Virtue Ethics
Etica delle virtù

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fondata da Vittorio Sainati
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Premise / Premessa

The present special issue aims at representing some kind of novelty, not only as a remedy to the lack of systematic work on Virtue Ethics within the Italian philosophical landscape, but mostly because Virtue Ethics is here presented directly – in the first section – by the most notable representatives of its main trends, and discussed in the following two sections by Italian and international scholars who are accepting the virtue-ethical challenge, and trying to address (and assess) some of its crucial assumptions.

The first section is opened by an interview with Julia Annas, who kindly accepted to answer some of our questions on her neo-Aristotelian approach, centered on the notion of *eudaimonia* as human flourishing. In *The Humean Sentimentalist Learns from the Aristotelian Anscombe*, Michael Slote presents us with his Humean-sentimentalist agent-based proposal, while in the following article (*Eudaimonistic versus Target Centred Virtue Ethics*), Christine Swanton, by contrast, discusses her target-centered virtue-ethical view. Linda Zagzebski, in her *Exemplarist Moral Theory* summarizes her latest exemplarist theory, which can be seen as a peculiar (and somehow radical) version of an agent-based view. Finally, Giacomo Samek Lodovici (*Virtue Ethics: an Overview*), offers an overall picture of Virtue Ethics' main tenets, as well as of its diverse forms.

The second section discusses some key issues within the virtue-ethical debate and the tradition underlying it, with a particular focus on the meaning and role of practical wisdom (*phronesis*, *prudentia*). Angelo Campodonico, in *Why Wisdom needs fortitude* (*and viceversa*), highlights the constitutive link between the virtue of phronesis-prudentia and the other cardinal virtues, and particularly with fortitude. Maria Silvia Vaccarezza (*Dilemmi e unità delle virtù. La phronesis come integratore morale ed esistenziale*) ar-

gues for the integrating role of phronesis, which allows it to prioritize values, as well as to find a way out of apparent moral dilemmas. Franco Manti (*Il giudizio morale. Phronesis e complessità della moralità*) reinterprets practical wisdom as a form of ethical competence, capable of integrating different moral perspectives. In the closing contribution of the section, Howard Curzer, in his *Good People with Bad Principles*, addresses an extremely timely issue: i.e., how to make sense of ordinarily good people who wholeheartedly embrace controversial – or even bad – political views.

The third and final section of the special issue hosts some critical voices of Virtue Ethics or of some of its trends. Mark Alfano (*A plague on both your houses: Virtue theory after situationism and repligate*), briefly summarizes the situationist challenge posed to the whole virtue-ethical project and analyzes the main virtue-ethical responses to it, deeming both sides of the debate partial and inadequate, and encouraging renewed interdisciplinary investigation of virtues and vices. Lorenzo Greco, in his *Against Aristotelian Virtue Ethics: The Humean Challenge*, criticizes current neo-Aristotelian Virtue Ethics from within a Humean standpoint. He claims, that such a perspective is much more fruitful than neo-Aristotelian proposals in terms of addressing some of Virtue Ethics' main worries, such as the educational challenge. In the final contribution of the section and of the whole issue (*Per un modello esemplarista di educazione alle virtù*), Michel Croce addresses the educational dimension directly, highlighting the role played in this respect by moral exemplars, and offering a solution against the risk of indoctrination.

The contributions collected here should provide the readers with a sense of the lively debate taking place between Virtue Ethics and other normative theories – or even non-philosophical disciplines, such as psychology –, and within Virtue Ethics itself. The existence of such a debate, as far as we can tell, is the best proof of the maturity and fertility of this normative ethical approach.

Questo numero monografico di *Teoria* rappresenta in qualche misura un fatto nuovo. Non solo e non tanto per il tema, ancora poco frequentato in Italia e nell'Europa continentale in genere, ma soprattutto per il fatto che l'Etica delle Virtù (*Virtue Ethics*) è presentata nella prima sezione dagli stessi principali esponenti delle correnti in cui oggi si articola, e successivamente discussa da studiosi italiani e internazionali che ne accettano la sfida, misurandosi con alcuni dei suoi snodi più problematici. Nella prima sezione figurano infatti Julia Annas (che ha gentilmente risposto ad alcune

nostre domande) per quanto riguarda la corrente neoaristotelica centrata sulla fioritura umana; Michael Slote (*The Humean Sentimentalist Learns from the Aristotelian Anscombe)* per quello che riguarda quella sentimentalista humeana «agent-based»; Christine Swanton *(Eudaimonistic versus Target Centred Virtue Ethics)* per quella che, al contrario, è target-centred; Linda Zagzebski (*Exemplarist Moral Theory*) per quanto riguarda il cosiddetto «esemplarismo», che ella ha lanciato nel dibattito internazionale, e che rappresenta una forma peculiare di Virtue Ethics agent-based. Infine Giacomo Samek Lodovici (*Virtue Ethics: an Overview*) offre un quadro sintetico di questo variegato filone dell'etica contemporanea nel suo complesso.

La seconda sezione del fascicolo tratta temi centrali dell'Etica delle virtù e della tradizione che la sottende, e in particolare il significato e il ruolo della saggezza pratica (*phronesis*, *prudentia*). Angelo Campodonico, in *Why Wisdom needs fortitude (and viceversa*), ne evidenzia il nesso costitutivo e imprescindibile, smarrito progressivamente durante la modernità, con le virtù cardinali, in particolare con la fortezza; Maria Silvia Vaccarezza (*Dilemmi e unità delle virtù*) sottolinea la sua funzione di integratore del carattere morale, che le consente di gerarchizzare i valori e permette, così, di non concepire i dilemmi morali come conflitti irriducibili; Franco Manti (*Il giudizio morale. Phronesis e complessità della moralità*) la reinterpreta nella prospettiva della contemporanea competenza etica che valorizza diverse prospettive sulla morale. Infine Howard Curzer (*Good People with Bad Principles*) tratta una tematica che presenta una scottante attualità: come è possibile che persone che nella vita ordinaria definiamo buone aderiscano cordialmente a prospettive politiche che sembrano contraddire radicalmente la loro natura «virtuosa».

Infine, nella terza parte ci si sofferma su alcune problematicità dell'Etica delle virtù e su alcune critiche rivolte ad essa o ad alcune sue correnti. Mark Alfano (*A plague on both your houses: Virtue theory after situationism and repligate*) riprende sinteticamente le critiche (e relative risposte) rivolte all'Etica delle virtù dal *situazionismo,* ovvero da quella posizione che accentua l'incidenza sulla condotta morale delle diverse situazioni rispetto a quella della formazione del carattere. Egli evidenzia i limiti, sotto il profilo scientifico, della metodologia che sottende tali critiche e auspica un rinnovamento della ricerca interdisciplinare sulla tematica delle virtù. Lorenzo Greco (*Against Aristotelian Virtue Ethics: The Humean Challenge*) critica la contemporanea etica delle virtù d'ispirazione aristotelica «dall'interno», ovvero da un punto di vista humeano, sottolineando come questo risponda meglio a certe istanze dell'Etica delle virtù stessa, quali

quella educativa; infine Michel Croce (*Per un modello esemplarista di educazione alle virtù*) si sofferma proprio sulla dimensione educativa dell'Etica delle virtù, in particolare sulla centralità in questa prospettiva degli esemplari virtuosi e sulla possibilità di evitare il rischio dell'indottrinamento, educando alla criticità.

I contributi nel loro complesso mostrano come sussista ormai un dialogo serrato e fecondo non soltanto tra l'Etica delle virtù e le altre correnti dell'etica contemporanea, ma anche fra gli stessi filoni dell'Etica delle virtù e fra questa e le scienze umane in una prospettiva interdisciplinare. Ciò è segno della maturità e della fecondità raggiunte dalla riflessione morale nell'ambito dell'Etica delle virtù.

Angelo Campodonico, Maria Silvia Vaccarezza

I.
Correnti

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Conversation with Julia Annas

1. *Professor Annas, you are very well known in continental Europe, and particularly in Italy, for your works on ancient philosophy, most of which are available in translation and extensively studied. Could you tell us how and why at some point you turned to virtue ethics, and proposed your own original theoretical proposal?*

Firstly, thank you very much for this opportunity to answer your questions. I am very honoured to be given this chance to present some of my positions to the readers of *Teoria*. (I regret that my Italian is not good enough to write in Italian.)

While I was working on *The Morality of Happiness* I became interested in the structure of contemporary ethical theories. That book is a work of scholarship about ancient ethical theories, and I had to work out a methodology for this ambitious task. I was aware of the problems in taking a supposedly timeless stance outside the ancient theories; it seemed to me that much unsatisfactory work about ancient ethics came from thinking that you could do this. This assumption can, and often does, lead to lack of awareness of the substantial assumptions that you are bringing to exploring ancient theories, and this leads to anachronisms. I was worried by the way that, for example, some philosophers unhesitatingly described Aristotle's ethics as egoistic. This imports a distinction between egoism and concern for others which simply didn't fit Aristotle. I wanted to bring an awareness of my own commitments to studying the ancient theories, to stay conscious of the dangers of seeing Aristotle, the Stoics and others in terms of distinctions that come easily to us, but misrepresent the issues important to them.

I was also aware of the problems in contextualizing the ancient ethical theories too deeply in their historical and social circumstances. It's impor-

tant to see ancient philosophers as products of specific societies; it's important, for example, to notice the contrast between Plato's and Aristotle's assumption that the Greek *polis* is the default model for political activity and the way later philosophers have adjusted to the *polis*'subordination to the Hellenistic kings, and later to Rome. But philosophy demands its own level of comprehension, one that can't be reduced to external social factors. This is particularly true for ethical philosophy, where ethics should improve your life, and what improves your life can't just be a redescription of what you already think to be important; people seeking to improve their lives through ethical philosophy are looking for something that they precisely are *not* getting from their society.

In *Morality of Happiness* I was trying to get away from accounts of ancient ethics which treated Epicurean and Stoic ethics, for example, as stuck in place in Epicurean and Stoic thought as a whole. While it's important to try to understand each philosophy as a whole, it's also crucial to study aspects of it as they relate to the same aspects in other theories. We are used to this with ancient logic and theories of knowledge; *Morality of Happiness* aimed to do this for ancient theories of ethics. I was and remain convinced that we understand ancient ethics best as a series of variations, worked out in ever more systematic detail, on the framework of eudaimonism, the basic idea that we all seek happiness, and that we achieve this best by acquiring and exercising the virtues.

That book focused on ancient theories, and treated contemporary theories in a more general way. I had become interested also in the different ways that philosophers throughout the history of Western ethics had dealt with virtue. I found fascinating variations on the role and nature of virtue in thinkers like Hume, Kant, Mill, Sidgwick and later utilitarians, and Nietzsche, and I have taken a very amateur interest in early Confucianism, where there is debate as to whether it is a form of virtue ethics or not. Life is too short, unfortunately, to follow up all the interesting virtue paths in ethical theories. I would like to study virtue in mediaeval thinkers, in eighteenth century philosophers and many more. Interest in virtue has spread to many areas, such as law and medicine, where again I am interested but lack the time to study them profitably.

One result of discovering the ubiquity of virtue in ethical theories was to realize that the period in anglophone ethical philosophy which I encountered as a student, a particularly barren and tedious one, was historically just an anomalous blip in a long history in which virtue was as important as ethical concepts such as rules, principles and duties. I am fortunate to

have lived in a period of rebirth of anglophone ethical philosophy. Renewed interest in virtue and happiness, which brought about a whole new field of virtue ethics, also rejuvenated other theories. Standard predictable debates between consequentialists and deontologists have been replaced by deeper and more systematic study of these theories. In making a place for virtue they had to reconceive themselves to some extent, and the current discourse of ethical philosophy is much richer for this cross-fertilization, and the more serious study of ethical traditions that has come with it.

Interest in a variety of ethical theories improved my attempts to understand virtue in a contemporary context. When I wrote *Morality of Happiness* my aim was the scholarly one of locating the basis of ancient ethical thinking and enabling us to understand it without reading our own concerns into it or distancing it too much historically. I hoped that contemporary ethical thinking would benefit from this encounter with ancient thought. If I may quote the last sentences of the book, 'The primary aim of this book has been to further the historical study of ancient ethical theories. But it is not an accident, I think, that this study may be of direct help in further articulating, and trying to understand, our own moral point of view.' I didn't for some time think of attempting to produce a contemporary version of virtue ethics myself, but this became increasingly an aim as I learned more about the way virtue had fared throughout the history of ethics, and became familiar with the arguments put forward for (and against) contemporary virtue ethical theory. Over the last thirty years there has been a huge improvement in the quality of argument about virtue and virtue ethics, from which I have benefitted greatly. From about 2000 I started, in articles and talks and discussions, to work out a view of my own which would show how even today an ethics in which virtue is central is viable, and, further, is an attractive alternative to ethical theories which are also available.

I abandoned my first attempt to write on virtue ethics, for two reasons. I started to write at the beginning of serious interest in virtue ethics, and too much of the book consisted of reactions to objections raised at that period against the whole idea of virtue ethics. As these objections were met, and discussion developed on a higher level, this reactive way of presenting virtue ethics became outdated. I also realized that I was doing what Socrates is always challenging people for doing – writing about the role of virtue in ethical theory without first giving an account of what virtue is. (I prefer the term 'giving an account' to 'giving a definition' because the latter has a number of misleading aspects.) I started again, to give an account

of virtue itself; this resulted in *Intelligent Virtue*. In that book I developed an account of virtue which is explicitly Aristotelean (or 'neo-Aristotelian). The Aristotelian version which I defend owes much to the work of Rosalind Hursthouse, who has pioneered the cause of virtue for many years and whose work has played a major role in the emergence of virtue as a serious topic in ethical philosophy. During the development of discussions of virtue ethics there have also been developments of different versions of virtue. We are now in the situation of having a number of different versions of virtue, and hence of possibilities for virtue ethics. There is a 'target-centred' version of virtue, an 'exemplarist' version and sophisticated accounts of virtue in Kantian and utilitarian theories. There has been much discussion about virtue ethics as a 'third way', an alternative to the traditional duo (in anglophone philosophy) of Kantian or deontological ethics *versus* utilitarian ethics. I am able, fortunately, to see that I made the right decision to work out an account of virtue before dealing with the role virtue can play in ethics.

Another factor which changed the face of anglophone ethical theory has been a surge in interest in happiness, well-being and flourishing. There has been an explosion of popular books claiming to have the secret to living a happy life, and there have also been a number of serious books in philosophy and social psychology. As with virtue, there has been a tendency to look back to Aristotle's views on the subject, and there has been much debate as to whether his concept of *eudaimonia* should be rendered as *happiness* or *flourishing*, or simply left untranslated on the grounds that we lack an equivalent term. In the numerous books and articles which have been produced (there is now a sub-field of Happiness Studies) a major problem has been lack of consensus as to what happiness is. Some psychologists assume that it is a pleasant feeling or an emotion, while others distinguish the role of pleasure in life from that of broader positive factors which constitute well-being. There is a similar problem among philosophers, some of whom and regard happiness as pleasure, while others distinguish between pleasant feelings and happiness as something to be aimed for over a life as a whole (thus both broader and more important than pleasant feelings).

Here those of us working in virtue ethics have the advantage of studying a tradition in which happiness (or flourishing) is the overall aim of one's life, and quite distinct from pleasant feelings. It has always seemed to me that this approach, not just Aristotle's but that of ancient ethics generally, is the most helpful and fruitful approach to ethics. It is more sophisticated

than contemporary theories in giving us a way of thinking of our aims and goals which recognizes that our lives are not static; we are always changing and developing in a variety of ways. Unfortunately it is still a minority view in the vast psychological literature, and also among philosophers, many of whom still think of our overall aim in life as something fixed and unchanging.

2. *What are the cornerstones of your virtue-ethical approach, and which of your own works do you think are crucial to it?*

For me the main cornerstone is the idea that the 'entry-point for ethical reflection' arises when each of us asks the question, how my life is going, and whether I could live it better. This is far closer to our everyday lived experience than approaches which would have us start from difficult and puzzling ethical problems. When I ask myself how I have lived my life and whether I am satisfied with this, I am almost certain (unless I am both extremely egoistic and extremely unreflective) to feel that I am lacking and feel an aspiration to do better. This is where we turn to self-help books, or, if we are more reflective, to philosophy of the kind Aristotle and other ancient philosophers offered, ethical philosophy which does not just teach you about virtue, but enables you, by coming to understand it and put it into practice, to start on becoming virtuous. For otherwise, Aristotle says, there would be no point to it. I find it very gratifying that there is considerable movement within anglophone philosophy towards this idea, recognizing the limited appeal and usefulness of purely academic ethical philosophy. Given this, I think it is important to work on virtue and becoming virtuous, as a proposed way for you to live your life better, and on happiness as the way in which this can become your overall aim in a way that makes sense of your everyday aims – a good job, a family, security and so on.

Virtue is the harder of the two to give an account of, but we can begin from the less controversial. Virtue is just the virtues, and the virtues are, at first, recognized as traits in our society and culture – where else could we learn them? But we are not stuck with keeping these traits unchanged, so an ethics of virtue is not in its nature conservative, as some object. As our virtues develop, we become reflective and critical about the way we learnt to be virtuous, and what we learned that the virtues are, and so it is no surprise that what we take as, for example, the virtue of modesty has rather different content from what our grandparents thought. Eventually we can reflect in the same way on the content of virtues in other cultures, so that virtue is well suited to cross-cultural exchange and discussion.

A virtue is a matter of character, a disposition or trait which has to be acquired over a period of time and through experience. An ethics of virtue thus has to take education and training into account from the start, rather than producing a theory which works for adults and then assuming that there will be some process by which we can get from here, where we are, to there, where the theory is accepted. The education that we get from our upbringing as children is important, but it does not end, leaving us finished; as adults we take over our own education, and keep aiming to improve ourselves for our entire life. For this reason among others, an ethics of virtue does not aim to produce a finished set of principles, or rules, or aims, leaving it to us merely to try to follow them. We are always refining our ways of being virtuous – brave, generous, modest and so on – because our lives are always progressing, and facing new circumstances. Being brave or generous is not a static condition that can be reached and then left untouched.

A virtue is built up through experience, but not by any chance experience; it is a disposition whose growth is structured in the way that the growth of a practical skill is structured. We learn to play a musical instrument not by sounding it at random, but by learning from a teacher, who imparts the strategies for playing the instrument and gives us a model to follow. We learn to do what the teacher does, at first just because the teacher does it, and then because we come to understand why is behind the teacher's actions; we get *why* she does this and not that, and acquire the ability to play in a way going beyond what following a model has taught us. This point, labelled 'the skill analogy', is an important to an ethics in which virtue is central. We learn to be virtuous as we learn to build, or to play an instrument; it is a practical achievement before we get to theoretical complexity. It is this everyday aspect which can lead to the underestimation of the resources of virtue ethics.

So far this can sound rather too intellectual, so it needs to be stressed, firstly that virtue is like a *practical* skill, not a detached academic exercise, and secondly that as we learn what to do, we not only get better at understanding what it is that we do, and thus better at getting it right, we do it more readily, with less felt obstruction; our emotive side functions in better harmony with the cognitive side, and we come to feel at ease acting in this way, and even come to enjoy it. In virtue ethics, the virtues are not constant correctives to our ethically unreliable desires, but the structures that focus our desires, wishes and aims towards the good.

This direction to the good is central to virtues, and distinguishes them

from other traits which can be trained towards the good or towards other aims, and thus allow of being exercised viciously as well as virtuously. Tidiness, cleanliness and diligence count as virtues in some theories, but in a theory of Aristotelian virtue they are just traits which virtue can direct well (or not). It is because it is essential to virtues to be directed towards the good that progress in becoming brave, generous, kind and so on leads to an integration of the virtues, since they all aim at the good in their own ways (unlike the vices, which have no tendency to integration). What is the good at which virtues aim? In an Aristotelian theory this will be happiness (or flourishing), living a human life well. It is significant, though, that this conception of virtue also allows for other versions of the good – a Platonic good unattainable in this life, for example.

In virtue ethics of an Aristotelian kind practical reasoning is central, and this operates over the person's life in an undivided way; it is not split between what is called *moral* reasoning and what is called *prudential* reasoning, reasoning about one's own concerns and aims as opposed to those of others. The notion of the moral does not fit virtue ethics well, mainly because there are so many different accounts of it, some of which conflict, and also because in most understandings moral is opposed to concern with one's own interests and desires, an opposition which makes no sense in a virtue ethics framework.

Intelligent Virtue focussed on developing an Aristotelean conception of virtue and its relation to happiness, and so laid the basis for a eudaimonist virtue ethics. I hope, in a book which I am writing, drawing on some articles, to strengthen my account of eudaimonist virtue ethics, and to follow up issues which arise for any theory of ethics. I hope to develop further my account of right action in virtue ethics, and to relate it to duty and obligation, and also to make clearer the way in which virtue makes *demands* on us, and does not merely provide us with ideals to aspire towards. I am also working on an account of vice, a surprisingly neglected topic in discussions of virtue, but needed to give us a complete theory. It has been claimed that accounts of vice in a virtue ethics framework are too weak to account for evil, and so examination of the difficult concept of evil is also needed. I also argue that in virtue ethics there is no need for supererogation, which is what accounts for heroic actions in theories which begin from classifying actions as required or forbidden. This shows the need for a convincing account of heroism as distinct from an ordinary level of virtue (a task I have begun on). Other issues arise – one advantage of working in virtue ethics is that there are many ways in which theories of ethics can

develop while keeping virtue central. This is something which we can learn by looking at the wide variety of theories in the ancient tradition, all of which make virtue and happiness basic.

3. *What are in your view the main challenges virtue ethics has to face these days?*

Until fairly recently, virtue ethics was thought to face a serious challenge from some findings in social psychology, where experiments showed that actions can be explained by appeal to features of the situation rather than dispositional features of the person. This point was extended to claim that we are mistaken in thinking that virtues explain our actions, since as dispositional features of the person they fail to explain actions; it is features of the situation which seem to be doing the explanatory work. Debate has made clear that the experiments were taken by psychologists to refine, rather than to undermine, the explanatory force of character traits; and also that philosophers who used them to attack the claims of virtue ethics had an inadequate account of virtue. A virtue is not a disposition to perform, always or regularly, actions of a certain type; it is a disposition to act rightly in accordance with whatever virtue is required, in whatever situations present themselves. The 'situationism' debate did a great deal to clear this issue up.

Virtue ethics has also had to face charges that it is egoistic; this comes from the mistaken view that the virtuous person is seeking to improve a state of herself, not others, and also from the mistaken view that when virtue is sought as a constituent of happiness this gives virtue a merely instrumental value for the achievement of happiness, thought of in yet another mistake as a pleasant state of the person. Virtue ethics has also been charged with failing to provide a 'theory of action', an account of what makes right actions *right* actions. With these objections, discussion and debate has over the past decade clarified the issues and made it obvious that virtue ethics can readily meet these objections, and, in so doing, display some of its attractive, though often misunderstood, features.

The main challenges faced by virtue ethics today are, I think, three. One is to provide a meta-ethics for virtue ethics. Aristotle's naturalistic background for ethics is obviously not available to us, and Aristotelian versions of naturalism that have been offered have been found controversial. A problem here is that the tradition of contemporary metaethics developed in a period when virtue ethics had disappeared from discussion among philosophers, so that there are problems in adjusting current

methodologies to virtue ethics. (I have explored one issue here, that of thick concepts, very briefly.) The other main challenge is to strengthen the claim that virtue ethics is not just a theory of aspiration, but is as demanding on us as Kantian and utilitarian theories are. Even people sympathetic to virtue ethics sometimes feel that virtue must somehow make a weaker demand than a rule or principle does. Allied to this, though distinct from it, is the challenge of relating virtue ethics to the concept of *morality*. This is a concept which is understood in a number of different ways in different theories, and it is controversial whether we (in anglophone philosophy, at least) have a robust pre-theoretical conception of it. This makes it especially difficult to relate virtue and eudaimonism to contemporary uses of morality. I hope, at any rate, that this is not an unworkable task!

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Virtue Ethics: An Overview[1]

Giacomo Samek Lodovici

The purpose of this essay is to review some of the significant themes present in the works of Virtue Ethics (VE) authors (mainly, but not exclusively, neo-Aristotelian ones), who have rediscovered the theme of virtue[2]. It must be clear that, for reasons of space[3], I do not pretend to be exhaustive[4]

[1] I have developed more extensively some themes of this contribution in G. Samek Lodovici, *Il ritorno delle virtù. Temi salienti della Virtue Ethics*, ESD, Bologna 2009, which I draw from and update here.

[2] I do not have the space here to consider German *Tugendethik*, or some Spanish and Italian authors' theories about the virtues, or the overlap between VE and feminist ethics.

[3] For an introductory overview of VE, see, for example (in chronological order): G. Abbà, *Felicità, vita buona e virtù. Saggio di filosofia morale*, Las, Roma 1995, pp. 79-144; J. Oakley, *Varieties of Virtue Ethics*, in «Ratio», 9 (1996), pp. 128-152; M. Mangini, *L'etica delle virtù e i suoi critici*, La città del sole, Napoli 1996, pp. 9-40; D. Statman, *Introduction to Virtue Ethics*, in D. Statman (ed.), *Virtue Ethics*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 1997, pp. 1-41; M. Slote, *Virtue Ethics*, in H. LaFollette (ed.), *Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory*, Blackwell, Malden (Mass.) - Oxford 2000, pp. 325-347; A. Da Re, *La riscoperta delle virtù nell'etica contemporanea: guadagni e limiti*, in A. Da Re, G. De Anna (eds.), *Virtù, natura e normatività*, Il Poligrafo, Padova 2004, pp. 233-261; D. Copp, D. Sobel, *Morality and Virtue: An Assessment of Some Recent Work in Virtue Ethics*, in «Ethics», 114 (2004), pp. 514-554; N. Athanassoulis, *Virtue Ethics*, 2004, www.iep.utm.edu/virtue/, in J. Fieser - B. Dowden (eds.), *Internet Enciclopedia of Philosophy*; S. Van Hooft, *Understanding Virtue Ethics*, Acumen, Teddington 2006; J. Annas, *Virtue Ethics*, in D. Copp (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007, pp. 515-536; G. Samek Lodovici, *Il ritorno delle virtù*, cit.; S. Van Hooft (ed.), *The Handbook of Virtue Ethics*, Acumen, Durham 2014; R. Hursthouse, *Virtue Ethics*, in E. Zalta (ed.), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 2016, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-virtue/; D. Carr, J. Arthur, K. Kristjánsson, *Varieties of Virtue Ethics*, Palgrave-Macmillan, London 2017; A. Campodonico, M. Croce, M.S. Vaccarezza, *Etica delle virtù. Un'introduzione*, Carocci, Roma 2017.

[4] For example, among other topics, I will not consider Virtue Epistemology: see, for example, L. Zagzebsky, *Virtues of the mind. An inquiry into the nature of virtue and the ethical foundation of knowledge*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996 and M. DePaul, L. Zagzebski (eds.), *Intellectual virtue. Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2003.

and that I cannot here express an evaluation[5].

It is important to note that VE is not monolithic. Though it has some unifying elements, in particular, its criticism of deontological and consequentialist ethics, it encompasses various theoretical disagreements[6] and many varieties[7]. VE authors' sources of inspiration are also diverse. The main one is Aristotle, but some others include Plato, the Stoics, Thomas Aquinas, Hume, and, at times, Nietzsche[8], to mention only the main ones.

A common aspect of VE is of course the focus on character and virtue, and it is the criterion used in this paper to select the authors mentioned, even when they[9] do not consider themselves among VE's exponents.

Virtue and character are not absent from modern ethics (e.g., Hume treats these subjects), and are not neglected by deontological ethics (Kant, e.g., speaks of virtue in *The Metaphysics of Morals*) or consequentialist ethics (Bentham, e.g., deals with them in his *Deontology*). But in these moral philosophies' works, character and virtue are secondary. In contrast, in the twentieth century these themes became more central in the works[10] of some pioneers, for example: Hampshire (1949), Anscombe (1958)[11], von Wright (1965), Murdoch[12] (1970), Geach (1977), and Foot (1978). Finally, MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (1981)[13], inspired a proliferation of works on the theme of virtue, which now collectively constitute a very vast literature.

[5] I explained my virtue's theory in G. Samek Lodovici, *L'emozione del bene. Alcune idee sulla virtù*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2010.

[6] M. Nussbaum, *Virtue Ethics: a Misleading Category*, in «The Journal of Ethics», 3 (1999), pp. 163-201, has come even to question the existence of VE as an autonomous approach to moral issues. Now, it is true that VE's exponents differ on many issues, but, as we shall see, some themes are common.

[7] Of recent literature, see, for example, D. Carr, J. Arthur, K. Kristjánsson (eds.), *op. cit.*, especially R.C. Roberts, *Varieties of Virtue Ethics*, pp. 17-34.

[8] For a critic, see J. Annas, *Which Variety of Virtue Ethics?*, in *ivi*, pp. 35-52.

[9] It is precisely the case with Nussbaum.

[10] For the references of these works, see G. Samek Lodovici, *Il ritorno delle virtù*, cit.

[11] E. Anscombe, *Modern Moral Philosophy*, in «Philosophy», 33 (1958), pp. 1-19.

[12] We will see some later.

[13] A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue. A Study in Moral Theory*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame 1981, 1984^2.

1. *Supremacy of End-Telos versus Emphasis on Duty*

A frequent topic in VE is the criticism versus modern ethics' concentration on duty[14]: norms and moral obligations, says Anscombe, lack normativity if disconnected from a legislator (human or divine). For Anscombe, deontology must explain the origin of the morally obligatory strength of its imperatives. Some authors insist on the connection between duty and goods: duty receives its justification from the end-good it is meant to safeguard. Therefore, they argue, it is necessary to return to the concept of the excellent *telos* of human life, namely *eudaimonia*[15], or flourishment. In other words, it is necessary to focus ethics on good[16].

Life must be considered as a totality, not segmented into disconnected fragments[17]. For Annas[18], every action has a past, because it is the result of a certain way of reasoning and of reacting emotionally developed in the past; and it has a future, because it influences future actions and emotions. The obstacle to comprehending life in this way, says MacIntyre[19], is that modernity often subdivides every human life into multiple unrelated segments (work, love, free time, private and public lives, etc.), each with its own rules, and treats human action as atomistic. In fact, though, humans are the authors of a story terminating only with death, and behavior cannot be characterized while disregarding the intentions behind it[20].

2. *Preservation of Love and Friendship*

Love is a crucial resource for society, but, often, modern ethics is not able to account for the value of love, friendship[21], and solicitude for oth-

[14] See, for example, E. Anscombe, *op. cit.*; A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, pp. 51-56, 118-119, 202-203, 215-216; R. Taylor, *Ethics, Faith and Reason*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs 1985, chapters 1-2, 12, 14.

[15] J. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2011, pp. 122-123.

[16] I. Murdoch, *Metaphisics as a Guide to Morals*, Penguin Books, New York 1993, p. 492; Id., *The Sovereignty of Good*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London-New York 1970, pp. 51 and 76.

[17] See for example J. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, pp. 113-117, 121-126.

[18] J. Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1993, p. 52.

[19] See A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, cit., pp. 204-208.

[20] About this, see, recently, G. Pettigrove, *Virtue ethics, virtue theory and moral theology*, in S. Van Hooft (ed.), *The Handbook of Virtue Ethics*, cit., pp. 92-93.

[21] M. Stocker, *The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories*, in «The Journal of Philosophy», 73 (1976), pp. 453-466; N. Sherman, *The Place of Emotions in Kantian Morality*, in O. Flanagan,

ers' good: it demands that people consider others as a means to satisfy an obligation (deontologism) or to cause the best possible consequences[22] (consequentialism).

But for some virtue ethicists, virtues are dispositions to do good to others, to express solicitude for others' well-being[23], because virtues have a relational aspect. For Nussbaum, "true courage [...] requires an appropriate, which is to say more than merely instrumental, concern for the well-being of one's country and citizens; [...] true generosity a non-crafty concern for the good of the recipient; and so forth. In each case, one cannot choose these excellent activities as ends in themselves [...] without also choosing the good of others as end"[24].

The intersubjective dimension is structural[25] for mankind, therefore we have a constitutive need to love and be loved[26]. Consequently, virtue as human excellence must find its realization in human relations. Here emerges the need to pay careful attention[27] to others – a *loving attention* (see Blum) – because love is a way of looking that is able to distinguish the important aspects of others' condition. For Murdoch, what is demanded is a "loving gaze", "a suppression of self"; and "the ability so to direct attention is love"[28]. For Tabensky[29], we fear to perceive "the all-consuming sense that one is alone or [...] that nobody cares about me, [...] that I am special to no one". But "I can only dispel the anxiety of separateness [...] by giving of myself for the sake of others. [...] despite the fact that it has a self-regarding dimension. When loving in the "mercenary spirit", one remains enclosed in oneself".

A.O. Rorty (eds.), *Identity, Character, and Morality*, MIT Press, Cambridge (Mass.) 1990; C. Swanton, *Virtue Ethics. A pluralistic View*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2003, pp. 42 e 54.

[22] However, virtue ethicists can be sensitive to consequences: for example, N. Snow, *Generativity and flourishing*, in «Journal of Moral Education», 44 (2015), 3, pp. 263-277, reflects on the virtues of generativity toward future generations.

[23] See for example M. Slote, *Virtue Ethics*, cit.; C. Swanton, *Virtue Ethics*, cit., pp. 115 and ff.

[24] M. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness. Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1986, p. 352.

[25] See also A. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals. Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, Open Court, Chicago 2008, pp. 99 and ff.

[26] J.L. Garcia, *Interpersonal Virtue: Whose Interest do They Serve?*, in «American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly», LXXI (1997), p. 47.

[27] See L. Blum, *Moral Perception and Particularity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994, p. 12.

[28] I. Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, cit., pp. 33, 64-65.

[29] P. Tabensky, *Virtue ethics for skin-bags: an ethics of love for vulnerable creatures*, in S. Van Hooft (ed.), *The Handbook of Virtue Ethics*, cit., pp. 462, 466, 468-469. I developed a similar discourse in G. Samek Lodovici, *L'emozione del bene*, cit., pp. 151-180.

3. *Norms Are Not Sufficient to Act Well*

To act well, it is not enough to have norms or rules[30]. In fact, sometimes there are conflicts between norms that, in certain cases, demand incompatible actions[31].

Moreover, applying norms demands the ability to make out the main features of a situation, which we must first of all be aware of in order to be able to decide how to act. The exercise of the crucial virtue of *phronesis* and the education of will and emotions[32] are necessary. Furthermore, to apply ethical norms, we must have the ability to identify actions correctly so as to understand when such norms govern a situation (for example, is interrupting the alimentation of a subject nourished with a stomach tube a murder or a refusal to turn into a therapeutic obstinacy?).

And after determining that a certain norm governs a certain act, the norm does not tell us precisely how we must act.

No system of rules can conclusively guide every practical reasoning[33]. Rather, practical reason becomes capable of identifying what is actually good thanks to the accrued power given by *phronesis* and from emotions informed by virtue. Furthermore, to be able to perform a virtuous action and acquire moral knowledge, we need to know exemplar excellent human beings that we admire[34] as models, and for this purpose it is also very important to listen to stories (cf. the importance of literature mentioned in § 6). We need to be inspired by the model of the *phronimos*[35], and also to ask for advice (when possible).

Criticism of VE about the supremacy of norms does not imply on behalf of every author that norms are not useful. It is possible to integrate virtue and rules[36]: "Duty [...] does not constitute the whole of the moral

[30] See E. Pincoff, *Quandaries and the Virtues. Against Reductivism in Ethics*, University Press of Kansas, Lawrence (Kansas) 1986; N. Sherman, *The Fabric of Character. Aristotle's Theory of Virtue*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1989.

[31] For example M. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, cit., pp. 25 and ff.; P. Foot, *Moral Dilemmas. And Other Topics in Moral Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2002, pp. 175-188.

[32] See L. Blum, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-61.

[33] See A. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame (In.) 1988, pp. 113-123; L. Zagzebsky, *Virtues of the mind*, cit., p. 226.

[34] Cf. L. Zagzebsky, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2017. Contra Virtue Exemplarism see H. Curzer, *Against Idealization in Virtue Ethics*, in D. Carr, J. Arthur, K. Kristjánsson, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-72.

[35] H. Alderman, *By Virtue of a Virtue*, in D. Statman (ed.), *Virtue Ethics*, cit., p. 156.

[36] Among the deontologists, this is the need expressed for example by O. O'Neill, *Towards*

life. But […] helps the formations of moral habits […] because we thereby internalize and take for granted certain patterns and values"[37]. People who do not yet possess *phronesis*, besides from imitating and/or consulting wise persons (and even more when they don't know wise men), need to follow some good norms, that contain the wise judgment of other people[38]. Quite simply, norms do not have supremacy[39]: they are a useful but not sufficient guide for action and must have as a goal the exercise of virtue and the realization of *eudaimonia*[40]. Moreover, the field of ethics is broader than that of actions prescribed by norms, because some good actions are not duties[41] and some are supererogatory (such as to give one's life for others)[42].

4. *The Morally Necessary Role of Emotions*

According to VE, deontologists often disregard the role of emotions in a morally good life. Acting morally well demands adequate moral knowledge, but this is not enough. it is necessary to possess above all a well-formed character and appropriate emotions[43]. Emotions allow us to pay careful attention to the main details of a practical situation[44], as attention presupposes a certain loving interest in an object and their emotions[45]. Emotions allow us to partially perceive another person's interior life, in

justice and virtue. A constructive account of practical reasoning, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996. On the different relationship between virtue and norms in VE, in deontologism, and in rule-consequentialism, see T. Chappel, *Virtues and Rules*, in S. Van Hooft (ed.), *The Handbook of Virtue Ethics*, pp. 76-87.

[37] I. Murdoch, *Metaphisics as a Guide to Morals*, cit., p. 494. On the presence of moral rules in Aristotle, see H.J. Curzer, *Rules Lurking at the Heart of Aristotle's Virtue Ethics*, in «Apeiron», 49 (2016) 1, pp. 57-92.

[38] M. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, cit., pp. 304-305.

[39] N. Sherman, *Making a Necessity of the Virtue*, cit., pp. 239-246, 266-275.

[40] A. MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry. Encyclopaedia, Genealogy and Tradition*, Duckworth, London 1990, p. 139.

[41] S. Van Hooft, *Understanding Virtue Ethics*, cit., pp. 9, 46.

[42] See, for example, S. Hudson, *Taking Virtues Seriously*, in «Australasian Journal of Philosophy», 59 (1981), 2, p. 192; L. Blum, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-21, 166-168.

[43] See N. Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, cit.

[44] Id., *The Place of Emotions in Kantian Morality*, pp. 149-170; M. Stocker, *How Emotions Reveal value and Help Cure the Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories*, in R. Crisp (ed.), *How Should One Live?, Essays on the Virtues*, Clarendon Press, London 1996, pp. 173-189.

[45] M. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought. The Intelligence of Emotions*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001, p. 30.

turn allowing us to intervene morally well in his/her respect, even though they do not externally manifest their inner life[46].

According to MacIntyre (see also Aristotle), virtues "are dispositions not only to act in particular ways but also to feel in particular ways"[47]. Sometimes emotions constitute a great moral obstacle, but, other times, they support both *phronesis* and other dianoetic virtues[48]. They are a kind of energy, and support acting virtuously[49] and respecting norms: gratitude pushes us to thank a benefactor and to reciprocate; rage brings us to repay an unjust situation/act; admiration urges us to emulate others' morally good actions[50]. Therefore, our emotions need to be developed so as not to deform reason's evaluations: temperate, courageous, and just people reason better morally because they are not influenced by resentment, fear, or pleasure[51]. A vicious disposition and the correlated emotions may alter our intellectual evaluation of good and evil in a situation because our will and affectivity are altered[52].

5. *The Importance of the Community*

Another recurrent criticism of modern ethics from VE is that it does not take into adequate consideration the importance of the community in the moral life of the subject, while what and how far we are able to perform "depends in part on what and how far we received". We need others to help us not only materialistically but also morally because we are not self-sufficient, and not only at birth. Thanks to others' goodwill, we may become "the kind of human being – through acquisition and exercise of the virtues – who makes the good of others her or his good"[53]. Then "it is al-

[46] For example N. Eisenberg, T.L. Spinrad, Z.E. Taylor, *Sympathy*, in S. Van Hooft (ed.), *The Handbook of Virtue Ethics*, cit., pp. 409-417.

[47] A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, cit., p. 149.

[48] See L. Zagzebsky, *Virtues of the mind*, cit., especially pp. 137-139, 146-150, 214-219, 230-231.

[49] M. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1996, p. 96.

[50] For example C. Swanton, *Virtue Ethics*, cit., pp. 179 e 231; R. Hursthouse, *Virtue Ethics and Emotions*, in D. Statman, *Virtue Ethics*, cit., pp. 101 and ff.

[51] See G. Santas, *Does Aristotle Have a Virtue Ethics?*, in D. Statman (ed.), *Virtue Ethics*, cit., p. 269.

[52] M. Stocker, *How Emotions Reveal value*, cit., pp. 175-190; N. Sherman, *Making a Necessity of Virtue*, cit., pp. 39 and ff.; L. Zagzebsky, *Virtues of the mind*, cit., pp. 51-58, 147-151.

[53] A. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, cit., pp. 99, 108.

ways within some particular community […] that we learn or fail to learn to exercise the virtues"[54], and "our individual good is connected to the common good of the communities of which we are part"[55].

Between virtue and community, according to these authors, it is possible to distinguish various links[56]. For example:

- virtues are apprehended in specific communities (starting from the family), through theoretical explanations and examples of realized models;
- practice of virtue is sustained by various communities;
- some civic virtues sustain communities: solicitude, care, etc. constitute communities' social capital and make for a good society[57].

6. *The Nature of Virtue*

Up to now, we have seen some of the most frequent VE criticisms of modern ethics, and, indirectly, we have also started to rebuild the outlines of VE theories of virtue. Turning now directly to its concepts of virtue, we must underline that according to the most common interpretation of VE authors, virtue is a disposition to perform morally good actions and react to situations with the appropriate emotions. Our tendencies are always molded by the moral dispositions and the ethical commitment that we have or have not spent. Virtue[58] is a character trait that intimately constitutes a personality and constitutes human excellence: is a moral excellence.

Virtue, like vice, is acquired by reiterating acts[59]. This depends on the fact that human action has an intransitive-immanent dimension: its effects fall back on the acting subject, determining in him/her inner modifications, including the dispositions to act. This means it is an error to sup-

[54] Id., *After Virtue*, cit., p. 195.

[55] D. McPherson, *Vocational Virtue Ethics: Prospects for a Virtue Ethic Approach to Business*, in «Journal of Business Ethics», 116 (2013), 2, p. 291. The author argues there is a "we identity" and applies VE to business.

[56] Some are indicated by L. Blum, *op. cit.*, pp. 146-147.

[57] D.S. Bright, B.A. Winn, J. Kanov, *Reconsidering Virtue: Differences of Perspective in Virtue Ethics and the Positive Social Sciences*, in «Journal of Business Ethics», 119 (2014), pp. 454-458, conjecture that there are also virtues of communities.

[58] See for example L. Zagzebsky, *Virtues of the mind*, cit., pp. 84 and ff. and J. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, cit. (for example pp. 1, 14-16), which focuses on the analogy between the acquisition of virtues and practical skills.

[59] See, recently, J. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, cit.

pose that in human life certain areas have no moral relevance[60]. Through virtue, the virtuous act becomes natural and amiable (except in dramatic circumstances[61]): the subject performs it as if by a second nature[62]. So whoever acts out of a sense of duty is always exposed to the temptation to do evil, while for the virtuous person it is much easier to avoid it. Virtue is achieved through a repetition of acts, through long and complex self-development. Once acquired, virtue makes good action spontaneous. But this is only its secondary effect.

Its primary effect is to enable the subject to desire (the task of ethical virtues), to identify, evaluate, and command (the task of *phronesis*), to choose and execute (again the task of ethical virtues) the action or emotion that is good in a certain situation. Therefore without virtue the desire, identification, choice and execution of the good action/emotion is often impossible.

We have already seen (§ 4) that emotions assist or mislead *phronesis*, and therefore must be developed to avoid a misleading evaluation on the part of reason. This process of cultivating[63] good emotions is possible thanks to their intentional content, that is, the fact that they concern an object[64]: for example, rage flares up with reference to something that unleashes it in me (e.g., I may think I have been offended). Emotions surge inside us at the thought of something. Because of this intentionality, emotions can be cultivated: by modifying and correcting the beliefs on which they are based (for example, I can realize that the offense I thought I received had not actually wronged me); through the education we receive from others; through the education of laws; thanks to friendship and love of others; through artistic fruition[65] (literature, cinema, theater, etc.).

According to Nussbaum[66], narrative art increases our understanding of the world, of life, and of ourselves: it makes us observe the lives of various

[60] J. Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, cit., p. 126; I. Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, cit., p. 36.

[61] Id., *Intelligent Virtue*, cit., p. 77.

[62] See, for example, L. Zagzebsky, *Virtues of the mind*, cit., p. 116.

[63] See R. Hursthouse, *Virtue Ethics and the emotions*, cit., pp. 108-120.

[64] See M. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, cit., pp. 19-48; N. Sherman, *Making a Necessity of the Virtue*, cit., pp. 31, 45, 78 and ff.

[65] M. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity. A classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.) 1997.

[66] M. Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice. The Literary Imagination and Public Life*, Beacon Press, Boston 1995.

characters living experiences we have not had, or we have only partially had; it makes us participate in the decision-making processes of some characters. Narratives construe some traits "as worth pursuing, some action as to be done or to be avoided, and so on"[67], because art has a universal value (cf. Aristotle)[68].

To be sure, some consequentialists and deontologists also recognize the existence and the role of virtues, but only because they think that virtues contribute to realizing optimal states of the world or to developing respect for norms, that is, virtues have extrinsic value[69]. Rather, a virtuous action has intrinsic value: the goal of virtuous dispositions is to realize virtuous actions in itself[70]. For VE, the just person "*aims* at keeping promises, paying what is owed, and defending those whose rights are being violated, so far as such actions are required by the virtue"[71].

Therefore why act virtuously? Because of the beauty of the act (cf. Aristotle). Here we may find an analogy between virtue and a work of art[72], because the latter is the result of the desire to realize beauty.

Abstract

The purpose of this essay is to review some significant themes present in the works of Virtue Ethics (VE) authors (mainly, but not exclusively, neo-Aristotelian ones). First it focuses some VE's criticism versus modern ethics, for example the concentration on duty, arguing, on the contrary, that it is necessary to identify the telos*-flourishment of human life and to preserve love-friendship as crucial for societies. According to VE, norms are not sufficient to act well: we need to be inspired by the* phronimos *and to possess* phronesis. *That implies the importance of the community and the necessary role of emotions. Then the essay focuses on virtues as dispositions to perform*

[67] G. Pettigrove, *Virtue ethics, virtue theory and moral theology*, in S. Van Hooft (ed.), *The Handbook of Virtue Ethics*, cit., p. 94.

[68] D. Carr, *Literature, arts and the education of virtuous emotions*, in *ivi*.

[69] An attempt to develop a consequentialist theory in which virtue has intrinsic value is T. Hurka, *Virtue as Loving the Good*, in E. Frankel Paul, F.D. Miller, J. Paul (eds.), *The Good Life and The Human Good*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1992, pp. 149-168.

[70] See for example R. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1999, pp. 123-131 and J. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, pp. 105-107, 110-111, 117, 154.

[71] P. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2001, p. 12.

[72] See C. Swanton, *Virtue Ethics*, cit., pp. 163 and ff.

morally good actions and react with the appropriate emotions. Virtue has intrinsic value and makes good action spontaneous, but its primary effect is to enable us to desire, identify, evaluate, command, choose and execute the good in a certain situation.

Keywords: Virtue Ethics; rule's insufficiency; human telos; friendship-love; ethical role of emotions.

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The Humean Sentimentalist Learns from the Aristotelian Anscombe

Michael Slote

1. *Empathy in Moral Sentimentalism*

Elizabeth (G.E.M.) Anscombe is my favorite twentieth-century philosopher: not just because I am an adherent of a movement, contemporary virtue ethics, that she initiated, but also because she has so much to teach us about the nature of the mind. In this essay I shall draw on some of her major insights about the mind. But I shall use those insights within a form of virtue ethics whose recent revival she almost certainly never anticipated: Humean, not Aristotelian, virtue ethics. I need to begin with some background.

Sentimentalist virtue ethicists in the roughly Humean tradition base normative morality on sentiments like compassion, benevolence, and, more generally (though this is a concept Hume never explicitly refers too), caring concern about others. In my 2010 OUP book *Moral Sentimentalism*, I defended a neo-Humean virtue ethics and also a neo-Humean account of the meaning of moral terms. I sought to show that such systematic sentimentalism can be developed in ways that allow it to be plausible in contemporary terms. This sentimentalism can intuitively account for respect, autonomy, justice, and the validity of deontology; and it can also show us how to understand the meaning of moral terms in a way that allows for the full validity and objective truth of moral judgments. But I am not going to try to repeat the arguments for these conclusions here or state my reasons for thinking that neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics doesn't do comparably well with these philosophical tasks. Rather, I shall focus at least initially on the role empathy plays in moral sentimentalism and then show you why I think Anscombe has much to teach us sentimentalists.

The sentimentalist typically holds that empathy plays an important role in or behind the sentiments that sentimentalism bases morality on. But until very recently I think I had a somewhat distorted view of *how* empathy motivates altruistic behavior or just plain sympathy with the plight of others, a distorted view, however, that I shared with some of the most significant recent psychologists who have written on the subject of empathy. Martin Hoffman, Nancy Eisenberg, C.D. Batson, and I myself (following their lead) have long believed that the relation between empathy and sympathy/altruism is an empirical issue, that human sympathy and altruistic motivation develop as a result of developing empathy and that this is an entirely contingent matter that we have to learn about from the science of psychology (or personal observation)[1]. But I now think we have all been mistaken about this. I therefore propose to tell you now why I think we have been confused on this subject, and that conclusion will prepare us for the contributions Anscombe's thought can make to virtue-ethical sentimentalism.

For the purposes of this essay, I understand empathy the way Bill Clinton taught us to think about it. Wanting someone's pain to be diminished or ended is sympathy, but empathy involves *feeling* someone's pain or pain distress. Via empathy someone's feelings spread by a kind of contagion (Hume's word) from one person to another; so empathy is a kind of psychological mechanism, but the question is: how does this mechanism relate to sentiments like compassion and benevolence (I shall leave sympathy to one side) that constitute the normative basis of sentimentalist virtue ethics?

Well, imagine a father who is empathically infected by his young daughter's enthusiasm for stamp collecting. He doesn't merely become enthusiastic in an unspecific or vague way. The enthusiasm has the same intentional object as his daughter's, namely, stamp collecting. In other words, empathy (as opposed to *mere contagion*) takes in an attitude, motive, or feeling with its intentional object. Now if someone feels pain and is distressed about it, then they automatically count as motivated to alleviate that pain. That's just what distress *means*. But then consider someone who empathizes with, who empathically takes in, the other person's distress at their pain. This means feeling distressed oneself about their pain, and ex vi termini this constitutes altruistic and compassionate motivation to alle-

[1] See M. Hoffman, *Empathy and Moral Development*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2000; N. Eisenberg, *The Caring Child*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1992; C.D. Batson, *Altruism in Humans*, Oxford University Press, New York 2011; and my own *Moral Sentimentalism*, Oxford University Press, New York 2010.

viate that person's pain. So on strictly conceptual grounds empathy can involve compassion or benevolence toward another. (Of course, this motivation may not issue in action if stronger contrary motives are also in play in the given situation.)

However, those who accept the above argument have sometimes said to me that even if empathy entails compassion, etc., on the grounds just mentioned, there still might be such a thing as compassion (or sympathy) *without* empathy. But I think Anscombe's ideas can give us reason to doubt this last claim, and they do so within a certain problem issue for sentimentalism that I believe has never been mentioned previously. Here is the problematic issue.

We all agree that compassion (or benevolence) is or can be a motive. But we also think of compassion as a feeling and as an emotion, and to complicate things further, we also regard compassion as a virtue. But how can compassion be or "compassion" designate all of these things? Is the notion ambiguous? This question needs to be answered if normative sentimentalism, which bases everything on sentiments like compassion, is to be put in good working order, and I think the best way to answer it involves relying on Anscombe. She can help us see that compassion isn't possible without empathy and that that fact can help us overcome the idea that "compassion" is an ambiguous term designating a number of different though contingently related things.

2. *Anscombe and Moral Sentimentalism*

In her famous book *Intention* Elizabeth Anscombe made a conceptual point that very much bears remembering[2]. She argued (roughly) that certain desires don't in fact make any sense, that if someone claimed to desire a saucer of mud, we couldn't attach any sense to what they were saying unless they went on to suggest some intelligible reason why they wanted this: e.g., they needed the mud in saucer form for a beautifying facial. The point is well taken; it makes no sense to suppose that someone just wants a saucer of mud and has no further reason for this desire beyond the simple desire itself; and this bears immediately on the question of the relationship between empathy and compassion. But before I go into that, let me first note couple of curious historical facts.

[2] G.E.M. Anscombe, *Intention*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1957, p. 70 and passim.

In his *Reasons and Persons* (OUP, 1984, p. 123 f.) Derek Parfit speaks about having the basic attitude of "future Tuesday indifference" and clearly considers such an attitude to be possible but irrational. But this constitutes a failure to learn the lesson of Anscombe's example of saucers of mud. If we can't basically *want* a saucer of mud, neither, it would seem, could someone, for no further reason, simply be *indifferent* (only) to future Tuesdays.

Then there is the work of Philippa Foot, Anscombe's close philosophical associate. In her 1961 Aristotelian Society paper "Goodness and Choice", Foot says it is impossible for someone to have as a basic value "always turning northeast after turning northwest" (I have adjusted her example). This is fundamentally the same point Anscombe was making earlier with her saucer of mud example, but Foot never mentions Anscombe in this connection. Did she fail to see the relevance of what Anscombe had said previously? But let's return to whether there can be compassion without empathy.

The Shakespearian critic A.C. Bradley once wrote of Iago's motiveless malignity toward Othello, but Iago actually thought Othello had previously mistreated him by passing him over for promotion. He was seeking *revenge* on Othello, and I think Anscombe's saucer argument gives us reason to doubt whether there can be such a thing as pure or basic malice in the absence of some further motive like revenge. But then if ungrounded malice is impossible, the same may hold for ungrounded compassion. For compassion to exist pure and simple and in the absence of empathy, it would have to be some kind of basic instinct, and if a basic instinct of malice is impossible, how could a basic instinct of compassion be possible? Rather, empathy helps us understand how compassion can get its motivational grounding or foothold, and it is difficult to think of any other way this could be done.

The case of psychopathy may help us here. Psychopaths lack compassion and lack empathy, and it is often said that the former lack is due to the latter. But if compassion can come from other sources, then perhaps there would be some way of getting psychopaths to be compassionate other than via the kind of empathy that psychologists believe cannot be instilled into those who are already psychopaths. Well, no one has ever figured out a way to do this, and I would guess that empathy is the only way in which genuine compassion toward others can be launched. A basic instinct of compassion makes no more sense than a basic desire for a saucer of mud. (If one acts to help needy others out of a sense of duty/conscience or in order to promote the Good [whatever that is], it isn't appropriate to describe one as acting from compassion.)

So I think we have some reason to hold that the kind of receptive empa-

thy that takes in others' feelings of distress automatically and on conceptual grounds entails compassion for those others and that compassion cannot rest on anything other than such receptive empathy. The latter point is made with the help of Anscombe's arguments about saucers of mud, and our total conclusion here can now help us deal with the issue, the problem for sentimentalism, that I mentioned earlier. If the feeling or emotion of compassion can be traced to empathy, but is separable from compassionate motivation, then the term "compassion" refers to at least two different and separate or separable mental entities, and the term "compassion" will probably have to be construed as ambiguous. This raises or would raise problems for moral sentimentalism that, as I mentioned, sentimentalism has never been aware of much less dealt with. But if, as (with Anscombe's help) one can argue, compassionate motivation and compassionate feeling cannot be separated, then compassion is one phenomenon and the term "compassion" doesn't have to be considered ambiguous. When we use the term, we can be trying to highlight the empathic/feeling side of this single phenomenon, and that is what we are doing when we talk of compassion as a feeling. And when we want to highlight the motivational side of it, we can speak of compassion as a motive. But there is just one phenomenon that can be viewed under different and indissolubly linked aspects.

This then allows us to speak of the or a virtue of compassion, a single morally desirable and admirable state of character with different but necessarily connected aspects – one that can lead on given occasions to instances of compassion with the same sort of structure. Moreover, what we have said actually helps traditional or historical moral sentimentalism by allowing us to explain more clearly than it has ever been able to do how empathy can lead to moral and compassionate motivation and action. The psychologists mentioned above treat that connection as merely empirical and metaphysically contingent, and Hume's discussion of sentiments like compassion and benevolence doesn't explicitly tie these to empathy (what he, for lack of the term "empathy" called sympathy). If, as Hume says, benevolence is an "original instinct," then benevolence seems to exist in possible separation from the operations of empathy, and the same will hold for compassion. But I have tied compassion and, by parity of reasoning, benevolence and caring to empathy in the strictest way, and this means that empathy doesn't yield compassionate motivation in a merely contingent way but necessarily does so. This gives moral/altruistic motivation a fuller explanation than anything one finds previously in the sentimentalist literature.

So I have made use of Anscombe's saucer of mud insight to offer a (partial) defense of sentimentalist virtue ethics, and I wonder whether any neo-Aristotelian could make such good use of this insight. If not, then perhaps it is the sentimentalist kind of virtue ethics that, of all present-day forms of virtue ethics, comes closest to following her ideas. That conclusion together with the arguments used to reach it might well have surprised Anscombe herself, but it may be true nonetheless. However, I want to proceed now with another topic, and when we do, we will find that Anscombe's point about saucers of mud is hardly the only idea we need to borrow from her philosophy of mind.

3. *Moral Sentimentalism and Yin/yang*

I am now going to make what will seem to most of you like an incredible leap of topic. I think the sketchy (but new) defense of virtue-ethical sentimentalism I have just given offers a philosophical foothold for the ancient Chinese complementarity of yin and yang, and if that is the case, moral sentimentalism illustrates some themes, some ideas, that go beyond Western culture. Now yin and yang are nowadays not thought to be serious topics for philosophical thinking – even by the Chinese. Like us Westerners they are accustomed to various popularizations of yin and yang – as with macrobiotic diets; and they are aware, as most of us Westerners are not, of how ancient yin-and-yang explanations of physical phenomena (e.g., of how sunlight differentially affects the two sides of a hill) have had to yield to more quantitative and mathematical explanations of such phenomena of the sort that are the mainstay of (elementary) modern physics. But despite these problems or limitations, I think that suitably updated notions of yin and yang can be useful for present-day philosophical purposes, and I am going to try to persuade you of that here and now. We will also see how this brings Anscombe once again into the philosophical picture.

What do I mean by updated versions or notions of yin and yang? In a recent article, I have argued that we can make the most ethical sense of yin and yang via the Western notions of receptivity and active directed control[3]. Yin is often equated with passivity and often with pliancy or pliability, but it is also often equated with receptivity (there is no term in Chinese for "recep-

[3] See my *Updating Yin and Yang*, in «Dao», 12, 3 (2013), pp. 271-282. That article emphasized the rational quality of some control more than I think is necessary for our purposes here.

tivity" and "yin" may be the closest that language comes to our notion of receptivity). And I think that, unlike passivity and pliability, receptivity is a positive and broadly valued quality that, equated with yin, can be counterbalanced with or against the quality I am proposing to equate with yang, the quality (and notion) of active directed/controlled purpose (or purposiveness).

I have argued elsewhere that Western philosophy has tended to emphasize active control at the expense of the value and virtue of receptivity, but the point then is that we need and need to value both active control and receptivity in our lives and thought. And I think these two qualities can be viewed as necessary complements in the moral or ethical life. Again, I have made the arguments for this conclusion elsewhere[4]. But for present purposes and given what I argued earlier, something very interesting (I think) follows if we conceive yin and yang in this updated philosophical way. When we empathize with the distress of someone who is in pain, we are receptive to them in a way the psychopath never is with anyone. And when we ipso facto are then motivated to help (remember, though, that this doesn't mean we actually will help – other motivational factors may override our compassion), we are motivated to actively do something effective as a means to alleviating the pain of the other person; and this motivation to help shows us as active, directed in our purpose, and interested in exerting control over what will happen to the other person.

So I am saying that compassion, benevolence, and the like have the yin quality of receptive feeling and the yang quality of desiring actively to help in a specific way – they have both of these at the same time and, as I have been arguing, each aspect is inseparable from the other. This gives yin and yang a deeper, further foothold in our discussion because that complementarity is traditionally viewed as involving just such an inextricable or irrecusable relationship. The traditional symbol of yin and yang depicts yin with a small circle of yang in it and yang with a small circle of yin in it, and this is one way to symbolize the ancient view that yin and yang is a necessary complementarity, that yin and yang are really yin/yang. (There is another, ancient tradition of yin and yang that treats them as contraries rather than as complementary, but that tradition is less useful for our philosophical purposes.)

The present discussion gives these ancient and philosophically somewhat vague (and till now suspect) notions a particular and definite embodiment. If you can't have compassion as feeling without compassion as moti-

[4] See my *From Enlightenment to Receptivity: Rethinking Our Values*, OUP, Oxford 2013.

vation and vice versa, then you can't have a certain sort of receptivity without also having a certain sort of controlling or directed activeness and vice versa; and if one buys my updating of the notions of yin and yang, then in the sphere of moral sentiments you can't have yin without yang or yang without yin and they are invariably instantiated together. The virtuous moral sentiments thus all have a yin/yang character, and that is a philosophically significant fact both about the sentiments and about the ancient Chinese complementarity of yin/yang.

But if moral sentimentalism lends itself to an interpretation via the Chinese categories of yin and yang, we really shouldn't be too surprised. What we call moral sentimentalism had its origins, in the modern West, in eighteenth-century Britain, but there is a strong element or aspect of sentimentalism in traditional Confucianism: in Mencius and in neo-Confucians like Cheng Hao and Wang Yangming who were strongly influenced by him. However, the specific idea that yin/yang applies to compassion and other particular moral sentiments doesn't seem to have occurred to any Confucian or neo-Confucian (or later Chinese) philosopher, so what I have just been saying is intended as a contribution to the overall Confucian tradition at the same time that it represents, as I believe, a philosophical application of yin/yang to or within moral sentimentalism. (I also think yin/yang has applications outside of ethics, but that is a long story to be told on another occasion.)

Moreover, our bringing yin and yang and what is called yin/yang into the discussion allows another idea of Anscombe's to appear and show some of its significance. In *Intention* (section 32) Anscombe mentioned the possibility that a list of items could serve two different purposes: it could be a list of grocery items written down by a wife for guiding some husband in his purchase of groceries, or it could be a list compiled by a detective being paid (by the wife?) to report all the items that the husband bought in the grocery store or supermarket. The recently familiar philosophical notion of "direction of fit" largely comes from this example of Anscombe's. It is commonplace among philosophers of mind now to say that beliefs have a mind-to-world direction of fit and desires a world-to-mind direction of fit because beliefs are supposed to fit the world whereas desires are supposed to make the world *fit them*. Similarly in Anscombe's original list example, the detective's list has a mind-to-world direction of fit because it is supposed to fit what the husband does independently in the world with the grocery shopping; and the list given the husband by the wife has a world-to-mind direction of fit because it is supposed to result in a world where the husband has bought what the wife has wanted him to buy.

Now some philosophers have argued that certain mental items (called "besires") can exhibit or exemplify both directions of fit at the same time. For example, it is sometimes said that explicitly evaluative beliefs can reflect the world at the same time that they express a wish or desire that the world change in certain ways that reflect *them*[5]. But in the light of our earlier discussion we don't need to refer to or bring in value judgments in order to find examples of mental items that have both directions of fit. Compassion as a feeling involves empathy with and receptivity toward the (actual or apparent) distress of another, and that shows compassion as having a mind-to-world direction of fit. But as a motive compassion shows or exemplifies a world-to-mind direction of fit, and since these two aspects of compassion are inseparable, we can see that compassion as a virtue and given instances of human compassion have both directions of fit (and can be called besires). Philosophers have realized that Anscombe's original list example is the source of the interesting distinction between a world-to-mind direction of fit and a mind-to-world direction of fit and also, though indirectly, of the less-well-accepted notion of a besire. But I hope what I have said about compassion (and by extension various other moral sentiments) gives us a new kind of putative example of besire and thereby helps that notion (further) establish its philosophical validity. In so doing, it would also further highlight the importance of Anscombe's basic idea of direction of fit and it would be doing so in the overall context of defending virtue-ethical sentimentalism and its connection with ideas gathered from China. But all of that just indicates further how important Anscombe's ideas about the mind are for our philosophical future.

Abstract

Elizabeth Anscombe is an Aristotelian, but her insights allow one to make a better case for moral sentimentalism. The sentimentalist tradition emphasizes both the empathic and the active sides of compassion, benevolence, and other such sentiments, but hasn't previously allowed us to see how these two aspects of the moral sentiments necessarily work together. However, Anscombe's idea that one cannot simply desire a saucer of mud allows the sentimentalist to argue that compassion, e.g., as a motive cannot exist all on

[5] For more on besires and on the notion of direction of fit, see the references to those concepts in various articles in the online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

its own but requires empathic feeling. It can also be argued that empathy doesn't merely lead to compassionate motivation but entails it. The two sides of compassion are necessarily tied together, and the paper ends by showing us how we might more deeply understand such a moral sentiment and others in terms of the traditional Chinese idea of the necessary complementarity of yin and yang.

Keywords: Anscombe; compassion; empathy; Hume; sentimentalism; yin/yang.

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Eudaimonistic versus Target Centred Virtue Ethics

Christine Swanton

1. *What is Eudaimonistic Virtue Ethics?*

This paper undertakes to elucidate some core characteristics of two forms of virtue ethics; the dominant form, eudaimonistic virtue ethics, and what I call target centred virtue ethics[1]. As part of the defence of target centredness, it briefly discusses possibly the most serious objection to eudaimonism, the self-centredness objection, and shows how target centred virtue ethics is not vulnerable to this objection.

Let us begin with the question: What is eudaimonistic virtue ethics? The dominant form of contemporary virtue ethics has been a form of eudaimonism, Neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics. The relative inability of other forms of virtue ethics to make traction is due to two features: virtue ethics has been virtually defined, explicitly or implicitly, in eudaimonistic, even Neo- Aristotelian terms, but even more seriously, there is imprecision not to mention confusion in the commitments of eudaimonism, and consequent expansion in what counts as eudaimonistic virtue ethics. This is the problem to be addressed in the present section.

In my *Virtue Ethics* following Hursthouse[2], I assumed a conception of eudaimonism which did justice to a distinctive feature of the ancient

[1] First developed by Christine Swanton in *A Virtue Ethical Account of Right Action*, in «Ethics», 112 (2001), pp. 32–52, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2003, and further developed in particularly *A Particularist but Codifiable Virtue Ethics*, in Mark Timmons (ed.), *Oxford Studies in Normative Ethics*, vol. 5, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2015, pp. 38-63.

[2] *On Virtue Ethics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1999.

Greek tradition, namely that in order to be a virtue a trait of character needed to characteristically benefit its possessor.

Eudaimonistic virtue ethics as I understood the concept in 2003 then is committed to the following thesis:

(1) It is a necessary condition of a trait being a virtue that it characteristically benefits its possessor.

This thesis can of course be refined in various ways depending on how one understands 'characteristically'. Crucially for my purposes according to Hursthouse a trait can be a virtue even if it does not benefit an agent because she has been unlucky[3]. A virtue just needs to be a 'reliable bet'[4] for flourishing. Putative counterexamples to (1) (such as those provided in my *Virtue Ethics*, pp. 80-81) relied on a certain conception of what counted as unlucky. Here I argued that virtuous lives may be lives dominated by virtues that are not reliable bets for flourishing: the life of a courageous freedom fighter; that of the charitable aid worker whose suffering is not mitigated by religious purpose, the virtuously creative and persevering artist whose work is unrecognized in his lifetime, and the persevering environmentalist who is ahead of his time in foreseeing environmental disaster but is not listened to. The assumption is that the lack of flourishing of these agents is not due to ill luck: one could not reasonably expect such admirable agents to flourish in worlds that are only to be expected, given the prevalence of vice, epistemic failings, scarcity and so forth. By contrast if one claims that these agents are unlucky, one is claiming that they are living in an unlucky world where virtues are as a result 'burdened'[5]. One has relegated to ill luck standard conditions, for example what Tessman calls 'systematic sources of adversity' (159). Virtues are burdened in the sense that exercising those particular virtues in particular social contexts requires sacrifice of for example 'physical or psychological health' (159).

In defending eudaimonism against my counterexamples Badwhar argues that:

(2) Virtues cannot have an inherent tendency to make people unhappy[6].

[3] *On Virtue Ethics*, cit., p. 218, *passim*.

[4] *Ivi*, p. 172.

[5] L. Tessman, *Burdened Virtues: Virtues for Liberatory Struggles*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2005.

[6] See for this requirement on virtue N. Badhwar, *Well-Being: Happiness in a Worthwhile Life*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014.

She claims that my counterexamples to (1) are not genuine counterexamples since it is false that the unhappiness of the virtuous agents of my examples 'is due to their virtue and not to bad luck'[7], as I supposedly argue. But I do not argue that their unhappiness is due to the *inherent* qualities of the virtues manifested (whatever these may be and this is not clear) but to the fact that their virtue is exercised in a world with characteristic problematic features. Their unhappiness on my view is not due either to their virtue or to ill luck: rather it is due to the relation between their virtue and problematic all too characteristic features of the world in which they find themselves – bad people, lack of resources and so on. Virtue need not characteristically benefit its possessor.

In reply it could be argued that in the face of my counterexamples the truth of (1) is preserved via the truth of (2) since it is still true that in the worlds I describe, (call them W1-Wn), the virtues of the unhappy people do not have an *inherent* tendency to make them unhappy in those worlds. But how does this claim support thesis (1) against my counterexamples? To answer this question we need to see what is claimed by Thesis (2). What is it to say that a virtue cannot have an inherent tendency to make one unhappy? One option is:

(2*) Virtues cannot have a tendency to make people unhappy in any world W in which those virtues are manifested and exercised; if it has that tendency in W it is not a virtue in W.

What counts as a virtue according to (2*) is indexed to the particular world in which the virtue is possessed. What counts as a virtue in this world (for example a disposition to be trusting) may not be a virtue in what Vayrynen calls a 'Nasty World'[8], for example a Nasty World (NW) where everyone is hopelessly untrustworthy, life is brutish and short, and so on. In that case being trusting could not be a virtue in NW. But (2*) does not help Badwhar's defence of (1) against my counterexamples since (W1-Wn) are not versions of NW. They are not Nasty Worlds. We cannot say that my counterexamples are not genuine counterexamples on the grounds that a putative virtue in W1 say (e.g. the perseverance of the environmentalist) is not after all a virtue in W1.

More probably, (2) should be read as

[7] *Ivi*, p. 153.

[8] P. Vayrynen, *Particularism and Default Reasons*, in «Ethical Theory and Moral Practice», 7 (2004), pp. 53-79.

(2**) Virtues cannot have a tendency to make one unhappy in normal worlds.

Normal worlds are worlds like W1-Wn, worlds which are not nasty but which are nonetheless far from utopian. In such worlds we are inclined to call traits such as justice, perseverance, kindness, charity, having a tendency to trust, (instead of being completely untrusting) virtues. For example Hume's circumstances of justice presuppose worlds in which there is scarcity and want of extensive generosity: without such worlds there would be no need of the personal virtue of justice, the acquisition of which presupposes a successful training in regarding violating the rules of justice as base and their maintenance as honourable. Similarly we would have no need of the virtue of intellectual perseverance if there were no obstacles to the pursuit of and dissemination of truth. Such non utopian worlds may be characterized by e.g. quite considerable vice, quite widespread lack of appreciation of many valuable properties, scarcity of resources, lack of cooperation (call these features [F1…Fn]).

But (2**) does not help Badwhar's defence of eudaimonism against my counterexamples either. For my point is this: Though I am happy to agree that it is not virtue alone that is making one unhappy in normal worlds it is the characteristic features of those worlds which may cause the exercise of virtue to make one unhappy. In that case (1) is shown to be false since it is not true that it is a necessary condition of being a virtue that it characteristically benefit its possessor. Being negatively affected by (F1…Fn) is not a matter of ill luck which by definition is uncharacteristic. Rather some or all of (F1…Fn) are endemic features of W1- Wn. Partly because of (some or all of) F1…Fn an agent may characteristically be rendered unhappy while exercising a virtue in W, but that is not to say that she is rendered unhappy simply by her virtue, or simply by ill luck.

Turn now to other possible understandings of the eudaimonist thesis.

(3) What *makes* a trait of character a virtue is that it benefits its possessor at least characteristically.

This thesis is particularly hard to defend if one thinks as do standard eudaimonists that the point or rationale of at least most virtues is not agent benefit, but for example the protection and sustainability of the environment, the welfare of others, maintenance of rules that benefit society as a whole and so on. However on the assumption that the rationale or point of a virtue is expressed by (3), (3) has a decided advantage over (1), namely that the necessary conditions of being a virtue do not come apart from its

rationale or point. There is no disconnect between what a virtue is targeted at and its necessary conditions. However this advantage of (3) comes at a large cost. Agent benefit has to be moralized to the point where agent benefit, understood as *eudaimonia*, cannot come apart from virtue, even in the presence of ill luck[9]. Some features which make a trait of character a virtue (that it benefits its possessor) and other features which make a trait of character a virtue (that it benefits others, protects the environment and so on) turn out to be the same thing; or rather, benefiting others and so forth turn out at an ultimate level to characteristically benefit the agent after all. However, if agent benefit is what *makes* any trait a virtue how can the *target* of a virtue be other regarding?

In the face of this apparent incoherence eudaimonists are thrown back to the weaker thesis (1). But now the disconnect between necessary conditions of virtue and what *makes* traits virtues creates another cluster of problems, much canvased in the literature. These are the problems of indirection and egoism at an ultimate level. If the *point* of a virtue such as benevolence is other regarding, how can it be that in order to be a virtue at all benevolence must somehow characteristically benefit the benevolent agent? To these problems I shall return.

Whether or not various weakenings and expansionist meanings of 'eudaimonism' have been due to the intransigent nature of problems thrown up by (1) to (3) it is undoubtedly true that eudaimonism has been associated with a number of weaker theses which deniers of (1) and (3) could easily accept. Let us now briefly consider a number of such weaker versions.

First we can reject (1) while still accepting the following Constraint on Virtue:

(4) What counts as a virtue is constrained by an adequate conception of human development and flourishing[10].

The point of (4) is to ensure that virtue is understood as a properly *human* excellence relative to human modes of cognition, characteristic human needs and modes of development. (4) is a potent thesis in the face of current developments in idealized versions of virtue ethics which toss aside its core strength: its strong connection between ethics and a properly human form of virtue answerable to numerous important developments in

[9] See further B. Hooker, *Does Moral Virtue Constitute a Benefit to the Agent?*, in R. Crisp (ed.), *How Should One Live: Essays on the Virtues* Clarendon Press, Oxford 1996, pp. 141-155.

[10] C. Swanton, *Virtue Ethics*, cit., p. 15.

psychology, such as attachment theory, developmental psychology and studies of pathological altruism. (4) neither entails that all virtue is targeted at the flourishing of the agent nor that it is a necessary condition of being a virtue that it characteristically benefit its possessor.

A fifth thesis is this:

(5) Agents need virtue to flourish.

Thesis (5) is rather routinely confused with thesis (1). (5) is a completely different thesis from (1)[11]. A person may need virtue to flourish but this does not imply that unless a trait contributes to or is partially constitutive of the flourishing of the agent it is not a virtue. Consider a virtue whose point is to contribute to the well-being of others such as benevolence. Let us assume that a flourishing person needs to be benevolent. Let us also assume that people exercise the virtue; many are benefited, but the benevolent people do not flourish for reasons that cannot be laid at the door of ill luck, but for reasons that are to do with the characteristic conditions in which the virtue is exercised. For example there is corruption, the beneficiaries are very ungrateful, there is considerable scarcity, and the benevolent agents are exhausted fighting these obstacles in order to do some good. But let us say that giving up on benevolence would make these agents very unhappy. We would not say that benevolence ceases to be a virtue because its possessors are not flourishing in a world containing characteristic problematic features such as (F1-Fn); rather benevolence remains a virtue because its characteristic point (benefiting others) is still able to be served by benevolent agents in the (unhospitable) conditions in which they find themselves.

Thesis (5) is of course highly imprecise and its plausibility depends on what is the scope of 'virtue' in the thesis. A thorough going Aristotelian who believes in a strong version of the Unity of the Virtues thesis will be happy to accept that by 'virtue' should be understood 'all virtues' but for those who find the Unity doctrine implausible in our actual imperfect world weaker versions of (5) need to be canvassed. One may believe that a person needs the core virtues to flourish, most virtues, most core virtues, specified virtues, and so on.

Non- eudaimonists such as myself need not sever all links between virtue and flourishing: after all the idea that one needs some virtue to flourish is plausible and cogently argued by many including Hursthouse,

[11] *Ivi*, p. 77.

Russell[12], Badwhar[13], LeBar[14]. Thesis (1) specifies a necessary condition on virtue, while Thesis (5) specifies a necessary condition on flourishing.

Weaker versions of eudaimonism also specify connections between features and virtue that are weaker and arguably more plausible than that specified by (1) and (4). For example consider:

(6) To be a virtue, a virtue must be conducive to human flourishing[15].

Or consider:

(7) Virtues are those qualities that further the flourishing of life as whole[16].

These further weakenings of the eudaimonist position are endemic, but I do not have space to discuss them here.

2. *Indirection and Target Centred Virtue Ethics*

If we hold a view whose consequences are that what makes a trait a virtue and/or its necessary conditions (such as agent flourishing, human flourishing, life flourishing) are separable from its targets or aims (such as appreciating natural values or items for their own sake) then we become vulnerable to a problem which has plagued eudaimonistic virtue ethics, that of indirection. In the case of thesis (1) we have the further problem of alleged self centredness or egoism, in the case of thesis (6) human centredness and anthropocentrism, and in the case of thesis (7) life centredness. Let us briefly explain the basic problem as it applies to traditional eudaimonism. According to David Solomon's[17] "deeper level" version of the objection the *reason* for the alleged self centredness of the agent's moral attention and motivation lies in the logic of (eudaimonist) virtue ethics' conception of the final end of the agent. Her ultimate motivation is having virtue: it is not crudely egoistic

[12] D.C. Russell, *Happiness For Humans*, Oxford University Press, New York 2012.

[13] *Ibidem*.

[14] M. LeBar, *The Value of Living Well*, Oxford University Press, New York 2013.

[15] For example: 'the virtues in the main are those qualities that either constitute or contribute to human flourishing' (P. Cafaro, *Environmental Virtue Ethics*, in L. Besser-Jones, M. Slote (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, Routledge, New York 2015, pp. 424-444, p. 437.

[16] Cafaro, *op. cit.*, p. 432.

[17] D. Solomon, *Internal Objections to Virtue Ethics*, in D. Statman (ed.), *Virtue Ethics: A Critical Reader*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 1997, p. 172.

but it is self centred. For me as a virtuous agent "having… virtue is the most important thing for me; practically I must subordinate everything else to this"[18]. Call this 'personal virtue motivation'. This "self-centred" feature, claims Solomon, is "ineliminable within virtue ethics"[19].

In order to rebut the self-centredness objection as articulated by Solomon we show that even if his objection applies to eudaimonist virtue ethics it need not apply to virtue ethics in general. Virtue ethics as such need not subscribe to the view that having virtue is the most important thing for a virtuous agent. On the contrary if the point of a virtue is to meet its targets (which is the central claim of target centred virtue ethics to be explicated presently) then what is most important to a virtuous agent is not to possess virtue herself but to meet the targets of virtue. That indeed is what it is to live well. Certainly such an agent values possessing virtue above all other desirable and meritorious traits such as being a good athlete, but it does not follow that striving for personal virtue trumps realizing the ends of virtue (such as conserving nature, looking after her children and so forth). This assumption of personal virtue motivation may be 'ineliminable' within *eudaimonistic* virtue ethics, but it is eliminable within a target centred virtue ethics as I now show.

What is target centred virtue ethics? Its two most central claims are:

(1) The features which *make* traits of character virtues are determined by their targets, aims, or point, as opposed to the flourishing of the possessor of the virtues (though of course that may be the target of some virtues). No one target is a necessary condition of all virtues such as the flourishing of the agent or broad social good. Virtues are targeted at all kinds of things for example environmental good, stability of (legitimately acquired) property, the good of others whether strangers one's children and so on, preservation and appreciation of valued cultural and artistic items.
(2) Acts are evaluated (as right) in terms of their hitting the targets of virtues in action. Hitting the targets of (relevant) virtues in action is what makes actions right.

We have seen how (1) resolves the problem of egoism and indirection, so to further explicate target centred virtue ethics the final section focuses on the second of these features.

[18] *Ibid.*
[19] *Ibid.*

3. *Target Centredness and Rightness*

What counts as hitting the targets of the virtues in action? At the highest level of abstraction, hitting the targets of the virtues is what Aristotle calls hitting the 'mean' the targets of virtue: 'virtue aims to hit the mean'[20]. Virtue itself as an excellence of character is a mean *condition* (as a character trait), and persons of virtue have practical wisdom and fine motivation, including the *aim* of hitting the mean. On Aristotle's account the mean is multi-dimensional. To fully meet the target of a virtue V and thereby the mean in relation to V involves acting (in respect of V) in the right circumstance, in the right manner, at the right time, to the right extent, for the right reasons, with respect to the right people, deploying the right instruments[21].

I have claimed that the account of rightness understood in terms of hitting the mean of the virtues is a schematic framework only. What needs to be done in order to gain a clearer idea in concrete cases of what counts as hitting the targets of the virtues? First of all how demanding is this requirement if an action is to be deemed right? Given that the mean is multi-dimensional there could be two broad views about what is required for an action to be right on the target centred view. On one interpretation, Aristotle favours the highly demanding view: there is only one right action (or more only if there is a tie) namely the one that optimally hits the mean on all dimensions. This view is suggested by a familiar passage:

> Again, failure is possible in many ways (for evil, as the Pythagoreans represented it, is a form of the Unlimited, and good of the Limited), but success is only one. That is why the one is easy and the other difficult; it is easy to miss the target and difficult to hit it. Here, then, is another reason why excess and deficiency fall under evil, and the mean state under good;
>
> For men are bad in countless ways, but good only in one[22].

This passage appears to claim that there are many ways to be in error and only one way to be correct, which suggests the demanding interpretation of rightness. However the passage describes what it is to be right at a high level of abstraction: there is only one way to be right, hitting the

[20] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. J.A.K. Thomson, revised H. Tredennick, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1976, 1106b16-24.

[21] *Ivi*, e.g. 1106b 18-23.

[22] *Ivi*, 1106b 29-33.

mean, but there are several ways of missing the mean, and thereby being wrong. Once however we realize that the mean is multidimensional we can appreciate the importance of context in weighing success on various dimensions of the mean. Hitting the target may be a matter of actions being within an acceptable range to be right[23]. A permissible but not highly desirable act can be judged right (in the sense of "all right") but is to be distinguished from an act which is also right but highly admirable. The latter hits the targets of the relevant virtues in a way that metaphorically speaking is closer to the bullseye than a less stellar performance. On many views on supererogation, an action mat hit the bullseye – optimal in that sense – but may not necessarily be required. Less than optimal actions may even be meritorious, better than "all right". In short, a non-required suboptimal performance may be right, even meritorious. This variation in our conception of the rightness of actions is captured in virtue language: patient, generous, courageous actions can be meritorious without being optimal; and at the lower end of the scale we might even say that a generous enough action can be "all right", but it cannot be stingy in which case it would be prohibited.

Second, assuming that actions which do not optimally hit the mean on all dimensions may be right – at least permissible – how do we determine rightness? In particular which dimensions of the mean are salient in that determination? Which dimensions of the mean are salient depends on context and the nature of the virtue – indeed some dimensions of the mean may in certain contexts be deemed irrelevant. Both these features are illustrated in the following example owed to Das:

> A dives into a swimming pool to save a child, but is motivated exclusively by a desire to impress the mother as a means to sleeping with her[24].

On the target centred account of rightness, the act clearly misses the target of a virtue of benevolence on one dimension of the mean (acting from reasons of benevolence as a virtue) but hits the target of that virtue on other dimensions that are more important in this context. The act of diving and saving is an act performed at the right time (delay may have been fatal)

[23] This is an interpretation of the quoted text favoured by P. Losin, *Aristotle's Doctrine of the Mean*, in «History of Philosophy Quarterly», 4: 3 (1987), pp. 329-342. Cited in H. Curzer, *Aristotle and the Virtues*, Oxford University Press Oxford 2012, p. 141.

[24] L. van Zyl, *Agent-based Virtue Ethics and the Problem of Action Guidance*, in «Journal of Moral Philosophy», 6 (2009), pp. 50-69, p. 50, citing R. Das, *Virtue Ethics and Right Action*, in «Australasian Journal of Philosophy», 81 (2003), pp. 330-334.

with respect to the right person (the child in danger of drowning) in the right manner (with alacrity and competently). It is possible on target centred views to have a very demanding view of rightness according to which the rescuer acts wrongly. But this is counterintuitive on common sense views. Nonetheless, there is no general agreement as to how success in relation to various dimensions of the mean bear on rightness. Some such as W.D. Ross claim a distinction between the right and the good arguing that rightness does not depend on quality of motive, while others disagree.

Abstract

There is much debate about what virtue ethics is as a type of contemporary moral theory. This question is addressed by distinguishing eudaimonistic virtue ethics (in contemporary forms) in terms of which virtue ethics as such is often defined, from Target Centred Virtue Ethics. This form comprises two main theses: a target centred account of what makes a trait of character a virtue and a target centred account of right action. Target centred virtue ethics is given a partial defence in this paper. Part of this defence involves getting clear on what are the presuppositions of contemporary eudaimonistic virtue ethics, for these may be more or less controversial. Another part discusses the problems of indirection and egoism faced by eudaimonism, and the target centred virtue ethical response.

Keywords: Eudaimonistic Virtue Ethics; Virtues; flourish; eudaimonism; Target Centred Virtue Ethics.

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Exemplarist Moral Theory

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There are people we encounter in history or fiction or in our personal lives whom we find supremely admirable, and who show us the upper reaches of human moral capacity. These people are what I mean by exemplars. They not only reveal what an admirable person is like, but they inspire us to become better persons. Recently, I have been working on a moral theory I call "Exemplarist Moral Theory," or just "Exemplarism," which is a comprehensive ethical theory based on direct reference to exemplars, people we find most admirable. We identify the admirable through our emotion of admiration. Admiration is developed, refined, and altered through experience, including the experience of others whom we trust, and the cumulative experience of admiration in past ages and in past cultures is transmitted to us through stories of exemplars. The set of exemplars forms the basis for a theoretical map in which I define "virtue," "good motive," good life," "duty," and other moral terms by referring directly to exemplars. An advantage of this theory is that it is practically useful as well as theoretically simple and comprehensive. It can be used in moral education, and the body of the theory incorporates empirical studies and narratives, so it does not have the limitations of a wholly a priori project.

I am using the term "direct reference" in the sense that became famous in the 1970s, particularly in the form in which it was used by Saul Kripke and Hilary Putnam to define natural kind terms, or terms for naturally occurring substances or species, like "water," "gold," and "tiger." Briefly, "water" is defined as "stuff like *that*," "tiger" is defined as "creatures like *that*," and so on, where in each case the indexical "that" is used to point to real objects. Direct reference revolutionized semantics because it meant that we succeed in thinking about and talking about objects in the natural

world without needing a descriptive meaning in our heads. People could think about water, ask questions about water, and make assertions about water long before they knew that what makes water *water* is that it is H2O. So the meaning of "water" cannot be "H2O." But the meaning of "water" also cannot be a description that people carry around in their heads like "colorless, odorless liquid that flows in the streams and falls from the sky." We know that because we realize upon reflection that something other than the substance water could have fallen from the sky, could have been in the oceans and streams, could have been the liquid we drink, and so on.

The theory was also revolutionary because of the way it linked empirical science with semantics, and it led to a great deal of work on the social construction of language. The upshot was that we are not connected to the outside world through a mental description. We are (or can be) connected to it directly. What we are talking about when we say "tiger" or "water" or "gold" is determined by observation of something we can pick out through ostension. A meaning is not a description in the head. In fact, a meaning is not a description at all.

This means that the theory of direct reference was *semantically externalist:* the contents of our thoughts and speech when we talk about water, gold, cats, etc. are determined outside of our heads. One way it was externalist is that it maintained that the contents of our thoughts and speech are determined, in part, by the way the world is – what gold and tigers are actually like in a deep way. We find out what makes gold gold and what makes a tiger a tiger by empirical observation. We find out by observation that water is H2O, that gold is the element with atomic number 79, that tigers are animals with a certain biological structure. Kripke argued that there are also superficial, easily observable features of natural kinds that permit users to *fix the reference* of a term, but the experts tell us what the stuff whose reference has been fixed is like in its deep structure, the structure that makes it what it is. It is *because* water is H2O that it has the properties ordinary people use to identify water. It is *because* gold has a certain atomic structure that it has the properties we ordinarily use to identify a piece of gold. The deep physical structure explains the superficial features.The theory was semantically externalist in another way. What we think about and talk about when we use words like "gold" and "tiger" is partly determined by a social network that connects ordinary speakers with the things out there in the world. Putnam proposed a principle he called the Division of Linguistic Labor according to which competent users of a term have different functions in the use of the term. In order to

have properly acquired a term, ordinary people must grasp what Putnam called a "stereotype" of the kind in order to be connected to the network of users of the term for that kind. So to be properly connected to the network of users of the word "gold," people must grasp a description of gold that is vague, but usually roughly accurate. The stereotype of "gold" may be something like "golden-colored metal made into jewelry." The stereotype of "water" might be the description I gave above, probably expanded a bit: "clear, tasteless liquid that flows in the streams and falls from the sky, and which we habitually drink to stay alive." Stereotypes of less common kinds are permissibly shorter and even vaguer. For instance, the stereotype of titanium may not include anything more than being a lightweight metal that the experts refer to by that name. The stereotype is a description, but it does not give necessary and sufficient conditions for being a member of the kind and it is not the meaning of the term. We defer to experts who tell us what the precise conditions are for being a member of the kind, and so the experts have an important semantical function. We ordinary users of natural kind terms intend to refer to whatever the experts are referring to. The experts have the linguistic job of determining the extension of the terms in the domain of their expertise and of determining what the deep properties are that make something a member of the kind. The theory therefore had the attractive feature of smoothly connecting semantics with science. When Putnam extended the theory to many more terms than natural kind terms, it revolutionized the way many philosophers think of the connection between the mind and reality.

There is one other fascinating feature of the Kripke version of the theory of direct reference that I would like to mention for its possible use for moral terms. Kripke argued that there are necessary a posteriori truths. "Water is H2O" is necessary in a strong sense of necessity because it is not possible for anything to be water and not be H2O, and it is not possible for anything to be H2O and not be water. But this truth is discovered empirically, and it certainly was not always known. It is not an analytic truth because someone can understand the word "water" without understanding that it is H2O, yet it is not a mere convention that we do not treat anything as water unless it is H2O. Instead, we think that that is the way the world is. We did not decide to make it that way.

Exemplarism is a theory in which I have borrowed components of direct reference for moral terms. The basic idea is that exemplars are persons *like that*, and we point directly to exemplars of goodness like Confucius, Socrates, Jesus, Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Holocaust rescuers, Jean

Vanier, or many ordinary people who are known only to a small circle of acquaintances. We find out what makes them admirable by observation, just as we find out what makes water the substance that it is by observation. The observation of admirable persons is obviously a much more complex process than the observation of water since the psychological structure of an admirable person is much more complex than the physical structure of water, and individual exemplars differ from each other much more than individual samples of water. Also, we cannot simply put admirable persons under a microscope (although neuroimaging of exemplars is currently being done). Rather, we observe them through narratives and more recently, through controlled empirical studies. So for exemplarism the place of science in the theory of direct reference is held by narratives as well as ordinary observations and controlled studies. The deep structure of an exemplar is a psychological structure, so psychological structure holds the place of molecular or biological structure in the theory of natural kinds. We find out the motivational structure of exemplars by observation, and that permits us to define basic moral terms like "good trait of character," "good life," "good motive," "right act," and so on by features of exemplars or features of their judgments. We do not need a descriptive meaning for terms like "good person," "good life," "good trait of character," "right act," and the other moral terms, any more than we need a descriptive meaning for natural kind terms.

Direct reference is semantically externalist. I mentioned above that one of its attractive features is that it smoothly connects semantics with science. For natural kinds, the deep physical structure of water or gold, discovered by empirical science, is *what we mean to be referring to* when we say "water" or "gold," and it explains the superficial properties that we use to fix the reference. So, being H20 is both what we mean to be referring to when we say "water," and it explains why water is the colorless, odorless liquid that we drink. Being the element with atomic number 79 is both what we mean to be referring to when we say "gold," and it explains why gold is the golden- colored, malleable metal used to make jewelry.

Similarly, my theory is committed to moral semantic externalism. When we say "good person," the deep psychological structure is what we mean to be referring to when we say "good person," and that structure explains the easily observable behavioral properties that we use to fix the reference of "good person." The easily observable features of a good person are usually overt acts and patterns of acts that we admire upon reflection. We may call them acts of bravery, compassion, generosity, justice, and so on, but the

virtue terms "bravery," "compassion, "generosity," and so on arise from a social history of observation of acts that we collectively admire, with narratives that attempt to identify the deeper psychological features of those persons, so the recognition of admirable acts does not depend upon a prior account of what makes someone admirable. Instead, we can admire an act in advance of knowing what it is we admire about it, and it can take careful observation to uncover the deeper psychological structure of an admirable person. Exemplarism is therefore semantically externalist in the first way I have identified because what we mean when we say "good person" or "admirable person" depends in part on what admirable persons are actually like in their psychology.

Exemplarism is also semantically externalist in the second way I identified above. I mentioned Putnam's Principle of the Division of Linguistic Labor according to which semantic success depends upon being properly connected to a social linguistic network that distinguishes the role of expert in identifying the members of the extension of a term from the role of the ordinary user of the term. Ordinary users are expected to grasp a "stereotype" of the kind in question, but they defer to the experts to identify the term's extension and to give an account of what it takes to be a member of the kind. Similarly, I have proposed a principle I call the Division of Moral Linguistic Labor for moral terms. Ordinary people need to grasp a stereotype of good persons in order to be properly connected to the linguistic network with respect to the term "good person," but they do not need to know what makes a good person good (an admirable person admirable), nor do they need to be able to correctly identify every good person. The stereotype no doubt includes some general descriptions, and is often spread through a linguistic community via narratives. So, for instance, if you ask a person what compassion is, she might give you the story of the Good Samaritan. A difference between Putnam's Division of Linguistic Labor and my Division of Moral Linguistic Labor is that Putnam thinks that ordinary people defer to the scientific experts, and ordinary people succeed in referring to the right thing when they say "elm tree" or "titanium" or "gold" because the experts can reliably pick out elm trees and titanium and gold. In contrast, most people either think they are moral experts, or they think that nobody is an expert. I propose that there is still a division of labor for moral terms, but there are more functions than just ordinary speakers and experts. There are at least four distinct groups which have an important linguistic function in connecting all speakers of moral terms to their extensions. Story-tellers have the function of shaping the stereotypes

of good persons and their virtues and spreading them widely. Philosophers contribute their powers of abstract reasoning to the community, which permits them to analyze stereotypes and to reveal problems of incoherence in them, and to produce arguments explaining and justifying what virtuous persons do, helping to make the network with respect to moral terms clearer. Empirical scientists have the role of finding out how widespread the extension of a virtue term is, how changeable the extension is (whether virtuous persons tend to remain virtuous), and whether there are any connections between one virtue term and another. I agree that there are few if any moral experts recognized by most people in a society, but faith communities have acknowledged authorities, such as the Pope and Bishops of the Catholic Church, and many local religious communities acknowledge their pastor or leader as having a degree of moral authority the exercise of which is a part of that person's function in the community. These different groups of people have a linguistic function in my view because they shape and gradually change the stereotype of a moral term, aid the community in identifying the members of the extension of a term, and can sometimes cause a term to go out of use.

I have said that moral termsdo not have a descriptive meaning, but can be defined by direct reference to exemplars of goodness whom we identify through the emotion of admiration. A list of the main moral terms defined in this way is as follows:

(1) A *virtue* is a trait we admire in an exemplar. It is a trait that makes a person like that admirable in a certain respect.
(2) A *good motive* is a motive we admire in an exemplar. It is a motive of a person like that.
(3) A *good end* is a state of affairs that exemplars aim to bring about. It is the state of affairs at which persons like that aim.
(4) A *virtuous act* is an admirable act, an act we admire in a person like that.
(5) An *admirable life* is a life lived by an exemplar.
(6) A *desirable life* (a life of flourishing) is a life desired by an exemplar.
(7) A *right act* for person A in some set of circumstances C is what the admirable (practically wise) person would take to be most favored by the balance of reasons for A in C.
(8) A *duty* is what persons like that demand of themselves and others.
(9) A *wrong act* is what persons like that demand not be done. It is intolerable.

As I have said, these definitions are not intended to give the content of a series of concepts, but notice also that they are not intended to reveal the "deep" nature of virtue, right action, or a good life. They do not tell us what a virtue, a right act, or a good life *is*, but they give us directions for finding out. They are like defining "water" as "stuff like that," leaving the determination of the deep nature of water for investigation. The purpose of the definition is to identify the reference of the term to make investigation of it possible.

There are different linguistic expectations for the deontic terms like "wrong act" and "duty" and the value terms like "virtue," "good act," "good motive," "good end," and "good life," and the division of linguistic labor differs for the two sets of terms. We have a social obligation to know the members of the extension of the terms "wrong act" and "duty," and the linguistic community is much more demanding of competent users of those terms than of the value terms. The terms "wrong" and "duty" exist because no civil society can survive without agreement about a range of behavior that is critical to the basic functioning of the society. In particular, there are certain acts that we cannot tolerate, and it is crucial that we agree about what those acts are. A speaker who fails to recognize many wrong acts is deemed linguistically incompetent in the use of the word "wrong," and may be called a sociopath. In theoretical ethics, moral terms are associated with concepts that are imbedded in complex and subtle theories, but it is not necessary that individuals have the same *concept* of wrong or duty. All that is necessary is that they agree that acts *like that* should not be done. It does not matter why they think that those acts should not be done. A well-functioning society cannot tolerate theft, but if you ask people why theft is wrong, it does not matter whether they give different answers or no answer. Furthermore, it does not matter whether their behavior is virtuously motivated as long as they refrain from stealing. That means that the stereotype of these terms is exceedingly thin, and the function of the linguistic network with respect to those terms is to make everyone in the community know all of the members of the extension of the terms. Doing one's duty and avoiding wrongful acts does not go very far in giving a person a good life, but it makes society functional. In contrast, the value terms have an intricate connection to the linguistic network and each has a rich and subtle stereotype. The degree of grasp of these terms varies from individual to individual, and the ability of individuals to acquire good motives, good ends, and the virtues depends upon their place in the social network and the individual characteristics of the admirable

persons of their acquaintance. We want as many people as possible in our society to grasp the value terms because emulating the acts and persons in the extension of these terms is the best way for people to lead a life that is both desirable and admirable. But since the deontic terms are critical to avoid social collapse, they tend to get the most attention.

Exemplars help us to acquire higher moral aspirations. I have examined three basic categories of exemplars: the hero, the saint, and the sage. There are many stories about exemplars in these categories, but since some of them are dominant at certain stages of history or in certain cultures, I think we are in danger of losing some of these categories of exemplars in our linguistic networks. Fortunately, there is recent empirical research on all of them. I know of research on Holocaust rescuers, whom I interpret as modern heroes. There is also research on many saintly persons, including people like L'Arche caregivers, who sometimes devote many years of their lives to living in a community with persons who are mentally and sometimes physically disabled. There are also recent empirical studies on wisdom, although only a little of it focuses on particular wise persons, the approach I advocate. However, there is a multitude of narratives on the great wise persons of the past, such as Jesus, the Buddha, and Confucius, as well as some contemporary moral leaders like Chief Plenty Coups, the last great chief of the Crow Nation, who is described as an exemplar of Aristotelian virtue in Jonathan Lear's recent book, *Radical Hope*. One of the important things we learn from exemplars is the variety of good lives. Since we are all different in our talents, personalities, and social situation, we need to spread throughout our communities narratives of many different kinds of exemplars who not only teach us what it means to be moral, but inspire us to emulate them ourselves.

One of the advantages of exemplarism is its connection to a natural method of moral learning through emulation. Much of what we learn is by imitation – how to speak our native language, how to play games and sports, how to cook, how to dance, how to do philosophy. Some imitation is automatic and even subconscious, as when a student picks up a teacher's mannerism, but some of it is conscious and we have some control over it. Emulation is a form of imitation in which the emulated person is perceived as a model in some domain – a model cook, dancer, philosopher. The emulated person might be like James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), a model of the daring teenager. Unfortunately, some teens imitated the game of racing their cars toward the edge of steep cliffs, and some were killed, precipitating classic work on imitation by Albert Bandura and others. Re-

cently, there have been empirical studies of individuals emulating a person rather than an act – someone admired as a whole person rather than a domain-specific role model[1]. What I hope to see is more research on the acquisition of motives and reasons from other people. I have proposed that we can acquire motivating emotions by emulation of admirable people, and these motives can also justify behavior, but we cannot acquire reasons that are propositional beliefs by emulation. We can acquire beliefs from other persons, but by a different process than emulation.

I intend my exemplarist virtue theory to be a philosophical framework for studies in many fields. It has a simple theoretical structure that is philosophically comprehensive. It is designed in a way that gives a place for empirical work and narratives in the structure of the theory. It permits different versions for different communities, including faith communities, but it can also facilitate cross-cultural discourse through investigation of the overlapping sets of admirable persons in different cultures. It is constructed with the purpose of inserting the motive to be moral into the theoretical structure. This is a significant advantage because so often we hear complaints that moral philosophy does nothing to make people moral. I believe that admiration is one of the most significant of the human emotions. The cognitive side of the emotion has the potential to generate a conceptual framework. The affective side of the emotion moves us to emulate the admirable and become better persons. Exemplarism broadens the reach of moral philosophy by creating a structure that encompasses many aspects of our moral practices besides the theoretical. I believe that our societies are morally healthier when moral philosophers integrate their work with the work of scholars in other fields and with the narratives that shape the culture. This theory is my contribution to that effort.

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[1] See, for example, some of the projects funded through the Moral Beacons project, directed by William Fleeson at Wake Forest University, http:// www.moralbeacons.org. The initiative is funded by a grant from the Templeton Religion Trust.

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Abstract

This paper summarizes my new moral theory, which is based on direct reference to exemplars of goodness, identified through the emotion of admiration. Since a motivating emotion is at the root of the theory, it is intended to serve both the theoretical purpose of mapping the main moral terms by reference to features of exemplars, and the practical purpose of making us want to act morally and showing us how to do so through emulation of exemplars. The theory links the a priori side of ethics with empirical work in psychology and neuroscience, and it gives narratives a key function in the theory. Since it tracks a natural process of moral development in the emulation of exemplars, it also connects with moral education.

Keywords: moral theory; goodness; admiration; ethics; moral education.

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II.
Temi e discussioni

T

Why Wisdom needs Fortitude (and viceversa)

Angelo Campodonico

1. *The Relationship between Fortitude and Practical Wisdom*

In our European and Western societies fortitude is not popular: to be frank, even as a virtue, it is often misunderstood. Thus, further research needs to be done to clarify its meaning, and its place among the other virtues as well as its relationship with practical wisdom (*phronēsis, prudentia*). On the one hand, without fortitude prudence (*prudentia*) as practical wisdom loses its original meaning. On the other, without the regulative role of practical wisdom, fortitude turns into obsessive behaviour, e.g., into mere grit[1]. We can easily find both risks in our contemporary culture. In this paper, I will highlight the mutual dependence of the virtues of fortitude and practical wisdom, grounding my argument primarily on the work of Thomas Aquinas and on his conception of the cardinal virtues.

First of all, let me give a definition of fortitude[2]. According to Aquinas, who distances himself on this point from a strictly Aristotelian perspective, following rather a Platonic, Stoic and patristic path, fortitude is one of

[1] This might be the risk of some contemporary psychological approaches, particularly those of positive psychology. For A. Duckworth grit is a positive, non-cognitive trait based on an individual's passion for a particular long-term goal or end state, coupled with a powerful motivation to achieve their respective objective. Cf. A. Duckworth, *Grit. The Power of Passion and Perseverance*, Scribner, New York 2016. In fact, fortitude is not mere grit or resilience, but it has moral traits. On the topics of positive psychology from a philosophical point of view see K. Kristiansson, *Virtues and vices in positive psychology. A philosophical critique*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2013, in particular p. 208.

[2] On the topic of fortitude both in Aquinas and in Chinese culture see L.H. Yearley, *Mencius and Aquinas. Theories of Virtue and Conception of Courage*, State University of New York Press, Albany 1990.

the four cardinal virtues, together with prudence, temperance, and justice. Thus, like all the four cardinal virtues, it can be conceived both as a specific and as a general virtue. It is not simply equivalent to courage in battle (*andreia*), as it was above all in Aristotle, but, as a general virtue, it marks pervasively all virtuous actions. The four virtues, Aquinas says, «can be understood in accord with their *common* formal notions»:

> And on this score, they are called "principal" in the sense that they are general with respect to all the virtues – so that, namely, (a) every virtue that contributes to the good in reason's consideration is called prudence, and (b) every virtue that contributes to what is due and upright in operations is called justice, and (c) every virtue that restrains and represses the passions is called temperance (temperantia), and (d) every virtue that contributes to the mind's firmness in the face of any given passion is called fortitude[3].

The cardinal virtues, broadly understood, are pervasive because all circumstances require us to exercise all of them. If we are in any situation that calls for any of the virtues, we have to exercise the formal principle of all the different cardinal virtues[4]. Such virtues, in turn, are united and form a system because they all require prudence (the correct conception of the end). In sum, the four cardinal virtues express the «perfect character of virtue, which requires correctness of desire»[5]. To act virtuously we must act on the cardinal virtues, no matter which special virtue we exercise in a particular action.

This premise regarding the twofold meaning of the cardinal virtues should allow us understanding also the meaning of fortitude as a specific virtue, i.e., fortitude as bravery, which will be the main focus of my paper. Although it has primarily to do with confronting the danger of death in battle, fortitude makes the brave person firm and constant in other situations as well[6]. It allows agents to overcome obstacles, by bearing up and

[3] Thomas Aquinas, ST. I-II, q. 61, a. 3.

[4] Cf. ST. II-II q. 123 a. 11; q. 141 a. 7. See T. Irwin, *Do Virtues Conflict? Aquinas' Answer*, in S. Gardiner (ed.), *Virtue Ethics, Old and New*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 2005, p. 67: «[…] Aquinas' view that the cardinal virtues mark pervasive features of all virtuous action is defensible by appeal to Aristotle. But it is especially characteristic of Stoicism».

[5] ST. I-II, 61, a. 1.

[6] See T. Irwin, *op. cit.*, p. 72: «Aristotle is right to suggest that not every case of facing danger is relevant to bravery. But we ought not to infer from Aristotle's account that facing danger is the only principal exercise of bravery. We find principal cases of bravery wherever we find the occasion of praiseworthy firmness in the face of danger for the common good. Since others types of danger may be equally relevant to bravery, according to this criterion, they may equally allow principal exercises of the virtue».

withstanding[7]. It includes courage, but does not coincide with it: indeed, fortitude can also consist in magnanimity, patience, and endurance[8]. According to Aquinas:

> Endurance is more of the essence of fortitude than attack […] to suffer and endure is, furthermore, something passive only in an external sense […] Enduring comprises a strong activity of the soul, namely, a vigorous grasping of and clinging to the good […][9].

Among the four cardinal virtues, fortitude holds the third position, after prudence and justice and before temperance[10]. It concerns self-preservation and, according to Aquinas, is rooted in the first precept of natural law, which concerns the preservation of human life[11].

Let us consider the relationship between fortitude and practical wisdom (*prudentia*). First of all, before examining this link, it is useful to recall the difference between prudence and one of the sub-excellences it encompasses, namely *synesis*. The latter concerns mere judgements about human behaviour, whereas the former includes *synesis*, but it is essentially prescriptive [12]. Such difference helps us understanding why prudence, given its prescriptive character, requires strength of character, the virtue of fortitude.

Practical wisdom acts on the irascible part of the soul aiming it toward the golden mean of fortitude and against both weakness of character and stubbornness. As Joseph Pieper holds «Fortitude becomes fortitude only through being "informed" by prudence»[13]. Grit is not enough, because we need practical wisdom in order to develop a moral virtue as fortitude (and perseverance) in ourselves[14].

Given such clarifications, I will now defend three specific claims aimed at clarifying the boundary between fortitude and practical wisdom.

1) According to Aristotle and Aquinas temperance is specifically connected with practical wisdom, since – by moderating pleasures and pains –

[7] Cf. ST. II-II 123, 2.

[8] On the parts of fortitude see ST. II-II, 128, 1, iv.

[9] See J. Pieper, *The four cardinal Virtues*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame 1966, pp. 128-129. Cf. ST. II-II, 123, 6.

[10] ST. II-II, 123, 12.

[11] Cf. ST. I-II, 94, 2.

[12] Cf. Aristotle, NE VI, 10 1143a6.

[13] J. Pieper, *op. cit.*, p. 123. In the instruction of fortitude by prudence the former receives from the latter its inner form, that is, its specific character as virtue.

[14] Cf. ST. II-II 65, 4; A. Duckworth, *op. cit.*

it preserves it from errors in deliberating about the human goods[15]. But the lack or deficiency of temperance is often related to the lack of fortitude, i.e. to a deficiency regarding a virtue deeply rooted in the *irascible* part of the soul[16]:

> […] whoever can curb his desires for the pleasures of touch, so that they keep within bounds, which is a very hard thing to do, for this very reason is more able to check his daring in dangers of death, so as not to go too far, which is much easier; and in this sense fortitude is said to be temperate. Again, temperance is said to be brave, by reason of fortitude overflowing into temperance: in so far, to wit, as he whose mind is strengthened by fortitude against dangers of death, which is a matter of very great difficulty, is more able to remain firm against the onslaught of pleasures; for as Cicero says (*De Offic.* i), «it would be inconsistent for a man to be unbroken by fear, and yet vanquished by cupidity; or that he should be conquered by lust, after showing himself to be unconquered by toil»[17].

Therefore, by acting directly on temperance, fortitude acts *indirectly* on practical wisdom.

2) The lack of fortitude may also *directly* affect practical wisdom when dreadful aspects of life shock us. In these situations, the functioning of practical wisdom is compromised and so are our judgments and our choices.
3) Fortitude operates on the capacity of practical wisdom (*prudentia*) to direct actions in context, judging with openness of mind and choosing and acting bravely. This means to tell the truth when it is required and in the right terms that are required.

2. *Fortitude and recognition*

Everyone, who wants to become wise (*prudens*), must develop the virtue of fortitude. But this requires a strong motivation, which is related to the right answer to the question of self-love, of happiness and the meaning of life, of confidence in ourselves, particularly when faced with adversities (as in Aristotle and Aquinas)[18]. And this question is strictly related to the

[15] Cf. Aristotle, NE VI, 5, 1140b 11-12; ST. II-II 123, 2.
[16] ST. I-II, 61, 4 ad I; II-II, 123, 2 ad 2.
[17] ST. I-II, 61.4 ad 1.
[18] Kant – like Stoicism – stresses the role of fortitude in his ethics, a role that was not ignored, but less stressed, by Aristotle and Aquinas. Kant does not stress the motivating role of

topic of recognition during the first years of life, but also later on[19]. As Christine Swanton holds:

> There is something wrong, especially if failure to stick with projects is a form of escape characteristic of lack of self love [...] the point is that perseverance is a virtue of bonding rather than merely a virtue responding to the demands of value[20].

In fact, what is specifically *human* in our world if we try to look at it, as Thomas Nagel would say, from a "point of view of nowhere"? I would answer: first of all, a restless desire for recognition by other human beings or other persons, i.e. beings endowed with reason, freedom, and love. This means a restless desire for originality and authenticity in front of others, a quest that may have good or bad ethical consequences; a desire for interpersonal communication in the silence of the universe, communication with other human beings also by media, but also with God (in religion), a quest for honour, but also a desire for compassion towards and from other human beings[21]. This restless quest often occurs either pushing up from the infrahuman level (animals etc.) towards the human level, or thinking of the divine from the point of view of man.

Let us go back to the desire for recognition. As Max Scheler holds, we cannot think of (and therefore desire) anything higher than "person" (a being with reason and free will) – conceived, however, not necessarily in merely anthropomorphic terms[22]. Therefore, in our experience a person is the only sort of being that may genuinely nourish and satisfy human desire. For instance: parental love is fundamental for children's education[23].

pleasure in virtue (pleasure which, according to Aquinas, often is not present with fortitude). Although he underlines the quest for the meaning of life and for happiness. Without grasping a meaning of life we do not have motives to be strong in the face of difficulties. See K. Kristiansson, *Virtues and vices in positive psychology. A philosophical critique*, CUA, Cambridge 2013, pp. 151 and 171. According to the author positive psychology does not highlight the main role of practical reason (*phronēsis*) among virtues.

[19] Cf. D. Narvaez, *The co-construction of Virtue: Epigenetics, Development and Culture*, in N. Snow (ed.), *Cultivating Virtue. Perspectives from Philosophy, Theology and Psychology*, OUP, Oxford, pp. 251-278. See also on the topic of Self-concern M. Slote, *Moral from Motives*, OUP, Oxford 2001, p. 77.

[20] C. Swanton, *Virtue Ethics. A Pluralistic View*, OUP, Oxford 2003, p. 43.

[21] Cf. B. Pascal, *Pensées*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1995. On the topic of the main role of glory in ethics see T. Chappell, *Knowing What To Do. Imagination,Virtue, and Platonism in Ethics*, OUP, Oxford 2014, ch. 8.

[22] Cf. M. Scheler, *On the Idea of Man* (1915), in «Journal of the British society of phenomenology», vol. 9, n. 3, October 1978.

[23] See M. Hoffman, *Empathy and Moral Development: Implications for Caring and Justice*,

In general, the role of others deeply qualifies our moral experience[24]. But I would like to stress that in all these cases the issue is primarily ontological and not merely psychological. The *human soul* is intentionally and potentially everything or infinite "quodammodo omnia" according to Aquinas[25]. Every human being naturally needs recognition by others (*glory*), in order to acquire *magnanimity* (one of the parts of fortitude according to Aquinas) and hence autonomy in front of the world[26]. However, he must not depend totally on the judgment of other people because, from an ontological and psychological perspective, as finite beings, other human persons cannot fulfil human desire, which is potentially infinite[27].

Discernable here are the predominant role of recognition by a personal God in theistic religions and, in general, of wisdom in identifying the right measure of recognition such as leaves room for right self-love (*magnanimitas*), fortitude and – again – practical wisdom[28]. This is a virtuous circle: the circle of human experience, of inner development and growth, of equilibrial self-love as the root of fortitude and practical wisdom. As Aquinas says:

Cambridge University Press, New York 2000; M. Slote, *The Roots of Empathy*, pp. 65-86; D. Narvaez, *The Co-Construction of Virtue: Epigenetics, Development and Culture*, pp. 251-278 in N.E. Snow (ed.), *Cultivating Virtue. Perspectives from Philosophy, Psychology and Theology*, OUP, New York 2015.

[24] See E. Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority*, Kluwer Academic publishers, Dordrecht 1991; *Otherwise than Being or beyond Essence*, Kluwer, Dordrecht 1991.

[25] Cf. ST. 1.16.3 and Aristotle, *De anima*, 3.8.431b 21.

[26] On the role of glory today see T. Chappell, *Knowing What To Do. Imagination,Virtue, and Platonism in Ethics*, OUP, Oxford 2014, p. 159: «The notion of glory may, perhaps, be a neglected one in contemporary philosophy partly because of the notion's apparent religious overtones. Be that as it may, to say a little about what glory is is not to introduce a concept that we do not have, but to clarify the content and significance of a concept that we already use […]. In our society, the idea of glory – though not necessarily the word – is all around us; I doubt I have ever met anyone over the age of two who did not have the concept already. A concern with glory is central to our society's actual, though not always to its officially announced, values. For us glory is typically both an ethical idea, a concept that we use, and also an ethical ideal, a way of being that we aspire to[…]Glory is something that the sportsmen and sportswomen, the film stars and actors, the pop stars, celebrities, and "personalities" who dominate our public life and discourse all typically aim at. Not that they all aim at it all of the time, and under that very description, and wisely and well. Nor that they do not aim at other things also»; p. 184: «I have been arguing that we might enrich our thinking about how to live and what to do, both by acknowledging the place that this idea of glory already has in our lives, and by making more use of it than we do already».

[27] Also, from an ethical perspective, if we depended *totally* on the judgment of other people, we could not judge in an autonomous way.

[28] Within a theistic religion, human beings can avoid both the risks of desiring too much and of desiring too little recognition (glory) by others.

Glory is an effect of honour and praise: because from the fact that a man is praised, or shown any kind of reverence, he acquires clarity in the knowledge of others. And since magnanimity is about honour, as stated above (129, 1, 2), it follows that it also is about glory: seeing that as a man uses honour moderately, so too does he use glory in moderation. Wherefore inordinate desire of glory is directly opposed to magnanimity[29].

And, as Aquinas says in another work:

[…] one of the things that human beings naturally desire is excellence. For it is natural for both human beings and everything to seek in desired goods the perfection that consists of a certain excellence. Therefore, the will will indeed be morally right and belong to loftiness of spirit if it seeks excellence in accord with the rule of reason informed by God […] and one will incur the sin of pusillanimity if one should fall short of the rule of reason. And there will be the sin of pride if one should exceed the rule, as the very name "pride" [*superbia*] demonstrates, since to be proud is simply to exceed the proper measure in the desire for excellence[30].

Therefore, according to Aristotle and Aquinas magnanimity (*megalopsuchia*, *magnanimitas*) is the golden mean between pride (*chaunotēs*, *superbia*) and pusillanimity or cowardliness (*mikropsuchia*, *pusillanimitas*)[31]. Magnanimity means also confidence in ourselves and hope[32].

All that might suggest that the absence of the right desire for glory (*magnanimitas*) or the presence of an immoderate quest for it – and so the lack or deficiency of fortitude – may be one of the main reasons for the transformation of the meaning of the word "prudence" (*prudentia*), in modern and contemporary parlance, from signifying a virtue regarding moral decision-making, personal responsibility, and the proper evaluation of

[29] ST. II-II, 132, 2.

[30] *Quaestiones disputatae de malo* VIII, 2, B; *On Evil*, OUP, Oxford 2003. See also Aristotle, NE II, 7, 1107 b 21 ss, in particular 1125b20: «People seek honour both more than they should, and also less than they should; therefore, there is a right way to seek honour».

[31] Cf. T. Irwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-76: «Aquinas confronts an aspect of the alleged conflict between the pagan and the Christian virtues, in his examination of magnanimity and humility. In his view, the two virtues do not really conflict, and we can see this when we understand their relation to the cardinal virtues. Magnanimity is a potential part of bravery and humility of temperance. Since each of them is subordinate to the overriding aims of the cardinal virtues, they do not conflict. Magnanimity stregthens us in the pursuit of appropriately great actions, while humility restrains us from the distractions that would result from illusions about our own importance; hence we need both magnanimity and humility to pursue the right ends without distraction (q. 161, a. 1)».

[32] Cf. ST. II-II, 129, 6, 7.

risk, to signifying a characteristic of those who are careful and simply avoid risks[33]. In fact,

> [t]o the contemporary mind, prudence seems less a prerequisite to goodness than an evasion of it. The statement that it is prudence which makes an action good strikes us as well-nigh ridiculous – in colloquial use prudence always carries the connotation of timorous, small-minded self-preservation, of a rather selfish concern about oneself. Neither of these traits is compatible with nobility; both are unworthy of the noble man[34].

This is perhaps why Kant highlights in his moral philosophy the main role of *strength* in ethics. For him, «virtue is a moral *strength* of the will»[35]. But this concept of virtue might seem in Aristotelian terms more a kind of *continence* (*egkrateia*), than the virtue of temperance (*sophrosunē*), which is proper to the wise man (*phronimos, spoudaios*)[36].

To sum up, fortitude, which is the root of temperance and prudence, is in turn rooted in a proper response to the desire for recognition, one capable of hitting the mean between an immoderate quest for glory (pride) and a form of pusillanimity. Such a mean fosters a virtuous self-love, which in turn becomes the source of fortitude and of practical wisdom in our lives.

3. *The main role of education and of* parrhesia

Finally, from a pedagogical point of view we must highlight that fortitude is not much cultivated in connection with practical wisdom in our politically correct everyday culture, and is sometimes repressed[37]. And this

[33] See I. Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Moral*, chap. II. «Skill in the choice of means to one's own greatest welfare can be called 'prudence' in the narrowest sense. Thus the imperative that refers to the choice of means to one's own happiness (i.e. the precept of prudence) is still only hypothetical; it commands the action not outright but only as a means to another end». On the topic of the change of the meaning of *prudentia* in the late medieval and modern age see J. Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington 1995.

[34] J. Pieper, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

[35] I. Kant, MS 6:405.

[36] Cf. Aristotle, NE I, 13, 1102 b 27ss.

[37] On the relationship between fortitude and wrath see ST. II-II, 123, 10 ad 3. Cf. J. Pieper, *op. cit.*, p. 130: «The fact, however, that Thomas assigns to (just) wrath a positive relation to the virtue of fortitude has become largely unintelligible and unacceptable[…]This lack of comprehension may explained partly by the exclusion, from Christian ethics, of the component of pas-

is not without consequences also from a psychological perspective[38]. The truth is that fortitude requires a specific education. It is generated especially in dangerous situations, but, as a dimension also of the other cardinal virtues, fortitude develops by being cultivated in less dramatic situations: one learns day by day how opportunity and also adversity can lead to advances in wisdom.

As Servais Pinkaers highlights:

> Courage, which the Romans considered as the highest of virtues, is a characteristic of the morally mature person. It is indispensable for complete moral freedom. Gradually formed in us through life's discipline [...] courage enables us to undertake worthwhile projects of high value to ourselves and others, regardless of all interior and exterior resistance, obstacles, and opposition. We act when and how we wish, to the point of exploiting the very setbacks that might have weakened our resolve and checked our plans. The person of little courage can indeed boast that he is free to do what he wants, and can affirm himself along with the crowd in rebelling against rules and laws. In reality, despite all his talk, his freedom is very weak and he is near to being a slave, for he does not know how to form a firm, lasting determination strong enough to rescue him from the pressure of circumstances or feelings so as to master them as he ought. Courage presupposes a mature personality, formed by difficulties and trials and capable of initiating and achieving the worthwhile actions that are life's fruits. Once again we are looking at a courageous freedom with qualities far different from those of freedom of indifference[39].

Freedom as mere capacity of choice is not enough, because human beings always desire a flourishing life. Fortitude requires education of freedom, in particular in young people, in order to develop their practical wisdom.

Finally, fortitude is extremely useful also in intellectual work. As Alexander Solzhenitsyn maintains in the famous *Commencement Address* delivered at Harvard in 1978,

sion (with its inevitably physical aspect) as something alien and incongruous – an exclusion due to a kind of intellectual stoicism – and partly by the fact that the explosive activity which reveals itself in wrath is naturally repugnant to good behavior regulated by "bourgeois" standards».

[38] Cf. J. Pieper, *op. cit.*, p. 134: «To the modern science of psychology, we owe the insight that the lack of courage to accept injury and the incapability of self-sacrifice belong to the deepest sources of psychic illness. All neuroses seem to have as a common symptom an egocentric anxiety, a tense and sel-centered concern for security, the inability to "let go"; in short, that kind of love for one's own lover that leads straight to the loss of life».

[39] S. Pinckaers, *op. cit.*, p. 356.

In the West there is no censorship, but there is a sly selectiveness at work, separating ideas, which are "in" from those which are not. Although the latter are not directly quashed, they can find no authentic medium of expression in the press, in books, or in university courses. Legally, the spirit of your research is indeed free, but it is restricted on all sides by popular opinion[40].

Fortitude helps practical wisdom, which is open towards wisdom as *sophia* (theoretical wisdom), although, according to Aristotle, it does not rule over *sophia.* As he puts it, «it issues orders, then, for its sake, but not to it»[41]. Philosophers and academics need to be able to speak with frankness and freedom (with what the Greeks called *parrhesia*); in doing their job everyday, they require, therefore, both fortitude and wisdom.

Conclusion

In sum: I hold that there is a strong relationship between fortitude and practical wisdom as cardinal virtues. Without practical wisdom there is no fortitude, but mere grit. Moreover, without fortitude practical wisdom easily becomes prudence, as understood in modern and contemporary parlance. Finally, fortitude requires confidence in ourselves and such confidence itself depends upon the right measure of recognition by other people and by God. There is, therefore, a virtuous circle between practical reason and our desire for recognition, connected as it is with fortitude.

Abstract

Although fortitude is primarily about confronting the danger of death, it makes the brave person firm and constant in other situations as well. Fortitude acts directly on temperance and therefore indirectly on practical wisdom. But the lack of fortitude may also directly affect practical wisdom when dreadful aspects of life shock us. Fortitude operates on the capacity of practical wisdom to direct actions in context, judging with openness of mind and choosing and acting bravely. Practical wisdom acts on the irascible part of the soul aiming it toward the golden mean of fortitude and

[40] *Le declin du courage* [Seuil, 1978], p. 30, quoted by S. Pinckaers, *op. cit.*, p. 430.
[41] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VI 1145a 1-11.

against both weakness of character and stubbornness. The phronimos *must develop the virtue of fortitude. But this requires a strong motivation related to the answer to the question of happiness and the meaning of life. And this question is strictly related to the topic of recognition. All that suggests that the lack of or deficiency of fortitude may be one of the main causes of the transformation of the meaning of prudence from the virtue of moral decision, personal responsibility and risk to the virtue of those who are careful and avoid risks.*

Keywords: Practical wisdom; fortitude; virtues; Thomas Aquinas.

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T

Good People with Bad Principles

Howard J. Curzer

> Conservatives think that liberals are good people with bad ideas, whereas liberals think conservatives are bad people.
>
> Todd Zywicki, Cato Institute, 1/17/14
>
> Republicans are good people… It's just their ideas are bad.
>
> President Obama, 7/3/15

Introduction

Right now many countries seem quite divided about justice. Since the two sides hold incompatible principles, at least one side must be holding the wrong principles. And these people do not just hold bad principles, they act upon them. This is vice. Yet we all know people on *both* sides of the political divide whom we consider morally good. How can people who espouse and systematically act upon bad principles nevertheless be morally good people? I shall begin by putting some basics on the table, and then describe the challenge in more detail. Next, I shall describe and reject nine potential solutions. Finally, I shall propose a tenth solution based upon the distinction between personal and role virtue.

1. *Basics*

For virtue ethics, a virtue is an integrated package of dispositions to perceive, believe, feel, desire, choose, and act well. Now human life may be divided into different sets of situations concerned with different goods. A virtue is the best disposition for an agent to have when responding to one of these spheres of human life[1]. *Virtues differ* if and only if they are

[1] I ignore the tiny possibility that two different dispositions might be equally good.

dispositions to think, feel, and act best within different spheres.

What does "best" mean? *Eudaimonism* takes a *personal virtue* to be a character trait which is generally in the best interest of its possessor. That does not mean that every virtuous act or feeling is in the agent's best interest, or that the agent does things because they are in his or her interest, but merely that a virtue is better for the agent than all alternative character trait options for dealing with its sphere. Whether the virtues turn out to be good for, or valued by the society are empirical questions to be dealt with on a virtue-by-virtue basis. Some traits that society considers to be virtues may turn out to be eudaimonistic, personal vices.

Role virtues are character traits that are best for accomplishing the goal of some role. The role virtues of some roles are simply the same as the personal virtues. The collection of role virtues for other roles consists of personal virtues plus character traits that are morally neutral or even personal vices. For example, deceptiveness is personal vice, but a role virtue for trial lawyers.

To recapitulate: a *virtue* is a disposition to respond to a set of situations concerned with some good, in ways that are generally best. For eudaimonist personal virtues, "best" means best for the agent; for role virtues, "best" means best for accomplishing the goal of the role.

Bracketing numerous caveats, we might say that choice results from a practical syllogism whose premises are perceptions about the specific situation, general beliefs about the world, and normative principles tailored to the situation. A virtuous person perceives the situation correctly (insofar as that is reasonably possible), adds the right general beliefs about the world and normative principles, combines the conclusion with the appropriate motivating passions and/or desires, makes the right choice, and acts upon it.

Going wrong with respect to principles, passions, and actions is *vice*. More precisely, leaving aside people with severe environmental or hereditary bad moral luck, closed-minded people who feel and act according to principles which are significantly different from the principles of virtuous people are vicious. Sometimes "They didn't know any better" is offered as an excuse for unjust acts. This might mean, "They misperceived the situation, or held false beliefs about the world through no fault of their own." But if it means that they had the wrong principles, it is a condemnation rather than an excuse.

2. *The problem*

Let's apply these basics to a real-world issue. Roughly half the population of many countries seems to accept one principle (or a family of principles) of distributive justice; the other half accepts another principle. Each half of the country seems to feel strongly in accordance with its avowed principle, and to act accordingly when engaging in *social action* (e.g. voting, donating, demonstrating, boycotting, posting on Facebook). One unfortunate consequence of this division is that people dismiss, disparage, and unfriend folks whom they otherwise respect. By explaining how this is the result of a mistake about the nature of justice, I hope to help people mend and maintain relationships across the partisan divide.

In order to discuss this issue without offence, I shall give no examples. I'll just call the correct principle of justice, "principle A," and the incorrect principle, "principle B." Please assume that you hold principle A, and describe principles A and B however you see fit. Since believing bad principles, and feeling and acting accordingly is vice, it seems to follow that at least half of the population is unjust.

Let me raise the stakes. Justice is meta-virtue; it governs the distribution of many sorts of goods in many sorts of contexts. So justice and injustice subsume large portions of the other virtues and vices. For example, in situations of shared risk, safety may be distributed fairly or unfairly. Some cowardly acts may be described as taking more than one's fair share of safety; some rash acts as taking less than one's share. Thus, much of the sphere of courage falls into the sphere of justice. Courageous acts in situations of shared risk are also just acts; cowardly and rash acts are unjust acts. The principle of courage is an application of the principle of justice to situations involving shared risk. A just person is a courageous person. Conversely, someone who typically chooses, feels, and acts upon the wrong principle of justice across the board is not only unjust, but also lacking in courage. Similarly for other goods. For example, who should be paid, or honored, or told the truth, or teased, and when, and about what, and to what extent are also matters of justice. So if half of the country has the wrong principle of justice, then not only is half of the country unjust, but half of the country is also lacking in courage, liberality, good-temper, truthfulness, wittiness, and perhaps other virtues. Indeed, people who disagree about principles A and B typically have different views about whom to fear, pay, honor, deceive, and tease. Advocates of principle B are not merely people with a single vice; they are all-around vicious people.

What's the problem with that? After all, virtue ethicists recognize that personal virtue is rare. Indeed, the expectation is that considerably fewer than half of the people are just or virtuous.

The problem is not that half of the country is lacking in justice and generally in virtue. Rather the problem is this. We all know people whom we consider generally virtuous, and who are on the other side of the political divide. Think about your uncle or neighbor, Max, and your colleague or friend, Matilda. These are people you know very well and respect greatly. They are role models in many ways. They don't steal, cheat, play favorites when grading, etc. But they say things which you consider outrageous when talking about justice; they hold principle B. And they vote, donate, and demonstrate accordingly. Because justice is a meta-virtue, this is a larger problem. We all know people who seem generous yet espouse bad principles of generosity, people who seem courageous yet espouse bad principles of courage, etc. Virtue ethics implies that Max and Matilda (I shall call them "M&M.") are vicious people. Because M&M seem, to people who know them well, to be virtuous, the thesis that they are vicious people is counterintuitive.

This is a problem for every moral theory, but it hits virtue ethics particularly hard. For utilitarianism or deontology, the starting points and gold standards are general principles. People who don't have the right principles are bad people. But for virtue ethics, the starting points and gold standards are exemplary people. Just as we don't identify good teachers by reading their statements of teaching philosophy, so virtue ethics says that we don't identify virtuous people by pouring over their principles. Intuitions about people are primary. The right principles are derivatively defined as the ones that good people have and use. So to reject our intuitions about M&M in favor of our beliefs about principles is to back away from virtue ethics. Starkly put, the problem is this.

(1) M&M are morally good people.
(2) M&M firmly believe in a certain principle of justice despite numerous serious attempts to convince them otherwise. They also feel in accord with principle B, and vote, donate, and demonstrate accordingly.
(3) M&M's principle, principle B, is the false principle of justice.
(4) People holding, feeling, and acting upon a false principle of justice reliably without regret or reconsideration are unjust people.
(5) Unjust people are bad people.
(6) Therefore, M&M are morally bad people.

Statements (2) through (5) imply statement (6). But statements (1) and (6) are incompatible. In order to hold on to the observation that (1) M&M are morally good people, it seems that one must deny that (2) M&M believe principle B, (3) principle B is the wrong principle of justice, (4) the definition of vice, or (5) lack of justice is sufficient to make a person bad.

3. *Solutions*

This might seem to be a familiar, easily resolved issue, but I shall show that the usual ways of dealing with this objection don't work. I shall canvas nine unsuccessful strategies, and then advance a successful solution.

Deny (1): M&M are not actually good

Solution #1: Some people seem to be good people, even though they are actually far from good. They have acquired the mere appearance of virtue.

Reply: Admittedly, there are some natural con artists who can fool everyone around them for years. However, they are quite rare. This solution would not explain the vast number of people who hold principle B, yet seem, to those who know them well, to be good people.

Deny (2): M&M don't actually believe principle B

Solution #2: People can act in accordance with one principle, while actually holding another if they are mistaken about the relevant evidence. Some people actually hold principle A, but also hold false beliefs about economics and/or sociology, or they misperceive the economic and/or social situation. Yet other people hold the right beliefs, perceptions, and principles, but reason badly. When combined with principle A, these misperceptions, mistaken beliefs, or fallacies yield the votes, donations, demonstrations, etc. entailed by principle B. These people actually hold principle A, but *seem* to hold principle B because their practical syllogisms lead them to the wrong acts.

Reply: This solution doesn't help much. Let's face it; many folks hold false beliefs about the world, misperceive it, or reason fallaciously *because* they believe principle B, and not the other way around. They *want* to act in accord with principle B because it rationalizes their privileges and/or their prejudices, or at least they don't care enough to change their principles or behavior. Their ignorance about the world and/or their illogic is willful, or at least negligent. So this solution exonerates only a few people. The rest turn out to be not only unjust, but also intellectually dishonest or lazy.

Solution #3: Some people don't really believe what they say, especially when it comes to values. In particular, some people espouse principle B and use it when engaging in social action because it is fashionable in their circles, or because it sounds good when you say it fast, or because their spouses believe principle B, or for some other reason. But prod them a bit, and you discover that they are just mouthing slogans which are at odds with their actual values.

Reply: This solution doesn't exonerate many people, either. Sometimes people have good reasons for espousing a principle they don't believe, but mostly it is cowardly, deceptive, or an expression of some other vice. And they are not just talking. They are engaging in social action in accordance with principle B, and when they act wrongly at the ballot box, the protest, the checkbook, etc., they feel no regret. So these people may not be completely unjust, but they are far from the virtue of justice, and they are also hypocrites.

Solution #4: If virtue ethics is to apply to real people, then virtue must be a threshold concept. Real people's virtues have flaws. To have a virtue is to have a disposition, not a guarantee to think, feel, and act well. In particular, some people hold principle A, but are not perfectly virtuous. They are virtuous enough to be over the threshold, but they have a glitch which is that they talk and act according to principle B when engaging in social action.

Reply: Character traits with large glitches are not virtues. Teachers who think, feel, and act justly in all things except that they are unjustifiably lenient toward redheaded, six foot tall women making tearful grade appeals have a character flaw that is not a vice because such cases constitute only a tiny part of the sphere of justice. But the disposition to vote, demonstrate, donate, etc. according to principle B is far too large a part of a character to be a mere glitch.

Although these four explanations may cover (without exoneration) some of the people who both seem to believe B and seem virtuous, most remain. (#1) M&M really are good people. (#2) They understand the facts and the principles reasonably well. (#3) They are able and eager to express and act upon their actual opinions. (#4) And they fall below the threshold of the virtue of justice.

Deny (3): Principles A and B are both right

Solution #5: Perhaps principles A and B are equivalent. When applied correctly, they yield the same results. Half the country is applying them incorrectly.

Solution #6: Perhaps principles A and B are different, but equally acceptable because they apply to different spheres, or they apply to the same issues under different conditions.

Reply: These explanations are non-starters. The two principles clearly apply to the same set of issues, but yield different answers. For example, both principles imply that the tax code should be revised, but disagree about what revisions would make the tax code more just. They are neither equivalent nor disjoint.

Deny (4): Although M&M believe principle B, they are not blameworthy

Solution #7: Some people cannot help believing principle B because they have had a bad upbringing and no subsequent opportunity to discover the truth. They have been enveloped in a cocoon of misleading information and bad values for their whole life. The assertions and arguments that they regularly hear reinforce their view rather than challenging it.

Reply: This solution makes people who hold principle B vicious, just not *culpably* vicious. Their acceptance of principle B was involuntary, but they do hold it. Moreover, most believers in principle B are not victims of bad moral luck; rather they have *wrapped themselves* in the cocoon of false information.

Solution #8: Vice is not just holding, feeling, and acting on the wrong principles. Kids do that before they learn better. To be vicious one must also be unwilling to change. Some people who believe principle B are persuadable, however, and therefore are not vicious.

Reply: Persuadable people who hold principle B are not technically vicious, but they still believe, feel, and act as the vicious do. Unlike the vicious, they can improve, but they have a long, long way to go. Moreover, most people holding principle B are not open to persuasion, as you see when you try to persuade them. So this solution exonerates only a few folks at best.

Deny (5): Unjust people can be good

Solution #9: People who are missing a few virtues can still be good people. For example, temperance and appropriate ambition are virtues, yet intemperate, unambitious people are not evil. Similarly, even though people who hold principle B are unjust, they may, on balance, still be good people if they have lots of other virtues.

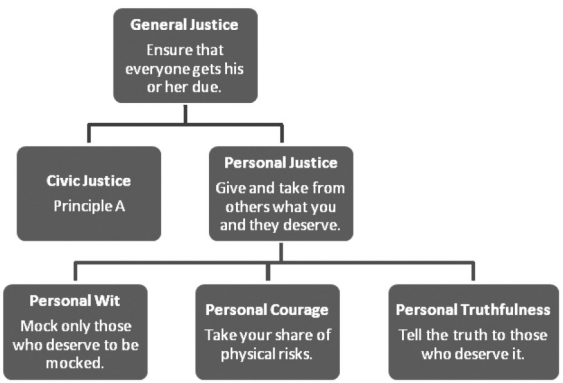
Reply: Justice is a huge part of being good. As mentioned earlier, justice and injustice subsume large portions of the other virtues and vices. An alternative measure of the scope of justice is that it includes respect for the

rights of others. Thus, justice includes most of the most important aspects of ethics. Those who hold principle B not only lack justice, they also lack most of the other virtues, and endorse rights violations right and left.

Like explanations #1, #2, #3, and #4, explanations #7, #8, and #9 cover some, but not most of these people who espouse principle B, yet also seem virtuous.

Deny (6): Neither principle is really a principle of personal justice

My Solution: First, recall that virtues are individuated according to spheres, and spheres are collections of different sorts of situations. The situations calling for choices of whether and how to participate in social action concerning some sort of social policy are different than situations calling for the personal choice to treat an individual justly or unjustly. The true and false principles of justice are not the principles that just people use in their personal life. Instead, principles A and B concern the ways in which cities, counties, states, and countries, should run. They resemble the principles of personal justice in the way that corporations resemble mom-and-pop stores, or smart phones resemble rotary phones. That is, they are not completely unrelated, but they are nevertheless quite different. Differences in associated passion and action are also accordingly great. At the most general level, there is one principle of justice. But at the next level, therefore, we can distinguish two character traits: one concerned with the civic sphere (decisions about society) and the other with the personal sphere (decisions about inter-personal matters). We might call these character traits *civic justice* and *personal justice*. Principle A is a principle of civic justice, but not personal justice. Since justice includes much of the other virtues, there are corresponding civic and personal versions of the other virtues.



Now recall that a personal virtue is a character trait which is in the best interest of its possessor. Now the virtue of personal justice helps its possessor in at least four ways. (a) It keeps its possessors out of trouble. They do not end up jailed for shoplifting, shunned for freeloading, or shot by outraged colleagues to whom they unfairly denied tenure. (b) More positively, people with the virtue of personal justice treat those around them justly. Thus, they are respected for their justice by others. (c) By serving as just role models, they help those around them to become more just[2]. Thus, they are more likely to be treated justly by those around them. (d) The virtue of personal justice disposes people to treat themselves justly. They don't exploit themselves or allow themselves to be exploited. These are four reasons to consider personal justice to be a virtue. These advantages plus the warm glow of having acted rightly, and the pleasure from satisfying one's desire to forward justice generally outweigh any drawbacks of a just character.

Although it provides the warm glow and characteristic pleasure, civic justice does not help its possessor in the four aforementioned ways (or in any other ways, for that matter). Indeed, I suggest that it is not in the best interest of agents to possess either the character trait corresponding to principle A or the character trait corresponding to principle B. The reason is that each of these character trait is beneficial in only some circumstances. Let me be careful. Of course, the *implementation* of principle A or principle B by the state might make a big difference to the agents. They might gain more goods of fortune under one principle than the other. Again, it probably makes a big difference to agents whether they *espouse* principle A or principle B. They may gain friends by espousing one, and lose them by espousing the other, for example. My claim is that a disposition to vote, demonstrate, donate, etc. according to one principle or the other will not reliably be an advantage to agents. It will help some and hurt others, depending upon their place within society (socioeconomic status, location, age, gender, marital status, race, religion, etc.) To most, it will make no difference. By contrast, character traits are personal virtues because they are advantageous in almost every social position. Thus, civic justice is not a personal virtue.

Distinguishing civic justice and personal justice, and then denying that civic justice is a personal virtue solves the original problem of how M&M

[2] In particular, they help those over whom they have great influence (e.g. their children) to become more just.

can seem virtuous despite holding principle B. A good person is someone who has the personal virtues. Thus, M&M *seem* to be virtuous, good people because they *are* virtuous, good people. They have personal justice which ramifies through all of the personal virtues subsumed by justice. Statement (6) is false. M&M do not pay, fear, retaliate against, or make fun of the wrong people, in the wrong way, etc. But they *seem* like bad people because when the talk turns to justice, they think and talk in terms of civic justice and offer principle B. And their views about who the government and other social institutions should give to, fear, become angry at, etc. are correspondingly mistaken. Their bad principles indicate that they lack civic justice, but civic justice is not a personal virtue, anyway. The problem with the argument is equivocation. Statements (2), (3), and (4) are about civic justice; statements (1), (5), and (6) are about personal justice.

4. *Implications?*

I began by describing a familiar problem: how can good people have bad principles of justice? I rejected nine solutions to this problem. My own solution is that civic justice is not a personal virtue. Good people with bad principles have personal, but not civic justice. My solution seems to have a pair of unsettling implications.

First, if civic justice is not a personal virtue, then it seems that participating in social action in accord with principle A is not virtuous, and participating in social action in accord with principle B is not vicious. Now social action is a crucial vehicle for accomplishing many important things. A solution which takes social action to be orthogonal to virtue is counterintuitive.

Luckily, personal virtue is not the whole moral story. The role virtues of a citizen are character traits that forward the goals of the state. Those goals may be immoral, of course. Thus, as Aristotle says, a good citizen is a good person only in a good state (*Politics* 1288a 37-39). Because people are political animals, the roles of citizen and activist are not optional roles such as doctor and lawyer. In addition to acquiring and maintaining personal virtues, people also have the duty to be good citizens when living in good states, and good activists rather than good citizens when living in bad states[3]. To be a good citizen or good activist one must hold, feel, and act upon principle A. Thus, civic virtues are morally required virtues, even

[3] One may also be a good activist in a good state, but it is not a duty.

though they not personal virtues. We do have a duty to vote, donate, and demonstrate for the right candidates, to the right causes, etc. It is a duty we have *qua* citizen or activist rather than *qua* person, but it is still a duty. The problem with M&M is not that they are bad people, but they do have a moral failing which is that they are bad citizens in a good state, or bad activists in a bad state. Thus, my solution does not take social action to be orthogonal to virtue.

My solution does have a different implication which some might find unsettling, however. The Reciprocity of Virtues doctrine says that a person cannot have only some virtues. If a person has any virtue, then he or she must have all virtues. Presumably, the complete package of virtues includes all of the virtues one needs in order to fulfill one's moral duties. Since the roles of citizen or activist are morally required roles, the role virtue of civic justice is part of the package. Now my solution says that M&M possess personal justice, but not civic justice. Thus, my solution and the Reciprocity of Virtues doctrine are incompatible. Although my solution enables us to acknowledge that M&M are good people, and thus helps to bridge the partisan divide, fans of the Reciprocity of Virtues doctrine may find my solution to be a bitter pill to swallow.

Abstract

Right now many countries seem quite divided about justice. Since the two sides hold incompatible principles, at least one side must be holding the wrong principles. To have bad principles, and to feel and act upon them reliably without regret or reconsideration, is vice. Yet we all know people on both *sides of the political divide whom we consider virtuous. This poses a challenge for virtue ethics. How can people with bad principles of justice be good people?*

Keywords: justice; virtue; role virtue; civic virtue.

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Il giudizio morale. *Phronesis* e complessità della moralità

Franco Manti

Premessa

È parte dell'esperienza quotidiana formulare giudizi morali prendendo posizione sui comportamenti nostri e altrui, su azioni ed eventi, discriminando fra ciò che è bene, giusto o appropriato fare e ciò che non si dovrebbe. Pur costituendo un aspetto fondamentale della nostra vita, il giudizio morale sembra avere una natura misteriosa[1]. Quali sono i processi che consentono la formulazione di un giudizio morale? In base a quali criteri ne diamo ragione? Il kantismo e l'utilitarismo si caratterizzano per il loro monismo etico. Per i kantiani la deliberazione morale è deontologica (tutti gli obblighi morali sono categorici), per gli utilitaristi è consequenzialista (non vi sono obblighi vincolanti a priori). Ciò ha determinato una messa fra parentesi del giudizio morale come facoltà che consente di rapportare principi o regole generali a contesti specifici e ha eliso il conflitto morale come dimensione della moralità[2]. D'altra parte, le filosofie del *moral sense* non paiono costituire un'alternativa soddisfacente, poiché sono esposte a una tautologia: un'azione è ingiusta perché la disapproviamo (sulla base di una disposizione a provare emozioni, ossia sentimenti morali) e la ragione della disapprovazione è che, in base alla suddetta disposizione, essa è ingiusta[3].

[1] Cfr. C. Larmore, *Patterns of Moral Complexity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1987, pp. 14-19 (trad. it. di S. Nono, *Le strutture della complessità morale*, Feltrinelli, Milano 1990, pp. 31-36).

[2] Questo vale anche per resoconti contemporanei, come quelli di Rawls e Harsanyi. Per una discussione approfondita, cfr. F. Manti, *Bios e polis. Etica, politica, responsabilità per la vita*, Genova University Press, Genova 2012, pp. 18-41.

[3] Per un approfondimento, cfr. L. Surian, *Il giudizio morale*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2013, pp. 74-78.

Inoltre, l'emotivismo contemporaneo, approda a una visione fortemente controversa: le asserzioni morali sono soltanto articolazione delle emozioni di chi le esprime; le proposizioni prescrittive sono psedo-proposizioni le quali nulla hanno a che fare con il piano logico del vero e del falso[4], pertanto esse sono prive di rilevanza semantica e conoscitiva[5].

Per tentare di porre al centro della riflessione etica il giudizio e il conflitto morale, credo si debba prendere sul serio quanto afferma C. Larmore:

> Un aiuto inestimabile per rettificare l'enfasi posta unilateralmente sulle regole, che caratterizza tanta parte della filosofia morale moderna, è fornito dal pensiero etico dei greci. Una delle migliori introduzioni alla funzione del giudizio e al suo significato per altri fenomeni morali, come il carattere e la virtù, è costituita dalla discussione aristotelica della *phronesis*, o giudizio morale[6].

Ritengo l'"aiuto" valga anche per l'emotivismo e possa offrire spunti per comprendere il rapporto razionalità-emozioni nella costruzione del giudizio morale.

Nel proseguo cercherò di fornire, attraverso la lettura di alcuni passi significativi del resoconto aristotelico, elementi a sostegno della tesi di Larmore e di dimostrare come l'idea di competenza etica possa costituire una risposta (parziale) alla complessità della moralità e contribuire a svelare

[4] Cfr. A.J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, Penguin Books Ltd, London 1990 e Id., *The Analysis of Moral Judgments*, in A.J. Ayer, *Philosophical Essays*, Macmillan, London 1954, pp. 231-249.

[5] Cfr. E. Lecaldano, *Etica e significato: un bilancio*, in C.A. Viano (a cura di), *Teorie etiche contemporanee*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 1990, p. 63; fra le altre, una critica particolarmente significativa del pensiero di Ayer è quella di Berlin, cfr. J. Berlin, *Verification*, in Id., *Concepts and Categories. Philosophical Essays*, Pimlico, Londra 1999, pp. 12-31. Una presa di distanza dalle posizioni di Ayer, nell'ambito della filosofia analitica, è rappresenta da Hare, secondo il quale il giudizio morale ha la funzione di prescrivere azioni e non di esprimere emozioni. Pertanto, tutte le proposizioni valutative sono imperative. I principi morali, in quanto imperativi, non sono giustificabili razionalmente, ma sono riconducibili all'assunzione di una decisione (cfr. M.R. Hare, *The Language of Morals*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1956). In generale, la filosofia analitica ha dato luogo a riflessioni metaetiche e non è intervenuta su questioni etiche sostantive. Tale orientamento è stato criticato, con severità, da Williams (cfr. B. Williams, *Morality*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2012, I ed. 1972).

[6] C. Larmore, *Patterns of Moral Complexity*, cit., p. xi (trad. it., p. 12). Un'ulteriore specificazione è fornita da Larmore quando afferma: «La teoria morale moderna nelle sue due forme principali, kantismo (criticismo) e utilitarismo, ha sostenuto che attraverso le regole è possibile fornire una completa specificazione di ciò che è moralmente giusto. L'esigenza di una procedura di decisione completamente esplicita era infatti senz'altro frutto di una reazione a quella che i moralisti moderni percepivano come la intollerabile vaghezza degli appelli di Aristotele alla phronesis. I loro desideri sono però realizzabili solo a costo che la moralità assuma caratteristiche molto diverse da quelle che ha avuto e che ha tuttora» (*ivi*, p. 5; trad. it., p. 22).

la natura del giudizio morale. Il tutto tenendo presente come, ad Aristotele e al pensiero greco, sfuggano due strutture della complessità morale: la differenziazione fra ideali politici ed ideali personali e l'eterogeneità della morale[7].

1. *La* phrónesis*: una verità per lo più*

Nella discussione della φρόνησις (*phrónesis*)[8], Aristotele evidenzia come, pur trattandosi di una virtù dianoetica, i discorsi che riguardano i comportamenti non affermano una verità incontrovertibile, ma «[…] ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ […]»[9], ossia per lo più, poiché il giudizio morale viene elaborato applicando regole morali a situazioni particolari quando dobbiamo operare scelte[10]: la *phrónesis* consente di scegliere, in ogni contesto, il comportamento migliore. Aristotele specifica come essa sia uno stato abituale veritiero, accompagnato da ragione e rivolto all'agire, che riguarda ciò che è bene o male per l'uomo[11]. L'agire bene costituisce un fine in se stesso[12] e l'ὀρθός λόγος (*orthós lógos*), la retta ragione, consiste nel deliberare ciò che abbiamo maggiore ragione di fare in quanto appropriato al contesto in cui ci troviamo e alla promozione della vita buona in generale[13].

[7] Cfr. *ivi*, pp. 12-13.

[8] Cfr. Aristotele, *Etica Nicomachea*, VI, 1140 a 24 - 1140 b 30. Per un'analisi della *phronesis*, cfr. M.S. Vaccarezza, *Le ragioni del contingente. La saggezza pratica tra Aristotele e Tommaso d'Aquino*, Orthotes, Napoli 2012, pp. 168-179.

[9] *Ivi*, I, 1094 b 21: «[…] ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ […]». Cfr. C. Larmore, *Patterns of Moral Complexity*, cit., p. 15 (trad. it., p. 32).

[10] *Ivi*, II, 1104 a 9: «[…] τὰ πρὸς τὸν καιρὸν σκοπεῖν […]». Cfr. C. Larmore, *Patterns of Moral Complexity*, cit., p. 15 (trad. it., p. 32). Sulla precisione dei discorsi concernenti i comportamenti, Aristotele afferma che è data dalla natura dell'oggetto cui si riferiscono, altrimenti: «[…] παραπλήσιον γάρ φαίνεται μαθηματκοῦ τε πιθανολογοῦντος ἀποδέχεσθαι καὶ ῥητορικὸν αποδείξεισ ἀπαιτεῖν». («Sarebbe, pressappoco, come ammettere che un matematico si appelli alla persuasione e un retore a dimostrazioni rigorose». *Ivi*, I, 1094 b 25-27).

[11] J. Annas ha proposto di tradurre *phronesis* con intelligenza. Essa riguarda la vita buona in generale. Cfr. J. Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, Oxford University Press, New York-Oxford 1993, pp. 73-74.

[12] Aristotele, *Etica Nicomachea*, VI, 1140 b 4-7: «[…] ἔστι γὰρ αὐτὴ ἡ εὐπρασξία τέλος».

[13] Cfr. *ivi*, VI, 1140 a 27-28. Per un approfondimento sull'argomento, cfr. M. Mangini, *Etica democratica. Una riflessione sui valori etici nella società liberale*, Giappichelli, Torino 2013, pp. 61-64 e pp. 69-72. Per una interpretazione dell'*orthós lógos* (ὀρθός λόγος), diversa da quella che propongo, cfr. L. Clavell, *La presenza di Aristotele nell'enciclica Fides et ratio*, in S.L. Brock, *L'attualità di Aristotele*, Armando, Roma 2000, p. 162. Clavell ritiene *orthós lógos* un ragionamento capace di fare scaturire correttamente da principi primi e universali dell'essere conclusioni coerenti di ordine logico e ontologico.

Aristotele definisce indirettamente la *phrónesis* facendo riferimento al φρόνιμος (*phrónimos*)[14], colui che ha la capacità di deliberare quanto è bene o è conveniente[15], per lui, riguardo alla vita buona in generale. Egli delibera[16], ma non dimostra, poiché la dimostrazione riguarda ciò che non può essere diversamente da come è, mentre, quando ci riferiamo ai nostri comportamenti, parliamo di qualcosa che può, anche, essere diversamente[17]. Inoltre, il *phrónimos* sa giudicare[18] ciò che è bene per gli altri uomini. Sotto questo profilo, con l'esempio riferito a Pericle, Aristotele evidenzia la coincidenza fra la dimensione etica e quella politica della deliberazione morale[19].

Fin qui, Aristotele non affronta una questione fondamentale: come costruiamo il giudizio morale. Egli fornisce, però, due indizi: la teoria della medietà e il sillogismo pratico.

Riguardo alla prima, Aristotele afferma: «La virtù, dunque, è una disposizione che orienta la deliberazione secondo una medietà verso noi stessi, definita dalla ragione e così come la definirebbe colui che è saggio»[20], ossia, essa consiste nel saper fare fronte, appropriatamente, alle esigenze, emergenti in una determinata situazione, evitando eccessi di qualsiasi tipo. Aristotele rileva, anche, come sia problematico porre in atto le virtù etiche in quanto medietà. Trovare il giusto mezzo è difficile come trovare il centro di un cerchio: non è cosa da tutti, ma solo di colui che ne ha piena cognizione[21]. Egli individua, anche, alcune regole di comportamento atte a definire in che cosa consista effettivamente la medietà verso noi stessi[22], ma, come evidenzia Larmore, «[…] solamente il giudizio può dare forma alla loro vaghezza e tramutarle in prescrizioni significative»[23].

[14] Cfr. *ivi*, VI, 1140 a 24: «Περὶ δὲ φρονήσεως οὕτως ἂν λάβομεν τοὺς φρονίμους». *Phronimos* è traducibile con saggio, ma anche con padrone di sé.

[15] *Ibidem.* Aristotele utilizza il termine *ta symphéronta* (τὰ συμφέποντα) traducibile, anche, con: ciò che è utile, vantaggioso, che giova.

[16] Cfr. *ivi*, VI, 1140 a 26-2: «[…] εἴη φρόνιμος ὁ βουλευτικός». L'utilizzo del vocabolo *bouleutikós* (βουλευτικός) è significativo, poiché indica, anche, l'esercizio della capacità di decisione politica (cfr. Aristotele, *Politica*, 1260 a 12).

[17] Cfr. *ivi*, VI, 1140 a 35: «[…] ἐνδεχέται καὶ ἄλλως ἔχειν».

[18] Aristotele utilizza il verbo *theorein* (θεωρεῖν).

[19] Cfr. Aristotele, *Etica Nicomachea*, VI, 1140 b 7-11.

[20] *Ivi*, II, 1106 b 36 - 1107 a 1-2: «Ἔστιν ἄρα ἡ ἀπετὴ ἕξις προαιρετική, ἐν μεσότητι οὖσα τῇ πρὸς ἡμᾶς, ὡρισμένῃ λόγῳ καὶ ᾧ ἂν ὁ φπόνιμος ὁρίσειεν». Senza voler entrare nel merito di raffinate dispute filologiche, ὡρισμένῃ è, a mio avviso, riferito alla medietà (verso se stessi) che è resa possibile dall'*orthós lógos* (ὀρθός λόγος).

[21] Aristotele utilizza il termine *eidótos* (εἰδότως).

[22] Cfr. Aristotele, *Etica Nicomachea*, II, 1109 b 2-26.

[23] C. Larmore, *Patterns of Moral Complexity*, cit., p. 16 (trad. it., p. 33).

Quanto al sillogismo pratico[24], Aristotele, pur analizzando la deliberazione[25] e fornendo spunti di riflessione sul ragionamento pratico, non dà indicazioni sulla sua forma e se esso sia orientato da considerazioni concernenti la virtù. La deliberazione morale, come si è detto, è caratterizzata dall'essere "per lo più". Egli individua una struttura, di tipo sillogistico, propria della deliberazione morale che può essere configurata nel modo seguente:

Premessa maggiore: ciò che si ritiene debba essere posto in atto

Premessa minore: i mezzi attraverso cui adempio a quanto affermato nella premessa maggiore (dato il contesto)

———————

Conclusione: il fine che si raggiunge[26].

Come rileva MacIntyre, « Ogni sillogismo pratico è una performance di una particolare persona in una particolare occasione»[27]. Le premesse, però, presuppongono il giudizio morale che ne consente la formulazione. Perciò, il sillogismo pratico non può essere considerato un modello che illustri come funziona il giudizio morale[28].

2. *Monismo etico ed eterogeneità della moralità*

L'esigenza di una procedura di decisione completamente esplicita da contrapporre alla "vaghezza" del modello phronetico ha prodotto, in età

[24] Cfr. Aristotele, *Il moto degli animali*, 701a; cfr., anche Id., *Etica Nicomachea*, 1147 a 25 - 1147 b 18. Nel primo testo, l'attenzione di Aristotele è centrata sulla *symperasma* (συμπέρασμα) ossia sulla conclusione del sillogismo pratico, mentre, nel secondo, sulla deliberazione (vedi nota 29).

[25] Cfr. Aristotele, *Etica Nicomachea*, III, 1112 a 18 - 1113 a 14. Traduco con deliberazione sia βουλή (*boulé*) che βούλευσις (*bouleusis*), poiché i due vocaboli possono essere considerati sinonimici.

[26] Un esempio può essere il seguente: P.Mag. È bene (per me) nutrirmi; P-Min. Questo pezzo di pane è un alimento adeguato; Con. è bene per me mangiare questo pezzo di pane. Dunque, nella fattispecie, se perseguo il mio bene, devo cibarmi del pezzo di pane di cui dispongo. Riguardo alla struttura e alla natura del sillogismo pratico, cfr. M. Rohnhaimer, *Die Perspekive der Moral. Grundlagen der Philosophischen Ethik* (trad. it., A. Jappe, II ed., Armando Editore, Roma 2006), pp. 103-107; cfr. anche A. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, Notre Dame University Press, Notre Dame 1988, pp. 129-145 e M.S. Vacarezza, *Le ragioni del contingente*, cit., pp. 49-57.

[27] A. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, cit., p. 129: «Every pratical syllogism is a performance by a particular person on a particular occasion». Riguardo all'esempio della nota precedente, la premessa maggiore è valida qui e ora: non necessariamente è sempre bene nutrirmi. Infatti, se mangio in eccesso rischio un'indigestione.

[28] Cfr. C. Larmore, *Patterns of Moral Complexity*, cit., p. 16 (trad. it., p. 33).

moderna, un'eccessiva semplificazione riguardo al processo di costruzione del giudizio morale con la sottovalutazione della sussistenza di una molteplicità di forme di ragionamento sull'azione giusta da compiere per perseguire il bene proprio e altrui. La nostra esperienza morale mostra, però, come la deliberazione morale possa essere sostenuta tanto da ragioni deontologiche quanto consequenzialiste. Dobbiamo, perciò, riconoscere che esistono più modi di ragionare moralmente[29].

Inoltre, talvolta, intratteniamo relazioni speciali, riguardo modi di vita o interessi, con individui o gruppi verso i quali, a determinate condizioni e in circostanze particolari, possiamo giustificare azioni che li privilegiano adottando un principio di parzialità[30]. Pertanto, un carattere proprio della moralità è la sua eterogeneità.

La nostra esperienza morale mostra, anche, la sussistenza di situazioni nelle quali il giudizio morale viene sollecitato o indotto dalle emozioni. L'impatto emotivo con stati di sofferenza, disuguaglianza, ecc., può contribuire a generare una riflessione morale su come dovremmo agire per evitarli o, almeno, limitarne gli effetti. Aristotele aveva intuito l'esistenza di un rapporto fra bene e passioni fino a pensare che, talvolta, possano coincidere[31]. La stessa φιλία (*philía*) amicizia verso se stessi è considerata come un accordo reciproco fra ragione e passioni[32].

Gran parte dell'etica moderna ha eliso le emozioni dalla moralità. Si deve ai filosofi del *moral sense*, l'aver posto, in vario modo, l'accento sulla sua dimensione emotiva, ma non sul giudizio morale[33]. Fu A. Smith a sottolinearne l'importanza ponendo l'accento sul fatto che le virtù sono associate a una regola generale o a un modo di agire e, insieme, integrate con il sentimento morale proprio di ognuna. Pertanto, egli riteneva si potesse comprendere la natura del giudizio morale esaminando il sentimento carat-

[29] C. Larmore, *Dare ragioni,* Rosemberg & Sellier, Torino 2008, p. 34.

[30] Cfr. *ivi*, p. 37.

[31] Cfr. Aristotele, *Etica Eudemia*, VII, 12, 1245 b 1-2.

[32] Cfr. Aristotele, *Grande Etica*, II, 11, 1211 a 33-37.

[33] Cfr. D. Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, in T.H. Green and T.H. Grose (eds.), *The Philosophical Works of David Hume*, Longman, London 1739-1740, II, Section III, pp. 413-418 (trad. it. di M. Dal Prà ed Enrico Mistretta, *Trattato sulla natura umana*, in Id., *Opere filosofiche*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1993, pp. 434-439). Hume giunse a negare la possibilità di un conflitto fra passioni (era il termine che, allora, si utilizzava per emozioni) e ragione, poiché il fondamento della moralità risiede nelle passioni di cui la ragione non può che essere schiava. In queste pagine Hume afferma: «Una passione è un'esistenza originaria […]». Questo rende impossibile che «[…] possa essere ostacolata dalla verità e dalla ragione o possa contradirle […]». La teoria humiana, finisce, così, per eliminare il giudizio morale.

teristico che, oltre alla comprensione di qualche regola generale, motiva l'esercizio di una particolare virtù. Tale sentimento è esposto a una serie di variazioni a seconda dei contesti e una sua descrizione generale tende a raffigurarlo come l'avvenuto riconoscimento della regola generale associata. Smith, però, non andò oltre l'affermazione per cui il vero giudizio morale dovrebbe essere visto come l'espressione del sentimento morale che proverebbe un osservatore simpatetico imparziale[34]. Facendo esplicitamente riferimento a Smith, Hoffman ha proposto una teoria del rapporto fra empatia e sviluppo morale che consente di superare la tautologia dell'emotivismo. La sua tesi è che, per quanto la morale empatica possa spiegare molti aspetti del comportamento prosociale, una teoria morale richiede il riferimento a principi morali. Secondo Hoffman, affetti empatici e principi morali sono congruenti, poiché i primi possono essere integrati nei secondi; inoltre, il concetto di reciprocità, che è alla base di molti principi di giustizia, e l'empatia sono ortogonali[35]. Un osservatore può sentirsi motivato, per empatia, ad aiutare una persona e, insieme, sentire l'obbligo a farlo perché si prende cura degli altri. Anche Hoffman, però, pur fornendo importanti spunti, non giunge a elaborare una teoria del giudizio morale.

3. *La competenza etica e i suoi limiti*

Il giudizio morale mira ad applicare, in modo appropriato, regole *morali* a circostanze particolari.

Larmore propone di distinguere fra applicazione di una regola e agire secondo ragioni che implicano regole non previamente fornite[36]. In effetti, una regola, tipo devi dire sempre la verità, può risultare eccessivamente schema-

[34] Cfr. A. Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002 (trad. it. di C. Cozzo, *Teoria dei sentimenti morali*, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, Roma 1991), pp. 11-18 (trad. it. pp. 5-12); cfr., anche, *ivi*, pp. 256-266 (trad. it., pp. 297-309).

[35] Cfr. M.L. Hoffman, *Empathy and Moral Development. Implications for Caring and Justice*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2000, p. 221 (trad.it. di M. Riccucci, *Empatia e sviluppo morale*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2008, p. 257). L'empatia implica "il mettersi nei panni" degli altri il che la rende ortogonale con il rispetto dei diritti individuali producendo una forte motivazione alla giustizia. Come rileva A.E. Berti: «Quello che Hoffman (e con lui diversi altri studiosi dell'argomento) chiamano attualmente *empatia* ha fatto il suo ingresso nella filosofia morale con il nome di *simpatia*. La più estesa trattazione di questa *passione* (termine che possiamo considerare sinonimo del più recente *emozione*) e del suo ruolo nella moralità si trova nel trattato di Smith sui sentimenti morali […]» (A.E. Berti, *Introduzione*, in *Empatia e sviluppo morale*, cit., pp. 7-8).

[36] Cfr. C. Larmore, *Patterns of Moral Complexity*, cit., pp. 6-8 (trad. it., pp. 25-26).

tica e richiedere l'esercizio del giudizio morale per essere applicata o disattesa in casi particolari[37]. Un regola può, anche, non essere data, ma emergere da una valutazione del contesto nel quale ci si trova a dover deliberare e agire. Ciò significa che il giudizio morale consente fare fronte a specifiche circostanze sulla base di ragioni che richiedono regole di cui non si dispone a priori. La nostra esperienza morale, inoltre, ci pone di fronte a dilemmi e conflitti morali caratterizzati dal fatto che principi e regole, importanti per la nostra moralità, si elidono a vicenda[38]. Si tratta di un aspetto sottovalutato da Aristotele il quale, data la sua visione finalistica e perfezionista dell'etica «[…] mostrò scarsa consapevolezza dei conflitti morali, e così non colse questo ruolo peculiare del giudizio morale»[39] e da kantismo e utilitarismo il cui monismo etico finisce per ritenere il conflitto solo apparente[40].

Alla luce di quanto detto finora, ritengo che l'elaborazione del giudizio morale si configuri come competenza, poiché le competenze costituiscono un *bricolage* di saperi e capacità di agire in contesti determinati dove consistono in conoscenze in azione e nel sapersi servire delle risorse che si hanno a disposizione[41]. Quella etica è una competenza di base[42] in quanto trasversale e influente su quelle più specifiche ed emerge come risposta-assunzione di responsabilità rispetto a dilemmi e conflitti morali. Essa consiste nel decidere quale fra i principi fondamentali dell'etica privilegiare, in uno specifico contesto, dandone ragioni[43]. Tale decisione può,

[37] Cfr. B. Constant, *Cours de politique constitutionelle ou collection des ouvrages publiées sur le gouvernement représentatif, Des réactions politiques*, Slatkine, Genève-Paris 1982, II, c. VII, pp. 108-115; I. Kant, *Über ein vermeintes Recht aus Menschenliebe zu lügen*, in «Berlinische Monatsschrift», Berlin 6 settembre 1797, pp. 485-504.

[38] Un esempio tipico è, in bioetica medica, il conflitto, che può verificarsi, fra beneficialità del medico e rispetto per l'autonomia della persona assistita, dove ragioni deontologiche e ragioni consequenzialiste risultano incompatibili.

[39] C. Larmore, *Patterns of Moral Complexity*, cit., p. 10 (trad. it., p. 27).

[40] Per una trattazione approfondita, cfr. *ivi*, 10-11 (trad. it., pp. 27-28).

[41] La definizione di competenza è oggetto di discussione (cfr. P.G. Bresciani, *Capire la competenza*, Franco Angeli, Milano 2012). Qui mi rifaccio a quanto afferma Cepollaro secondo il quale per comprenderne la natura delle competenze è possibile pensarle come proprietà emergenti legate all'uso e ai contesti. Esse, dunque, non sono "cose" o "pacchetti" che si apprendono e s'importano in un sistema: loro caratteristica fondamentale è l'essere contestuali, locali. Agire con le competenze contribuisce all'evoluzione dei contesti originandone nuovi (cfr. G. Cepollaro, *Le competenze non sono cose*, Guerini e Associati, Milano 2008, pp. 43-55).

[42] Cfr. G. Boschini, S.E. Masi, *L'etica come competenza di base*, in Ii. Dd. (a cura di), *Etica, organizzazione e formazione*, Franco Angeli, Milano 2004, pp. 13-14.

[43] Cfr. C. Larmore, *Patterns of Moral Complexity*, cit., pp. 148-150 (trad. it., pp. 164-166). In queste pagine, Larmore individua tre regole pratiche in base alle quali decider la priorità fra ragioni deontologiche, consequenzialiste e di parzialità, ma ne evidenzia anche i limiti. Dal mio

anche, essere indotta dalla congruenza fra emozioni e principi morali. La competenza etica è, pertanto, espressione dell'immaginazione morale, ossia della capacità di elaborare e valutare diverse possibilità di comportamento non limitandoci al contenuto di regole morali. Elaborando creativamente esempi ed esperienze, rapportando emozioni e principi etici, l'immaginazione morale «[…] rivela un interesse attivo e serio nella vita morale»[44] e dà un'idea della virtù morale di una persona. In sintesi, la competenza etica è espressione di un equilibrio, dinamico, culturale e operativo, che le persone trovano tra sé e un contesto ed è agita da soggetti che sanno diagnosticare l'ambiente in cui operano e produrre relazioni e comportamenti appropriati di cui sono in grado dare ragioni.

Infine, poiché il giudizio morale ha un ruolo centrale riguardo alla moralità personale, ma non ha la stessa rilevanza nella sfera politica, la competenza etica consente di non sovrapporre ideali personali e politici[45] diversamente da quanto accadeva nella visione aristotelica. Al tempo stesso, questa non sovrapposizione permette di «[…] evitare uno dei nefasti paradossi della teoria liberale successiva a Locke, la quale difendeva la neutralità politica appellandosi a ideali della persona essi stessi giustamente controversi»[46].

La competenza etica, però, non consente, di per sé, di risolvere, sempre e comunque, questioni morali. Dobbiamo arrenderci all'evidenza che possiamo avere a che fare con conflitti che non ammettono soluzione e che la nostra ragione è limitata. Ciò avviene nei casi in cui ci sentiamo obbligati ad agire sia alla luce del principio deontologico che di quello consequenzialista perché tanto l'uno che l'altro comportano azioni che non solo riteniamo ammissibili, ma appunto, obbligatorie. In casi come questi, non abbiamo un *deficit* di conoscenza, al contrario, sappiamo troppo, ossia, che abbiamo l'obbligo di compiere l'azione che riteniamo migliore sia dal punto di vista deontologico che consequenzialista. Pertanto, questi principi stabiliscono i limiti dell'intelligibilità morale. Infine, di fronte a un conflitto morale insolubile e alla necessità di deliberare come comportarci, dobbiamo

punto di vista si tratta di una conferma dell'opportunità di intendere l'elaborazione del giudizio morale come competenza etica.

[44] *Ivi*, p. 15 (trad. it., p. 29).

[45] Non è qui possibile affrontare questo tema. Per un approfondimento, cfr. F. Manti, *La neutralità politica come principio deontologico*, in «Etica e politica/Ethics & Politics», vol. 17, n. 3, pp. 247-261.

[46] C. Larmore, *Patterns of Moral Complexity*, cit., xiii (trad. it., p. 14). Larmore si riferisce, in particolare, a Kant e J.S. Mill che hanno vincolato l'ideale della neutralità politica, a una concezione comprensiva della vita buona fondata, rispettivamente, sull'ideale dell'autonomia e sullo sperimentalismo rispetto a varie forme di vita del soggetto morale.

prendere atto che ci sono obblighi che non siamo in grado di rispettare, per cui le scelte morali, in condizione di conflitto fra i principi fondamentali, non sono mai a costo zero. Fra il darsi dei contesti e il dover essere c'è il nostro poter fare, ma dobbiamo essere consapevoli della sussistenza di obblighi che, talvolta, non possiamo osservare: «Le nostre possibilità di agire nel mondo sono, allora, troppo limitate rispetto a quello che sappiamo sarebbe nostro dovere fare»[47]. Questo distingue il soggetto eticamente competente dal *phrónimos*, poiché la competenza etica è situata, contestuale e prescinde da una concezione perfezionista della natura umana[48]. Tuttavia, l'idea che la centralità del giudizio morale non comporti il venir meno del ruolo della ragione e quella di ragionevolezza pratica, possono essere considerate un'importante eredità lasciataci da Aristotele.

English title: The moral judgment. *Phronesis* and moral complexity

Abstract

An invaluable resource for correcting the limits of deontological and consequentialist theories, is given by the Aristotelian idea of φρόνησις *(*phronesis*) or moral judgement, because it helps to free moral decision from standard rules and principles and to give contextual justification. It is a very important intuition that, however, has to be re-thought in the light of pluralism and heterogeneousness and complexity of morality. Therefore, I propose a theory of the moral decision able to see the judgement as the expression of a plurality of factors that our moral imagination organizes and composes. In this sense, it is possible to intend the moral judgement as as an expression of ethical competence.*

Keywords: Ethical competence; heterogeneousness of morality; moral judgment; phronesis.

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[47] *Ivi*, p. 150 (trad. it., p. 166).

[48] Cfr. J. Annas, *The Moral of Happiness*, cit., p. 72. Annas afferma: «[…] Plato and Aristotle, insist that working for a living was incompatible with developing the virtues; thus virtue and skill, would not naturally be thought as forming aspects of the *same* life».

T

Dilemmi e unità delle virtù: la *phronesis* come integratore morale ed esistenziale

Maria Silvia Vaccarezza

Scopo di questo articolo è intrecciare due dibattiti – quello circa la natura dei dilemmi morali e dei conflitti tra valori e quello sull'unità o reciprocità delle virtù – per affermare il ruolo di integratore morale della phronesis (o saggezza pratica) e sostenere, inoltre, la plausibilità di due tesi correlate: (i) l'unità (dinamica) delle virtù e (ii) la non-conflittualità dei valori morali.

Di contro all'idea che le virtù generino richieste in conflitto e, dunque, diano luogo a dilemmi morali, tratteggerò una concezione delle virtù che sappia rendere conto della loro mutua interazione e non-conflittualità, e della phronesis quale integratore morale, ovvero virtù sovrana, responsabile di integrare i valori salvandone l'irriducibilità, e gerarchizzarli qui e ora. In tal modo, sarà fatta salva la tesi tradizionale dell'unità delle virtù, alla luce di una concezione più analitica di cosa siano le virtù, quale il loro scopo e il loro nesso con la phronesis, e quale la natura dell'atto virtuoso. In particolare, sosterrò che l'unificazione data dalla phronesis alla luce di uno scopo olistico sia da intendere come "unità dinamica delle virtù". Inoltre, attribuirò una funzione ulteriore alla phronesis, ovvero quella di "integratore esistenziale", capace di preservare l'integrità della persona alla luce di tale ideale di unità dinamica delle virtù. Non, cioè, in forza di un'unità de facto, né dell'unità come mero ideale regolativo, ma dell'unità delle virtù come *ideale possibile* – dunque normativo – e misura del progresso morale.

1. *Dilemmi morali?*

Il tema dei dilemmi morali non è certo recente; basti pensare che, già nell'*Etica Nicomachea*, Aristotele si domanda quale sia il grado di volon-

tarietà di decisioni prese in situazioni estreme, nelle quali ci si trovi costretti a compiere azioni che, in circostanze ordinarie, mai si vorrebbero commettere, come gettare un carico in mare durante un naufragio, o macchiarsi di un crimine perché costretti a ciò da un tiranno che minaccia la propria famiglia (cfr. EN III, 1100 a4-b9). E tuttavia questa tematica ha, negli ultimi decenni, nuovamente affascinato il dibattito filosofico, e visto alcune delle più acute voci del panorama internazionale prendere posizione in proposito. In particolare, il dibattito si concentra non tanto sulle situazioni "tragiche", ma su casi dilemmatici in cui pare profilarsi un conflitto tra valori. Tipico è il caso dello studente menzionato da Jean-Paul Sartre, diviso tra il dovere di difendere la patria e quello di assistere l'anziana madre; più semplicemente, si può pensare al caso ordinario di non saper scegliere tra il dire una verità dolorosa o sgradevole, venendo apparentemente meno al dovere di amicizia che ci lega a qualcuno, e l'ometterla, rinunciando, così, all'esigenza di veridicità e sincerità.

Come nota Carla Bagnoli in un suo importante lavoro[1], il caso del dilemma morale pone una sfida alla tenuta stessa delle teorie etiche e alla loro capacità di rappresentare una guida per l'agire: da un lato, infatti, si collocano teorie che ammettono l'autenticità del dilemma (ovvero, il conflitto insolubile), e rendono perciò conto delle nostre intuizioni in proposito, esponendosi, però, al rischio di non essere *action-guiding*; dall'altro, vi sono teorie che negano tale autenticità, interpretando ogni apparente conflitto dilemmatico come una situazione in linea di principio risolvibile, una volta rimossi i difetti cognitivi dell'agente che gli impediscono di intravedere la giusta soluzione, ma così facendo rischiano di non rendere adeguatamente conto della fenomenologia morale e dell'esperienza di stallo, conflitto interiore e rimorso che l'agente si trova effettivamente a provare. Pur muovendo da presupposti differenti, ricadono nella prima posizione autori come Nagel[2] e Williams[3], secondo i quali "i dilemmi si generano perché vi sono valori differenti e incomparabili", e "un agente che riconosce tali valori si trova perciò inevitabilmente vincolato da obblighi che possono entrare in conflitto"[4]. D'altro lato, tanto un consequen-

[1] C. Bagnoli, *Dilemmi morali*, De Ferrari, Genova 2006. Di Carla Bagnoli si veda anche, sullo stesso tema, *I dilemmi morali e l'integrità*, in «Iride», 27/2 (1999), pp. 291-310.

[2] T. Nagel, *The Fragmentation of Value*, in Id., *Mortal Questions*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1979.

[3] B. Williams, *Conflitti tra valori*, in Id., *Sorte morale*, Il Saggiatore, Milano 1987, pp. 97-110.

[4] C. Bagnoli, *Dilemmi morali*, cit., p. 10.

zialista come Hare[5], quanto razionalisti di stampo "virtueticista" come MacIntyre[6], Donagan[7], Korsgaard[8] e Foot[9], per ragioni differenti sostengono unanimemente che il dilemma nasca "a causa di certi difetti cognitivi, morali o logici dell'agente", e che, pertanto, "non vi sono conflitti morali irrisolvibili, ma solo agenti difettosi"[10]. Foot, in particolare, difende il cognitivismo (contrastando la posizione anti-cognitivista e anti-realista di Williams) in due celebri articoli, nei quali ricorre alla distinzione tra proposizioni che esprimano un semplice obbligo o impegno morale, e proposizioni che sanciscano invece l'azione moralmente migliore "tutto considerato"[11]; se le prime asseriscono l'esistenza di obbligazioni, promesse, regole e simili, le seconde invece esprimono ciò che l'agente dovrebbe fare nella situazione presente. Sebbene le proposizioni riguardanti gli obblighi *prima facie* rappresentino il fondamento dell'obbligatorietà di quelle che stabiliscono l'azione moralmente migliore e obbligante nel caso particolare, solo queste ultime esprimono ciò per cui vi sono non semplicemente ragioni, ma ragioni migliori o conclusive. E, a questo livello particolare, non è possibile conflitto, dal momento che, in ogni situazione pratica, possono esservi ragioni conclusive solo per un corso d'azione. Ciò vale, a dire di Foot, tanto nel caso dei dilemmi cosiddetti "risolvibili", nei quali, cioè, non è problematico stabilire quale corso d'azione intraprendere, e il problema che si pone è solo quello dell'aver apparentemente infranto una norma morale, quanto nella situazione ben più problematica dei casi tragici.

[5] R.M. Hare, *Il pensiero morale. Livelli, metodi, scopi*, il Mulino, Bologna 1989, pp. 57-76.

[6] A. MacIntyre, *Moral Dilemmas*, in «Philosophy and Phenomenological Research», 1 (1990), Suppl., pp. 367-382.

[7] Cfr. A. Donagan, *Consistency in rationalist moral systems*, in «Journal of Philosophy», 81 (1984), pp. 291-309; A. Donagan, *Moral dilemmas, Genuine and Spurious: A comparative anatomy*, in «Ethics», 104 (1993), pp. 7-21, ripubblicato in in *The Philosophical papers of Alan Donagan*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago-London 1994, vol. 2, pp. 153-167.

[8] C. Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996.

[9] P. Foot, *Moral Dilemmas. And Other Topics in Moral Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2002, pp. 175-188.

[10] C. Bagnoli, *Dilemmi morali*, cit., pp. 8-9.

[11] Si tratta di quelli che in *Moral Realism and Moral Dilemma* Foot chiama "type 1" e "type 2" ought statements (2002 a, 43), e in *Moral Dilemmas Revisited* "ought as a ground" (*O'XA*) e "practical ought" (*OXA*) (2002b, 178).

2. *Unità delle virtù: una concezione aristotelica*

Per comprendere come si possa riformulare dal punto di vista delle virtù la questione dei dilemmi, occorre muovere un passo indietro e porsi una domanda circa l'annoso dibattito sulla tesi della cosiddetta unità delle virtù, che può essere così riformulata per meglio mostrarne l'aderenza al nostro tema: è necessario che le virtù generino richieste morali in conflitto? Per i sostenitori della tesi "unitarista", dal momento che il possesso di una (vera) virtù implica necessariamente il possesso di tutte le altre, è impossibile che da due o più virtù scaturiscano indicazioni conflittuali[12]. Apparentemente, la tesi dell'unità delle virtù comporta solo che chi possiede una virtù le abbia tutte, e non esclude di per sé che le diverse virtù richiedano risposte contraddittorie in determinate situazioni. Tuttavia, la tesi dell'unità può essere facilmente vista come una delle premesse di un argomento che conclude contro l'esistenza di conflitti morali genuini: se, infatti, si assume che una virtù costituisca una disposizione stabile ad agire bene in un determinato ambito morale, e a guidare l'azione in maniera affidabile, sarebbe problematico per la tesi dell'unità se due azioni richieste da due virtù differenti si rivelassero, in una data situazione, incompatibili al punto di dover sacrificare l'azione prescritta da una delle due, senza doverne concludere che la virtù in questione si sia rivelata inaffidabile nel generare richieste morali e nel guidare efficacemente l'azione. Ecco perché, di fatto, i sostenitori dell'unità delle virtù supportano nella quasi totalità dei casi la tesi per la quale virtù differenti non generino mai richieste morali autenticamente conflittuali[13]. Di contro, i "disunitaristi" traggono molta della loro forza argomentativa proprio dalla constatazione della comune esperienza di esigenze virtuose contrapposte, nonché di frequenti casi in cui sembra impossibile essere, ad esempio, al contempo sinceri e amichevoli, coraggiosi e temperanti, e così via[14]. Sebbene il focus non sia tanto sulle obbligazioni,

[12] Una co-implicazione reciproca di tutte le virtù, è sostenuta – tra gli altri – da T.H. Irwin, *Disunity in the Aristotelian Virtues*, in «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», Supplementary Volume, 72 (1988), pp. 61-78; J. Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1993; S. Wolf, *Moral Psychology and the Unity of the Virtues*, in «Ratio», 20 (2007), n. 2, pp. 145-167; D. Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2009.

[13] Sono grata a un revisore anonimo di questa rivista per avermi aiutato a chiarire questo punto.

[14] Tra questi, ricordiamo T. Nagel, *The Fragmentation of Value*, cit.; B. Williams, *Conflicts of Values*, in Id., *Moral Luck*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1982, pp. 71-82; A.D.M. Walker, *The Incompatibility of the Virtues*, in «Ratio», 6 (1993), n. 1, pp. 44-60; N.K. Badhwar, *The Limited Unity of Virtue*, in «Nous», 30 (1996), n. 3, pp. 306-329; J.H. McDowell, *Mind,*

quanto su quale sia l'azione virtuosa moralmente migliore, l'analogia con il dilemma morale "standard" è evidente: basti pensare al caso ordinario, e per nulla drammatico, menzionato prima, ovvero la situazione in cui dover scegliere se dire una verità dolorosa (virtù della sincerità) od ometterla per non ferire l'interlocutore (virtù del tatto e dell'amichevolezza).

Il disaccordo in merito all'unità o disunità delle virtù, e dunque riguardo alla loro reciproca compatibilità, è, a mio avviso, radicato in una presa di posizione più profonda, ovvero nell'esistenza di due visioni complessive differenti di che cosa sia una virtù, che chiamo "di senso comune"[15] e "aristotelica", e che si sostanziano in una differente concezione, in particolare, di due aspetti:

i. ciò cui le virtù tendono = lo scopo dell'azione virtuosa;
ii. cosa significa realmente esercitare un atto virtuoso = la natura (quantitativa o qualitativa) dell'azione virtuosa.

Ne segue, sosterrò, che una visione di senso comune, proprio alla luce della posizione che prende in merito a questi due aspetti centrali, non può che sostenere il disunitarismo, mentre da una visione pienamente aristotelica consegue chiaramente una tesi unitarista, in base alla quale è falso che le virtù generino richieste morali in conflitto.

2.1. *Scopo singolo e scopo olistico*

Per quanto riguarda il primo aspetto, ovvero il fine o scopo cui tendono le virtù, possiamo individuare la differenza tra le due concezioni rivali contrapponendo una visione incentrata su uno scopo singolo e una che concepisce lo scopo delle virtù come olistico.

In base a una visione del senso comune, ogni virtù tende a uno scopo singolo, in quanto le diverse virtù sono risposte distinte a considerazioni distinte, cui capita in maniera meramente accidentale di essere compresenti nella stessa situazione[16]. In base a tale concezione, dunque, avere una determinata virtù significa possedere:

Value, and Reality, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA) 1998. Si tratta di autori che o non credono nella compatibilità reciproca delle virtù o, più debolmente, dubitano che l'unità tra virtù sia necessaria affinché una virtù sia veramente tale.

[15] Scelgo di chiamare "di senso comune" una posizione che, a ben vedere, non è così pacificamente tale, in quanto pone requisiti meno stringenti alla concezione di virtù, tanto che lo stesso Walker, che come mostrerò ne è l'esponente più rappresentativo, riconosce che la sua concezione potrebbe facilmente essere interpretata in tal senso.

[16] Cfr. A.D.M. Walker, *The Incompatibility of the Virtues*, in «Ratio», VI (1993), pp. 44-62.

– sensibilità a un tipo particolare di considerazioni, e
– desiderio di promuovere esclusivamente gli interessi originati da tali considerazioni[17].

Pertanto, possedere una virtù implica il possesso di una *sensibilità specifica*, indipendente da altre risposte a considerazioni morali.

Al contrario, entro un quadro aristotelico del funzionamento delle virtù, per rispondere adeguatamente alle considerazioni morali specifiche del proprio ambito, ogni virtù necessita di tendere all'atto che è buono sotto ogni rispetto; dunque, essa deve tener conto delle diverse richieste morali del mondo, e beneficiare del contributo delle altre virtù e della capacità di unificazione e integrazione morale della saggezza pratica[18]. Per questo, grande enfasi è attribuita alla phronesis, virtù che gioca un fondamentale ruolo di "orchestrazione"[19], in quanto individua l'equilibrio tra le rispettive esigenze delle diverse virtù[20]. Chi non abbia una nozione del fine complessivo dell'azione, non possiede, in un quadro aristotelico, autentica saggezza pratica; e chi non l'abbia, viceversa, manca della capacità di bilanciamento tra virtù che, sola, impedisce alle varie virtù di rappresentare impulsi miopi verso fini distinti[21].

Per esemplificare: in mancanza di un progetto, i diversi operai e artigiani al lavoro nella costruzione di una casa, ciascuno con le proprie abilità, non potrebbero ben coordinarsi, e, di conseguenza, verrebbero meno (paradossalmente) anche al loro fine particolare. Ma per avere un progetto occorre un architetto, ovvero non semplicemente un tecnico in grado di disegnare, ma qualcuno che conosca la destinazione d'uso dell'edificio, le esigenze dei suoi futuri occupanti, ecc.[22]. Non sarebbe neppure un buon falegname chi fosse abilissimo a modellare il legno, ma costruisse una scala

[17] *Ivi*, p. 51.

[18] Susan Wolf ha sottolineato la necessità della *phronesis* perché si abbiano autentiche virtù, anziché mere capacità naturali, e si riferisce alla phronesis come a una forma di "conoscenza valutativa", ovvero "conoscenza di ciò che importante e di valore". Si tratta di una conoscenza che "può essere acquisita solo attraverso una combinazione di esperienza e riflessione", e conduce ad avere chiare le proprie priorità. Cfr. S. Wolf, *Moral Psychology and the Unity of the Virtues*, in «Ratio» (new series), XX, 2 (2007), pp. 155-156 (traduzione mia).

[19] K. Kristjánsson, *Virtues and Vices in Positive Psychology. A Philosophical Critique*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2013.

[20] Cfr. D.C. Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2009, p. 167.

[21] *Ivi*, p. 341. Questo aspetto è ben sottolineato, tra gli altri, anche da J. Annas in *The Morality of Happiness*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1993, pp. 75 e segg., e T.H. Irwin, *Disunity in the Aristotelian Virtues*, in «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», suppl. (1988), pp. 61-78.

[22] Lo stesso Aristotele sottintende questa metafora: cfr. EN I, 1094 a7-17.

nel mezzo di una stanza, o ostruisse le prese elettriche col mobilio, rifiutandosi di coordinarsi con il progetto complessivo e con gli altri artigiani.

Fuor di metafora, occorre la phronesis per conoscere lo *skopos* o *horos*[23], ovvero, l'obiettivo, cui le virtù devono tendere.

In sintesi, la lettura di senso comune adotta una visione singola dello scopo dell'azione virtuosa, e dipinge le virtù come sensibilità che tendono ciascuna al proprio fine; la lettura aristotelica, per contro, fa della cooperazione e dell'integrazione elementi essenziali di una visione olistica del fine, e le fonda nel possesso della phronesis, che dà ad ogni virtù la propria direzione fornendo loro un abbozzo del bene dell'agente.

2.2. *Concezione quantitativa e qualitativa dell'atto virtuoso*

Il secondo aspetto di controversia, che porta a una differenza di vedute circa l'unità delle virtù, riguarda, come accennato, che cosa significhi realmente esercitare un atto virtuoso, ovvero la natura (quantitativa o qualitativa) dell'azione virtuosa.

La visione di senso comune sposa infatti, a mio avviso, una lettura *quantitativa* dell'atto virtuoso, che equipara il possesso di una virtù alla massimizzazione dell'esercizio del suo atto distintivo, mentre quella aristotelica ne abbraccia una *qualitativa*, in base alla quale definire quale sia l'atto virtuoso è una attività più complessa[24]. Per esemplificare molto semplicemente, nelle due concezioni possedere una virtù come, ad esempio, la sincerità, significa:

– in una visione quantitativa, dire sempre la verità;
– in una visione qualitativa, pensare, sentire e agire sempre in modo da preservare il più possibile la verità nelle circostanze date.

Come affermato ad esempio da Walker, "un essere perfettamente misericordioso perdonerebbe ogni errore", così come uno perfettamente giusto "punirebbe ogni errore"; ecco perché, in tale concezione, il possesso di

[23] Cfr. *Etica Nicomachea* VI, 1138 b1; 1138 b2.

[24] Alfano propone una concezione "mista". Basandosi sulla distinzione di Adams 2006 tra virtù legate a doveri imperfetti, come la generosità, e virtù legate a doveri perfetti, come la castità, Alfano distingue tra virtù "ad alta fedeltà" (*high-fidelity virtues*), come castità, equità, fedeltà, onestà, giustizia e affidabilità, che richiedono un grado elevato di coerenza, e virtù "a bassa fedeltà" (*low-fidelity virtues*), come carità, diligenza, amichevolezza, generosità, industriosità, magnanimità, pietà, tatto e tenacia, che ammettono un grado di coerenza inferiore (M. Alfano, *Character as Moral Fiction*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2013, p. 241). In altri termini, "una persona può essere generosa se fa l'elemosina una volta ogni tanto", mentre al contrario "non è affatto casta se si trattiene dal violare le proprie promesse matrimoniali solo occasionalmente" (traduzione mia).

perfetta giustizia è per definizione incompatibile con il possesso di perfetta misericordia[25]. La visione quantitativa è implicata in particolar modo da quella che Walker chiama "assunzione di correlazione", in base alla quale "il grado di possesso di una virtù è direttamente correlato all'estensività del suo esercizio"[26]. In base alla mia lettura, tale affermazione va letta, più precisamente, come segue: "il grado di possesso di una virtù è direttamente correlato all'estensività dell'esercizio *del suo atto distintivo*". Solo intesa in tal senso si può comprendere come l'esercizio estensivo di una virtù confligga con quello di altre, come Walker sostiene quando afferma che "possiamo esercitare la sincerità solo a spese del non esercizio di quella del tatto, come quando ci viene fatta una domanda la risposta sincera alla quale implicherebbe ferire l'interlocutore"[27]: in questo caso, la sincerità equivale semplicemente a dire ciò che si pensa, così come il tatto coincide con il non ferire in alcun caso; e seppure tali definizioni siano accettabili *prima facie*, è dubbio che lo siano tutto considerato.

In linea con Aristotele, in base a una visione aristotelica la virtù, ad es., della sincerità è una capacità più complessa di pensare, sentire e agire in modo da tendere alla verità all'interno delle circostanze e della situazione data[28]. Non c'è, pertanto, se non a grandi linee, un modo infallibile di predeterminare in cosa consista una risposta sincera alla situazione, dato che per stabilirlo è necessaria quella sensibilità alla situazione e alle sue richieste morali che è tipica della virtù[29]. Questo è ciò in cui, a mio avviso, consiste una visione qualitativa dell'atto virtuoso, ovvero considerare le virtù come configurazioni profonde di sentimenti e pensieri, configurazioni che non producono un comportamento automatico, codificabile a priori, ma una sensibilità ad alcune ragioni morali, una capacità di percepire le caratteristiche moralmente salienti della circostanza.

Ogni virtù ha dunque, come sottolineato da McDowell, un "relevant ran-

[25] Walker, *The Incompatibility of the Virtues*, cit., p. 46.

[26] *Ivi*, p. 48.

[27] *Ivi*, p. 47.

[28] Tra gli altri, vale la pena richiamare l'efficace sintesi di questo punto compiuta da Kristjánsson: "Ogni virtù, tipicamente, comprende un insieme unico di percezione/riconoscimento, emozione, desiderio, motivazione, comportamento e stile, che si applica alla sfera rilevante, senza che nessuno dei fattori (nemmeno il comportamento "corretto") possa essere valutato indipendentemente dagli altri". Cfr. K. Kristjánsson, *Aristotelian Character Education*, Routledge, London-New York 2015, p. 14 (traduzione mia).

[29] Si vedano ad esempio Sherman 1989, Nussbaum 1990 e tutti gli altri eticisti della virtù che concepiscono le virtù come forme di reattività sensibile e assegnano la priorità alla particolarità della situazione morale.

ge of behavior", ovvero un ambito rilevante di comportamento – ciò che Aristotele considerava il continuum entro cui la medietà virtuosa va trovata in ogni situazione. Nel caso della gentilezza, per esempio, tale ambito è contrassegnato dalla nozione di "attenzione appropriata ai sentimenti altrui", cosa che non coincide con "semplice propensione ad essere gentili"[30].

A questo proposito, ritengo sia esattamente per questa ragione che, in Aristotele, a una visione qualitativa delle virtù se ne accompagni una quantitativa dei vizi e delle cosiddette virtù naturali: entrambi questi ultimi tratti, infatti, sono risposte semplici e standard, incapaci di valutazione, variazione e creatività[31]. Non sorprende, perciò, che Aristotele veda le virtù come reciprocamente unite e le virtù naturali e i vizi come invece spesso reciprocamente incompatibili[32]: proprio perché, avendo questi ultimi una struttura quantitativa, portano spesso a conflitti tra forze miopi dell'anima.

In sintesi, in questo secondo punto ho cercato di mostrare come la mancanza di una tesi circa l'unità delle virtù non dipende solo da una differente concezione di quale sia lo scopo (singolo od olistico) cui ciascuna virtù ultimamente tende, ma anche da una diversa visione della natura dell'atto virtuoso; quantitativa, in una visione di senso comune, e qualitativa in base a una lettura aristotelica. Per quest'ultima, come detto, agire virtuosamente ha a che fare con l'individuazione del giusto mezzo all'interno di un continuum rilevante, e, inoltre, l'esercizio di una virtù è un possesso profondo che non sempre sfocia in azioni evidenti, ma può semplicemente coincidere con un certo sentire e pensare, quando le circostanze non permettano o giustifichino l'azione.

3. *Unità e dilemmi: qualche conseguenza*

Come si sposa quanto visto finora, circa la sostenibilità della tesi dell'unità, con la constatazione che l'esperienza morale ci pone di fronte a dilemmi morali? O, più precisamente, che resoconto dà del dilemma morale una teoria etica basata sulle virtù che ne supporti la reciproca compatibilità? Innanzi tutto, occorre sottolineare che, rispetto a una concezione razionalista in senso stretto, che vede il conflitto *prima facie* come indicativo di uno scontro tra regole morali generali che entrano in collisione, una

[30] J. McDowell, *Virtue and Reason*, in Id., *Mind, Value and Reality*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, p. 53 (traduzione mia).

[31] Cfr. EN VI, 1144b 2-17.

[32] Cfr. EN IV, 1121a 15-16.

prospettiva incentrata sulle virtù e sulla saggezza pratica come quella tratteggiata ha il vantaggio di vedere la seconda natura virtuosa non come la mera internalizzazione e applicazione al caso particolare di norme generali, ma come un'intelligenza del particolare orientata a fini, dotata quindi di sensibilità al caso singolo e flessibilità. In particolare, in base a una visione olistica e qualitativa, le virtù non generano richieste morali in conflitto, perché non sono da interpretare come tendenze meccaniche a rispettare principi inviolabili, ma dimensioni elastiche di individuazione del bene e del valore nella situazione presente, orientate dalla saggezza pratica che ne garantisce la capacità di percezione della salienza morale e l'orientamento a uno scopo complessivo buono dell'esistenza.

Dunque, di contro all'idea che l'insorgere di dilemmi morali riveli l'esistenza di conflitti irriducibili tra valori, la concezione olistica e qualitativa che ho qui difeso sostiene la capacità della *phronesis* di fungere da integratore morale, ovvero di integrare i valori salvandone l'irriducibilità e gerarchizzandoli. In tal modo, essa può rivendicare che il conflitto *prima facie* tra valori non dia luogo a un autentico dilemma, ma a una situazione complessa nella quale la saggezza pratica può costituire un'efficace guida per l'azione, individuando il miglior corso d'azione.

Ma c'è di più. Compiendo un importante rilievo, Bagnoli sostiene che negare il dilemma ritenendolo spurio, imputandolo cioè a un difetto di razionalità dell'agente, significa obliterare ciò che ci rende umani, ovvero il fatto di operare in condizione di limiti strutturali, ed esperire per questo minacciata la nostra integrità. Il dilemma, infatti, a suo dire, "porta allo scoperto un conflitto latente tra le ragioni morali che l'agente, se vuol mantenere la propria integrità morale, non può disconoscere introducendo un ordine fittizio di priorità. Nessuna delle alternative che l'agente ha di fronte può lasciare intatta la sua integrità: ecco il senso e l'importanza morale del dilemma morale. Il blocco della deliberazione esprime il fatto che l'integrità dell'agente è minacciata" (Bagnoli 1999: 308). Ciò che qui voglio sostenere è, per contro, che una prospettiva di prima persona centrata sulle virtù possa costituire un buon modo di negare il conflitto radicale senza cancellare però la strutturale limitatezza umana, bensì considerandola non solo come limitatezza epistemica, ma anche e soprattutto morale, ovvero come mancato pieno raggiungimento dell'ideale di integrazione virtuosa piena. Ecco che la *phronesis*, in questa prospettiva, può essere dunque vista come la virtù che, una volta acquisita, non solo opera da *integratore morale*, ovvero gerarchizza i valori, salvando la razionalità della situazione morale e risolvendo il caso dilemmatico, ma, ancor più profonda-

mente, funge da *integratore esistenziale*, ovvero preserva l'integrità normativa della persona agente[33], e dunque ricompone il suo sé morale alla luce di un ideale di unità dinamica delle virtù. Non, cioè, in forza di un'unità *de facto*, né dell'unità come mero ideale regolativo, ma dell'unità delle virtù come *ideale possibile* – dunque normativo – e misura del progresso morale, fatta salva la consapevolezza, di cui si diceva in apertura ricordando la discussione aristotelica dell'involontarietà, che spesso sono le circostanze, e non la moralità o le capacità cognitive del soggetto, a ricordare a quest'ultimo la propria, in ultima analisi irrimediabile, limitatezza.

English title: Dilemmas and the unity of virtues: the *phronesis* as moral and existential integrator

Abstract

In this paper, I aim at showing practical wisdom's integrating and orchestrating role by referring to the two intertwined debates on the nature of moral dilemmas and on the unity or reciprocity of virtues. Against the widespread idea that the virtues may generate conflicting moral requirements, I will outline a conception which accounts for the virtues' compatibility and mutual dependence. In order to defend this view, I will propose an account of Aristotelian phronesis (practical wisdom) conceived as a moral integrator and sovereign virtue, capable of integrating and prioritizing values. by doing so, I will be in a position to defend a revised version of the unity of the virtues thesis.

Keywords: moral dilemmas; unity of the virtues; phronesis; Aristotelian virtue ethics.

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[33] Tra le molte concezioni dell'integrità sul mercato, ad essere implicita nel mio discorso è quella che la vede come un cluster di virtù (costanza, fedeltà e integrità in senso stretto), nonché come virtù della "razionalità pratica imperfetta" e del "prendere la propria vita sul serio", ovvero come via di mediazione ed equilibrio tra le minacce all'unità del sé e le opposte secche del conservatorismo e del mantenimento dello status quo, alla luce di un'istanza di fedeltà a se stessi bilanciata da una disponibilità alla novità morale delle circostanze e alla revisione critica del proprio sistema di credenze e impegni morali. Cfr. D. Cox, M. La Caze, M. Levine, *Integrity*, in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2017 Edition), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/integrity/; C.F. Rees, J. Webber, *Constancy, fidelity and integrity*, in S. Van Hooft (ed.), *The Handbook of Virtue Ethics*, Acumen Press, Durham 2014, pp. 399-408; D. Cox, M. La Caze, M. Levine, *Integrity*, in S. Van Hooft (ed.), *The Handbook of Virtue Ethics*, cit., pp. 200-209.

III.
Prospettive critiche

T

A Plague on both your Houses: Virtue Theory after Situationism and Repligate

Mark Alfano

Introduction

Over the last two and a half decades, philosophers have failed to come to grips with the implications of social and personality psychology for virtue theory. In this paper, I indict both the critics and the defenders of virtue theory. Critics have relied too heavily on a biased sample of the available evidence. What's more, the most troubling studies and effects that they tend to emphasize have turned out to replicate poorly. At the same time, most virtue theorists have responded not by pointing to these very real flaws in the empirical base for skepticism about character traits, but by retreating into unfalsifiable obscurantism. If my criticisms are on the right track, then virtue theorists have countered bad arguments with worse. I conclude by pointing to more promising directions to follow in theorizing about virtues, vices, and character.

1. *Building on a foundation of sand*

Starting with Owen Flanagan's *Varieties of Moral Personality* (1993), philosophers began to worry that empirical results from social psychology were inconsistent with the structure of human agency presupposed by virtue theory – or at least the neo-Aristotelian virtue theory predominant at the time. In this framework, people are conceived as having more or less fixed traits of character that systematically order their perception, cognition, emotion, reasoning, decision-making, and behavior. For example, a generous person is inclined to notice and seek out opportunities to give supererogatorily to others. The generous person is also inclined to think

about what would (and wouldn't) be appreciated by potential recipients, to feel the urge to give and the glow of satisfaction after giving, to deliberate effectively about when, where, and how to give to whom, to come to firm decisions based on such deliberation, and to follow through on those decisions once they've been made. Other traits are meant to fit the same pattern, structuring perception, cognition, motivation, and action of their bearers. Famous results in social psychology, such as Darley & Batson's (1973) Good Samaritan experiment, seem to tell against this view of human moral conduct. When someone helps another in need, they may do so simply because they are not in a rush, rather than because they are expressing a fixed trait like generosity or compassion.

One might respond by emphasizing that virtue theorists don't have to be optimists; they can explain failures of generosity and compassion by attributing akrasia, enkrasia, or vice rather than virtue (Bates & Kleingeld 2017). In the virtue theoretic framework, people are not necessarily assumed to already be virtuous. However, they are assumed to be at least potentially responsive to the considerations that a virtuous person would ordinarily notice and take into account. Flanagan (1993), followed by Doris (1998, 2002), Harman (1999, 2000), and Alfano (2013), made trouble for this framework by pointing to social psychological evidence suggesting that much of people's thinking, feeling, and acting is instead predicted by (and hence responsive to) situational factors that don't seem to count as reasons *at all* – not even bad reasons or temptations to vice. These include influences such as ambient sensibilia (sounds, smells, light levels, etc.), seemingly trivial and normatively irrelevant inducers of positive and negative moods, order of presentation of stimuli, and a variety of framing and priming effects, many of which are reviewed in Ross & Nisbett (1991) and Alfano (2013, pp. 40-50). It's worth emphasizing the depth of the problem these studies pose. It's not that they suggest that most people aren't virtuous (although they do suggest that as well). It's that they undermine the entire framework in which people are conceived as cognitively sensitive and motivationally responsive to reasons. Someone whose failure to act virtuously because they gave in to temptation can be understood in the virtue theoretic framework. Someone whose failure to act virtuously because they'd just been subliminally primed with physical coldness, which in turn is metaphorically associated with social coldness, finds no place in the virtue theoretic framework. These sorts of effects push us to revamp our whole notion of agency and personhood (Bargh 1999; Doris 2009).

The saving grace of all this, though, is that precisely the most troubling

studies and effects – in which seemingly trivial and normatively irrelevant situational factors predict and explain people's thought, feeling, and behavior better than personality or traits – replicate either poorly or not at all. The replication crisis is an ongoing development within psychology, so it is not yet possible to say definitively which studies do and which do not replicate, but the "Many Labs" collaborations (among other replication efforts) seriously undermine any confidence we might have in the robustness and even existence of a wide variety of framing, priming, and embodied metaphor effects (Klein et al. 2014; Klein et al. 2017; Ebersole et al. 2016). While this does not mean that psychology prompts no revisions to our conception of how virtues are best acquired, maintained, or expressed, it does mean that overall framework is not under threat. Yet, for the most part, defenders of virtue theory have not taken comfort in this fact, choosing instead to shift towards unfalsifiability.

2. *Virtue as a god of the gaps*

In the previous section, I argued that the most troubling evidence for the virtue theoretic perspective on human agency is also among the least replicable. This, I want to suggest, is what virtue theoreticians should have been arguing as psychology's replication crisis began to heat up. While a few philosophers have made efforts to engage the empirical literature as a whole rather than cherry-picking a few studies (e.g., Snow 2009, Russell 2012, Miller 2015), their work has its own problems. For example, Snow (2009) leans heavily on the work of John Bargh, much of which has failed to replicate. Russell (2012) explicitly states that the theory of virtue he endorses is unfalsifiable. Both Snow and Russell also rely heavily on the cognitive-affective personality system (CAPS) model. This is a framework developed in the context of pathological development (at-risk youth), not normal adults; it's hard to imagine that it would ground a theory of *virtue*. Miller (2015) also relies on Bargh's studies, along with a large number of studies from the 1970s and 1980s that have very low statistical power (as few as n=20 per cell) and are most likely instances of p-hacking or HARKing (Kerr 1998).

Setting aside these exceptions, most philosophers responding to the empirical challenge to virtue ethics have avoided scrutinizing and engaging with the evidence itself, preferring instead either to argue that it was irrelevant *in principle* or to come up with post hoc stories about particular experiments that had been cited as exemplars of the empirical literature.

Those who argue that empirical evidence is in principle irrelevant end up committed to accepting anecdotal reports of virtue possession and expression while denying that such reports could be systematically collected and analyzed. Those who argue that the (as we now know, flawed) empirical evidence cited by Flanagan, Doris, and Harman happens to be irrelevant typically end up jerry-rigging their accounts of virtue in an effort to make them unfalsifiable. The amount of ink spilled parsing the interpretation of a few seminal studies like the Good Samaritan experiment could fill a lake, even while ongoing and systematic developments (and opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration) in psychology and interdisciplinary philosophy-cum-psychology have been neglected[1].

In so doing, defenders of virtue ethics have resorted to a strategy analogous to the "God of the gaps" arguments offered by creationist opponents of Darwin. The phrase derives from the self-critical Christian preacher, Henry Drummond, who, in his Lowell Lectures on *The Ascent of Man*, accused his coreligionists thusly:

> There are reverent minds who ceaselessly scan the fields of Nature and the books of Science in search of gaps – gaps which they will fill up with God. As if God lived in gaps! What view of Nature or of Truth is theirs whose interest in Science is not in what it can explain, but in what it cannot, whose quest is ignorance, not knowledge, whose daily dread is that the cloud may lift, and who, as darkness melts from this field or that, begin to tremble for the place of his abode? (Drummond 1894, p. 333).

A century later, one could replace 'God' with 'virtue', 'Science' with '*Science*', and 'Nature' with '*Nature*', and the accusation would ring just as true. Instead of following the best evidence where it leads, philosophers have tended to seek ways to insulate their favored views against any evidence whatsoever. Such a desperate rearguard maneuver is hopeless, and in this case it is also unnecessary. The philosophical response should have been, and still could be, to engage both seriously and critically with the relevant science.

3. *After the plague*

In my more recent work, I've attempted to engage in precisely this way. For example, in Alfano (2016, chapter 4) I argue that the best, aggregated

[1] Examples include Annas (2003), Kamtekar (2004), Kristjansson (2008), Sreenivasan (2002, 2008), Upton (2009), and many others.

evidence indicates that eight situational factors explain approximately twice as much of the variance in human behavior as the five main trait factors (Rauthmann et al. 2014). These situational factors (the so-called DIAMONDS) are:

– *duty*: a job must be done;
– *intellect*: the situation affords a chance to demonstrate one's intellect;
– *adversity*: one reacts either prospectively or retrospectively to blame;
– *mating*: one modulates one's behavior because potential romantic partners are present;
– *positivity*: the situation is potentially enjoyable;
– *negativity*: the situation is potentially unenjoyable or anxiety-provoking;
– *deception*: it is possible to deceive someone; and
– *sociality*: social interaction is possible.

Together, these eight kinds of situational influences account for a larger amount of the variance in people's behavior (24-74 percent) than trait dimensions (3-18 percent). Notice, however, that all eight of these dimensions name aspects of situations that provide reasons for thought, feeling, and action. Unlike the faulty evidence on priming, framing, and embodied metaphors, they indicate considerations that, in the virtue-theoretic framework, count in favor of or against having an array of beliefs and motives, in favor of or against undertaking a range of actions and omissions. This sort of evidence may (and probably will) force us to reconsider which temptations we are most prone to, which bad reasons have a tendency to loom too large in our decision-making and policy, which good reasons we have a tendency to neglect. It may help us to formulate a virtue theory that better answers to the types of animals that we are. However, it does not undermine – indeed, it corroborates – the picture of human agency presupposed by virtue theory.

Further research will be needed to map out the details. Perhaps we will end up skeptical of the existence or robustness of certain particularly demanding virtues such as honesty while confident in the existence and robustness of other traits. For example, Fleeson (2001), Fleeson & Gallagher (2009), and Fleeson et al. (2014) provide highly suggestive evidence that most people's patterns of behavior are, though predictable, at best candidates for low- or medium-fidelity traits (virtues, vices, or neither). Some traits predict extremely important and valuable long-term outcomes. For example, people who score low in Propriety – a dimension of the "Big Six" personality model formulated by Saucier (2009) – are much more likely to, at least once in their lives, engage in such morally questionable behaviors

as drunk driving, bar brawls, shoplifting, vehicle theft, assault, and delinquent gang activity (Simms 2007). Along these lines, Jayawickreme et al. (2014) contend that the Agreeableness and Conscientiousness dimensions of the "Big Five" personality model are associated with such low-fidelity virtues as compassion and prudence.

Future research should follow up on these results by developing philosophically sophisticated and empirically validated measures of various candidate virtues (and vices), then using those measures to predict and explain – as best as can be managed – relevant thought, feelings, and behavior. In Alfano et al. (2017) my collaborators and I make a first attempt to do precisely this for the virtue of intellectual humility. Further interdisciplinary research could do likewise for the full range of dispositions in the ethical and epistemic canon.

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Abstract

Virtues are dispositions that make their bearers admirable. Dispositions can be studied scientifically by systematically varying whether their alleged bearers are in (or take themselves to be in) the dispositions' eliciting conditions. In recent decades, empirically-minded philosophers looked to social and personality psychology to study the extent to which ordinary humans embody dispositions traditionally considered admirable in the Aristotelian tradition. This led some to conclude that virtues are not attainable ideals, and that we should focus our ethical reflection and efforts more on jerry-rigging our environments than on improving our characters. Most virtue ethicists resisted this reorientation. However, much of the scientific evidence on which the controversy was based has failed to replicate, raising the question of how much faith we should place in methodologically suspect studies. In this paper, I assess the state of the debate and recommend best practices for a renewed interdisciplinary investigation of virtues and vices in which philosophical expertise related to conceptualization and theorizing is essentially intertwined with scientific expertise related to operationalization, measurement, and statistics.

Keywords: virtue; situationism; replication; reproducibility.

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Against Neo-Aristotelian Virtue Ethics: The Humean Challenge

Lorenzo Greco

Introduction

Until recently, the philosopher who represented the virtue ethical tradition was mainly only Aristotle. David Hume was sometimes mentioned as a virtue theorist, but he was either considered as an eccentric exception within the modern ethical tradition[1], or his name was mentioned only to brush it aside soon after[2]. Hume has not been seen as providing a distinguishable and independent model for virtue ethics until recently. Today, though, the interpretation of Hume's moral theory as a form of virtue ethics has become well established[3]. However, interpreters diverge on how to properly understand Hume's virtue ethics. Here I would like to briefly sketch the reasons that make Hume a virtue ethicist, and contrast Hume's

[1] See J.B. Schneewind, *The Misfortunes of Virtue*, in «Ethics», 101 (1990), 1, pp. 42-63.

[2] It is the case of Philippa Foot, who removed the name of Hume as a representative of virtue ethics from the second edition of her essay *Virtues and Vices*. See P. Foot, *Virtues and Vices*, in P. Foot, *Virtues and Vices and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1978, and Oxford University Press, Oxford 2002, pp. 1-18.

[3] See e.g. R. Cohon, *Hume's Morality: Feeling and Fabrication*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2008, ch. 6; R. Crisp, *Hume on Virtue, Utility, and Morality*, in S.M. Gardiner (ed.), *Virtue Ethics, Old and New*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 2005, pp. 159-178; S. Darwall, *Motive and Obligation in Hume's Ethics*, in «Noûs», 27 (1993), 4, pp. 415-448; J. Driver, *Ethics: The Fundamentals*, Blackwell, Oxford 2007, ch. 8; D. Garrett, *Hume*, Routledge, New York-London 2015, ch. 8; L. Greco, *Toward a Humean Virtue Ethics*, in J. Peters (ed.), *Aristotelian Ethics in Contemporary Perspective*, Routledge, New York-London 2013, pp. 210-223; P. Russell, *Hume's Anatomy of Virtue*, in D.C. Russell (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2013, pp. 92-123; C. Swanton, *Can Hume Be Read as a Virtue Ethicist?*, in «Hume Studies», 33 (2007), 1, pp. 91-113; J. Taylor, *Hume*, in L. Besser-Jones, M. Slote (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, Routledge, New York-London 2015, ch. 12.

approach to the more established neo-Aristotelian one. After having presented the features of Hume's morality that make it a form of virtue ethics, I shall suggest what I believe is the direction that a reading of Hume as a virtue ethicist should take[4].

1. *The Elements of Hume's Virtue Ethics*

What are the elements that make Hume's conception a form of virtue ethics for all intents and purposes, and why are they refuted by neo-Aristotelians[5]?

To begin with, it is Hume himself that presents his approach as one focused on the virtues. In a famous passage from *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* Hume says that

> [w]e shall analyze that complication of mental qualities, which form what, in common life, we call Personal Merit: We shall consider every attribute of the mind, which renders a man an object either of esteem and affection, or of hatred and contempt; every habit or sentiment or faculty, which, if ascribed to any person, implies either praise or blame, and may enter into any panegyric or satire of his character and manners. (EPM 1.10; SBN 173-74)[6]

This allows us to provide a "catalogue" (EPM 1.10; SBN 174) of virtues

[4] Given the limited scope of this essay, I shall not provide a full account of the numerous contemporary positions within the Humean ethical framework, and shall only outline the main reasons why for me Hume is in fact a philosopher with a lot to teach us about the theory of virtue. Likewise, I shall here talk in terms of "neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics", without going into details of the various versions of it that are discussed in today's philosophical debate.

[5] In *Modern Moral Philosophy and the Virtues*, in R. Crisp (ed.), *How Should One Live? Essays on the Virtues*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1996, pp. 1-18, Roger Crisp distinguishes between "virtue theory" and "virtue ethics". According to Crisp, "[v]irtue theory is the area of inquiry concerned with the virtues in general; virtue ethics is narrower and prescriptive, and consists primarily in the advocacy of the virtues" (p. 5). Here I shall refer to "virtue theory" and "virtue ethics" as synonym, and I shall understand "virtue ethics" the way defined by Crisp.

[6] I shall quote *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* as EHU and *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* as EPM in the body of the text, followed by section, paragraph, and SBN with the page in the Selby-Bigge edition (I shall refer to *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals*, edited by L.A. Selby-Bigge, revised by P.H. Nidditch, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1975, and also to the editions of EHU and EPM edited T.L. Beauchamp, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1999 and 1998). I shall quote *A Treatise of Human Nature* in the body of the text as T followed by book, part, section, paragraph, and SBN with the page in the Selby-Bigge edition. (I shall refer to the edition of the *Treatise* edited by L.A. Selby-Bigge, revised by P.H. Nidditch, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1978, and to the edition edited by D.F. Norton, M.J. Norton, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2007).

and vices by observing human beings in their activities and in the relations they have with each other. This is in line with Hume's ambition of supplying a "science of human nature" (T Intro.9; SBN xvii-xviii) based on empirical grounds.

Moreover, Hume makes it clear that it is not actions that we primarily assess, but rather the character traits that produced them:

> If any *action* be either virtuous or vicious, 'tis only as a sign of some quality or character. It must depend upon durable principles of the mind, which extend over the whole conduct, and enter into the personal character. Actions themselves, not proceeding from any constant principle, have no influence on love or hatred, pride or humility; and consequently are never consider'd in morality. (T 3.3.1.4; SBN 575)

In turn, these virtuous or vicious character traits compose unitary characters that represent the basic objects of moral evaluation. There are various passages from Hume's philosophical works to which one can refer in this regard[7]. Besides, *The History of England* can be read as the work in which Hume's conviction regarding the centrality of characters for ethics is put to the test by examining human affairs as they develop in a historical context[8].

Given Hume's attention to virtuous and vicious character traits, and to those very unitary characters of which those traits are parts, personal upbringing and character development become elements of the greatest importance, making the issue of moral education another piece of Hume's virtue ethical outlook[9]. For example, this is what Hume says regarding the acquisition of the central virtue of justice:

[7] See T 2.1.7.5; SBN 296; T 3.1.2.3; SBN 471; T 3.3.1.5; SBN 575; T 3.3.1.19; SBN 584; T 3.3.1.30; SBN 591; EPM 9.10; SBN 276; EPM 9.25; SBN 283; *The Sceptic*, in D. Hume, *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, E.F. Miller (ed.), Liberty Fund, Indianapolis 1987, pp. 159-180, p. 170; *A Dissertation on the Passions*, in D. Hume, *A Dissertation on the Passions. The Natural History of Religion: A Critical Edition*, T.L. Beauchamp (ed.), Clarendon Press, Oxford 2007, 2.14, p. 9.

[8] D. Hume, *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*, 6 vols., Liberty Fund, Indianapolis 1983. On the relations between Hume's morality and *The History of England*, see A. Sabl, *Hume's Politics: Coordination and Crisis in the History of England*, Princeton University Press, Princeton-Oxford 2012; D.T. Siebert, *The Moral Animus of David Hume*, University of Delaware Press, Newark 1990. See also J. Harris, *Hume: An Intellectual Bibliography*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2015, that devotes two chapters, chs. 6 and 7, to the *History*.

[9] Note that for Hume education is important, but doesn't represent the sole element in moral development, since human nature has in itself specific moral sentiments that are independent of education. See EPM 5.3; SBN 214. On the role of education in Hume, see D. O'Brien, *Hume on Education*, in «Pacific Philosophical Quarterly», 98 (2017), S1, pp. 619-642.

> As publick praise and blame encrease our esteem for justice; so private education and instruction contribute to the same effect. For as parents easily observe, that a man is the more useful, both to himself and others, the greater degree of probity and honour he is endow'd with; and that those principles have greater force, when custom and education assist interest and reflection: For these reasons they are induc'd to inculcate on their children, from their earliest infancy, the principles of probity, and teach them to regard the observance of those rules, by which society is maintain'd, as worthy and honourable, and their violation as base and infamous. By this means the sentiments of honour may take root in their tender minds, and acquire such firmness and solidity, that they may fall little short of those principles, which are the most essential to our natures, and the most deeply radicated in our internal constitution. (T 3.2.2.26; SBN 500-501)

All these features – the necessity of compiling a catalogue of virtues and vices, the focus on character traits as composing virtuous or vicious characters over actions, the role of education – make Hume's virtue ethics similar to Aristotle's. Also, the appeal to empirical observation of human beings can be understood in Aristotelian terms, insofar as Aristotle as well moved from observable data to present a picture of human nature in which virtue and vice played an integral part. However, the Humean way of doing this departs from the Aristotelian one in a crucial aspect. In the case of Hume, there is no appeal to any final cause whatsoever. It is true that virtue and vice enter for Hume in the description of what human nature consists in. However, for him virtue and vice emerge from a rigorously *a posteriori* analysis of human beings that doesn't presuppose any *telos* intrinsic to human nature. The Humean picture doesn't move from any pre-established conception of the good for human beings from which to determine virtue and vice, and thus to assess human conduct, independent of those pleasures and pains that human beings happen to feel. According to Hume, in fact, "moral distinctions depend entirely on certain peculiar sentiments of pain and pleasure, and […] whatever mental quality in ourselves or others gives us a satisfaction, by the survey or reflection, is of course virtuous; as every thing of this nature, that gives uneasiness, is vicious" (T 3.3.1.3; SBN 574-575).

In this sense, Hume's virtue ethics is sentimentalist. Virtue and vice are functions of sentiments of approval and disapproval felt by human beings, and these in turn depend on feelings of pleasure and pain. Hume's sentimentalism has a critical impact on Hume's virtue ethics. According to Hume, human nature is framed in sentimental terms. Ultimately, human actions are not determined by reason. They are instead the result of passions that represent the sole motivational drives. True, Hume observes that

"*reason* and *sentiment* concur in almost all moral determinations and conclusions" (EPM 1.9; SBN 172). However, when we think that our conduct is guided by reason, we are actually moved by "calm passions", which allow us to organize our lives according to long-term goals (see T 2.3.3.8; SBN 417; EPM 6.15; SBN 239-40)[10].

Not only reason doesn't move people to action. Reason doesn't help determine the ends people pursue either, which again are left to desires people have, given their individual characters and preferences. As Hume observes in another passage of *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*,

> [i]t appears evident, that the ultimate ends of human actions can never, in any case, be accounted for by *reason*, but recommend themselves entirely to the sentiments and affections of mankind, without any dependance on the intellectual faculties. Ask a man, *why he uses exercise*; he will answer, *because he desires to keep his health*. If you then enquire, *why he desires health*, he will readily reply, *because sickness is painful*. If you push your enquiries farther, and desire a reason, *why he hates pain*, it is impossible he can ever give any. This is an ultimate end, and is never referred to any other object. (EPM App 1.18; SBN 293)[11]

The Aristotelian formula whereby "rational choice is either desire-related intellect or thought-related desire"[12] doesn't seem to hold for Hume.

2. *A Non-Relativistic Subjectivism*

Given Hume's commitment to describing human nature in such terms, it is legitimate to ask if his virtue ethics ends up being a form of subjectivism. Does his sentimentalism commit him to this position? And if it does, is this something negative[13]? Hume's sentimentalism has been un-

[10] See also D. Hume, *A Dissertation on the Passions*, cit., 5.4, pp. 24-25.

[11] This is how Hume continues: "Perhaps, to your second question, *why he desires health*, he may also reply, that *it is necessary for the exercise of his calling*. If you ask, *why he is anxious on that head*, he will answer, *because he desires to get money*. If you demand *Why? It is the instrument of pleasure*, says he. And beyond this it is an absurdity to ask for a reason. It is impossible there can be a progress *in infinitum*; and that one thing can always be a reason, why another is desired. Something must be desirable on its own account, and because of its immediate accord or agreement with human sentiment and affection" (EPM App 1.18; SBN 293).

[12] *Nicomachean Ethics*, Revised Edition, R. Crisp (ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2014, 1139b.

[13] This is Foot's conclusion; see her *Hume on Moral Judgement*, in P. Foot, *Virtues and Vices*, cit., pp. 74-80.

derstood in numerous and contrasting ways[14]. Notwithstanding the attempts that have been made by some contemporary Humeans to show that Hume's morality isn't in fact subjectivist[15], it seems to me that it is. However, the reason why it can be said to be so needs clarification. Insofar as Hume's virtue ethics hinges on the notion of character, then I believe it is correct to present it as subjectivist, since it is the case that the characters of individuals differ given the variations of their subjective personalities, and these, in turn, are determined by sentiment and not by reason. Moreover, it is also the case that individuals show characters that are a *mix* of virtues and vices[16]. As I said, when it comes to morals Hume looks at people's characters in their entireties. What matters for him is the appraisal of human beings as possessors of laudable or contemptible characters, not of virtues and vices taken in isolation. Those characters are combinations of virtuous and vicious traits that don't have necessarily to cohere with each other, and that are assessed by *a posteriori* standards.

Given that Hume's virtue ethics is distinguished for being an ethics of character thus conceived, it makes sense to call it subjectivist. This being the case, some have discarded it since they believe that it lacks both a clear and distinct criterion to discern virtue and vice, and a convincing definition of the agent as a model for conduct[17]. By being subjectivist, Hume's virtue ethics is also relativist – so the story goes – and thus incapable of accounting for the objectivity of ethics in any persuasive way. Is this result inevitable?

[14] As a way of example, one just thinks of Michael Slote's ethics of care, or the response-dependent, pluralist virtue ethics developed by Christine Swanton. See M. Slote, *The Ethics of Care and Empathy*, Routledge, London-New York 2007; C. Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2003, and *The Virtue Ethics of Hume and Nietzsche*, Wiley Blackwell, Chichester (West Sussex) 2015.

[15] It is the case of Swanton. See *Can Hume Be Read as a Virtue Ethicist?*, cit., and *The Virtue Ethics of Hume and Nietzsche*, cit.

[16] See J. Driver, *op. cit.*, pp. 155-158; E. Frykholm, *A Humean Particularist Virtue Ethic*, in «Philosophical Studies», 172 (2015), pp. 2171-2191; L. Greco, *Toward a Humean Virtue Ethics*, cit.; D. O'Brien, *Hume, Intellectual Virtue, and Virtue Epistemology*, in A.L. Anton (ed.), *The Bright and the Good: The Connection Between Intellectual and Moral Virtues*, Rowman & Littlefield International, London 2018, pp. 153-168; P. Russell, *art. cit.* Christian Miller has recently developed a form of virtue ethics based on mixed character traits. See C.B. Miller, *Moral Character: An Empirical Theory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2013, and *Character and Moral Psychology*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014.

[17] Besides Foot, see R. Hursthouse, *Virtue Ethics and Human Nature*, in «Hume Studies», 25 (1999), 1-2, pp. 67-82; J. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2011, chs. 6-7.

Not really. According to Hume, when we judge a character trait as virtuous or vicious, our judgment is not given from our personal, situated point of view. On the contrary, we adopt a "steady and general", or "common" point of view (T 3.3.1.15-16 and 30; SBN 581-82 and 591; EPM 9.6; SBN 272) that allows us to express judgments that can be recognized and accepted also by others. Going into details of how the common point of view of morality comes to be determined would require more space than is here available[18]. I limit myself to observing that for Hume, when we adopt it, we don't approve or disapprove the person whose character we are judging just by considering the relation that we have with him or her. Rather, we sympathize with the "narrow circle" (T 3.3.3.2; SBN 602) of those who have any relation with him or her, and who are affected in a positive or negative way by that person's character. From the common point of view, a trait of character will be considered virtuous if it is either immediately agreeable to oneself or to others, or useful to oneself or to others (T 3.3.1.30; SBN 591). Otherwise, if it is immediately disagreeable to oneself or to others, or harmful to oneself or to others, it will be considered vicious. Such a common point of view is the result for Hume of "the force of many sympathies" (EPM 9.11; SBN 276), that is, it is a shared point of view that results from a continuing debate, sentimentally supported, among human beings in the course of time. Hume believes that, thanks to sympathy, human beings are capable of feeling what others feel, and thus of converging on a viewpoint that harmonizes a multiplicity of different, subjective perspectives.

If what I've said so far is persuasive, Humean subjectivism is not doomed to fall into relativism. On the contrary, in Hume's sentimentalist account of morality, objectivity can be explained in terms of intersubjectivity: ethics can be said to be objective since it results from human beings adopting a sympathetically reinforced point of view from which they can define virtues and vices, and express moral judgments that can both be recognized as such and move them accordingly. This solution might be considered by some not to really solve the problem; intersubjectivity is not objectivity, after all. Nevertheless, what I would like to stress is that criticizing Hume for lacking a standard of moral judgment because of his subjectivism doesn't really hit the mark. Hume, and the Humean virtue ethics

[18] I do that in *Preserving Practicality: In Defense of Hume's Sympathy-Based Ethics*, in R. Vitz, P.A. Reed (eds.), *Hume's Moral Philosophy and Contemporary Psychology*, Routledge, London-New York 2018, pp. 170-190.

I'm trying to depict, do offer such a standard. Even if it is subjectivist, Hume's virtue ethics does make use of a point of view of morality that allows us to identify virtues and vices, and to formulate moral judgments, that are not reducible to subjective expressions of one's feelings[19].

3. *The Perfect Character*

Also, Hume offers a sound description of the moral agent. Given Hume's appeal to sympathy as a principle that puts human beings in connection at a sentimental level, Hume's virtuous agent is far from being an isolated subject independent of others. On the contrary, the Humean virtuous agent is defined, and expresses herself, within a communal dimension of social connections. This appeal to the larger community in which the virtuous agent is placed and acts might, once again, remind us of a neo-Aristotelian approach[20]. However, this is only in part. The Humean virtuous agent does need to be in relation with other human beings, but this doesn't mean that by doing this she fulfills her natural potential as a proper human being; as I said, in Hume there is no final end of human nature we can appeal to. In addition, the Humean virtuous agent is not the one who presents in herself all the virtues at once; Hume's virtue ethics is centered on the virtues, but there is no unity of them. The Humean virtue ethical proposal is distinct from the neo-Aristotelian one in virtue of its lacking final causes, and of any model of the virtuous person

[19] It may be objected that Hume's ethics is dependent upon the mere fact that a community of individuals actually adopts sound moral standards; that being so, how can we morally assess a whole moral community that is based on weird or wrong moral practices? This is a serious issue. Here I just underline the fact that for Hume the community of individuals ideally comprehends the whole of humanity; Hume talks of "the *party* of human kind" (EPM 9.9; SBN 275) as it reveals itself in human history. The point of view of moral judgment is not limited to the community local to us. We can sympathize with other people far away from us in space and time and imagine their condition; this gives us the reflective resources to evaluate and criticize communities that are based on weird or wrong moral practices, as well as our own community. True, this moral viewpoint is the result of that very same sympathetic process. In this sense, it is always *internal* to human practices. However, protesting that there must be an external viewpoint independent of the concrete and contingent experience we have of human characters and practices, from which those very characters and practices can be objectively assessed, runs the risk of appearing question-begging, and eventually illusory. I thank an anonymous referee for drawing my attention to this problem.

[20] Alasdair MacIntyre, for example, relates Hume to Aristotle on these lines. See A. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, Duckworth, London 1988, pp. 298 and 321.

conceived as the *phronimos*. Rather, Hume talks of a "perfect" character:

> when we enumerate the good qualities of any person, we always mention those parts of his character, which render him a safe companion, an easy friend, a gentle master, an agreeable husband, or an indulgent father. We consider him with all his relations in society; and love or hate him, according as he affects those, who have any immediate intercourse with him. And 'tis a most certain rule, that if there be no relation of life, in which I cou'd not wish to stand to a particular person, his character must so far be allow'd to be perfect. If he be as little wanting to himself as to others, his character is entirely perfect. This is the ultimate test of merit and virtue. (T 3.3.3.9; SBN 606)

Even though Hume uses the term "perfect", this doesn't mean that the perfect agent is an ideal agent, for the perfect agent can be said to be so only as the outcome of the always-revisable sympathetic relations among people. The notion of perfection here has nothing to do with that perfectionism which is instead the hallmark of many neo-Aristotelian conceptions of human nature. The measure for judging the agent's perfection is not taken for granted in Hume, but it is itself the upshot of these relations. In this sense, there is no ideal of human excellence that can be specified in advance of the sympathetic relations among human beings. And it is the case that these relations are highly dependent on chance. It is true that Hume talks of a human nature that remains stable (see EPM A Dialogue). However, human nature doesn't work like an ideal for him; as in the case of the principle of sympathy, human nature too is a generalization emerging from those very relations.

4. *Contingent Pluralism*

This last point is pivotal in marking a further difference between the Humean and the neo-Aristotelian versions of virtue ethics. With respect to the neo-Aristotelian version, the Humean one depends on experience in a more radical way: for the latter, in fact, the very touchstone for assessing virtue and vice arises from the interaction between human nature and the circumstances in which people find themselves. The kind of virtue ethics that follows from all this might result in something less appealing and, in a way, less elegant than the neo-Aristotelian one. After all, Hume's virtue ethics doesn't put forward a model of virtuous conduct that can be validated in advance of and independently from the fortuitous ways in which hu-

man nature unfolds in the course of human affairs. Various Hume scholars admit that this produces a kind of "pluralism"[21] in which virtues and vices don't find their place in a single unified ranking. Because of that, many neo-Aristotelians criticize Hume's virtue ethics as too dependent on contingency[22]. However, this is far from being a defect: by being closer to an empirically tested picture of human nature that is in line with the results of contemporary experimental psychology[23], Hume's version of virtue ethics offers a more realistic image of what it means to act morally, an image that, I believe, is also ethically fairer.

5. *Conclusion*

In this essay I've discussed some elements of Hume's virtue ethics that make it different from the neo-Aristotelian one. I've stressed some of its characteristics – its focus on character traits rather than on actions, the role it reserves for moral education, its being sentimentalist – and highlighted its points of strength with respect to the neo-Aristotelian version. I've done that by defending an interpretation of Hume's virtue ethics in terms of a form of subjectivism hinging on individuals possessing virtuous or vicious characters[24].

[21] See E. Frykholm, *art. cit.*; M. Gill, *Humean Moral Pluralism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014; L. Greco, *Toward a Humean Virtue Ethics*, cit., Christine Swanton, *Virtue Ethics*, cit.

[22] It is the case of the aforementioned Annas, Foot, and Hursthouse.

[23] See M.W. Merritt, *Virtue Ethics and Situationist Personality Psychology*, in «Ethical Theory and Moral Practice», 3 (2000), pp. 363-383, and M.W. Merritt, J.M. Doris, G. Harman, *Character*, in J.M. Doris and the Moral Psychology Research Group, *The Moral Psychology Handbook*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2010, pp. 355-401. See also L. Besser, *Eudaimonic Ethics: The Philosophy and Psychology of Living Well*, Routledge, London-New York 2014, ch. 5; V. Tiberius, *Moral Psychology: A Contemporary Introduction*, Routledge, London-New York 2015, ch. 7.

[24] I would like to thank Roger Crisp, James Knight, Eugenio Lecaldano, Dan O'Brien, and two anonymous referees for their helpful observations.

Abstract

In this essay I discuss some elements of Hume's virtue ethics that distinguishes it from the neo-Aristotelian approach. I stress some of its characteristics – its emphasis on character traits rather than on actions, the role it reserves for moral education, its being sentimentalist – and highlight its points of strength with respect to the neo-Aristotelian version. I do that by defending an interpretation of Hume's virtue ethics in terms of a form of subjectivism hinging on individuals possessing virtuous or vicious characters.

Keywords: Hume; Aristotle; virtues and vices; character; subjectivism; moral pluralism.

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Per un modello esemplarista di educazione alle virtù

Michel Croce

Una attenta valutazione delle potenzialità di un approccio educativo non può prescindere dalla considerazione delle radici etiche su cui tale approccio si fonda (cfr. Steutel, Carr 1999, 3-4). Da questo punto di vista, è di cruciale interesse per la filosofia dell'educazione valutare le conseguenze che la cosiddetta teoria morale esemplarista (*Exemplarist Moral Theory*) recentemente proposta da Linda Zagzebski (2017) – o, in breve, l'esemplarismo morale – potrebbe avere sul piano educativo. In questo lavoro, dopo aver inquadrato brevemente le principali strategie educative utilizzate dall'approccio tradizionale di educazione alle virtù, delineerò i tratti essenziali della proposta educativa che emerge dalla prospettiva esemplarista e metterò in evidenza sia gli aspetti che accomunano questa concezione all'approccio tradizionale sia quelli che la differenziano da esso. Infine, mostrerò come la concezione educativa esemplarista possa rispondere a due obiezioni particolari.

1. *L'approccio tradizionale di educazione alle virtù*

In un recente articolo sull'educazione alle virtù nel contesto scolastico, Steven Porter analizza «l'approccio standard alla formazione delle virtù», un modello che sintetizzerebbe la proposta educativa tipica delle varie etiche – ed epistemologie – delle virtù. Porter individua quattro strategie educative proprie di tale approccio: (1) l'istruzione diretta circa la natura e l'importanza delle virtù; (2) l'esposizione a modelli esemplari che incarnano le virtù; (3) la pratica di comportamenti virtuosi finalizzata a favorire il formarsi di un *habitus* eccellente nell'alunno; infine, (4) la creazione di

contesti che permettano alle virtù di emergere e di svilupparsi (2016, 222)[1].

La prima strategia consiste in quella che potremmo definire la tipica «lezione frontale», quella fase in cui l'insegnante definisce ciascuna virtù, delimitandone i contorni in modo più o meno dettagliato, e ne sottolinea l'importanza sotto il profilo morale, descrivendo gli atteggiamenti tipici di chi la possiede e gli esiti positivi a cui essa conduce. La seconda, invece, mira a suscitare l'interesse dell'alunno nei confronti delle persone virtuose e delle gesta che le rendono tali. Più che indicare che cosa sia la virtù, questa strategia rivela il volto della virtù in azione, la rende concreta e ne alimenta l'attrattiva. La pratica di atti virtuosi – la terza strategia nella visione di Porter – permette di prendere consapevolezza delle sensazioni che accompagnano quel tipo di azioni e di esercitare le proprie disposizioni ad una risposta virtuosa alle varie situazioni in cui ci si viene a trovare. Nella maggior parte dei casi, questa strategia acquisisce un significato e un'utilità maggiore in un secondo stadio del processo educativo, quando l'alunno ha già fatto esperienza di almeno una delle strategie precedenti (223). La quarta strategia è meno valorizzata delle altre all'interno dell'approccio tradizionale, sebbene essa rivesta un ruolo cruciale. Accade spesso, infatti, che i giovani alunni non perseguano la virtù perché l'ambiente in cui si trovano ad agire non li mette nelle condizioni di scoprirne l'attrattiva né di poter dare il meglio di sé. Pertanto, diventa fondamentale per la formazione del loro carattere favorire l'emergere di un contesto socio-culturale non ostile al vocabolario delle virtù, che valorizzi i modelli virtuosi anziché nasconderli, e che fornisca a ciascuno lo spazio necessario per poter esprimere la propria personalità.

Le strategie appena descritte non devono considerarsi come alternative radicali, quanto piuttosto come strumenti diversi e spesso compatibili l'uno con l'altro a cui l'educatore può fare ricorso in fasi diverse del processo educativo. Infatti, la scelta di una specifica strategia da parte dell'insegnante può dipendere da fattori quali la situazione particolare del ragazzo che ha di fronte, il contesto di classe e – più in generale – le dinamiche della comunità a cui gli alunni appartengono. Per esempio, il doversi confrontare con una classe facilmente incline alla distrazione durante le lezioni frontali potrebbe indurre l'insegnante ad optare per il ricorso agli

[1] Il lavoro in questione si concentra, in particolare, sull'educazione alle virtù intellettuali, ma l'analisi delle strategie educative può essere applicata anche al caso delle virtù morali. Per semplicità, nel resto del contributo utilizzerò l'espressione «approccio tradizionale» in riferimento alla concezione analizzata da Porter.

esemplari, ossia a storie che possono conquistare l'attenzione degli scolari più rumorosi e dispersivi. Al contrario, in un contesto in cui gli alunni fossero più rapidi ad apprendere le nozioni fornite dall'insegnante e sufficientemente interessati alla sua figura e alle sue lezioni, l'istruzione diretta potrebbe funzionare in maniera ottimale.

2. *L'educazione del carattere secondo una concezione esemplarista*

Prima di poter delineare i tratti essenziali di una proposta educativa basata sull'esemplarismo morale, è necessario individuare i capisaldi di questa concezione. La teoria morale esemplarista di Zagzebski si distingue dalle teorie fondazionaliste classiche – etica delle virtù inclusa – poiché non trova il suo fondamento in un concetto, bensì in individui che ammiriamo naturalmente per la loro eccezionalità morale. Gran parte delle componenti dell'esemplarismo vengono individuate a partire dall'emozione di ammirazione che sorge spontaneamente nei confronti di un esemplare morale e da cui, soltanto dopo una opportuna riflessione, possiamo derivare concetti fondamentali quali quelli di virtù, bene, atto giusto, dovere, ecc. Zagzebski riconduce esplicitamente questa caratteristica dell'esemplarismo alla teoria del riferimento diretto di Hilary Putnam e Saul Kripke, applicandola al campo etico: l'identificazione dell'esemplare morale e la definizione delle sue caratteristiche virtuose deve avvenire mediante riferimento diretto ad un individuo «come lui (o lei)», «come quell'esemplare lì», proprio come il riferimento di un termine come «acqua», secondo i sostenitori del riferimento diretto, si fissa in relazione a «quella cosa lì», quell'oggetto che qualcuno ha battezzato come «acqua»[2].

Questa peculiarità dell'esemplarismo costituisce un importante vantaggio sull'etica delle virtù neo-aristotelica, poiché l'esemplarista non deve impegnarsi a sostenere l'esistenza di verità a priori in etica ma solamente ad ammettere l'esistenza di verità a posteriori e la possibilità che una persona possa essere buona in modi differenti, né deve preoccuparsi di fornire agli alunni particolari coordinate concettuali per avvicinarsi al discorso

[2] Cfr. Zagzebski 2017: § 1. Nello specifico, una volta individuato un esemplare morale, la teoria del riferimento diretto consente di stabilire il riferimento di altri concetti fondamentali quali quello di *virtù*, «un tratto che ammiriamo in un esemplare», di *fine buono*, «uno stato di cose che un esemplare cerca di produrre», e di *dovere*, «un atto che un esemplare pretende da sé e dagli altri, sentendosi colpevole se non lo facesse e condannando coloro che non agissero in quel modo» (21).

morale. Infatti, il processo di formazione attraverso cui possiamo arrivare a definire i concetti morali fondamentali verrebbe proprio innescato dall'ammirazione che gli esemplari suscitano in noi (Zagzebski 2017, 167-168).

L'altro pilastro fondamentale su cui si regge l'esemplarismo riguarda la dinamica che consentirebbe di perfezionarsi sul piano morale attraverso l'imitazione degli esemplari. Tale dinamica è caratterizzata da tre stadi ben definiti. Il primo stadio è quello della *ammirazione* che – quantomeno nei casi «felici», in cui tutto procede come previsto dalla teoria – sorgerebbe spontaneamente quando ci imbattiamo in individui moralmente esemplari. La caratteristica peculiare di questa emozione risiede indubbiamente nella sua capacità di motivare l'individuo, cioè di spingerlo all'azione, al cambiamento del proprio atteggiamento, o quantomeno alla riflessione sulla propria condotta. Le emozioni, tuttavia, non sono infallibili: pertanto, qualsiasi concezione che conferisce ad un'emozione un ruolo teorico fondamentale deve fornire buoni argomenti per giustificare tale mossa.

Il secondo stadio della dinamica esemplarista rende conto del ruolo dell'ammirazione e possiamo definirlo stadio della *riflessione consapevole*. Nella concezione di Zagzebski, è proprio di un individuo coscienzioso fidarsi delle proprie credenze ed emozioni in maniera pre-riflessiva – quell'atteggiamento che la filosofa americana chiama fiducia nel proprio sé (*self-trust*)[3]. A questo atteggiamento spontaneo deve far seguito l'elemento della *riflessione* a posteriori sull'affidabilità delle proprie facoltà, responsabile di quel controllo razionale e consapevole a cui ciascun individuo coscienzioso dovrebbe sottoporre le proprie credenze ed emozioni. Quando l'ammirazione che nutriamo per un esemplare sopravvive nel tempo alla nostra riflessione consapevole, possiamo ritenerla giustificata e continuare a fidarci di essa qualora dovessimo provarla in futuro in circostanze simili.

Il potere motivante dell'ammirazione e la giustificazione del ruolo che essa riveste nell'esemplarismo morale permettono di spiegare il terzo stadio della dinamica esemplarista, ossia quello della *imitazione*. Il metodo più immediato con cui possiamo formare la virtù o svilupparla, secondo Zagzebski, è quello di emulare le azioni del modello esemplare che ammiriamo, sebbene l'effettiva replicabilità delle sue gesta dipenda da diversi fattori, primi su tutti la distanza che ci separa dall'esemplare e le nostre capacità concrete[4]. È importante sottolineare che il mero replicare le azioni del modello non basta se vogliamo acquisire la virtù che questi esemplifica.

[3] Cfr. Zagzebski 2017: § 2.

[4] Cfr. Zagzebski (2017: § 5) e Vaccarezza-Croce (2016: 645 n. 30).

L'emulazione richiede, infatti, che la nostra ammirazione si rivolga non soltanto alle gesta dell'esemplare, ma anche al motivo per cui egli si comporta in un determinato modo. Emulare le azioni dell'esemplare con questo atteggiamento fino a farle diventare un *habitus* garantirebbe l'acquisizione della virtù, come già Aristotele aveva osservato e come alcuni studi recenti di psicologia sembrano confermare[5].

Questa attenzione alla fenomenologia dell'ammirazione e alla dinamica che ci conduce ad imitare i modelli esemplari motiva l'interesse di Zagzebski per l'applicabilità della teoria al campo dell'educazione morale. Zagzebski non arriva a formulare una autentica proposta educativa, ma le indicazioni che ci offre con la sua teoria ci consentono di abbozzare una concezione esemplarista di educazione morale. Il nucleo essenziale di tale concezione può essere riassunto nelle tre seguenti tesi:

(i) fine dell'educazione morale sono le *virtù* o le loro componenti costitutive;
(ii) la via principale per raggiungere questo fine è l'*imitazione* di esemplari virtuosi;
(iii) un'educazione appropriata all'imitazione implica che l'educatore (a) susciti l'*ammirazione* dei giovani mostrando loro modelli autenticamente buoni e imitabili, e (b) supporti lo sviluppo della loro *capacità di riflessione* sull'ammirazione[6].

Nello specifico, (i) inquadra la concezione esemplarista all'interno di una prospettiva aristotelica che dà priorità alle nozioni aretaiche piuttosto che a quelle deontiche; (ii) specifica la metodologia con cui la concezione esemplarista intende raggiungere il fine dell'educazione morale; e (iii) sintetizza il ruolo dell'educatore rispetto alla dinamica esemplarista introdotta in precedenza.

3. *Concezione educativa esemplarista e approccio tradizionale a confronto*

Mettendo da parte le differenze sul piano teorico tra etica delle virtù ed esemplarismo morale, relative al fondamento (non-)concettuale e alla

[5] Cfr. Aristotele EN, II, 1; Gill, Packer, Van Bavel 2013; Velleman 2002. Per ulteriori approfondimenti sull'esemplarismo morale, cfr. Croce 2017.

[6] Le tesi della concezione esemplarista sono state originariamente formulate in Vaccarezza-Croce 2016 e Croce-Vaccarezza 2017.

necessità di presupporre l'esistenza di verità a priori in etica, dal punto di vista educativo la concezione esemplarista si distingue dall'approccio tradizionale per una chiara incompatibilità con l'istruzione diretta, ossia la strategia (1). Se l'approccio tradizionale prevede una fase in cui gli alunni prendono consapevolezza dei concetti morali fondamentali attraverso le istruzioni dell'insegnante, la concezione esemplarista si fonda esclusivamente sulla strategia (2), ossia sull'incontro dei ragazzi con individui esemplari sotto la guida dell'insegnante, il cui compito diventa quello di aiutarli ad intraprendere i vari passaggi della dinamica analizzata in precedenza. In generale, l'attenzione dell'educatore non è rivolta ad assicurarsi che gli alunni imparino che cosa sono le virtù, bensì che essi abbiano occasione di rimanere colpiti da figure ammirevoli e di riflettere su ciò che le rende tali. Seguendo tale dinamica, i ragazzi svilupperebbero il desiderio di imitare gli esemplari e imparerebbero a dare un nome a quei tratti che di essi ammirano.

Per quanto riguarda le strategie (3) e (4), invece, occorre notare che la concezione esemplarista non si discosta in maniera rilevante dall'approccio tradizionale. Nella prospettiva esemplarista esse svolgerebbero la funzione di *strategie ausiliarie*, in grado di supportare l'esposizione ad esemplari morali una volta attivata la dinamica ammirazione-riflessione-imitazione. Andando nel dettaglio, la pratica di comportamenti virtuosi è per sua natura parte del progetto educativo esemplarista, che attraverso la metodologia dell'imitazione (ii) promuove lo sviluppo di un *habitus* virtuoso nell'alunno. Invece, per quanto riguarda la strategia (4), sarebbero necessari ulteriori approfondimenti su come l'ambiente e il contesto sociale possano influenzare la formazione delle virtù, specialmente in età scolare, ma non sembrano esserci ragioni per escludere tale metodo dalle risorse a disposizione dell'educatore che si rifà alla concezione esemplarista.

In generale, è importante sottolineare che tale concezione non deve necessariamente ambire ad ottenere risultati educativi ottimali a prescindere dalle condizioni di partenza della classe e dei singoli alunni. Per questo, tutte le strategie ausiliarie che non si scontrino con le tre tesi fondamentali introdotte nella sezione precedente dovrebbero essere non solo ammesse, bensì incoraggiate, in modo tale che l'educatore disponga di risorse variegate con cui sostenere il processo di crescita di ciascun ragazzo a seconda dei punti di forza e delle debolezze di quest'ultimo.

4. *Concezione educativa esemplarista e approccio tradizionale: due obiezioni in comune*

Dalla sintetica comparazione offerta nella sezione precedente emerge che la concezione esemplarista condivide varie strategie educative con l'approccio tradizionale da cui, però, si differenzia poiché non ammette la possibilità di istruire gli alunni circa la virtù in maniera diretta. Data questa relazione tra le due prospettive in questione, due obiezioni sollevate contro l'approccio tradizionale possono essere facilmente estese anche al sostenitore della concezione esemplarista. In quanto segue, espongo brevemente le due critiche e tento di mostrare come i sostenitori delle due concezioni potrebbero difendersi.

La prima obiezione è stata sollevata proprio da Porter, secondo cui l'approccio tradizionale sarebbe inefficace nei casi in cui un alunno ha sviluppato una «auto-rappresentazione» (2016, 226) di sé e delle proprie potenzialità che risulta essere incompatibile con la formazione della virtù. Ad esempio, si pensi al caso di un ragazzo che, in seguito a ripetute esperienze in cui si è trovato ad essere testimone di vessazioni subite da una persona onesta a lui cara, sviluppi la forte convinzione che l'onestà sia un tratto del carattere potenzialmente deleterio per la propria interazione con gli altri membri della comunità. In tali circostanze, fornire definizioni dell'onestà come virtù o mettere davanti agli occhi dell'alunno esempi virtuosi di onestà non produrrebbe l'effetto auspicato, in quanto l'auto-rappresentazione di sé sviluppata dal ragazzo gli impedirebbe di considerare le proposte dell'educatore.

Nella prospettiva di Porter, la soluzione più plausibile prevede l'adozione di un approccio cosiddetto «terapeutico», che aiuti l'alunno a liberarsi dall'auto-rappresentazione fuorviante di sé attraverso opportunità di relazione interpersonale in grado di far sperimentare al ragazzo un'esperienza di sé radicalmente diversa da quella che ha interiorizzato. Nell'esempio in questione relativo all'onestà, un'esperienza «riparativa» (227) efficace potrebbe consistere nel porre l'alunno in una circostanza in cui questi è prima vittima della disonestà di un compagno, che gli sottrae qualcosa dalla cartella, e successivamente si trova a poter intervenire per prevenire un altro tentativo di «furto» ai danni di un altro compagno o persino dell'insegnante stesso. In sostanza, la logica terapeutica di Porter intende superare l'ostacolo delle eventuali auto-rappresentazioni fuorvianti sviluppate dagli alunni favorendo esperienze di segno opposto, in cui i ragazzi sono chiamati ad agire in prima persona in situazioni concrete all'interno del ritmo quotidiano della classe.

Come dovrebbe risultare evidente, l'obiezione è rivolta tanto al sosteni-

tore dell'approccio tradizionale quanto all'esemplarista, poiché nei casi illustrati da Porter né la strategia (1) né la (2) sembrano essere risorse utili per fare fronte all'auto-rappresentazione problematica sviluppata dall'alunno. Tuttavia, la critica non sembra in grado di mettere in discussione le prospettive considerate, poiché le *esperienze riparative* non costituiscono una reale alternativa alle strategie in questione. La terapia che Porter propone per rimediare alle auto-rappresentazioni distorte degli alunni ed indirizzarli alla virtù è potenzialmente in grado di risolvere *quel* particolare problema. Tuttavia, non è necessario né sembra possibile considerarla un rimedio di portata generale proprio perché, per sua natura, essa richiede che l'educatore metta a punto misure *ad hoc* per ciascun ragazzo in base all'auto-rappresentazione distorta che questi ha formato. Nei numerosi casi in cui gli alunni sono fortunatamente scevri da tali distorsioni, l'istruzione diretta e/o l'esposizione agli esemplari morali risultano essere più efficaci e di più facile utilizzo. Per di più, tanto l'approccio tradizionale quanto la concezione esemplarista possono far spazio alla terapia di Porter come ad una ulteriore strategia ausiliaria, una risorsa a cui fare appello quando le altre non possono essere utilizzate.

La seconda obiezione, potenzialmente più pericolosa, è stata sollevata da Alessandra Tanesini, secondo cui le quattro strategie dell'approccio tradizionale avrebbero un'applicabilità alquanto limitata, ristretta a situazioni particolarmente fortunate in cui tutto sembra funzionare nel migliore dei modi (2016, 525). In particolare, l'istruzione diretta sembra poter ottenere gli effetti desiderati soltanto nella misura in cui gli alunni riconoscano l'autorevolezza dell'educatore e siano disposti mettere in pratica ciò che questi tenta di trasmettere loro. Invece, l'esposizione ad esemplari virtuosi avrebbe ripercussioni pesanti sia sui ragazzi presuntuosi o superbi sia su quelli che tendono a sottovalutarsi, assumendo un atteggiamento di sfiducia nei confronti delle proprie capacità di sviluppo morale. Gli uni, messi di fronte ad esemplari morali, andrebbero facilmente a caccia di quei tratti del carattere che credono di condividere con l'eroe morale di turno e presterebbero ben poca attenzione a ciò che li separa dalla virtù del modello in questione, finendo così per alimentare la loro superbia e illudersi di essere migliori di quanto pensassero in precedenza. Gli altri, al contrario, sarebbero ancor più scoraggiati dal confronto con l'esemplare, in cui vedrebbero quelle caratteristiche eccellenti che loro non possiedono e che suppongono di non poter acquisire, data la distanza che li separa dal modello e la bassa stima che hanno di se stessi (525-526).

Per rispondere all'obiezione di Tanesini, è opportuno sottolineare in-

nanzitutto che il sostenitore della concezione esemplarista ha il vantaggio di non doversi preoccupare delle critiche rivolte alla strategia (1), in quanto incompatibile con la concezione stessa. Invece, per quanto riguarda le critiche rivolte a (2), l'esemplarista può fare leva sul tema della distanza dell'esemplare morale dalla realtà quotidiana delle persone comuni, in cui il limite di ciascuno emerge in maniera prepotente. L'esemplarismo può essere davvero efficace nella misura in cui gli esemplari che l'educatore propone sono appropriati allo stadio dello sviluppo morale dei suoi alunni. Come sottolinea Zagzebski,

> il miglioramento morale avviene per gradi, e se miriamo troppo in alto in partenza, potremmo metterci nei guai da soli. L'imitazione diretta dell'esemplare può avvenire soltanto dopo che una persona abbia raggiunto un certo livello di sviluppo morale. Prima d'allora, ci conviene imitare persone che sono migliori di noi, ma non così migliori da impedirci di vedere chiaramente la strada per diventare esemplari (2017, 25).

Dal momento che gli alunni sono soltanto all'inizio del percorso di sviluppo morale, diventa cruciale proporre loro modelli esemplari magari imperfetti, ma vicini alla loro esperienza di tutti i giorni. Un interessante supporto teorico per la gradualità della formazione morale proposta dall'esemplarismo può essere ritrovato in quelli che Meira Levinson chiama *life-sized role models* (2012, 154), ossia modelli imperfetti ma significativi che un ragazzo può incontrare all'interno del suo contesto tipico, in famiglia, a scuola, nel vicinato, nello sport che pratica o nella realtà culturale o religiosa che frequenta.

Nello specifico, la scelta di esemplari «comuni»[7] ha almeno tre vantaggi rispetto a modelli virtuosi tratti dalla letteratura: in primo luogo, la prossimità, da intendersi come prossimità spazio-temporale, ma soprattutto come vicinanza di esperienze e di contesto sociale di appartenenza. Secondariamente, la possibilità di vederli all'opera con i propri occhi, di incontrarli concretamente e – potenzialmente – di stabilire con loro una relazione umana, che renderebbe più immediato e più interessante per l'alunno riflettere sull'ammirazione che nutre per l'esemplare. Infine, la loro (probabile) imperfezione morale, ossia il fatto che, nonostante eccellano in qualche particolare virtù, presentano qualche debolezza del carattere che ne evidenzia la fragilità umana e li avvicina così a chi è all'inizio del percorso di sviluppo morale.

[7] Nella formulazione di Levinson *ordinary models* (2012: 154).

Il ruolo degli esemplari comuni all'interno di una prospettiva esemplarista potrebbe, a prima vista, sembrare in contrasto con il modello teorico stesso, che privilegia in generale il riferimento a figure moralmente eccezionali. Tuttavia, a ben vedere, l'indicazione che Zagzebski ci fornisce nel passo appena citato consente una lettura di segno opposto: dato che la dinamica esemplarista mira, in ultima analisi, a metterci nelle condizioni di imitare gli esemplari morali – come espresso dalla tesi (ii) – è fondamentale assicurarsi che i modelli selezionati suscitino in noi non solo una ammirazione genuina, ma anche il desiderio di emularne il comportamento – come espresso da (iii). In quest'ottica, i *life-sized role models* rientrano perfettamente nella categoria di persone che riconosciamo essere migliori di noi, ma non così superiori da farci perdere il desiderio di imitarli[8].

Tornando ai casi particolari discussi da Tanesini, la scelta di esemplari comuni da parte dell'educatore potrebbe avere effetti molto positivi sugli alunni inclini alla presunzione, specialmente qualora l'esemplare avesse, tra le sue virtù, quella dell'umiltà, poiché risulterebbe più difficile per il ragazzo sottovalutare questa caratteristica eccezionale in una persona così vicina alla sua esperienza quotidiana, che egli ammira per qualche altra virtù e con cui, magari, ha anche occasione di dialogare personalmente. Al contrario, potrebbe non essere sufficiente offrire al ragazzo un modello di umiltà attraverso una storia, perché la distanza che lo separa dalla realtà in cui l'esemplare vive farebbe svanire quella sensazione quasi palpabile di disagio che si viene a creare quando percepiamo chiaramente il valore morale di qualcosa che ci sforziamo di non vedere o di tenere lontano dalla nostra esperienza. Anche per l'alunno che sottostima le proprie possibilità e vive la distanza dal modello come un ostacolo all'emulazione sarebbe fondamentale poter interagire con esemplari ordinari, poiché la loro imperfezione morale metterebbe in luce che il raggiungimento della virtù può convivere con la dimensione del limite, spronando

[8] Per ulteriori dettagli sull'incidenza dei *life-sized role models* nella società americana e alcune interessanti statistiche, si veda Levinson 2012: § 4, n. 45, n. 46, n. 47. Il legame tra figure moralmente eccezionali ed esemplari comuni e l'importanza di individuare modelli di riferimento autenticamente imitabili è stato rilevato – seppur da una prospettiva tradizionale – anche nel *Knightly Virtues Programme*, un progetto di educazione alle virtù attraverso le leggende di eroi e cavalieri medievali rivolto ad alunni di scuole primarie nel Regno Unito e promosso da alcuni ricercatori del *Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues* (University of Birmingham). Tra i risultati interessanti del programma emerge il fatto che i giovani scolari – o almeno alcuni di essi – al termine del percorso formativo erano in grado di individuare esemplari comuni all'interno del loro contesto sociale il cui comportamento rispecchiava gli stessi tratti virtuosi riconosciuti negli eroi proposti in classe (Carr-Harrison 2016: 141-142).

l'alunno a migliorarsi attraverso l'imitazione delle gesta del modello.

Il sostenitore dell'approccio tradizionale potrebbe fare proprie le considerazioni appena offerte in risposta all'obiezione di Tanesini nella misura in cui fosse disposto ad accettare questa declinazione particolare della strategia (2), che emerge da una lettura attenta dell'esemplarismo di Zagzebski alla luce delle osservazioni di Levinson sugli esemplari comuni.

Questa sintetica analisi ha messo in luce che la concezione esemplarista, rinunciando all'istruzione diretta e promuovendo l'educazione alle virtù attraverso esemplari comuni, è in grado di far fronte alle obiezioni sollevate da Porter e Tanesini. Le considerazioni sviluppate riguardano solamente il contesto delle teorie che considerano *le virtù* come uno degli elementi fondamentali dell'educazione del carattere. Vi sono, però, concezioni secondo cui lo scopo dell'educazione dovrebbe essere esclusivamente quello di dotare i ragazzi degli strumenti necessari per sviluppare un «pensiero critico» (*critical thinking*), ossia quelle capacità di riflessione con cui essi potrebbero farsi un'idea della realtà e dei valori che è importante perseguire in maniera il più possibile *autonoma*. Dai sostenitori di questa corrente (cfr., ad es., Siegel 1988) provengono ulteriori critiche con cui tanto l'esemplarista quanto il sostenitore dell'approccio tradizionale devono fare i conti. Nonostante alcuni autori abbiano già tentato di rispondere a tali obiezioni (Copp 2016; Hand 2014), ritengo che la questione meriti ulteriori approfondimenti, che mi ripropongo di sviluppare in futuri lavori[9].

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English title: In defence of an exemplarist approach to virtue education

Abstract

This paper explores the educational implications of Linda Zagzebski's recent Exemplarist Moral Theory. It purports to do so by comparing what I consider to be the basics of an exemplar-based educational approach with the standard approach to virtue formation, as it has been proposed by Steven Porter. After introducing four traditional strategies for fostering virtue formation in the young, I briefly summarize Zagzebski's view and shed light on the educational principles that the view entails. Then, I discuss some common features and relevant differences between an exemplar-based educational approach and the standard approach. Finally, I attempt to defend both views against a couple of recent objections.

Keywords: virtue; moral education; exemplarism; Linda Zagzebski.

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Genetic Phenomenology and Empirical Naturalism

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Introduction

The phenomenological project is developed in contrast to naturalism, which according to Husserl derives from a certain "rigidification" of the natural attitude that "reifies" and "absolutizes" the world (Moran 2008: 403). Whereas the natural attitude assumes the existence of the world and the relationship between mind and world as unproblematic, the phenomenological inquiry investigates the conditions of possibility of this relationship. In this way, we achieve the transcendental dimension of consciousness, conceived of as a condition of the possibility for every entity to be manifest in experience. In the light of this inquiry, nature turns out to be the correlate of constituting functions of transcendental consciousness. For this reason, Husserl claims that "[Transcendental consciousness] is not a component part of Nature, and is so far from being that, that Nature is possible only as an intentional unity motivated in transcendentally pure consciousness by immanental connections." (Husserl 1983: 95). Given that transcendental consciousness constitutes every transcendent being, it cannot be "naturalized", because the constituting principle cannot be led to what it constitutes: "The existence of a Nature *cannot* be the condition for the existence of consciousness, since Nature itself turns out to be a correlate of consciousness: Nature *is* only as being constituted in regular concatenations of consciousness." (Husserl 1983: 96).

However, these passages can be seen as the source of hard difficulties for phenomenology. A fundamental objection is that transcendental phenomenology reaches a concept of "pure" or "absolute" consciousness that is *abstract*, *disembodied* and *unnatural*, i.e. radically detached from the

natural world. This would mean, in the end, that Husserl's phenomenology leads to a form of idealism or even solipsism and that for it the relationship between consciousness and nature remains an enigma.

In order to confront the aforementioned difficulties, one could try to revise the phenomenological perspective to make it compatible with some form of naturalism. However, to assess the feasibility of the "naturalization of phenomenology", we must first clarify the notions of nature and naturalism. In the first section of this work, I shall analyze two different forms of metaphysical naturalism (scientific and naïve), which conceive of nature as an absolute, mind-independent ontological domain that can be known as it is "in itself". I shall therefore analyze the various attempts at naturalizing consciousness within this approach, arguing that these views are not compatible with the transcendental framework of phenomenology. In the second part, I shall consider the genetic development of phenomenology, arguing that this direction of inquiry leads us to define a form of *empirical* naturalism, which constitutes a coherent development of transcendental phenomenology and leads to a specific way of naturalizing consciousness.

1. *Metaphysical naturalism*

In this section, I shall define a form of naturalism that is placed at the base of various attempts at naturalizing consciousness and phenomenology. With "metaphysical naturalism" I refer to a view that conceives of nature as a mind-independent ontological domain that can be known as it is "in itself", independently of its relationship with a knowing subject. I use this notion while drawing on the distinction, which is present in Kant, between two notions of reality: empirical (i.e. relative to the cognitive relation with a knowing subject) and metaphysical (i.e. absolute, "in itself"). In particular, I shall distinguish between two forms of metaphysical naturalism, which are each placed at the basis of various attempts at naturalizing consciousness: scientific naturalism and naïve naturalism.

1.1. *Scientific naturalism*

With scientific naturalism, I refer to a certain metaphysical interpretation of the cognitive reach of the natural sciences and in particular of physics, conceived of as the science that is able to grasp the fundamental ontology of the natural world. This is a metaphysical form of scientific re-

alism, which claims the mind-independent reality of the entities that are posited by physics in order to account for phenomena. Such a view can be found in modern philosophers such as Galilei and Descartes and is strictly linked to a certain way of understanding the relationship between *quantitative* (physical-mathematical) and *sensory* properties of the objects that appear in our perceptual experience. In contrast to Aristotle's ontology, according to which qualities such as colors and sounds are part of the "ontological furniture" of the natural world, a widespread view in modern philosophy conceives of these sensory qualities as merely subjective appearances that are "internal" to the mind of the perceiver. In contrast to the sensory appearances "in the mind", the physical-mathematical properties are conceived of as the "primary properties" of the objects that are grasped through the scientific method[1].

This influential view can also be found at play in the contemporary philosophy of mind, being the ontological framework that is taken as the naturalistic starting point of various approaches for the naturalization of the mind. As David Chalmers asserts, "On the most common conception of nature, the natural world is the physical world" (Chalmers 2003: 102). According to Chalmers, the so-called "hard problem" of phenomenal consciousness (Chalmers 1995) arises when one acknowledges the fact that "[phenomenal] consciousness fits uneasily into our conception of the natural world." (Chalmers 2003: 102). With the concept of "phenomenal consciousness", Chalmers refers to the subjectively felt dimension of a mental state, i.e. its qualitative character or "what-it's-likeness", in the terminology introduced by Thomas Nagel (1974).

Within scientific naturalism, one can attempt to naturalize consciousness by tracing it back to the natural world. The reductionist approach to the naturalization of the mind identifies the phenomenal states with certain physical states of the brain. By contrast, the non-reductionist alternative consists in conceiving of the phenomenal properties of mental states (*qualia*) as *new*, *sui generis* properties that must be added to the ontological furniture of the world, in parallel to the physical-mathematical properties. This is the view that is developed by Chalmers (1996) with his "fundamental theory of consciousness", arguing for the "natural supervenience" or "strong emergence" (Chalmers 2006) of phenomenal consciousness on the physical states of a cognitive system. According to this view,

[1] This view is widespread in modern philosophy but it is also challenged by some authors (e.g. by Thomas Reid).

consciousness is a component of the natural world that transcends what is investigated by physics. When expressed in these terms, this view presupposes a metaphysical form of scientific realism, at the same time arguing that the physicalistic conception of nature must be "enlarged" in order to make room for the phenomenal properties of mental states[2].

1.2. *Naïve naturalism*

The second option for the naturalization of consciousness and phenomenology on the basis of a metaphysically realist conception of nature is *naïve naturalism*. With this notion, I refer to the view according to which the ontology of the natural world includes not only quantitative, physical-mathematical properties but also the sensory properties with which we are acquainted in perception. This metaphysical conception of nature can be based on certain theories of perception when they are understood as theories about the relationship between mind and world. In particular, naïve naturalism can be seen as a possible metaphysical implication of both *direct realism* and *externalist representationalism*. In contrast to the internalist conception of "qualia", both these views conceive of the qualitative properties that appear to us in perception as properties of the external objects in the environment (*qualia externalism*)[3].

For example, James Gibson's ecological theory of perception is a form of direct realism according to which in perception we are directly acquainted with the qualities of the objects in the environment, without the mediation of internal sensory "contents". Gibson develops this view with the aim of supporting naïve realism, i.e. the "naïve belief in the world of objects and events" and the "simple-minded conviction that our senses give knowledge of it" (Gibson 1967: 168). Gibson's view was reprised and developed by other authors, such as Kevin O'Regan and Alva Noë with their sensorimotor theory of perception (O'Regan and Noë 2001; Noë and O'Regan 2002).

Gibson's direct realism and its reprise by the sensorimotor theory do not make use of the notion of mental representation. On the contrary, Fred

[2] However, it must be noticed that Chalmers (2009) argues for an "ontological anti-realism" that implicitly questions the metaphysical realism and naturalism that was at the basis of *The Conscious Mind*.

[3] I must clarify that the intepretation of these theories in terms of metaphysical realism and naturalism is relatively straightforward, but one could also adopt them without taking an explicit stance on the metaphysics in relation to the ontology of perception and the issue of realism.

Dretske's representationalist theory of the mind conceives of perception as involving mental representations. However, in contrast to the traditional internalism regarding sensory qualities, Dretske argues that mental representations are constituted by a *vehicle* that is internal to the cognitive system and whose content is *external* to the mind. Dretske calls this view "phenomenal externalism" (Dretske 1996) and develops it within a project for the "naturalization of the mind" (Dretske 1995) that conceives of nature as endowed with qualitative properties.

For both direct realism and externalist representationalism, nature can be conceived of as containing more than what is covered by mathematical physics, being endowed with the sensory qualities that appear to us in perception. On the basis of this qualitative ontology of nature, one can also attempt at naturalizing the mind.

This strategy has been explored by some proponents of the "naturalization of phenomenology". Jean Petitot and Barry Smith (Petitot 1995, 1999; Smith 1995; Petitot and Smith 1997) developed a naturalistic version of phenomenology, which admits the possibility of naturalizing consciousness. According to these authors, this can be done by enlarging our concept of nature (Roy et al. 1999: 68), thus pursuing a "phenomenalization of physical objectivity" (Roy et al. 1999: 55). However, it must be noticed that Petitot is cautious when referring to the issue of realism, claiming that the notion of objective reality can be also interpreted in "Kantian" terms (see Petitot & Smith 1997: 239, 248). This would mean conceiving of "qualitative ontology" or "phenophysics" as a form of empirical and not metaphysical realism. By contrast, Barry Smith (Smith 1995; 1999) explicitly conceives of the qualitative ontology of nature in the terms of metaphysical realism and he does so by combining a realist interpretation of Husserl's phenomenology with Gibson's theory of direct perception (Smith 1999: 317 ff.).

1.3. *Metaphysical* versus *empirical naturalism*

Both scientific and naïve naturalism can be interpreted in metaphysical terms, as ways of reaching the knowledge of an absolute, mind-independent reality "in itself". In this reading, these views are forms of metaphysical naturalism, which conceive of nature as an ontological domain that can be known as it is independently of the relationship with a knowing subject. For scientific naturalism, this domain is the merely quantitative world that is grasped by mathematical physics, whereas for naïve naturalism it is the common-sense world made up of the objects of our ordinary experience.

The following step in the naturalistic project consists in attempting at tracing back consciousness to the natural world, by reducing it to certain natural processes (reductionism) or by conceiving of it as a new feature of the natural world (natural supervenience or strong emergence). This can be done by assuming, as ontological base of reduction or of supervenience, either physical reality (for scientific naturalism) or the qualitative ontology of nature (for naïve naturalism).

At this point, I would like to highlight how these forms of metaphysical naturalism are at odds with the transcendental framework of phenomenology, being a non viable option for the naturalization of consciousness. This is because these views refer to a notion of metaphysical reality that would be "absolutely transcendent" with respect to the cognitive relationship. On the contrary, Husserl takes up from Kant the inquiry into the conditions of the possibility of experience, which leads us to restrict our cognitive reach to the correlation between subject and object of experience, in contrast to the possibility of having knowledge of a transcendent reality "in itself".

Husserl especially criticizes the metaphysical interpretation of the object of physics. This object is theoretically construed through a process of mathematization of phenomena that separates the "primary" (physical-mathematical) properties from the sensory properties of the objects that appear in perceptual experience. The resulting object is a theoretical construction and must not be taken for an objective mind-independent reality "in itself" (see Husserl 1970: 51). This analysis rules out the scientific form of metaphysical realism and naturalism, but it can be also applied to the metaphysical interpretation of the qualitative ontology of nature. Also in this case, the transcendental analysis of experience rules out the possibility of reifying the object of ordinary experience, turning it into an absolutely mind-independent reality in itself. In fact, according to Husserl the object of experience is a "relative transcendence", being relative to constitutive functions of transcendental consciousness. In contrast to certain realistic interpretations of phenomenology, within the transcendental framework of phenomenology the transcendent (or "external") thing is the result of a process of constitution in the cognitive process[4].

The projects of metaphysical naturalization of the mind can be seen as

[4] Concerning the ontological status of the perceptual object in phenomenology see (Zhok 2013), who compares Husserl's and Gibson's theories of perception and stresses affinities but also radical differences between them in relation to the ontology of perception.

involving two steps: firstly, one "fixes" the ontology of nature; secondly, one traces back consciousness to the natural domain. The second step is also very problematic from the point of view of transcendental phenomenology. In fact, various naturalistic approaches conceive of consciousness as the object of psychology, whereas Husserl neatly distinguishes between the object of psychology and the transcendental dimension of consciousness. According to Husserl, the latter cannot be reduced to the object of a psychological investigation. Dan Zahavi observes that Husserl clearly "contrasts his own phenomenology of consciousness with a natural scientific account of consciousness" and for this reason "to suggest that the phenomenological account could be absorbed, or reduced, or replaced by a naturalistic account is for Husserl sheer nonsense." (Zahavi 2009: 4-5). This is because "Consciousness rather than merely being an object in the world, is also a subject for the world, i.e. a necessary condition of possibility for any entity to appear as an object in the way it does and with the meaning it has" (Zahavi 2009: 5). This point is stressed by Michel Bitbol, who claims that "consciousness is and remains *methodologically primary*" because "any ascription of existence *presupposes* the existence of conscious experience" (Bitbol 2008: 56-57). For the same reason, Trizio claims the "impossibility in principle of naturalizing phenomenology" and that the idea of a naturalized phenomenology "is simply meaningless" (Trizio 2012: 6-7).

However, we have also seen that the neat separation between transcendental consciousness (constituting) and the natural world (constituted) is the source of hard difficulties for phenomenology, which can be condensed into the problem of solipsism. This is why we must look at the genetic broadening of the phenomenological inquiry, which leads us to reframe the issue of the relationship between consciousness and nature, thus outlining an alternative to metaphysical naturalism.

2. *Genetic phenomenology*

The above-seen difficulties of transcendental phenomenology arise within a level of inquiry that is conceived of by Husserl as not ultimate but as preliminary to further developments. In fact, the transcendental phenomenology of constitution, which conceives of the objects of the various regional ontologies as correlating to constituting functions of consciousness, is developed within a fundamental delimitation. Through the phenomenological reduction, experiences are turned into objects of investiga-

tion, within an inquiry that considers them as unitary acts of perception, thought, imagination, etc. However, this inquiry explicitly leaves aside the investigation of the inner temporal unfolding of the experiences. In this way, the experiences, which have a processual nature, are somehow "artificially" turned into mental "states". Conversely, the genetic broadening of phenomenology "deepens" the investigation of experiences, by investigating their temporal structure.

The distinction between two "levels" of the phenomenological inquiry – static and genetic –, which is central in Husserl's later works, can already be found in *Ideas I*. Here Husserl claims that, "the level of consideration to which we are confined […] abstains from descending into the obscure depths of the ultimate consciousness which constitutes all […] temporality as belongs to mental processes, and instead takes mental processes as they offer themselves as unitary temporal processes in reflection on what is immanent" (Husserl 1983: 171). Husserl clarifies that, in the light of a subsequent broadening of the inquiry, it will turn out that "the transcendentally 'absolute' which we have brought about by the reductions is, in truth, not what is ultimate; it is something which constitutes itself in a certain profound and completely peculiar sense of its own and which has its primal source in what is ultimately and truly absolute." (Husserl 1983: 163). In the context of *Ideas I* this passage is enigmatic, pointing towards an inquiry that is not further developed in this work. Already there, however, Husserl seems to suggest that some problematic outcomes of the transcendental phenomenology of constitution should be reconsidered in the light of a genetic broadening of the inquiry.

In fact, whereas "static" phenomenology reaches an "absolute" or "pure" field of transcendental consciousness, "genetic" phenomenology investigates the genesis of the cognitive process in the life of a concrete, conscious subject. This is done by investigating the temporal constitution of the field of consciousness, with its threefold structure of impression-retention-protention. According to Husserl's analysis of time-consciousness, each moment of experience is constituted by a *primal impression*, which is a qualitative element in the flow of experience, together with the *retention* of previous impressions and the *protention* towards the expected course of experience. In this way, the analysis of time-consciousness accounts for the way in which continuously flowing experiences are held together in the unitary experience of a concrete subject. The unitariness of a concrete field of manifestation is possible due to the fact that the experiences have the constant structure of impression-retention-protention. Zahavi (2010:

334-335) stresses the link between the analysis of time-consciousness and self-awareness. The inquiry into the temporal structure of consciousness reveals the structure of the pre-reflective self-manifestation of subjectivity, i.e. how the experiences are self-aware before they are possibly turned into objects of reflection. The self-manifestation of experiences makes possible the manifestation of the objects of experience. In this way, genetic phenomenology shows how the process of constitution of objectivity implies the self-constitution of the subjective pole of the cognitive relation, in a process of *co-constitution* of the subject and the object of experience[5].

2.1. *Phenomenological naturalization*

At this point, we can ask about the implications of genetic phenomenology for the issue of naturalism. In the light of the genetic broadening of transcendental phenomenology, the field of transcendental consciousness turns out to be concretely realized in the experience of a living subject that is embodied and embedded in the natural world. In fact, the core of the process of genetic co-constitution of the two poles of the cognitive relation is the flow of impressions. This qualitative dimension, on the basis of which the subject and the object of experience are co-constituted, is essentially *embodied*, taking place in the self-affection of the living body (*Leib*), i.e. the body that senses itself in the continuous flow of bodily sensations. According to Bernet (2013), in the phenomenological analysis of the living body we find what Husserl considers a "legitimate naturalization of consciousness" (Husserl 1989: 168).

However, the acknowledgment of the essential bodily grounding of consciousness must be neatly distinguished from the various forms of metaphysical naturalism. These views presuppose a concept of nature as preconstituted and independent from the relation with the cognizing subject. On the contrary, within the transcendental phenomenological inquiry the "legitimate naturalization of consciousness" runs in tandem with a complementary process of "phenomenologisation of nature" (Vörös 2014), which consists in conceiving of nature as the correlate of consciousness in a process of co-constitution of mind and world.

[5] The concept of the co-constitution of subject and object in reciprocal dependence is placed at the basis of the enactive approach of (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991). These authors take back the notion of "dependent co-arising" from the Madhyamaka philosophy and they combine it with Husserl's and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology.

Conclusion

We have seen that, in the light of the transcendental framework of phenomenology, the various forms of metaphysical naturalism are not viable options for the naturalization of consciousness, since they make use of a concept of nature conceived of as an absolute mind-independent reality that can be known as it is "in itself". This concept of nature as absolute reality is ruled out by the phenomenological analysis of experience. In contrast to metaphysical naturalism, I have argued that the genetic development of phenomenology leads to an empirical form of naturalism, which conceives of nature as the correlate of consciousness in a process of co-constitution of the subject and the object of experience. This form of phenomenological naturalism overcomes the difficulties of the static phenomenology of constitution (condensed in the issue of solipsism) and leads us to acknowledge the natural and bodily grounding of consciousness. In this way, the empirical naturalism that is based on the genetic development of phenomenology constitutes a fruitful and promising framework for the collaboration between phenomenological and empirical investigations of the mind[6].

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[6] Developments of the phenomenological inquiry in this direction can be found, for example, in the works of Merleau-Ponty (1968, 2005) and in the enactive approach of Francisco Varela and Evan Thompson (Varela, Thompson, Rosch 1991; Varela 1996; Thompson 2007).

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Abstract

Husserl's phenomenology is developed in explicit contrast to naturalism. At the same time, various scholars have attempted to overcome this opposition by naturalizing consciousness and phenomenology. In this paper, I argue that, in order to confront the issue of the relationship between phenomenology and naturalism, we must distinguish between different forms of naturalism. In fact, Husserl's transcendental phenomenology is developed in contrast to a metaphysical form of naturalism, which conceives of nature as a mind-independent ontological domain that can be known as it is "in itself", independently of the cognitive relationship. At the same time, I argue that the genetic development of phenomenology, through the investigation of the temporal structure of experiences, leads to an empirical form of naturalism, which conceives of nature as the objective pole in a process of co-constitution of the subject and the object of experience.

Keywords: naturalized phenomenology; naturalization of consciousness; qualia; hard problem of consciousness; embodied mind.

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