle Revised*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
21. Kubi, B. (2023). *Woman As The Other: Gender Ideology And Patriarchal Hegemony In Ga Proverbs*, Doctoral Dissertation, University of Cape Coast.
22. Küçükuysal, B. & Beyhan, E. (2020). Virtue ethics in Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 3-5.
23. Kwamena-Poh, M. A. (2022). "Cultural Foundations of Virtue in Ghanaian Society." Accra University Press, 72-85.
24. Mogens, Herman Hansen. (2006). *Polis: An Introduction to the Ancient Greek City-State*. Oxford University Press.
25. Mulgan, R. G. (1977). *Aristotle's Political Theory: An Introduction for Students of Political Theory*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
26. Nartey, P., Sensoy Bahar, O., & Nabunya, P. (2023). A review of the cultural gender norms contributing to gender inequality in Ghana: An ecological systems perspective. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 25(7), 1-25.
27. Nukunya, G. K. (2003). *Traditional and Change in Ghana, and Introductory to Sociology* (2nd ed.). Ghana Universities Press.
28. Nussbaum, M. C. (1991). The philosophical basis of the capability approach. In M. C. Nussbaum & A. Sen (Eds.), *The Quality of Life*, 219-246.
29. Nyarko, K. (2014). Childrearing, motherhood, and fatherhood in Ghana. In H. Selin (Ed.), *Parenting*

- across cultures: Childrearing, motherhood and fatherhood in non-Western cultures, 231-239.
30. Osei-Tutu et al. (2023). Perceptions of Ghanaian values: A focus group study. *Ghana Social Science Journal*, Vol. 20 (1): 20-38.
 31. Otu, W. (2015). The Changing Roles of Fathers in Parenting in Ghana. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 5(15), 120-127.
 32. Peter, Walcott. (1997). Continuity and Tradition: The Persistence of Greek Values, *Greece & Rome*, Vol. 43, No. 2. 169-177.
 33. Plato. (2003) *The Republic*. 2nd ed. Edited and translated by D. Lee. New York, NY: Penguin Books.
 34. Pomeroy, Sarah B., et al. (1999). *Ancient Greece: A Political, Social, and Cultural History*. New York: Oxford University Press.
 35. Sarah, B. Pomeroy. (1996). *Families in Classical and Hellenistic Greece: Representations and Realities*. New York: Clarendon Press.
 36. Sarpong, K. (2018). Kinship and family in Ghanaian culture. *Accra Journal of Sociology*, 15(1), 34-50.
 37. Schwartz, S. H. (1996). Value priorities and behavior: Applying a theory of integrated value systems. In C. Seligman, J. M. Olson, & M. P. Zanna (Eds.), *The psychology of values: The Ontario Symposium*, Vol. 8, 1-24. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
 38. Sikweyiya, Y., et al. (2020). Patriarchy and gender-inequitable attitudes as drivers of intimate partner violence against women in the Central Region of Ghana. *BMC Public Health*, 20(1).
 39. Taylor, C. (1995). *Philosophical Arguments*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
 40. Traeder, C. K, Zeigler-Hill, V. (2020). The desire for power and perceptions of heterosexual romantic relationships: The moderating roles of perceived power and gender. *Sex Roles*: Vol. 82: 66-80.