

Phronēsis in Antisthenes' *Ajax* and *Odysseus*

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to read Antisthenes' speeches *Ajax* and *Odysseus* from the perspective of "Socratic discourses", that is as a text which could represent an alternative form of the search for a good life. The putative theme of the speeches is the contest for the arms of Achilles. But readers can find at a deeper level another subject: Ajax and Odysseus show two moral characters involved in the debate over the correct meaning of excellence (*aretē*) or practical wisdom (*phronēsis*).

Keywords: Antisthenes' *Ajax* and *Odysseus*, *aretē*, *phronēsis*, Socratic dialogue, searching for a good life

The question of *phronēsis* (in Greek φρόνησις) is one of the oldest topics of discussion in ancient ethics. We can translate the Greek word as "practical wisdom" or "prudence" (from the Latin *prudentia*). But neither of these modern terms is an accurate translation because *phronēsis* can also mean "human wisdom" or "mindfulness". For example, in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* *phronēsis* is a type of practical wisdom which is distinguished from such other types of wisdom as *technē*, *epistēmē* or *sophia*.

Among the first-generation Socratics, *phronēsis* very soon became a synonym for the activity of a virtuous person (*phronimos*, *spoudaios*). It is likely that one of the first authors of "Socratic discourses" (*logoi Sōkratikoí*) was Antisthenes (cf. Giannantoni, 1990, pp. 345–346).¹ If one were to look for the earliest discussions about *phronēsis* in Greek philosophy, we would have to start with Antisthenes (cf. Brancacci, 2005).² However, the situation is more complicated than it might seem. For one thing, no dialogues written by Antisthenes have actually been preserved.³ Although two speeches he authored are available in their entirety (*Ajax* and *Odysseus*), they resemble more closely epideictic declamations rather than Socratic dialogues in terms of genre. Other fragments more or less take the form of gnomes, *apophthegms* or *chreias*, and as such they are in fact based on later Cynic-Stoic genres (*biography*, *apophthegmata* etc.).

The aim of this paper is to read Antisthenes' speeches *Ajax* and *Odysseus* (SSR V A 53 and SSR V A 54) as a text which could represent an alternative form of the Socratic search for a good life. The authenticity of the speeches has been much discussed in the past.⁴ Contemporary historians, however, and almost without exception, consider the speeches to be genuine.⁵ *Ajax* and *Odysseus* present a fictional rhetorical confrontation between well-known

¹ These authors of "Socratic discourses" – like Antisthenes, Aristippus, Euclid, Phaedo, Aeschines – were active in the first half of the 4th century BC. For more details, see (Kahn, 1996, pp. 1–35).

² Antisthenes' fragments are numbered in accordance with Giannantoni's edition (Giannantoni 1990, Vol. II, pp. 137–181); abbreviation SSR.

³ Only short references to Antisthenes' dialogues and selected paraphrased passages have been preserved (Kahn, 1996, pp. 20, 33).

⁴ F. W. A. Mullach described them as late imitations of Gorgias' speeches (Mullach, 1867, vol. II, pp. 269–270). L. Radermacher considered the speeches to be late prose transcriptions of an unknown tragedy of Ajax (Radermacher, 1892, pp. 569–576). Other classical philologists (Dahmen, 1897; von Arnim, 1898; Joël, 1893–1901; Lehnert, 1909; Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, 1912; Gomperz, 1922) have entered into the discussion to express slight or profound objections against the authenticity of the speeches.

⁵ Cf. (Höistad, 1948); (Decleva Caizzi, 1966); (Patzner, 1970); (Rankin, 1986); (Giannantoni, 1990); (Brancacci, 1990); (Lévystone, 2005) etc.

Homeric heroes. As the mythical background implies, the ostensible theme of the speeches is the contest for the arms of Achilles. But readers can find at a deeper level another subject. Ajax and Odysseus show two moral characters engaged in the debate over the correct meaning of excellence (*aretē*) or practical wisdom (*phronēsis*)

The older line of scholarly interpretation took Antisthenes' speeches as exemplary rhetorical exercises and placed them into a relationship with epideictic speeches of the type exemplified by Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen*. Friedrich Blass (Blass, 1892, pp. 310–315) was probably first to notice that these speeches also have a dialectical character. Historians turned their minds to a closer study of their content and became gradually convinced that Antisthenes depicted, through an ethical-rhetorical prism, his own understanding of human character (Höistad, 1948, pp. 94–102; Patzer, 1970, p. 213 etc.). Contemporary scholars, except for some minor exemptions (e.g. Luttazzo, 1996, pp. 275–357), agree that the speeches pose ethical questions. Many of these scholars are actually convinced that Antisthenes created them not under the influence of sophistical rhetoric, but as a Socratic.⁶ This means that we could or actually should read them in the context of Socratic thought.⁷

Ajax in *agōn*

The initial theme of Antisthenes' *Ajax* and *Odysseus* is a question of harmony between words (*logoi*) and deeds (*erga*) that is crucial to the definition of practical wisdom (*phronēsis*). Both declamations deal with entitlement to Achilles' armour, as the two Homeric heroes defend themselves in an imaginary trial. Nonetheless, there is something else that gradually appears at the forefront: the speakers engage in a contest (*agōn*) over the correct definition of excellence (*aretē*), focusing their speeches on the actions they have previously taken – individual deeds they consider excellent. It is exactly in the difference between words and deeds that we can identify two different approaches to wisdom (*phronēsis*).

Right at the beginning of his speech, Ajax attacks the competence of the judges that have been appointed to judge his deeds (*erga*) on the basis of words (*logoi*), despite the fact that none of them witnessed the deeds with their own eyes.⁸ Regardless of the judges' incompetence, however, Ajax draws attention to Odysseus' past actions ("Odysseus had already profaned the sanctity of their temple by stealing the statue of Athena under cover of darkness") and future plans ("Odysseus asserts his right to [the armour] solely in order to sell it."), so as to undermine Odysseus' valour, which Odysseus likes to boast about (SSR V A 53, §3, §6).⁹ In Ajax's opinion, Odysseus' cowardice is evident from the fact that he does not act directly – disguising his intentions and actions instead.¹⁰ He does not mind gaining a bad reputation, which is something true soldiers would never allow (SSR V A 53, §5–6).

Ajax urges the judges not to take words into account in their decision-making and consider actions as far more important. It comes as a paradox, however, that he submits his request to those who, in his opinion, know nothing (SSR V A, 53 §7), which is why the judges cannot be competent (SSR V A 53, §1). There is an insurmountable ambiguity in Ajax's request, though: on the one hand, the Homeric hero cannot accept the fact that his actions are judged by someone who never witnessed them; on the other hand, he is at the mercy of inappropriate judges and asks them to take into account relevant actions rather than proclaimed words.

⁶ Cf. (Patzer, 1970, pp. 246–255); especially the conclusion on p. 255: *Der vorsokratische Antisthenes hat nie existiert* ("The Presocratic Antisthenes never existed").

⁷ Although *Ajax* and *Odysseus* are not Socratic dialogues, the two speeches are a valuable resource for those who study Antisthenes' way of thinking.

⁸ Cf. SSR V A 53, §4.

⁹ Translated by R. Dobbin (Dobbin, 2012).

¹⁰ Ajax uses the opposition between *lathra* and *phanerōs* (*secretly*–*evidently*) to discredit Odysseus' courage because he acts in disguise (e.g. when he dresses up as a beggar). Odysseus answers Ajax' question in §10 of his speech (SSR V A 54).

Nonetheless, he can only comment on his actions using words. Ajax's helplessness eventually results in a reckless suggestion that, rather than give an unfair verdict, the judges had better refrain from making a decision altogether. He even goes so far as to threaten the judges, warning them that they will be punished for any verdict that is unfair (SSR V A 53, §8).

In the final part of his speech, Ajax returns to his paradoxical request one more time, contrasting the truth that is based on actions with opinions that are based on words (SSR V A 53, §9): "I entrust you then to come to a determination about me and my actions; but I warn you all not to judge too hastily."¹¹

Odysseus on his deeds

Compared to Ajax's speech, Odysseus' speech is considerably longer and more balanced. It is addressed to the judges present in court as well as Odysseus' adversary. Odysseus stresses that it is only thanks to his actions that they do not have to suffer the misery and danger that come with war.¹² He responds to Ajax's accusations one by one, demonstrating they are all based on ignorance that he is unaware of.¹³ Ignorance (*amathia*) is like a disease that prevents man from desiring beautiful things (SSR V A, 54 §13): "[I]gnorance is the greatest evil to those who have it."

In Odysseus' opinion, the cause of Ajax's erroneous judgement and conduct is his ignorance, even though it is unintentional (SSR V A 54, §4).¹⁴

Ajax thinks Odysseus is cowardly, but Odysseus shows how naïve Ajax's understanding of courage is. A soldier's excellence (*aretē*) does not consist in rushing to battle "in anger like a wild boar".¹⁵ Rather than toil in vain, which is of no use in a battle even if you act along with others, a soldier must use his wisdom, even if he should use it by himself. This is the type of person who will not be afraid of death:¹⁶ "[The] superior man avoids suffering of any kind whether he himself is the cause, or an associate, or an enemy soldier."¹⁷

At one point, Odysseus calls himself a protector who keeps an eye on all of his companions day and night, although they are unaware of this. He uses this attribute to make his role stand out against the actions of the other Achaeans (SSR V A 54, §8). Odysseus is not afraid to use any weapons against his enemies – if need be, he does not hesitate to disguise himself as a slave, a beggar, a poor beaten soul.¹⁸ In Odysseus' opinion, such actions are

¹¹ Dobbin's translation.

¹² SSR V A 54, §1. The motif of a "lone hero" is repeated several times; cf. SSR §§2-5; §14.

¹³ The way Odysseus tries to explain how Ajax made the false assumption resembles Antisthenes' conviction that *contradiction is impossible* (SSR V A 174). Odysseus stresses on several occasions that Ajax is "stupid" and "childish" (SSR V A 54 §§6-7, §14). Odysseus' lecturing could be exemplified by the passage in which he relates Ajax's seeming courage to the circumstances of the battle and the Trojan customs (SSR V A 54, §§11-12).

¹⁴ Cf. Plato., *Apol.* 25d-26a, 37a. For more details on the Socratic nature of the Platonic thesis that *ignorance is the cause of erroneous conduct*, see Charles Kahn, who compares it to the argumentation of Antisthenes' Odysseus (Kahn, 1996, p. 92).

¹⁵ SSR V A 54, §6. Cf. SSR V A 54, §13.

¹⁶ SSR V A 54, §7. Cf. Plato., *Apol.* 41c-d; *Charm.* 173d), etc.

¹⁷ SSR V A 54, §6. When he refers to the malign consequences of Ajax's wild anger, Odysseus points out that, above everything else, a good man controls his desires; cf. SSR V A 54, §5 (cf. the representation of Ajax's anger in period drama; Soph., *Aj.* 29, 47, 349, 461, 467, 511). In Antisthenean ethics, self-control (*enkrateia*) is one of the most important virtues of excellence. For Antisthenes, Odysseus is a prototypical Socratic wise man because he does not succumb to Circe's charms or give preference to Calypso over Penelope (cf. SSR V A 188): Odysseus does not believe in empty words, i.e. *logoi* without *erga*, because he knows that true immortality can only be earned through excellent deeds (*erga*).

¹⁸ Rather than with weapons in the conventional sense of the word, Odysseus fights his enemy using all means possible; cf. SSR V A 53, §8.

examples of heroic deeds, too, although his fellow soldiers would not stoop so low (*SSR* V A 54, §9): “Whatever form of combat they choose I am always ready to meet them.”¹⁹

In the final part of his speech, Odysseus describes his own actions as wise, which might come across as rather immodest if it was not for Odysseus’ explanation of what he means by wisdom: “I imagine that if ever there arises a poet who really knows what counts for excellence in a soldier, he will represent me as a clever, composed and resourceful combatant.”²⁰

Odysseus’ wisdom does not consist in the knowledge of or an insight into what is right; instead, it is based on finding ways of coping with the suffering and dangers of life in a sensible manner. Without the kind of wisdom that takes into account goals rather than majority opinions, Odysseus – along with his fellow Achaeans – would never have conquered Troy.

Antisthenes’ problematization of *aretē*

Judging by the content and nature of his speeches, Antisthenes’ speakers problematize the question of what excellence (*aretē*) means – a question that is based on an even older question related to the conflict over Achilles’ armour: What does it mean to be the best Achaean?²¹ Antisthenes’ reformulation of the original question and the way his heroes respond to it evidently suggest that Antisthenes adapts the mythical theme to the type of discussions that Socratic philosophers engaged in at the turn of the 5th century BC.

Antisthenes’ Ajax represents the traditional hero who is convinced that actions must precede words.²² However, he is not able to put his conviction into practice in a situation when the only criterion for judging actions that is to be met is giving a persuasive speech. Ajax is angry not only at Odysseus, but also at the judges who are to make a decision about his excellence. He contrasts the straightforwardness of his own behaviour with Odysseus’ tendency to disguise his actions. However, Ajax’s excellence can only be judged on the basis of the opinions of the handful of fellow soldiers who witnessed his actions. They are the only people he is answerable to – they are the only people who can judge his actions. The soundness of Ajax’s conduct springs from the traditional understanding of a warrior’s excellence which is actually substantiated in advance. A virtue that is defined in this way is then circumscribed by the warrior’s actions, which make it meaningful, as well as the community of people who share Ajax’s ideals.

In contrast to Ajax, Antisthenes’ Odysseus represents a new type of hero – one who can harmonise his words with actions in all circumstances. Odysseus’ excellence (*aretē*) or Odysseus’ practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) is not limited to the time of war. It is not difficult to imagine that his actions would have been just as successful in everyday life. Odysseus will not be controlled by anger like Ajax; instead, he can control his temper perfectly, which only proves that his words tally with his actions.

Several attributes suggest that Antisthenes sees Odysseus as the mythical prototype of a Socratic wise man (Giannantoni, 1990, Vol. IV, p. 263; LévyStone, 2005, p. 212). In Odysseus’ opinion, a wise man ought to be able to come to terms with a bad reputation – just

¹⁹ Dobbin’s translation.

²⁰ Dobbin’s translation. Odysseus predicts that one day a poet (as wise as Homer once was?) will praise his excellence and call him *a man of much endurance, much intelligence, much contrivance* (*polutlanta kai polumētin kai polumēchanon*). The three epithets start with the prefix *polu-* (much-), possibly referring to the polytropic, multi-trait nature of Odysseus’ personality, as a result of which he comes across as not only rhetorically skilful, but also ethically excellent in the Socratic sense (cf. *SSR* V A, 187).

²¹ *SSR* V A 53, §4, §6, §7, §11 (“judging about virtue”). Cf. (Nagy, 1979, pp. 22–25, 43–49).

²² Ajax emphasises the status of a true soldier in the final part of his speech (*SSR* V A 53, §9): “...and me on the other hand, always the first in line for battle, unattended, and outside the protection of the fortress walls.”

as Socrates comes to terms with the accusations that he has a malign influence on young men living in Athens and does not believe in the gods of the city.²³ In the same spirit, Antisthenes figured in doxographic testimony claims that man must be indifferent to the opinions of others.²⁴ At one point in his speech, Odysseus lectures Ajax, explaining that ignorance is like a disease that a person is unaware of – an ignorant person does not deserve our condemnation but our pity (SSR V A 54, §4–5). Odysseus claims to be a guardian of the ignorant – the unknowing who cannot use their brains as an effective weapon. What prevents them from acting in accordance with reason and recognising Odysseus’ actions as reasonable are mere prejudices. Odysseus is a guardian who protects his companions from both enemies and themselves (SSR V A 54, §8): “Like sea captains who personally attend to the safety of their crew, night and day, I look after your welfare and everyone else’s besides.”²⁵

It is in this role that Odysseus primarily resembles Socrates, who describes himself as a tireless inquirer who helps himself and others take care of themselves (*eautou epimeleia*).²⁶

Understood as a disease of the soul, ignorance (*amathia*) is one of the key themes of Socratic philosophy.²⁷ Antisthenes puts ignorance in the Socratic context when he has Odysseus criticise Ajax for succumbing to public opinion on what is right and good.²⁸ A good person can tolerate no evil – not in a friend, not in an enemy, not in themselves. Odysseus’ statement echoes Socrates’ belief that nothing bad can happen to a good person.²⁹ Although involuntary, Ajax’s ignorance is, in Odysseus’ opinion, the cause of his erroneous judgment and conduct.³⁰ Whether Ajax can be cured of his pathological state of mind depends on his willingness to listen to Odysseus without strong emotions, rationally considering the motives of his own behaviour at the same time. Odysseus’ lecturing is exemplified by distinguishing between physical, bodily strength (*ischus*) and courage (*andreia*), which is a type of knowledge (*epistēmē* or *sophia*).³¹ Ajax is a classic example of a courageous man whose ability (*dunamis*) comes from his passion (which is why he is so prone to succumb to madness), but he is not courageous or bold because courage requires a rational control of passions.³² In a similar spirit, Antisthenes describes Alcibiades, who was not just handsome and happy to take chances, but also “violent and a man with no upbringing or education whatsoever.”³³ The key word in Athenaeus’ report is the adjective “badly educated” or “uneducated” (*apaideutos*) because courage becomes a virtue only thanks to practical wisdom, which requires a “Socratic strength” (Dudley, 1990, p. 11). At this point, it is worth getting back to the subheading of Antisthenes’ treatise called *The Greater Heracles*, namely “on Strength” (*Peri ischuos*). Besides *ischus*, the alternative title also included the term *phronēsis* (“practical wisdom”): *Hēraklēs hē peri phronēseōs hē ischuos* (*Heracles, or on*

²³ Cf. Plato., *Apol.* 18c.

²⁴ Cf. Diog. Laert. VI 11: “ill repute is a good thing”.

²⁵ Dobbin’s translation. In this sense, Odysseus explains to Ajax that his ignorance prevents him from recognising all the good things that Odysseus has provided him with (SSR V A 54, §4).

²⁶ For more details on Socrates’ mission, see Plato., *Apol.* 31b: “I have neglected all my own affairs and have been enduring the neglect of my concerns all these years, but I am always busy in your interest, coming to each one of you individually like a father or an elder brother and urging you to care for virtue.” Translated by H. N. Fowler (Plato, 1914).

²⁷ Cf. Plato., *Euthyd.* 281e4–5; see also *Alcib. II.* 148a; *Tim.* 88b; *Phil.* 49a; Xenoph., *Mem.* III 9,4, etc.

²⁸ Cf. SSR V A 54, §§3–6.

²⁹ Cf. Plato., *Apol.* 41c–d. For more details, see (LévyStone, 2005, p. 185); (Montiglio, 2011, pp. 28–29).

³⁰ Cf. Plato., *Apol.* 25d–26a, 37a for more details on the difference between voluntary and involuntary conduct that Plato reformulates in his subsequent dialogues into the well-known paradox that *no man voluntarily pursues evil*. For more details, see (Kahn, 1996, p. 92).

³¹ Cf. Plato., *Prot.* 350d–e.

³² Cf. Plato., *Prot.* 351a.

³³ Athen. XII 534 C [= SSR V A 198].

Practical Wisdom or on Strength).³⁴ Allegedly, the main theme of the dialogue would have been Socrates' perseverance as a representation of *phronēsis*, i.e. ethical excellence embodied and personified by the mythical Heracles (Höistad, 1948, p. 36).³⁵ This prototype of a Socratic wise man might have also applied to Odysseus – a hero who can be reasonable in any situation.

Odysseus' wisdom does not only make his own life better, but it also helps improve the lives of those who are willing to listen to him and think about themselves. In this sense, Odysseus is the steersman, guardian, and healer of ignorant people – he can cure them of the greatest disease that our souls can suffer from, i.e. ignorance (*amathia*). Antisthenes' Odysseus is an embodiment of the kind of practical wisdom and spiritual strength without which we cannot take care of our own lives. We all need Odysseus, we all need Heracles, and, most of all, we all need Socrates – provided that we want to learn to live our lives wisely and happily. Furthermore, they need us, as living our life wisely requires continual examination, effort, and toil. Wisdom by itself is not enough for a person to be cured of ignorance.

Conclusion

The purpose of Socratic education is to give the life of an individual a sense of direction, turning it into something beautiful and good.³⁶ The key virtue or excellence (*aretē*) in this effort is practical wisdom. Our reconstruction of Antisthenes' understanding of practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) suggests that early Socratic philosophers struggled to grasp the notion. Antisthenes' concept of wisdom is an alternative to the way Plato understands the notion. Antisthenes links wisdom with endurance and self-control – with an asceticism that results in excellent decisions. Antisthenes draws on the Socratic conviction that only thanks to practical wisdom can we distinguish between things that are deceptive with regard to life and those that are actually beneficial. The therapeutic function of wisdom (*phronēsis*) consists in eliminating all deceptive assumptions about what it means to live a good life. If we desire pleasures or if we long for wealth and power, we will soon become slaves to our own desires. However, wisdom by itself is not enough for anyone to live a happy life. Wisdom requires Socratic education, i.e. instruction aimed at others as well as ourselves. Without Socrates, i.e. without receiving help from someone who helps others through mutual love, we cannot give our lives the right direction.

Acknowledgement

This paper is a part of research project VEGA, No. 1/0017/17, Aeschines and the Socratic dialogue.

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³⁴ Cf. *SSR V A 41*.

³⁵ All ancient resources that associate *ischus* with Antisthenes' *Heracles* and *Cyrus* date back to a later doxographic tradition. However, their credibility can be supported by selected passages from Antisthenes' *Odysseus*, in which Odysseus explains that Ajax' errors of conduct were all caused by ignorance.

³⁶ As a model of Socratic education, cf. the argumentation in Aeschines' *Alcibiades* (*SSR VI A 53*): while doctors treat the ill thanks to a human art, Socrates is beneficial to those who need what he has to offer thanks to a gift from the gods – Socrates says: "Just so I have no knowledge of any subject that I can benefit a person by teaching him, and yet I thought that by being with him I would make him better, through my loving him." Translated by G. Boys-Stones and C. Rowe (Boys-Stones & Rowe, 2013).

Cepko, J., Kalaš, A., Suvák, V., *Diogenis fragmenta / Diogenove zlomky*, Bratislava 2016 (*The Fragments of Diogenes of Sinope*); Suvák, V. (ed.), *Antisthenica Cynica Socratica*, Prague 2014; Kalaš, A., Suvák, V., *Antisthenis fragmenta / Antisthenove zlomky*, Bratislava 2013 (*The Fragments of Antisthenes of Athens*); Sokratika: Štyri štúdie k sókratovskej tradícii myslenia, Prešov 2007 (*Socratics: Four studies concerning the Socratic Movement*).

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Comenius' ethics: from the heart to the world

Lucas E. Misseri

Abstract

This paper deals with the ethical views of the 17th century Czech thinker Jan Amos Komenský, also known as Johann Amos Comenius. Comeniologic studies are focused on different aspects of his contribution to education, theology and philosophy but surprisingly there are only a few studies on his ethical standpoints. Jan Patočka classified Comenius's work in three periods: prepanosophic, pansophic and panorthotic. Here the focus is on the panorthotic works in order to trace the different conceptions of ethics, virtue and other ethical concepts specially the virtue of prudence (*prudential/phronesis*). Furthermore, to have a broader perspective, a short analysis of his prepanosophic period book *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart* is also included in order to contrast the evolution of the concept of prudence and the ethical sphere in his world-view. The methodology is based on conceptual analysis, the contrast of different references to ethics in his late period books. At the same time, this work is an attempt to extract secular elements for understanding his ethics, although the organic link between philosophy, theology and politics is recognized in his thought.

Keywords: virtue ethics, prudence, human reform, peace, moral universalism

Introduction

Most Comeniologic studies since 19th century are focused on the main contribution of the Czech author to Western cultural pedagogy. In contrast, there are only a few references to his thought on ethics, even character formation appears to be a forgotten theme in pedagogical studies (Hábl, 2011). The problem addressed in this paper is: What characterizes Comenius's ethics? Despite it generally being accepted that the thinking of Jan Amos Comenius is an organic system in which educational, religious and ethical views are all intertwined, here I focus strictly on his philosophical references to ethical concepts. Putting aside — whenever possible — the theological and educational links of those concepts, namely because the goal of this paper is to identify the particular features that appeared in Comenius's standpoints on ethics, in order to reconstruct his ethical views with some degree of independence from his other perspectives which are more broadly studied.

The hypothesis guiding this research is that Comenius's ethics has two main characteristics making it special for his epoch and worthy studying nowadays. First, Comenius's ethical views are a form of virtue ethics. There is a strong influence of Aristotelian-Thomistic, Platonic and Neoplatonic and Stoic elements in his views on virtues. Second, his ethical stance is a universalistic one, although still from a Christian-centric perspective. Both features can be understood as attributes of the spirit of the 17th century in Europe, a time when irenic perspectives started to be developed as a reaction to religious and nationalistic conflicts. Despite Renaissance anti-scholasticism, Aristotle was still an important figure during the period mostly in his scholastic interpretation; his ethical works were re-interpreted many times and adapted according to national and cultural circumstances. Notwithstanding, the way Comenius combined these two features with other traditional figures of virtue ethics — from Greek and Roman classics such as Socrates, Plato, Epictetus and Seneca to some Biblical figures like King Solomon — is original and worth studying nowadays, not only as a way of developing a better understanding of 17th century ideas but in order to promote better ethical responses for periods of religious conflicts and cultural clashes like our times.

In the following pages it will be reconstructed how these two main features — virtue ethics and universal irenicism — were developed by Comenius in a progressive way and the role other philosophers and thinkers have played in that development. In addition to classical philosophers, some contemporaries like Johann Valentin Andreae, Johann Alsted and Thomas Campanella were notorious influences on Comenius's ideas. Furthermore, the hypotheses will be explained as a transition from the pursuit of individual virtuous behaviour to his universalistic panorthotic programme in the search for world peace and the spreading of knowledge.

Before focusing directly on Comenius's ethical references, some remarks about the historical context in which his works were written and how they can be classified to understand better the evolution of his system might be useful. Comenius's writings do not have a linear evolution (Čížek, 2016, p. 15) and sometimes they appeared incomplete, in the sense that lacking a proper final edition (Šolcová, forthcoming) as a "work in progress" (Soudilová, 1990, p. 51). The latter can be due to the many trips Comenius was forced to undertake during his life-time in order to survive, and also to the many times his books were set on fire (Yates, 1972, pp. 200–202). The life of Jan Amos Komenský "Comenius" (1592–1670) is linked to the religious wars of the 17th century, namely the Thirty Years War and the decline of the Moravian Church of the Unity of the Brethren (*Unitas Fratrum*) to which he belonged as a bishop. He spent his adult life going from his home town in the Uherské Hradiště District,¹ to Přerov and Fulnek in Moravia; later, Herborn and Heidelberg in modern-day Germany; Elbląg, Orla, Toruń, and Leszno in Poland; Sárospatak in Hungary; and even Sweden, England and The Netherlands.

In order to explain the development of his system of thought some Czech scholars since Jan Patočka have proposed different tripartite classifications of Comenian works (Čížek, 2016, pp. 15–17), in clear accordance with Comenius's inclination to conceptual triads. In Patočka's classification there are three continuous periods (Patočka, 1997, p. 175). First, there is an encyclopaedic or prepansophic period which goes from 1610 to 1628. This includes his academic studies and his first teachings and duties as a bishop of the Unity of the Brethren. Comenius spent most of the time between Moravia and the educational centres of western German States, namely Herborn and Heidelberg. The second period is the Pansophic one, 1628–1641, which is characterised by forced exile to save his life and his family's. Comenius opposed on this biographical period of familiar and material losses an inflexible optimism in the pursuit of a universal wisdom or *pansophia*. Finally, the third period goes from 1642 to his death in 1670. This one closes the dialectical triad encouraging a reform of all human things in a non-violent way and was deeply influenced by his short stay in London, 1641–1642 (Čížek, 2016, pp. 17, 129).

In the following pages, different ethical references from some works of the prepansophic and panorthotic periods are extracted and analysed. From the prepansophic period the book *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart* (written around 1623) was chosen, mainly because it allows contrasting the ethical views of a pessimistic period of Comenius's biography and how he classified ethical virtues in it. A short analysis of this is provided in section 1. Then the rest of the works *Janua linguae reserata* (1643), *Orbis pictus sensualium* (1658) — analysed in section 2 — and the *De Rerum Humanarum Emendatione Consultatio Catholica* (1644–1670, unfinished) — analysed in section 3 — belong to the Panorthotic period in which the virtue of prudence appears as an adequate bridge between two of the main characteristics of human nature: reason and free will. Through these works the author has tried to show how the ethical focus goes from an individual perspective of a good and prudent

¹ There is a debate whether Comenius was born in Uherský Brod, Nivnice or Komňa but in any case all three municipalities are located in the Uherské Hradiště District in the region of Zlín in Moravia, Czech Republic.

Christian to a universalistic and irenic one, or as it was summarized in the subtitle of this paper: from the heart to the world.

Ethics in the labyrinth: A secular interpretation

Some authors have warned about the misleading interpretation of Comenius works during the communist period and how setting aside the theological aspects of his thinking means betraying Comenius who considered himself above all a theologian (Soudilová, 1994, p. 25) and whose “philosophy and theology are inseparably bound” (Čížek, 2016, p. 12). However, the aim of this paper is not to deny the importance of Comenius’s theological thinking but to extract the explicit philosophical elements from some of his works, which are as important as the theological ones and are connected not as in scholasticism — in which philosophy was the servant of theology — but in a “sisterly [*sesterský*] relationship” (Soudilová, 1994, p. 25). This is a methodological and conceptual challenge because the theological and philosophical elements of Comenius’s system are all intermingled organically as in his metaphor of the tree (Červenka, 1969). But it is worth the effort to extract the philosophical elements from his references to ethics or moral virtues and compare them to other ethical and philosophical works.

The first text chosen to interpret in a secular way is extremely hard because it is a deep Christian consolation of his efforts, but it is worth analysing because it offers a clear contrast with some of the Panorthotic works that are analysed in section 2 and 3. The text is *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of Heart* which Comenius rewrote many times. It is said he finished the first manuscript around 1623. That period was the beginning of many trips trying to save his life and including many losses, above all the loss of his wife and two children. Therefore, it is not a surprise that the emotions expressed are more prone to anthropological pessimism. The whole book is a complete criticism of contemporary cultures that sometimes recalls that of *Inferno* in Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy* (1320) and Erasmus’ *Praise of the Folly* (1511). But probably one of his main influences was Johann Valentin Andreae’s utopia from 1619: *Reipublicae Christianopolitanae Descriptio* (Peuckert, 1928, p. 188) but other studies claim Comenius had more influences (Čyževskyj, 1953, p. 53).

Andreae’s works exerted a deep influx on Comenius’s thinking, not only on his pedagogic writings but also on his *Labyrinth*... Andreae’s utopia is described as a small island in which a group of Lutheran Christians developed a perfect community. In Christianopolis all is aimed at liberating oneself from the dirt of the world and to prepare for the joys of the Christian paradise in Heaven. The body is only a burden and life is a preparation for death. But at the same time, there is no place for idleness. One of the most interesting contributions of Andreae’s is how he described learned people as both skilful on bodily work and on literature and mathematics. The word “labyrinth” appears in the text: “Therefore they walk into a veritable labyrinth whosoever borrows poles and compasses from human philosophy which to measure the New Jerusalem, figure out its registers and sacred computation, or fortify it against the enemy” (Andreae, 2007, p. 222). Positive references to Aristotle and the Aristotelian system (Andreae 2007, pp. 110, 218) can also be found. The metaphorical element is explained from the beginning when Andreae says fantasy will take him through the sea of Academic issues. Some could see in the imaginary group of Christians — and their college with the many arts in the very centre of Christianopolis — another metaphor for the Rosicrucian invisible college.

Comenius repeats in his *Labyrinth*... the use of metaphors but the allegory is not a voyage to new worlds — as in utopias — but research on all the characteristics of the known world. At the beginning of the text, Comenius introduces it as an autobiography in which he took away the useless details of his life and kept those that could be of some use to his readers. The plot depicts the protagonist’s quest of his real calling. He is helped by a cicerone — as Vergil

in Dante's *Comedy* — named Mr. Ubiquitous — or Searchall — who will guide him in order to show them the many occupations of the world. That is the beginning of an exhaustive account of all the flaws, toils, and uselessness of the many occupations in the world. When, by the end, the protagonist is helpless after having witnessed how all the riches of human Wisdom are actually the futile matters of Vanity, he is saved by Christ who shows him his real calling: to follow the Christian lead.

Notwithstanding, as was mentioned above, the focus of this paper is on the features that can be separated from the theological aspects of Comenius's thinking. Hence the most useful passages of the *Labyrinth*... for a non-theological or a secular reading are those in which Comenius describes the court of Wisdom in detail, in which he makes a hierarchy of classical virtues. Mundane Wisdom is represented as queen of the world, and her counsellors: "On her right hand are Purity, Watchfulness, Prudence², Discretion, Affability, and Moderation; on her left hand are Truth, Zeal, Veracity, Bravery, Patience, and Constancy" (Comenius, 1998, p. 168). Her governors are Industry and Fortune, and her bodyguards are Craftiness and Power (Comenius, 1998, p. 169).

In this allegorical way, Comenius is depicting a hierarchy in which the centre is set around wisdom. But wisdom is not a passive or merely contemplative state, because it is linked to industry and it is not determined because it is related to changes of fortune. So here it appears that wisdom is an active faculty of humankind resulting from free will. Among the counsellors are mixed intellectual and moral virtues and the guardians are linked with basic needs for survival.

Furthermore, it is interesting that the figure unveiling the limits of human wisdom is King Solomon. On the one hand, this is appropriate because Solomon is one of the figures of the Wisdom Books from the Bible. On the other hand, he was the symbolic figure chosen by Francis Bacon to represent the founder of his utopia in New Atlantis: King Solomon is none other than King Solomon. Even the native name of New Atlantis's island is homage to him: "Bensalem" (Bacon, 2017, p. 72), it comes from *ben Shalom* or the "Son of Solomon" or "the son of peace" in Hebrew. This reference reappeared in Andreae's Christianopolis, who calls the island "Capharsalama" (Andreae, 2007, pp. 30, 143) which means "'sSolomon's village" or "peaceful village" in Hebrew. This recurrence of Solomon/Shalom can be explained as a result of the Christian utopian idea of creating a New Jerusalem. This is explicit on Samuel Gott's *Nova Solyma: the ideal city of Jerusalem regained* (1649).

In the *Labyrinth*... the two aspects of human nature in conflict — reason and free will — are surrendered willingly to God's will. The wisest option for the protagonist of Comenius's story is to choose to strengthen his will by choosing God's, and after that his will is going to become stronger and he will be able to tolerate all the evils and imperfections of the world. But again, this tolerance is not passive, it is aimed at helping others to diminish their suffering and find the true way, which is coherent with his view of free and active reason.

In addition, in the same book Comenius is very critical of philosophers in general but not with philosophy. The horde of philosophers are depicted as vulgar, useless, and lost. But at the same time a few of them are redeemed when they are mentioned again among the advisers of King Solomon. These privileged ones are "Socrates, Plato, Epictetus, [and] Seneca³..." (Comenius, 1998, p. 175). They represent a branch in the history of philosophy which considers virtue as a key element for well-ordered life on Earth. It is interesting to note that

2 The Czech word used by Comenius is *opatrnost* which has, among its meanings, that of prudence. Šolcová (forthcoming) in her analysis of the concept of prudence in Comenius uses *uvážlivost* and Soudilová (1990) employs *rozumnost*. In case some doubts can be raised from the translation in the cited passage, it is possible to reply that the meaning of prudence as practical wisdom can be implied from the set of virtues Comenius enumerates as counsellors of Wisdom (*moudrost*).

3 On the links between Comenius and Seneca see Soudilová (1990).

Aristotle is not mentioned among them. There is no explicit reason for that omission, but it could be of interest for an analysis on Comenius's reception of Aristotelian thought.

Later on, during the so called "Panorthotic period" Comenius will be more optimistic on the possibilities of accomplishing the task of philosophy of making humans better, not only by improving his contemporary philosophy but through the whole reform and amendment of all human aspects. One could ask Comenius: Why do this if the true way is beyond this life? Why not stand the injustice of the world and later delight oneself in the endless joys of paradise? Because as the Slovak theologian Igor Kišš explains, there are millenarian aspects in Comenius's thinking which make helping others in this material world also the duty of a true Christian. Comenius aims to prepare all his contemporaries for the Kingdom of God, first on the surface of this Earth and then in Heaven (Kišš, 2009). Christians should not detach themselves from the earthly duties, and — as in the Platonic allegory of the cave — those who saw the light must come back to the world to lead the others to the real kingdom by alleviating suffering on Earth for everybody, in all possible ways. In this plan the virtue of prudence will play a special role as it will be explained in the next sections.

Virtue ethics in Comenius's thought: The role of prudence

In Comenius's early Panorthotic works all references to ethics (*Ethica*) are unabashedly from the standpoint of virtue ethics. As an example it is possible to compare the little differences in his *Janua linguae reserata aurea* (1643) and the world famous *Orbis pictus sensualium* (1658). Just by taking a look at the hierarchical order of appearance of virtues, one can witness the importance of prudence (*prudentia*):

<i>Janua linguae reserata aurea</i>		<i>Orbis pictus sensualium</i>	
Chapter	Title	Chapter	Title
LXXXII	De ethica in genere	CXI	Ethica
LXXXIII	De prudentia	CXII	Prudentia
LXXXIV	De temperantia	CXIII	Sedulitas
LXXXV	De castitudo	CXIV	Temperantia

Both works are aimed at linguistic education and the ethical references are minimal. Despite that, there is a clear Aristotelian influence which becomes explicit in the image of Chapter CXI of *Orbis pictus*. There, it is represented a three-way path and the reader is invited to always stay in the middle way. As in Aristotle's view, the middle term is the most virtuous choice between the way of defect and the way of excess. For this reason, in both books, the next concept explained is prudence as practical rationality or the capability of choosing wisely.

The concept of prudence or practical reason (*phronesis*) was a key element for Aristotle because it is moral virtue that allows the connection with intellectual virtues (Aristotle, 2011, p. 283). There is much debate about the role of prudence in Aristotle's thinking but it is undeniable that it plays a key role in his ethical conceptions. Comenius seems to be a supporter of the interpretation in which intellectual and moral views are both necessary. The *bios theoretikos* (theoretic or contemplative life) is understood by the Czech thinker as a life not only of mental activity but of concrete physical work involving all senses. It is interesting to note that in *Orbis pictus* the concept of diligence (*sedulitas*) is depicted before temperance. The ethical subject must act and know his environment with his senses and transform it with his work. One could interpret the importance of diligence in a Weberian sense, i.e. as a result of the Reformation — as in Andreae's *Christianopolis* — and as the rudiments of work ethics

(Weber, 2013). But this will not be done here due to the limits of this paper and the chosen approach focused on secular aspects of Comenius's conceptions.

In later works Comenius will emphasize some triads to define the human being, including generally: the faculty of reason, free will and operative faculties — or in some works emotions instead of agency (Čížek, 2016). There is some debate on the ontological priority of any of these three aspects. But it looks clear and in some extent consistent that during his Pansophic period Comenius was prone to give priority to reason. This can be explained as a consequence of Comenius adopting Aristotelian thought in which humans are rational animals. The special feature Comenius added is that we, humans, are also spiritual beings such as angels. This angelic attribution can be understood as an echo of Renaissance anthropological optimism as in, for example, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's *Oratio de hominis dignitatis* in which the Florentine philosopher says humans can be angel-like or beast-like due to their open-ended nature (Pico della Mirandola, 1998).

In addition, this can also be traced to Avicenna's thinking (Corbin, 2014, p. 187) but it is more likely Comenius got it through Tommaso Campanella, a direct influence on Andreae via Christian Besold's translations of Campanella's books. Campanella stated in his poem *Della Possanza dell'Uomo* (On the Power of Man) humankind has the dignity of a second god on Earth: "beautiful image, that man is called (...) but so proud, that from the world is considered as second god (...) and gives laws, God-like" (Campanella, 1834, pp. 199–200). Furthermore, Campanella divided human faculties in three aspects as many Christians have done including Andreae and Comenius: first, knowledge or *senno*; then, will or *amore*; and finally, power or *possanza*. This classification appeared in his poems (Campanella, 1834) and in the ministries of his *City of the Sun* (Campanella, 1963). If one compares both anthropological standpoints in Comenius and Campanella, then common elements overlap. For example, as some scholars remarked, the concept of human nature in Comenius has the key elements of reason, will, and agency (Čížek, 2016); one can see how those are easy to be compared with Campanella's. For Campanella, reason is described with the Italian word *senno* which means sense in the way of being able to perceive sensually the world and at the same time to be self-aware. *Senno* is knowledge; it is the faculty of reason in its broadest understanding. *Amore* is willpower and free will, the ability of wishing things. And *possanza* is the faculty of being able to accomplish things, our human power. However, it is possible that Comenius received this idea of the three parts of the human beings from many sources in the Christian tradition, for instance directly from Andreae (2007) or Jean Gerson's "*posse, scire, and velle*" of Augustinian inspiration (Pascoe, 1973, p. 185) or from Augustine's work directly "*nosse/scire – velle – posse*" (Čížek, 2016, p. 187). Although they are many authors that have remarked the links between the Calabrian Catholic's thought and the Czech Bishop of the Unity of the Brethren.

Another interesting link between the Panorthotic works of Comenius and some interpretations of Campanella's thinking is their universalism. When Comenius writes his *Consultatio* for starting a change for everybody in every way, everywhere; Campanella imagines a theocratic Empire reigning over all humankind — including Native Americans. And when the latter needs to reply to the political realist measures of his time, he appeals as Comenius did to the concept of prudence as opposed to Machiavellian *virtù* (Campanella, 1998, p. 82). Comenius's political elements in his ethical references will be analysed in the next section.

Ethics in *Consultatio*: Free will and universal peace

The most important book from this period is his unfinished *De rerum humanarum emendatione consultatio catholica* (*The Consultation on an Amendment of All Things Human*) written between 1644 and 1670. This is the apex of Comenius's systematic work. Despite

some terminological inconsistencies, the work is a summary of all previous trials and it has the higher goal of a universal reform of all human things. Basically, Comenius refers to three aspects of humankind as beings created in God's image and as intermediaries between the material and the divine plane. These aspects or innate principles are: the desire of knowledge as in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (2007, p. 1, Alpha 980a), free will or the most sublime gift from God, and the power to get the things done or agency — sometimes named *anima* or spirit (Čížek, 2016, p. 56).

For Comenius these three human principles are degraded during his contemporaneity. Then he establishes these must be not replaced but reformed due to the potentiality in them that every human has without exception. These principles are linked to the fields of philosophy (*philosophia* or *eruditio*), politics, and religion and all three areas of the humankind (*res humanae*) need to be reformed (Comenius, 1966). Therefore, Comenius developed a highly ambitious plan in his *Consultatio* aiming at the reformation of the three most important cultural aspects of humankind. Continuing with the methodological constraint enunciated in the first pages of this paper the main focus of interest here is the Pansophic section called “*mundus moralis*” (moral world).

As mentioned above, Comenius's metaphysics of multiple worlds could come from Campanella's metaphysics (Červenka, 1979). But in Comenius, these worlds make direct Biblical reference and have a cyclical aspect as in Neoplatonic emanationism in a process of constitution, destitution and restitution (Soudilová, 1990, p. 51). These worlds are eight in number and correspond to the different ways human beings are related to God and matter.

World	School of Life	God's creation
Ideal	Birth	First day
Possible	Infancy	Second day
Angelic	Puerility	Third day
Material	Adolescence	Fourth day
Artificial	Youth	Fifth day
Moral	Adulthood	Sixth day
Spiritual	Senescence	Seventh day
Eternal	Death	God's rest

This schema can be problematic and there is too much to say about how Comenius deals with the combination between theology and Campanellian metaphysics, however here the focus is just on the sixth day world: the moral world which is usually considered by Comenionologists as “the best source from which we can make a full picture of Comenius's moral theory” (Soudilová, 1990, p. 51). *Mundus moralis* is characterised by the freedom of human beings who can only be ruled by themselves. This privilege is connected with the principle of free will and, as it was stated above, is God's greatest gift. Comenius is coherent in establishing freedom as the token for morality. But again prudence plays a key role: *prudentia moralis* (moral prudence) in this context is understood as the human privilege of governing oneself. This governing capacity can be developed in many ways because it does not mean only to rule over oneself but to rule over others. The goal of ruling is to keep peace and human freedom is what makes humans fully responsible in their acts, and responsible for the state of the mundane world.

Prudence is the art of all arts and implies autonomy, self-governing, and autarchy. But ethics (*ethica*) is understood as the use of oneself in relation to prudence. Human beings are a

mix of animality, rationality, and spirituality. Again three aspects one could link with agency, reason, and free will or in Campanellian terms *possanza*, *senno*, and *amore*.

Moral prudence is the capability to rule over oneself and over others (*symbiotica*), to rule over members of other groups (*oeconomica*), over youngsters (*scholastica*), and over a republic (*politica*). The main goal in a republic is to attain peace. Peace is the condition to the amendment of all three principles (knowledge, will, and power) and all three human fields (philosophy, religion, and politics). In Comenius, as in Campanella and other thinkers influenced by Plato, ethics and politics are mingled. Prudence or the “dominion over one’s self is the axis of »all human happiness«” (Prázný, 2016, p. 361) and the importance of teaching to be prudent is key for the reform of all things human. “Like Plato, who conceived an empire of education (*imperium educationis*) in his philosophical reflections, Comenius puts the issue of politics *sub specie educationis*” (Prázný, 2016, p. 360).

Comenius’s holism makes it difficult to differentiate the strict ethical aspects in its only philosophical grounding. Ethics is so tied to religion as it is to politics. So if in the Aristotelian tradition, virtues traced a bridge between intellectual and moral capabilities, this reappears in Comenius’s thought. But the scope of Comenius is larger than any previous virtue ethics, with the exception of stoic cosmopolitanism. In Comenian ethics the virtue of prudence is key to extending reform from mere individual modification of one’s behaviour as in the *Labyrinth...* to a better world worthy of God’s kingdom. Prudence is the bridge between reason, free will, and agency. It is the ability to know what is better, to choose to do it, and finally to accomplish it. When these three aspects converge harmonically humans justify their special place in the ontological hierarchy as mediators among the material world and God. This optimism of the human capability to reform is not an echo of Christian Reformation but the spirit of the times to come.

Comenius’s panorthotic project, i.e. the reform of the three most important human fields is one of the earliest examples of utopianism in its modern sense. The belief that States need more than good laws and harsh enforcement, humans on Earth can change and this change should be expanded to the whole globe. Of course, it must be remembered that Comenius thinks that change is help by the peaceful hand of Christ and only the Christian message can achieve world peace. However the ground was set for the pursuit of multi-religious or also secular pursuit of that goal.

Conclusion

After this limited review of the works from two of the three different periods of Comenius’s thinking, it is possible to witness how Comenius’s references to ethical concepts mix: on the one hand, the classical set of virtues and on the other, a program of reformation for human culture in a broad sense that includes every individual of the world. This program is rooted in the idea that all humans are equal and have free will and reason. The irenic program of Comenius is universalistic but at the same time Christian-centric. Comenius wants everybody be taught everything useful to live a good life on Earth in every possible way. The most useful is a mixture of the improvement of perception of the phenomena of the world, the teaching of past wisdom, and Christian Scriptures.

Among virtues, Comenius places the virtue of prudence high on the hierarchy echoing the classical view of virtue ethics. Prudence (*prudentia*) has a strong Aristotelian-Thomistic implication and in ethical debates was considered as the virtue joining moral and intellectual virtues. Prudence is an adequate bridge between free will (to be able to do what one wants) and choosing wisely by ruling over oneself and over others (the most rational option or the most adequate one in order to fulfil the highest goals). Some stressed the dependence of Comenius’s ethics on stoicism and it is well-known that he regards Epictetus and Seneca to be models, but he also criticizes them. The Christian-centric element adds a positive feature and

at the same time a negative one, the positive is that the Comenian sage — as the Platonic one — should not only save himself but also others. This is what makes him more than an animal, an angel-like being. The negative is that the non-Christian cannot do that, they are considered inferiors by default. They cannot be prudent because they do not recognize the truth.

Comenius alternates periods of anthropological pessimism with those of euphoric optimism as can be seen by comparing *Labyrinth...* with *Consultatio...* Notwithstanding, what makes Comenius's contribution significant to virtue ethics — even from a secular point of view — is his insistence on embracing all human individuals in the pursuit of a pacific reformation. In Comenius's ethics, religious salvation is consistent with the effort to lessen the suffering of everybody. Comenius's legacy of education for peace and inclusiveness is still a valuable contribution to think about — and try to overcome — the ethical challenges of our times.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank to all who helped me in the difficult task of finding Comenian literature in Argentina. Firstly, I want to thank Prof. Ángela M. Fernández (*in memoriam*) who taught me about the importance of Comenius in the Western World at the beginning of 2002. Secondly, I want to thank to Prof. Vasil Gluchman, SAIA, and Prešov University Library for their help in accessing Comenius's works, during my academic visit to Slovakia in 2009. And last but not least, thanks to three generous Czech scholars who shared with me their interesting and up-to-date contributions: Dr. Jan Čížek, Dr. Věra Schifferová, and Dr. Kateřina Šolcová.

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Kant's ethics as practical philosophy: On philosophy of freedom

Lubomír Belás

Abstract

The paper focuses on some important philosophical issues of Kant's philosophical legacy, especially on Kant's thoughts on man and his acting in community with other *human beings*, his fellows, (*Conjectural Beginning of Human History*) from the aspect of morality based on moral-practical terms and categories. The field of Kant's practical-critical thoughts is not only unusually broad but also full of ideological dynamics offered in a precise and modern linguistic form. The paper claims that Kant offers his own answer for the fourth question "Was ist der Mensch" ("What is man?"), introduced in *Logic* (Kant, 1992, p. 538) and at the same it also introduces a historical dimension to the issue of man, included in his short writings, in a compact form.

Keywords: categorical imperative, dignity, freedom, man, moral self-realization

Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end.

Immanuel Kant

Introduction

The paper on Kant's ethics¹ is based on a precise work with primary sources connected with functional interpretative literature, especially in German, which is also relevant for interpreting the contemporary state of the *res publica*. Kant's social-critical analysis connected with such issues as freedom, equality, dignity, or social contract is present in many topical philosophical discussions and disputes. The second, or *human*, variation of categorical imperative demanding the understanding of man mainly as an end, not as a means is also discussed. Important works dealing with this topic are e.g. the works of the German philosopher, Otfried Höffe, or Peter Koslowski who defends ethics and its independence from social conformism. In the "Foreword" to Koslowski's work *Staat und Gesellschaft bei Kant* the renowned Walter Eucken-Institut stated: "No one has ever contributed to the analysis and understanding of society of free, and for themselves, responsible people as Kant did, the crucial implication of his ideas and opinions is, however, known only to a limited circle of social scientists" (Koslowski, 1985, Vorwort).

Another author who significantly contributed to the research is Kant's student, the author of the work *Kants Leben und Lehre*, E. Cassirer, who broadens the diapason of possible innovative philosophical procedures of his teacher in, minimally, two cases: the social-historical and historical-philosophical dimension of the issue by stating that "Kant still uses the language of Rousseau here, but he has gone beyond Rousseau in the systematic and methodological foundations of his ideas. While Rousseau sees all of man's history as a fall from the condition of innocence and happiness in which man lived before he entered into society and before he banded [them] into social groups, to Kant the idea of such an original state appears utopian if taken as a fact, and ambiguous and unclear if regarded as a moral

¹ Alexey A. Skvortsov, the Russian ethicist, claims that Kant uses the term ethics only sporadically because he understands under this term contemplations about moral sentiments and happiness so typical for Enlightenment thought. According to him, analysis of Kant's ethical ideas shows that his moral philosophy can be daringly called the second climax of ethics after Aristotle (Skvortsov, 2014, pp. 100–101).

ideal. His ethics orients him toward the individual and toward the basic concept of the moral personality and its autonomy; but his view of history and its philosophy (*seine geschichtliche und geschichtsphilosophische Einsicht*) leads to the conviction that it is only through the medium of society that the ideal task of moral self-consciousness can find its actual empirical fulfillment [sic]. The value of society may seem negative when measured by the happiness of the individual, but this shows only that this point of view for evaluating and the standard of evaluation itself have been falsely chosen. The true criterion of this value lies not in what the social and political community accomplishes for the needs of the individual, for the security of his empirical existence, but in what it signifies as an instrument in his education into freedom” (Cassirer, 1981, pp. 223–224).

Kant’s opinion, according to which human natural capacities that are directed towards the use of his reason “could be fully developed only in the species, but not in the individual” (Kant, 1991b, p. 42), has far-reaching consequences for the internal *moral* justification of history. In *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose* Kant explains that “in the actual course of human affairs, a whole host of hardships awaits him” (Kant, 1991b, pp. 43–44) and that leads him to the conclusion that the way to a real unity of human species is possible only through *fight* and *antinomies* and only through *coercion*. Kant claims that nature – concerning the natural capacities of man – led man to a state where he is at a lower rank compared to other species and thus living in need and helplessness. On the other hand, it motivates him to step out of his natural limitations and isolation and by the steps of reason to leave the unity of animals and to understand that he is the end of nature. Reason, extended beyond the limits of animals, leads him to a new way of life in which the bases exist for *civil constitution* and *public justice*. After that the development of all *human culture* (sociability and civil security) and also *inequality* among people begins (Kant, 1991a, p. 230). Summarizing Kant’s ideas on the *development of morality* in the acting and non-acting of people led by *imagination*, however accompanied by *reason*, it is possible to say that the first social bonds would not appear without his innate disposition for society, and that it was *need* that established and created the crucial conditions for the establishment and stabilisation of *social structure*. According to Kant, a social unit cannot be explained through original internal harmony of individual wills or moral-social dispositions; its being is embedded in attracting and repelling, i.e. in antagonism of powers. This *contradiction* is the basis and precondition of every *social order*.

Kant, naturally, realized the complicatedness of creating man in the historical process of leaving the state of nature and thus, reacting to Rousseau, he states: “We are *cultivated* to a high degree by art and science. We are *civilised* to the point of excess in all kinds of social courtesies and proprieties. But we are still a long way from the point where we could consider ourselves *morally* mature. For while the idea of morality is indeed present in culture, an application of this idea which only extends to the semblances of morality, as in love of honour and outward propriety, amounts merely to civilisation. [...] But all good enterprises which are not grafted on to a morally good attitude of mind are nothing but illusion and outwardly glittering misery” (Kant, 1991b, p. 49).

Kant also explains this issue in the work *On the Common Saying: ‘This May Be True in History, but it Does Not Apply in Practice’*, published in 1793, in which he states that “[t]he civil state, regarded purely as a lawful state, is based on the following *a priori* principles: 1) The *freedom* of every member of society as a *human being*. 2) The *equality* of each with all the others as a *subject*. 3) The *independence* of each member of a commonwealth as a *citizen*” (Kant, 1991c, p. 74). Kant offers an interesting solution to the principle of independence, which is closely connected with juridical process: “Anyone who has the right to vote on this legislation is a *citizen* (*citoyen*, i.e. citizen of a state, not *bourgeois* or citizen of a town). The only qualification required by a citizen (apart, of course, from being an adult male) is that he

must be his *own master* (*sui iuris*), and must have some *property* (which can include any skill, trade, fine art or science) to support himself. In cases where he must earn his living from others, he must earn it only by *selling* that which is his, and not by allowing others to make use of him; for he must in the true sense of the word *serve* no-one but the commonwealth” (Kant, 1991c, pp. 77–78).

In this context, Jürgen Habermas speaks about a newly appearing sphere of the *social*.² Kant clearly states that reason, a priori juridical, has a “social authority” (Rossi, 2005, p. 117) and it does not take into account of any empirical purpose, e.g. blessedness. Kant also outlines the issue of possible *social mobility* when stating that position in society can be achieved by talent, industry and good fortune. Kant somehow completes an important task of social thought of the modern times, which is the *social contract* phenomenon. According to Kant, the social contract is based on a coalition of the wills of all private individuals in a nation to form a common, public will for the purposes of rightful legislation. It cannot, however be understood as a *fact* because “[s]uch an assumption would mean that we would first have to prove from history that some nation, whose rights and obligations have been passed down to us, did in fact perform such an act, and handed down some authentic record or legal instrument, orally or in writing, before we could regard ourselves as bound by a pre-existing civil constitution. It is in fact merely an *idea* of reason, which nonetheless has undoubted practical reality; for it can oblige every legislator to frame his laws in such a way that they could have been produced by the united will of a whole nation, and to regard each subject, in so far as he can claim citizenship, as if he had consented within the general will” (Kant, 1991c, p. 79).

This is the test of the rightfulness of every public law, i.e. the test of justice or injustice. A complex study of Kant’s works implies a crucial philosophical task that is a convincing and especially natural justification of the question of human sociability from the point of view of creating or preserving society. It can be said that in the current debates and disputes about the search for possibilities of a return to a *good life*, there appears the idea of re-establishing the *social contract* as a possible solution to a dramatic social situation.

Kant’s practical philosophy: Its basic characteristics

Kant uses the term *practical* intensively in the second chapter “The canon of pure reason” of the “Transcendental doctrine of method” of the *Critique of Pure Reason* in the first section called “On the ultimate end of the pure use of our reason” where he deals with reason’s propensity of its nature to go beyond its use in experience (Kant, 1998, p. 673). He then asks whether this propensity is based only on speculative use or, on the contrary, on practical use. He then claims that a faculty of choice which can be determined independently of sensory impulses, “through motives that can only be represented by reason, is called *free choice* (*arbitrium liberum*), and everything that is connected with this, whether as grounds or consequence, is called *practical*” (Kant, 1998, p. 675). He continues in the following way: “Pure reason thus contains – not in its speculative use, to be sure, but yet in a certain practical use, namely the moral use – principles of the *possibility of experience*, namely of those actions in conformity with moral precepts which could be encountered in the *history* of humankind” (Kant, 1998, p. 678). The speculation of reason in its transcendental use concerns three objects: the freedom of the will, the immortality of the soul, and the existence of God. According to Kant, they are not necessary for our knowing, however, they are insistently recommended to us by our reason, so their importance must concern the practical.

² “The “social” could be constituted as its own sphere to the degree that, on the one hand, the reproduction of life took on private forms, while, on the other hand, the private realm as a whole assumed public relevance” (Habermas, 1991, p. 127).

What is practical? Narskij characterizes it in the following way: a) in broader sense of the word, practical philosophising includes: ethics, doctrine of state and right, philosophy of history, philosophy of religion, pragmatic anthropology; b) in a narrower sense of the word, the term *practical reason* used by Kant signifies legislative reason, i.e. reason setting the principles of moral action and behaviour of people, unifying all our ends into one (Narskij, 1976, p. 116f). If our ends are set by inclinations, it is bliss, however, Kant is interested in something else – pure (not pragmatic) laws legislated by reason a priori, laws that are not conditioned empirically, i.e. laws that command are laws of pure reason. These types of laws are represented only by moral laws and thus reason accepts them only in practice.

The first variation of critical analysis of the issue of morality can be found in the work *Groundwork of The Metaphysic of Morals* published in 1785. In the Preface, Kant writes: “Ancient Greek philosophy was divided into three sciences: *physics*, *ethics*, and *logic*. This division is perfectly suitable to the nature of the subject and there is no need to improve upon it except, perhaps, to add its principle, partly so as to insure its completeness and partly so as to be able to determine correctly the necessary subdivisions” (Kant, 1997b, p. 1). This short extract is of significant importance from the point of view of the theory of historical-philosophical process, especially the *practical dimension of philosophising*. Other classic examples of 18th century thought are: Voltaire’s *Philosophical Dictionary*, entry “Philosopher” or Rousseau’s “Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar” (in *Emile, or On Education*).

Kant continues with an interpretatively interesting thought: “All trades, crafts, and arts have gained by the division of labour, namely when one person does not do everything but each limits himself to a certain task that differs markedly from others in the way it is to be handled, so as to be able to perform it most perfectly and with greater facility. Where work is not so differentiated and divided, where everyone is a jack-of-all-trades, there trades remain in the greatest barbarism. Whether pure philosophy in all its parts does not require its own special man might in itself be a subject not unworthy of consideration, and it might be worth asking whether the whole of this learned trade would not be better off if a warning were given to those who, in keeping with the taste of the public, are in the habit of vending the empirical mixed with the rational in all sorts of proportions unknown to themselves, who call themselves “independent thinkers,” and others, who prepare the rational part only, “hair-splitters”: the warning not to carry on at the same time two jobs which are very distinct in the way they are to be handled, for each of which a special talent is perhaps required, and the combination of which in one person produces only bunglers. Here, however, I ask only whether the nature of science does not require that the empirical part always be carefully separated from the rational part, and that a metaphysics of nature be put before physics proper (empirical physics) and a metaphysics of morals before practical anthropology, with metaphysics carefully cleansed of everything empirical so that we may know how much pure reason can accomplish in both cases and from what sources it draws this a priori teaching of its own – whether the latter job be carried on by all teachers of morals (whose name is legion) or only by some who feel a calling to it” (Kant, 1997b, p. 2).

Kant writes that his aim here is directed properly to moral philosophy and proposes a question: “is it not thought to be of the utmost necessity to work out for once a pure moral philosophy, completely cleansed of everything that may be only empirical and that belongs to anthropology? For, that there must be such a philosophy is clear of itself from the common idea of duty and of moral laws. Everyone must grant that a law, if it is to hold morally, that is, as a ground of an obligation, must carry with it absolute necessity; that, for example, the command “thou shalt not lie” does not hold only for human beings, as if other rational beings did not have to heed it, and so with all other moral laws properly so called; that, therefore, the ground of obligation here must not be sought in the nature of the human being or in the

circumstances of the world in which he is placed, but a priori simply in concepts of pure reason..." (Kant, 1997b, pp. 2–3). He then claims that any other precept, which is based on principles of mere experience, can indeed be called a *practical rule* but never a *moral law*.

Kant also focuses on this issue in the "First Introduction" to the *Critique of the Power of Judgement* when thinking of philosophy as a system, he states that theoretical and practical philosophy exist, the first being the philosophy of nature, the other that of morals; "the first of which is also empirical, the second of which, however (since freedom absolutely cannot be an object of experience), can never contain anything other than pure principles *a priori*" (Kant, 2000, p. 3). He continues in the contemplation claiming that there is a great misunderstanding about what should be held to be practical in the sense in which it deserves to be taken up into a *practical philosophy*. "Statesmanship and political economy, rules of good housekeeping as well as those of etiquette, precepts for good health and diet, of the soul as well as of the body (indeed why not all trades and arts?), have been believed to be able to be counted as practical philosophy, because they all contain a great many practical propositions" (Kant, 2000, p. 3). Kant says that not all practical propositions differ from theoretical ones as practical propositions exist which consider freedom under laws (Kant, 2000, p. 4).

An important moment in Kant's search and identification of the highest principle of morality is the phenomenon of good will. He writes: "It is impossible to think of anything at all in the world, or indeed even beyond it, that could be considered good without limitation except a *good will*. Understanding, wit, judgment and the like, whatever such *talents* of mind may be called, or courage, resolution, and perseverance in one's plans, as qualities of *temperament*, are undoubtedly good and desirable for many purposes, but they can also be extremely evil and harmful if the will which is to make use of these gifts of nature, and whose distinctive constitution is therefore called *character*, is not good. It is the same with *gifts of fortune*. Power, riches, honor [sic], even health and that complete wellbeing and satisfaction with one's condition called *happiness*, produce boldness and thereby often arrogance as well unless a good will is present which corrects the influence of these on the mind and, in so doing, also corrects the whole principle of action and brings it into conformity with universal ends – not to mention that an impartial rational spectator can take no delight in seeing the uninterrupted prosperity of a being graced with no feature of a pure and good will, so that a good will seems to constitute the indispensable condition even of worthiness to be happy" (Kant, 1997b, p. 7). The will is good, claims Kant, only because of its own volition, that is, it is good in itself and stands high above inclinations, usefulness, or provision.

A traditional interpretation of Kant's practical philosophy emphasises the issue of his doctrine of imperatives that, according to many readings, symbolise the core or *heart* of his doctrine of morals. In many contexts, Kant readers talk or write about categorical imperative as a *fact of reason* (Kant, 1997a, p. 177). In my opinion, these types of statements cover an important moment of Kant's thought – his reasons to use such formally strictly formulated moral-practical doctrine. In this context, Kant himself mentions the imperfection or fragility and dishonesty of human nature.

Pure moral philosophy

To some extent, the topic of this paper belongs to the German cultural-philosophical environment. It can be proven by the idea of the distinguished German Kantian thinker, Otfried Höffe,³ who wrote in the Preface to his book *Kants Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*:

³ Otfried Höffe is a renowned German philosopher, an expert on Kantian philosophy. He deals with Kant's philosophy complexly and by his extensive philosophical view he further analyses several philosophical-theoretical areas of historical as well as systematic character. He specialises in Enlightenment-era philosophy, morality, cosmopolitanism, philosophy of history, religion, education, law, analyses of Kant inspired ethics and at the same time he offers philosophically demanding Kantian *provocations*.

Eine Philosophie der Freiheit that, on the peak of European Enlightenment, Immanuel Kant turns the leitmotif of his era, criticism, towards two other leitmotifs, reason and freedom. In this way he exposes the Enlightenment to radical self-criticism and on this basis he introduces his three famous questions: 1) What can I know? 2) What should I do? 3) What may I hope? Höffe continues that many interpreters of Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* reduce the interpretation to the first question, and although it is also about the second and third, the interpretation is very short and so it is important to deal with Kant's other works, especially texts on morals, law and state, history, religion, and pedagogy (Höffe, 2012, p. 9). This can eliminate shallow interpretations of the Enlightenment and on this basis Höffe writes about the permanent attractiveness of Immanuel Kant.

In the second part of his work *Kants Kritik der praktischen Vernunft: Eine Philosophie der Freiheit* Höffe concentrates on the issue of *ethics as practical philosophy*. In his opinion, Kant brings a real revolution to Western moral philosophy. He knows that the long-ruling principle of Eudaimonia, i.e. bliss, as well as an occasional alternative in the form of the principle of teonomy of one on God's will of the corresponding legislation, were rejected. Their place, as well as the place of other principles, e. g. Epicureanism, Stoicism, was replaced by the principle of the self-legislation of will. This revolution appeared only in the *Critique of Practical Reason* and was further developed in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Although many debates primarily concentrate on the *Groundwork*, it is expressed in the *Critique of Practical Reason* in the most distinct form. Kant formulates the meaning of his second critique in the following form: "It is therefore incumbent upon the *Critique of Practical Reason* as such to prevent empirically conditioned reason from presuming that it, alone and exclusively, furnishes the determining ground[s] of the will" (Kant, 1997a, p. 148). Höffe writes that in Kant's work *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant's revolution of Western moral philosophy lies mainly in two parts: deconstructive and reconstructive. The first, destructive, part rejects all previous justifications of morality, or morals. While the origin of morality used to be searched for in the order of nature or commonwealth, happiness, God's will, or moral feelings before, Kant proves that all these attempts were unsuccessful (Höffe, 2012, p. 68).

Kant has two foundations for his moral-philosophical revolution. First, he wants to provide the right idea on the essence of morality, or morals. Together with Rousseau, he is convinced that the simple man already has the right concept of morals; however, he cannot revise it due to its wideness nor postulate it as a new understanding. However, he has a moral consciousness connected with the idea of unlimited obligation to enlighten himself.

Höffe writes that since John Rawls there has been a prevailing constructivism in the Anglophone interpretation of Kant's moral philosophy. Its consequence is that moral obligations are constructed by categorical imperative. Rawls legitimately sees that the process of categorical imperative is not constructed but spread. In this philosophically basic way, Kant's moral philosophy is not constructivist; it is of a character of reflexive self-enlightenment of moral consciousness (Höffe, 2012, p. 68).

Kant aims to revolutionise only the philosophy of morals, not morals itself. In this context, the formulation that everything that should be done to accomplish a task, should be realised mainly on the basis of duty. In this way, states Höffe, Kant pursues a practical end, close to a moral end, by which his ethics belongs, in an emphatic sense, to moral-practical philosophy, (Höffe, 2012, p. 69). It is important to add that the practical orientation of philosophy finds its broad use mainly in the philosophy of the Enlightenment. Voltaire, as one of the significant philosophers of his age, wrote in his *Philosophical Dictionary*: "there is not one [philosopher] in antiquity who has not given mankind examples of virtue and lessons in moral truths. They have all contrived to be deceived about natural philosophy; but natural philosophy is so little necessary for the conduct of life, that the philosophers had no need of it. It has taken centuries

to learn a part of nature's laws. One day was sufficient for a wise man to learn the duties of man" (Voltaire, 1976, p. 99). His philosophical rival, Rousseau, significantly, rationalised the field of *basic truths* and focused mainly on the *rules of acting*. It is possible to state that the Enlightenment is really "critical thinking with a practical focus" (Schneiders, 1974, p. 13). It is also important to mention the degree and importance of Rousseau's influence on Kant's moral-practical thought (Belás, 2005).

Mapping Kant's various philosophical-theoretical initiatives since the first critique, morality means, for Kant, a crucial moving force which, as already seen, is closely connected with three moving forces – the Enlightenment understood as independent thinking, judicative criticism and cosmopolitanism. Thanks to these motives, Kant's philosophy is necessarily purely moral and he calls it, because it is freed from everything empirical, metaphysics of morals. He explained it clearly in the "Preface" to the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* as indispensably necessary (Kant, 1997b, p. 3) from two reasons: the first lies in purely theoretical motive, "the grounds of obligation here must not be sought in the nature of the human being or in the circumstances of the world in which he is placed, but a priori simply in concepts of pure reason" (Kant, 1997b, p. 3). Kant emphasises that the metaphysics of morals has to examine the idea and the principles of a possible *pure* will and not the actions and conditions of human volition generally, which for the most part are drawn from psychology (Kant, 1997b, p. 4). Kant suggests that he is going to establish the metaphysics of morals one day. He characterises the present groundwork as nothing more than the search for and establishment of the *supreme principle of morality* (Kant, 1997b, p. 5). Kant explains the second reason why metaphysics of morals is indispensably necessary: "not merely because of a motive to speculation – for investigating the source of the practical basic principles that lie a priori in our reason – but also because morals themselves remain subject to all sorts of corruption as long as we are without that clue and supreme norm by which to appraise them correctly" (Kant, 1997b, p. 3).

Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals is followed by the *Critique of Practical Reason* that is also motivated by a moral-political aim and it is also visible in its incumbency (*Obliegenheit*). In this context, Höffe offers a short, however very interesting, comparative analysis of both works. Although the work *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* has been awarded a higher philosophical importance in history, according to Höffe, *Critique of Practical Reason* has a higher philosophical rank. The second critique is not only thematically richer, Kant also moves the orientation. If in the *Groundworks*, the categorical imperative with its various formulas and examples is in the first place, now it is autonomy, a fact of reason and sensuality in connection with practical reason, and (already discussed in the first critique) the highest good (Höffe, 2012, p. 71). Kant also wants to evaluate the unity of pure practical reason with the speculative one. In the second critique he wants to deal with this task because he believes that he will be able to solve it self-consciously and proudly. He writes: "Now, the concept of freedom, insofar as its reality is proved by an apodictic law of practical reason, constitutes the *keystone* of the whole structure of a system of pure reason, even of speculative reason; and all other concepts (those of God and immortality), which as mere ideas remain without support in the latter, now attach themselves to this concept and with it and by means of it get stability and objective reality, that is, their *possibility* is *proved* by this: that freedom is real, for this idea reveals itself through the moral law" (Kant, 1997a, p. 139). In the conclusion of the second critique, contemplating that what makes man something more in the world is morality, Kant may sound pathetic. And thus, he writes the often quoted text: "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence, the more often and more steadily one reflects on them: *the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me*" (Kant, 1997a, p. 269). The starry heaven names the central topic of the first critique; moral law is the topic of the second critique. Kant also explains why this pathos is

used here – he follows an existential interest: “I identify both things directly with the consciousness of my existence”.

In the “Doctrine of the method of pure practical reason” Kant offers an outline of the method of founding and cultivating genuine moral disposition: “If one attends to the course of conversation in mixed companies consisting not merely of scholars and subtle reasoners but also of business people or women, one notices that their entertainment includes, besides storytelling and jesting, arguing; for storytelling, if it is to have novelty and with it interest, is soon exhausted and jesting easily becomes insipid. Now, of all arguments there are none that more excite the participation of persons who are otherwise soon bored with subtle reasoning and that bring a certain liveliness into the company than arguments about the *moral worth* of this or that action by which the character of some person is to be made out” (Kant, 1997a, p. 262). Kant suggests that this is the way for the human being to understand the *inner freedom* (Kant, 1997a, p. 268) and to release himself from the impetuous importunity of inclinations and to make use of our own reason.

Acknowledgment

This paper is part of the research project VEGA 1/0238/15 *Kantove idey rozumu a súčasný svet* [*Kant's Ideas of Reason and Contemporary World*] supported by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic.

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Egalitarian Sexism: A Kantian Framework for Assessing the Cultural Evolution of Marriage (I)

Stephen R. Palmquist

Abstract

This first part of a two-part series exploring implications of the natural differences between the sexes for the cultural evolution of marriage assesses whether Kant should be condemned as a sexist due to his various offensive claims about women. Being antithetical to modern-day assumptions regarding the equality of the sexes, Kant's views seem to contradict his own egalitarian ethics. A philosophical framework for making cross-cultural ethical assessments requires one to assess those in other cultures by their own ethical standards. Sexism is inappropriate if it exhibits or reinforces a tendency to *dominate* the opposite sex. Kant's theory of marriage, by contrast, illustrates how sexism can be egalitarian: given the natural differences between the sexes, different roles and cultural norms help to ensure that females and males are equal. Judged by the standards of his own day and in the context of his philosophical system, Kant's sexism is not ethically inappropriate.

Keywords: Immanuel Kant, sexism, marriage, egalitarian ethics, cross-cultural assessments, cultural evolution, nature of the sexes

Does Kant's view of women contradict his egalitarian ethics?

Allegations that Immanuel Kant was a sexist have become commonplace over the past few decades, especially since Barbara Herman dubbed Kant “the modern moral philosopher feminists find most objectionable” (Herman, 1993, p. 50).¹ That the great German philosopher made various remarks about women that seem “noxious and distasteful” (Mosser, 1999, p. 322)² to today's readers is an undeniable fact. Interpreters such as Robin May Schott take these remarks as constituting various “internal contradictions of Kant's philosophy”, most notably “the contradiction between his call for universal enlightenment and his exclusion of women and servants from enlightenment” (Schott, 1998, p. 41).³ She argues that this hidden sexism calls into question the validity of the entire Critical philosophy. Kantians such as Arnulf Zweig have agreed that Kant's remarks are surprising in view of the fact that his official Critical philosophy promotes what appears to be a “radical egalitarianism”, but tend to excuse Kant's remarks as being a mere product of his era; Kant was simply not as forward-looking on gender issues as we might have hoped (Zweig, 1993, p.

¹ Herman herself attempts to defend Kant against the most radical critiques that suggest Kant's whole Critical philosophy is compromised by his sexism, observing that in fact some of his claims (especially about the tendency of sexual interactions to treat persons as objects) are remarkably similar to claims that some feminists make about sexual oppression of females by males. For a brief but interesting critique of Herman's position, see Laurentiis, 2000, p. 298n.

² Mosser repeatedly refers to Kant's remarks as “noxious” (Mosser, 1999, pp. 343, 350, 351n, 353), yet never actually attempts to interpret or explain the offensive passages in their original context. Instead, he merely assumes we can take them at face value, as constituting “Kant's sexism” (Mosser, 1999, p. 329). After examining the proposals of several feminist writers for dealing with the obvious tension between the egalitarianism of Kant's Critical philosophy and the sexism of his passing remarks about the empirical nature of women, Mosser suggests his own alternative, “that we happily reject the sexism of Kant's texts, while retaining that which can, and should, be read in a gender-neutral fashion” (Mosser, 1999, p. 345).

³ While Schott's essay is a balanced survey of the array of varying feminist approaches to Kant, in her other work Schott actively defends the position quoted here. For an insightful critique of Schott's interpretation, see Mosser, 1999, pp. 338–343.

297).⁴ Mason Cash, by contrast, portrays Kant in a more “malicious” way, as intentionally reacting against a strikingly forward-looking position defended by his friend, Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel (Cash, 2002, p. 109).⁵ While commentators disagree, sometimes widely, on how (or whether it is even worth trying) to resolve this obvious “tension” between Kant’s official egalitarian ethics and his private views on the nature of women, all agree that the tension cannot simply be ignored but calls for *some* type of explanation, assessment, and response.

Kant’s offensive remarks about women occur in relatively few places and with just one exception only in his minor writings (i.e., in his early publications, short popular essays, or student lecture notes).⁶ The exception, significantly, is the last systematic work Kant completed, *The Metaphysics of Morals* (1797), where we learn that his previous comments on women were not merely offhand remarks or bad jokes; for in this work he portrays his view of women as a consistent application of the systematic principles of his philosophical system to the cultural situation of his day – an application few if any recent commentators have found palatable. In her influential early survey of Kant’s various claims, Susan Mendus opines: “frequently Kant simply appears to indulge in an unthinking endorsement of the prejudices of his day and an uncritical acceptance of the dogma of others – notably Rousseau” (Mendus, 1992, pp. 21–22). Mendus helpfully groups Kant’s comments into four types: the legal status of women as second-class (“passive”) citizens; the function of monogamous marriage as the only rightful context for expressing sexual desire; the need for a hierarchical relationship between a husband and wife; and the fundamental differences between woman’s nature and man’s. Kant’s treatment of marriage, she says (Mendus, 1992, p. 31, quoting Aris, 1965, p. 102), “is notorious, an embarrassment to moral philosophers and philosophers of law alike. Few have found a good word to say about it, and at least one commentator has described Kant’s views as ‘shallow and repulsive’.” Similarly, in response to his comments on the differences between the sexes, Mendus laments: “Kant’s mind, almost wholly uncluttered by any actual experience, is laid bare and the prejudice and bigotry are revealed. A great deal of what he has to say about the inherent nature of woman is merely ludicrous” (Mendus (1992, p. 35). After quoting two examples, Mendus sighs: “And so it

⁴ Deranty argues that the philosophical systems of Fichte and Hegel exhibit the same tension Kant’s philosophy expresses, between formal promotion of an egalitarian agenda and a tendency to downplay the empirical status of women in the culture of their day. She portrays this not as a form of sexism, but as a direct implication of their overly male concepts of reason: “The reason for their choice must lie, not in personal animosity against the other sex, but in the concept of reason they were operating within and which was available at the time” (Deranty, 2000, p. 158).

⁵ Cash analyses some of Kant’s specific arguments and claims that “the devious rhetorical moves and fallacious argument forms” Kant employs suggest he was not just passively accepting the status quo of his day, but may have been actively reacting against more forward-looking ideas. For an account of Hippel’s views by an interpreter who, unlike Cash (Cash, 2002, cf. p. 135), believes Kant was intentionally defending a sexist agenda (Schröder, 1997). A point that typically goes unnoticed is that there is no evidence whatsoever in Kant’s texts that he was reacting against such early attempts to raise the status of women, especially since most of Kant’s comments predate the publication of Hippel’s position in 1792. Moreover, Hippel’s radical suggestions for integrating women into Prussian society had no significant impact on the political discussions of the day (Mosser, 1999, p. 346n), so Kant would not have felt any impelling need to react specifically to them.

⁶ Passages typically cited by those who wish to condemn Kant for being a sexist are: *Lectures on Ethics* (Kant, 1930), pp. (162–171); *On the Common Saying: “This May be True in Theory, but it does not Apply in Practice”* (Kant, 1991a), pp. 61–92; *The Metaphysics of Morals* (Kant, 1991b), pp. 277–280 (§§24–27 of “The Doctrine of Right”); *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (Kant, 1974), pp. 303–311; and various passages throughout his early (1764) book, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (Kant, 1960). My references to Kant’s writings normally cite the original German (*Akademie Ausgabe*) pagination. When referencing translations that do not cite this pagination, I provide the translation’s pagination in parentheses. Mosser lists several other relevant passages that refer to women, but these all “have the flavor of offhand remarks or asides” and therefore add nothing significant to our understanding of Kant’s position (Mosser, 1999, p. 325n).

grinds on... [O]ne implausible remark following upon another". Significant here, as elsewhere in Mendus' essay, is the lack of argument to support her claims. Rather than attempting an exegesis of Kant's texts, she is content merely to quote passages and assume that Kant's meaning (and its implausibility) is unmistakable. Thus, for example, she later claims "it is hard to see what exactly distinguishes women from serfs or even animals"; even though she notes "the lip-service Kant pays to the equality of women in marriage", she opines "there can be little doubt that Kant took an extremely dim view of woman's nature and abilities" (Mendus, 1992, p. 37).

Sally Sedgwick starts out her assessment of how much of Kant's ethics can be preserved, in spite of his sexism, by explaining: "Kant is not much loved by feminist philosophers... not only because on his view women are passive by nature and determined more by inclination than reason and therefore cannot be legitimate citizens, equal partners in marriage or, even, capable scholars, but also because there is something supposed to be deeply androcentric built into the theoretical assumptions of his critical philosophy" (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 60). Echoing Herman, she adds that Kant "simply got his facts about women wrong and was therefore blinded from recognizing their true potential as rational agents" (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 71). But she disagrees that correcting this mistake on its own will protect Kant's philosophy from feminist criticisms. Ironically, in explaining what more is needed, Sedgwick implicitly *agrees* with Kant's basic claim that men and women are fundamentally different, for she argues there is "a [gender] bias in the categorical imperative itself", with the result that "the Kantian portrayal of moral subjectivity more mirrors male than female identity and thus leaves women and their experience out" (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 72). What is needed, she claims, is not merely a revision of the *application* of the categorical imperative, but a revision of the categorical imperative *itself* "to include the different voice" represented by women, who by her own admission understand the meaning of "impartiality" in a fundamentally different way from men (Sedgwick, 1990, pp. 75–76). The irony, as we shall see below, is that this is the very goal Kant was trying to accomplish in making many of his allegedly sexist remarks.

Mosser also notes that some feminists (taking the natural difference between the sexes to an even greater extreme than Kant does) hold "the view that women... think, perceive, know, and reason about the world in ways fundamentally distinct from men" (Mosser, 1999, p. 336n). Mosser's essay persuasively argues that Kant's first *Critique* demonstrates that in the most fundamental senses, men and women must share an identical rational nature. However, his general remark about Kant's view of the differences between the sexes is less persuasive: "Kant's claims about women are not claimed to be logical consequences of the Critical philosophy, can draw no support from that philosophy, and seem to be the blinkered and confused generalizations by a philosopher whose interaction with women was limited and uncomfortable" (Mosser, 1999, p. 345; see also p. 351). In fact, as we shall see in §4, Kant may not have been as naïve concerning relations with the opposite sex as is often assumed. In any case, many of Kant's claims about the sexes *are* closely related, at least by way of analogy, to some of his most fundamental philosophical claims.

The rhetorical force of such assessments is so persuasive that more and more commentators have joined the chorus of those who label Kant as an outright "misogynist" (e.g., Mendus, 1992, p. 41). While Mendus' use of this term in the conclusion of her essay points only indirectly to Kant, others as notable as Martha Nussbaum have explicitly applied this label to Kant. Commenting on Barbara Herman's position, Nussbaum says: "Kant's evident misogyny and disdain for the body have caused feminists to dismiss his arguments without seriously considering them" (Nussbaum, 1994, p. 62). While she joins Herman in disapproving of those who claim we can dismiss Kant's entire philosophy because of this problem, Nussbaum does not deny that Kant's comments constitute misogyny. Indeed, few commentators nowadays regard such harsh condemnation as anything other than self-evident, so a mere quotation of the relevant texts (see note 6, above) typically takes the place of any

detailed analysis of Kant's intended meaning or refutation of his claims. Another typical example is Susan Feldman's undefended and unreferenced claim that Kant was "thoroughly anti-feminist and indeed misogynist" (Feldman, 1998). Similarly, Schott thinks Kant's "misogynist views" cannot "be dismissed as merely reflections of an earlier epoch" (Schott, 1998, p. 46). By contrast, Mosser thinks the term applies to Kant only because of "how generally misogynist that society was" and that it is therefore "unproductive to criticize him for not having been a visionary in Prussia relative to women" (Mosser, 1999, p. 346). Kant's remarks about women reveal what, Mosser claims, "can be described, at best, as his paternalism" (Mosser, 1999, p. 324).

Soble goes to the other extreme, accusing Kant of "heartlessness and brutal misogyny" for recommending in *Lectures on Ethics* that a woman would be better off allowing herself to be killed than to submit willingly to the sexual advances of a rapist (Soble, 2003, pp. 55–56); Soble presents no argument for his claim that such a view "is as deplorable as it is astonishing" and ignores the fact that the moral maxim Kant is applying here, that protecting one's honor is more important than protecting one's life, is based on a rational argument that applies *equally* to men and to women. (That is, Kant would have precisely the same advice for a man who is about to be raped as he has for a woman.) Likewise, he labels Kant's claim, that a husband may have sex with his wife even when she has no desire for it, as "another piece of Kantian misogyny" (Soble, 2003, p. 68) without supporting this claim with *any* argument and without noting that Kant would also allow the woman the same right, as an implication of her contractual ownership of her husband's sexual organs. To his credit, Soble does offer an important qualification: "Kant was writing *what we would consider* sexist accounts of women as early as 1764" (Soble, 2003, p. 82, emphasis added). He interprets Kant's claim that certain types of sex are "contrary to nature" as a mere sign of "Kant's allegiance to traditional cultural standards of masculinity"; by encouraging "men to be men... Kant engages in apologetics for the sexual-cultural order, not philosophy" (Soble, 2003, pp. 65–66). By the same token, however, Soble typically does not offer *arguments* to defend the judgment that Kant is a misogynist; in taking his own cultural presuppositions as self-evident, Soble (like most of the commentators cited in this section) assumes his readers will require no argument. Thus he ends his essay by admitting that his harsh response to Kant's position may reflect nothing more than the bias of his own "far away position of the early 21st-century" (Soble, 2003, p. 81). My task in this first article in the series is to demonstrate why an argument *is* needed, especially for anyone who applies such judgments to Kant *without* confessing his or her insensitivity to the constraints of Kant's culture, as Soble rightly does.

That today's readers do feel offended by many of Kant's remarks does not necessarily mean we are *justified* in being offended by them. We may be just as mistaken in our ethical assessments today as we believe Kant was in his remarks on women. Perhaps with this need for further justification in mind, several commentators have attempted a more systematic approach to assessing Kant's offensive comments. Pauline Kleingeld, for example, considers but rejects three common ways of responding to the tension between the apparent egalitarianism of Kant's official theories and the apparent sexism of his empirical understanding of women: readers have tended either to accept Kant's remarks as accurate (and therefore unproblematic), to claim that their problematic nature infects the Critical philosophy itself with an implicit misogyny, or to pretend that Kant's sexism doesn't exist by simply ignoring it when reading his systematic philosophical writings (Kleingeld, 1992–1993, pp. 134–150). Regarding the first option as self-evidently mistaken, she offers a solution that assumes the plausibility of both of the other options: commentators should interject "clarifying remarks, discussions, digressions, footnotes and annotations" into Kant's texts whenever quoting ideas that *seem* to be non-sexist, so that readers become aware that Kant himself might have intended many of his "universal" claims to apply only to males (Kleingeld, 1992–1993, p. 146).

Like Kleingeld, Mosser also offers three options: “Kant’s readers, then, are faced with the hermeneutical task of either 1) reconciling these seemingly inconsistent claims, 2) trying to eliminate that material that is indefensible, while retaining that which remains of philosophical interest, or 3) rejecting the entire Kantian approach as irredeemably sexist and oppressive” (Mosser, 1999, p. 322).⁷ The bulk of Mosser’s essay attempts to give due consideration to Kant’s theory of the subject, especially in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, a text that is almost always completely ignored in the literature on Kant’s alleged sexism. Such an approach, he claims, provides “good reasons to regard [Kant’s philosophy]... as *not* resulting in the kind of sexism conveyed by Kant’s own remarks” (Mosser, 1999, p. 323). Mosser’s impressive attempt at an even-handed approach illustrates that interpreters who wish to preserve the integrity of Kant’s philosophy often still merely *assume* that Kant’s remarks on women should be condemned as sexist. Let us therefore turn in the next section to consider the relevance a person’s cultural background may have on the issue of how those in a different culture should assess apparently sexist remarks. This alone can prepare us for an adequate assessment (in §§3–4) of the true nature of Kant’s sexism.

A philosophical framework for making cross-cultural ethical assessments

A problem that is rarely mentioned and whose implications have never been fully acknowledged by those who condemn Kant for being a sexist is that we live in a culture that is radically different from Kant’s. Kant himself recognized that, to a large extent, ethical judgments (especially those of the sort he makes in *The Metaphysics of Morals*) are necessarily tied to a specific cultural context. He explicitly points out that ethical norms *evolve*, thus implying that the *empirical* theories he advances (including all the rules and guidelines he suggests in his remarks on women) are not meant as universal judgments: they apply not to all cultures in all possible times, but only to the cultural context of his day.⁸ Typically ignoring the differences between Kant’s culture and our own, the literature on Kant’s alleged sexism never addresses the question of how it is *possible* to assess a person who belongs to a different culture. In the remainder of this essay I will advance the discussion of Kant’s alleged sexism by setting right this neglect: I shall ground my discussion on a specific philosophical framework that can guide the way a person makes ethical assessments of another person who lived (or lives) in a radically different culture from their own.

Kant calls attention in several places to the evolution of various ethical norms, most notably in the discussion of marriage in his *Anthropology* (Kant, 1974, pp. 303–311). Primarily for this reason, Part II of this series (Palmquist, 2017) will focus on whether Kant’s specific theory of the nature of marriage can be justifiably assessed by his twenty-first century readers as implying an objectionable form of sexism. However, understanding Kant’s position on the cultural evolution of marriage requires some prior familiarity with the other three topics relating to his alleged sexism (i.e., the legal status of women, the nature of human sexuality, and the distinctive nature of women as compared to men). because marriage can be regarded as *the* key issue for assessing the compatibility between Kant’s alleged sexism and his egalitarian moral philosophy, my goal in this first article will be to define the nature of the

⁷ A Google search using “Kant+sexism” reveals thousands of web pages (many set up by teachers for their students) where quotes are taken out of context and used to make Kant a scapegoat, an apparently easy target, exemplifying the evil tendency of past philosophers to be sexist. Mikkola does not question the assessment of Kant as a sexist, but does defend a more moderate position, calling attention to the incoherence of throwing out the entire Kantian System simply for this reason (Mikkola, 2011).

⁸ Kant’s belief that cultures evolve and that ethical norms will inevitably evolve with them is expressed primarily in his historically-oriented essays, such as “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View” (1784), “Conjectural Beginning of Human History” (1786), “The End of All Things” (1794), and especially “Perpetual Peace” (1795). On the evolution of marriage in particular, see his *Anthropology* (Kant, 1974, pp. 303–311).

question that must be answered with respect to Kant's theory of marriage, if a conclusive answer to the broader question of compatibility is to be given. As we shall see, understanding Kant's justification for viewing marriage as he did *for the culture of his time* will serve as the final step in the process, which I shall begin in this article, of accurately assessing whether his comments on *all* these topics are properly judged to be sexist. Fully elucidating all the texts relevant to Kant's views on women would require a book-length study; my central aim in this initial essay, therefore, will be to sketch a contextual backdrop – a way of seeing Kant, his ethics, and his approach to anthropology – that will enable twenty-first century readers to evaluate the implications of those other texts in a judicious way.

The theory of cross-cultural assessment that I shall develop in this section and apply to issues concerning Kant's alleged sexism throughout the remainder of this study rests on a set of fairly ordinary terms that take on very specific meanings when used within the context of this theory. To insure clarity and consistency, I shall begin by offering definitions of three key terms: "nature", "culture", and "sexism". In each case I shall distinguish between several senses each term will take on at various stages in the argument. After setting out these definitions in the remainder of this section, I will use the aforementioned three issues relating to Kant's alleged sexism to illustrate (in §§3–4) how this theory of cross-cultural ethical assessment can be used as a guide for *anyone* within one culture who seeks to assess an ethical situation or issue that arises within a different culture.

The words *nature* and *natural* shall refer to any characteristic(s) that determine the difference(s) between male and female human beings, in general.⁹ (The qualification "in general" implies that exceptions may exist; but in most cases, the claimed difference[s] will apply.) As such, nature manifests itself in two distinct forms: (a) biological differences; and (b) social and/or psychological differences.¹⁰ Examples of *biological nature* are that normal mature males produce many sperm per day, while normal mature females have only one ovum available during each menstrual cycle, and that normal healthy males may continue to produce sperm throughout their adult lives, whereas normal healthy females will experience menopause once their store of ova is exhausted.¹¹ Examples of *social-psychological nature* will vary from one culture to another, to the extent that they are socially-determined (see note 10); but they may still be called "natural" in the sense that the different gender traits are grounded in and/or manifest themselves through (or are at least related symbolically to) our biological nature. Thus, one culture might view men as having a natural social responsibility to play a more active role in *creating* babies (e.g., by initiating a relationship, arousing the woman's interest in him as a sexual partner, and eventually penetrating the woman's vagina with his penis, so that his sperm can search out and eventually penetrate her immobile ovum),

⁹ This definition is consistent with the way Kant uses the equivalent German words, *Natur* and *natürlichen*. Of course, his usage (like the normal use of the English terms) has a broader range of application, because the nature of human beings consists mostly of characteristics that males and females share in common. I narrow the definition here to focus on those features of human nature believed to distinguish the sexes. As we shall see, Kant also sometimes uses these terms in this narrower sense; he undoubtedly believed the differences between the sexes constitute a significant aspect of human nature.

¹⁰ I lump social and psychological differences together at this point to avoid weighing in on the controversy over whether or not the latter eventually reduce to the former. Social differences, of course, have a social origin by definition. But opinions differ over whether or not psychological differences between the sexes are also socially conditioned. My wording here is intentionally designed to render this disagreement irrelevant: for our purposes, all such differences will count as "natural", in the social/psychological sense, regardless of whether or not all such differences are at bottom social (or, for that matter, psychological).

¹¹ Technological developments in recent decades, such as test-tube fertilization and genetic engineering, provide a means of overcoming, or at least circumventing, some of what might be included as biological nature. As the reality of human cloning approaches ever nearer, the possibility of producing human life *itself* without reference to *nature* in the sense used here (i.e., without requiring a human sperm and ovum which presumably possess certain in-built, natural differences) seems more and more likely. For a more detailed discussion of the natural differences between the sexes, see Palmquist, 2003, especially Lecture 11.

while women play a more active role in *nurturing* babies (e.g., by carrying them within their bodies while they develop for approximately nine months, breast-feeding them once they are born, and being their primary care-giver at least until they reach a certain stage of independence).¹² Such expectations (and numerous others, such as “men don’t cry” or “women don’t play with cars”), or nowadays sometimes their *opposites* (see note 12), will count as *natural* (i.e., as part of the general *nature* of men and women) only insofar as the culture determining such social-psychological norms regards these differences as *part of what it means to be a normal person of that sex*.

As already used in the previous paragraph, the term *culture* refers in this study to the explanation given by any group of people as to how (if at all) biological nature relates to social-psychological nature. This relation may be explicitly acknowledged through religious, political, or other forms of social conventions or traditions; or it may remain only implicit in the way males and females interact within a given group. Of course, references to a group’s culture normally designate much more than just the way it views the relationship (if any) between the biological and social-psychological differences between the sexes; as with the foregoing definition of “nature” (see note 9), my use of “culture” here is intentionally narrowed to focus only on this aspect of a social group’s dynamics. I am assuming for the sake of descriptive simplicity (what would not normally be assumed in examining the general characteristics of a given culture) that a culture is *defined* by the way it relates (or refuses to relate)¹³ the social-psychological nature of its members to their biological nature. In what follows, I shall employ this narrow definition to distinguish four ideal types of culture, based on different ways of conceiving this basic relationship. While these ideal types may resemble specific historical cultures, my central argument does not depend on their real existence.

In common usage “*sexism*” and “*sexist*” typically apply to persons or language exhibiting a wide range of different characteristics, with the common feature being that the terms tend to be used in an emotionally-charged way in order to condemn the person or idea exhibiting what the user regards as an ethically objectionable attitude toward one’s own or the opposite sex. Here I refine this vague usage in hopes of bringing some much-needed clarity and precision to the use of these common terms. I define “sexism” in general as the belief that certain basic social-psychological differences do exist between male and female human beings, and that these differences are natural, in the previously defined sense of being rooted somehow in our biological nature. Two main types of sexism can be distinguished, depending on how the “sexist” (i.e., the person who maintains that such differences do exist) employs his or her set of sexist beliefs: “domineering” sexism refers to a form of sexism whereby a

¹² These examples of natural differences are strictly illustrative. One could, admittedly, offer a *very* different account of the relevant phenomena. Indeed, women nowadays are far more likely than in the past to choose their sex partners *rather than* passively waiting to be chosen. As an anonymous reviewer of a previous version of this article rightly pointed out, in some situations a woman might initiate a sexual encounter, actively *causing* a man’s (in this sense, passive) erection; in such cases, sexual intercourse would be most accurately described not as the active penetration of a penis into a passive vagina, but as a craving vagina’s active engulfing of an initially passive penis. Indeed, the days are long since gone when females were not “allowed” to experience pleasure during intercourse; they can now openly admit if they enjoy sex most when straddling the male from above, doing most if not all of the moving during sex, virtually sucking the ejaculate out of the passive male’s body. Obviously, those such as Andrea Dworkin (who might prefer this way of interpreting the social-psychological nature of males and females) would hotly dispute any claim that the man’s role as the more active agent in male-female relationships is somehow rooted in our respective biological natures. Even when it comes to biological differences, some researchers now claim that (despite appearances to the contrary) the ovum is not a dumb, passive target for a smart, active sperm; instead, the ovum may be the master, calling the shots, as it were, from her queenly throne as she decides which sperm to pull toward her for fertilization.

¹³ A culture that completely rejects the notion that *any* social-psychological differences are grounded in the biological nature of the sexes would still be a culture; it would simply deny that social-psychological differences are *ever* natural. Members of such a culture would therefore dispute my use of the words “nature” and “natural” when applied to such differences, or might insist that in all such uses the words should be put in quotation marks to convey their merely metaphorical meaning.

person of one sex seeks to *control* members of the other sex and justifies such behavior by appealing to the standards their own culture upholds with respect to nature; “egalitarian” sexism, by contrast, refers to a form of sexism whereby a person *believes* in certain basic natural differences, as determined by the standards of their own culture, yet interprets these in such a way as to treat individuals of both sexes with *equal respect and dignity* in spite of whatever natural differences (whether biological or social-psychological) may exist. Egalitarian sexism is still a form of sexism, in the broad sense defined above, insofar as it affirms that certain basic natural differences *do* exist. A *non-sexist*, on this account, is someone who does not believe in *any* significant social-psychological nature and for whom the undeniably natural biological differences between the sexes, if any, do not require *any* distinction to be made between the way males and females relate in the group that constitutes the culture in question.

A possible objection to this refined, twofold definition of sexism is that it begs the question regarding the inappropriateness of sexist language and beliefs: according to the common use of the term, accusing someone of being a sexist entails imputing an ethically *inappropriate* belief system to the accused. My refined definition, so this objection goes, surreptitiously allows for a possibility that common users of the term would never allow: sexists can *remain* sexist without thereby rendering themselves blameworthy. Yet this possibility is precisely what those who accuse others of being sexist will typically *refuse* to allow; they often respond with incredulity, if not horror, to the mere suggestion that some instance of sexist language or behavior might be unobjectionable, or that some forms of sexism might *not* be an affront to the dignity of their sex after all. On the common view that I am challenging, “sexism” is a term like “rape” or “blasphemy”, carrying with it an assumed culpability that applies analytically to anyone who is properly identified as having committed the offense in question. Those who assume this common meaning are likely to view my attempt to redefine the term as offensive in the extreme and to resist it for this reason – especially those who have suffered as a result of their association with a sexist. But does my redefinition constitute the logical fallacy of *begging the question*?

The foregoing objection correctly points out that my redefinition of “sexism” *forces* us to ask the (potentially uncomfortable) question whether a given instance of sexism is morally blameworthy. However, in so doing, I am not presupposing one answer or the other, so in no way can this be a case of begging the question. By contrast, the common use of the term *does* beg the question, by requiring in advance that everyone deny the existence of the kind of natural cultural differences outlined above. By refining the range of possible meanings of the terms “sexism” and “sexist” I am not begging any question, but *opening up* the question of the ethical status of sexist claims to a rational discussion, where previously emotive responses have been the norm. Human males and females either do or do not have natural biological differences, and these either do or do not exhibit themselves through social-psychological traits that become, as it were, second nature to those sharing a common culture. The point of my refined definition is not to declare that such differences do, in fact, occur but only to make allowance for the possibility that *if* they occur, then the mere acknowledgment of this fact could not be ethically inappropriate even though it would be the kind of belief that is nowadays often labeled as sexist and therefore deemed blameworthy. If such differences *do* exist as a matter of biological fact, then the simple declaration of this fact is in no way comparable to a criminal act such as rape or the sacrilege of blasphemy. Rather, an attempt to portray those who do believe in such differences as *unethical* would, in that event, itself be a case of attempting to dominate another person by exercising illegitimate control over them. Thus, my refined definition implies that those who use these terms in the common, *unrefined* way may themselves sometimes be guilty of an inappropriate, domineering attitude toward the accused person; for even if an accusation of ethical misconduct is merely implied, the accusation is nonetheless real. In other words, *antisexism* is also a belief system that (like

refined sexism) can be upheld in either a domineering or an egalitarian way. That both sexists and antisexistists may hold their beliefs in either a domineering or an egalitarian way is a possibility that only arises once we acknowledge the refined definition I have suggested.

In order to assist in determining when a person in one culture is *justified* in regarding a person in another culture – or regarding the other culture in general – as sexist, let us now construct a framework of ideal (philosophically-delineated) cultures that can be used to illustrate and examine how cultures relate to each other in such assessments. An often unacknowledged difficulty in determining whether Kant was a sexist is that this judgment involves the assessment of someone who lived in one culture by those who live in another culture that is separated from the first by a significant lapse of time. By defining each ideal type of culture primarily according to its temporal relation to other ideal cultures, then associating each type (though only loosely) with a real historical example, we shall ensure that our framework for cross-cultural assessment is relevant to the case at hand. Some looseness of fit between each ideal type and its historical illustration is necessary in order to prevent this study from taking the form of a historical commentary, rather than a philosophical analysis of how such cross-cultural assessments in general ought to be made. If the framework is correct, then it can be applied to a wide variety of actual historical cases, not just those used here as examples.

First, let *culture-k* be a culture from the moderately distant past, perhaps two to three centuries ago, wherein (a) men were generally regarded as having a naturally dominant social role in relation to women, due in part to their presumed physical and/or intellectual superiority, whereas women were generally assumed to be naturally more refined than men, due in part to a presumed superior aesthetic and/or emotional awareness, and (b) monogamous marriage between heterosexuals was considered to be the only morally acceptable context for sexual relations. My use of “k” as the label signaling any reference to this ideal type is based on the assumption that *Kant’s* Europe was a typical example of this type of culture. Kant himself clearly and repeatedly appealed to *nature* (and to nature’s *end* or “purpose”) as the proper philosophical grounding for his claims about the proper social roles for men and women; this reflects the fact that the truth of such claims seemed virtually self-evident to most members of his culture. Thus, for example, Kant grounds his defense of monogamy on a direct appeal to its teleological (what we today might call “evolutionary”) survival value: “Nature’s end in the cohabitation of the sexes is procreation, that is, the preservation of the species” (Kant, 1991b, p. 426). His controversial comments about women are all grounded on his fundamental belief that monogamous marriage is the only way the human species can survive without violating the moral integrity of the persons who participate in procreative activities. For the mechanism that impels the sexes to procreate is precisely “nature”¹⁴ – that is, the biological differences between the sexes, as supported by

¹⁴ Soble acknowledges that Kant repeatedly refers to nature and nature’s ends as the proper grounding of his arguments regarding various forms of sexual perversion, but points out that in *some* cases Kant also presents arguments that are based directly on the second formulation of the categorical imperative (i.e., the duty to respect humanity in all persons). However, he regards the former as “an additional, independent feature” of such arguments (Soble, 2003, p. 65) and as “irrelevant” because “Kant’s appeal to nature does no philosophical work, but allows him to vent his emotions” (Soble, 2003, pp. 63–64; see also p. 73). Ironically, Soble’s careful scholarship in quoting numerous relevant passages from Kant’s writings confirms that in *each case* Kant does appeal to nature as the grounding for his arguments. That Soble decides in advance to dismiss each such reference as a mere expression of emotion does not detract from the fact that *Kant* sees such appeals as the bedrock of his position. Soble himself even quotes Kant’s claim (in Kant, 1930, p. [122]): “The fundamental rule” in matters relating to duties to oneself “is the conformity of free behaviour [sic] to the essential ends of humanity” (Soble, 2003, p. 75). Perhaps the greatest irony, however, is that Soble ends his article with an *explicitly* emotional appeal, telling a story of his own experience of feeling psychologically wounded by listening to a group of students making fun of allegedly perverted sexual behavior that he himself regards as quite natural. That what is occurring in such situations is grounded in a clash between fundamentally different cultural assumptions, rather than a difference in the ethical integrity of either party, is an option Soble never

the social-psychological differences that persons living in culture-k assume must apply as a result of the biological differences.

The second ideal type, *culture-p*, shall refer to a culture that is developmentally *prior* to (i.e., typically considered to be less “modern” than) culture-k, wherein (a) men are generally assumed to be superior to women in every (or most significant) respect(s), to the extent that a wife is considered to be the exclusive property of her husband, but not vice versa, and (b) *polygamy* is therefore regarded as a morally acceptable form of marital relation, inasmuch as it expresses the fundamental superiority men have over women. Examples of this type of culture can be found throughout the Jewish Bible (the Christian Old Testament) and still exist in some traditional societies around the world,¹⁵ but had already become very rare (considered a thing of the past) throughout most of Kant’s Europe. As I will explain further in Part II (Palmquist 2017), Kant therefore assesses polygamy to be an ethically inappropriate form of marital relation; from the point of view of culture-k, it appears to be a form of culturally-sanctioned sexism.

The third ideal type, *culture-m*, shall refer to a culture that is developmentally subsequent to (i.e., typically considered to be more *modern* than) culture-k, wherein (a) men and women are generally assumed to be *equal in every essential respect* (i.e., while some minimal biological differences may be admitted, these are regarded as irrelevant to the social-psychological nature of the sexes, for in the latter sense the sexes are *the same*), and (b) monogamy is considered to be the only morally acceptable form of marital relation. Examples of real cultures that espouse or aspire to instantiate culture-m can be found throughout the world today, not only in the West, but also in places such as China, even though culture-p was the cultural norm not long ago.¹⁶ From the vantage point of culture-m, many of Kant’s comments about women seem to be so obviously inappropriate that assessing him to be a sexist seems self-evident. I shall examine the legitimacy of such assessments in §§3–4.

Finally, *culture-f* shall refer to a *future* culture that is presumed to be developmentally subsequent to culture-m, wherein (a) men and women regard both sexes as essentially equal, but acknowledge that their different biological natures give rise to corresponding differences in their social-psychological nature and that these must be recognized in order to guarantee equality, and (b) polygamy is sanctioned as morally acceptable within certain conditions – most notably, only where polyandry (marriage between one woman and more than one man) is also allowed, because legalizing plural marriage for only one sex would be fundamentally inequitable. Assuming this culture lies in the *future*, I cannot cite any past or present example to illustrate its features. I shall argue in Part II (Palmquist 2017), however, that from the vantage point of such a future culture, many of the statements and beliefs upheld as self-evidently correct by those in culture-m would appear to be just as sexist as Kant’s remarks seem to be for those in culture-m.

Based on the foregoing definitions and the resulting framework of four ideal cultures, how should an impartial observer go about assessing a person with respect to the issue of an alleged claim of sexism? A three-step procedure must be followed. First, identify which type of culture influenced the person being assessed, particularly with regard to its assumptions

considers.

¹⁵ The Koran, for example, allows men to have up to four wives – a religious law that is used as the basis for legalized polygamy in some countries even today – though the extent of actual practice tends to be lower, the more westernized a country becomes. In China, this second feature of culture-p remained until the 1950s, when anti-polygamy laws were instituted by the Communist regime. Surprisingly, in Hong Kong, despite its many decades under British rule, such laws did not come into effect until the mid-1970s.

¹⁶ Perhaps as a result of (or in response to) the relatively recent change in cultural norms (see note 15, above), a report published shortly after Hong Kong’s handover to China (Finlay, 1999, p. 2) estimated that about half a million men in Hong Kong (about one-fourth of the adult males) had fathered children (mostly from illegal or unofficial second wives or concubines) in mainland China.

about the natural differences between men and women. Second, seek to understand how the distinction between domineering and egalitarian sexism would be made *within* that culture. Finally, taking care to *suspend* one's own cultural biases, examine whether the person's views would be assessed as domineering or egalitarian within his or her own cultural context. Any reader who acknowledges the *possibility* of egalitarian sexism is likely to regard it as ethically acceptable, while condemning domineering sexism as ethically inappropriate *even if* it was condoned by the culture of the person being assessed. That is, by positing this new distinction we can no longer attribute domineering sexism to a person living in another culture simply on the grounds that the latter person views nature in a way that is foreign to *our own* culture (i.e., to culture-m). The person being assessed might have assumed natural differences simply because they were considered self-evident for anyone in their culture, yet might have employed them in a way that implied no fundamental *inequality* between the sexes, as understood within his or her own culture.

One might object to the foregoing three-step procedure on the grounds that it entails a commitment to cultural relativism. This, however, would be a mistaken inference, as can be clarified by calling attention to the difference between the terms *Sitten* and *Moralisch* for Kant. The former is culture-based, referring to the ethical norms that a person assumes, as a result of his or her educational and cultural background. The latter, by contrast, is independent of any given historical context, referring to the rational basis for any claim to moral rectitude. We can express the three-step procedure in terms of this distinction by saying that it bids us to ask whether a person, in seeking to abide by the *Sitten* of his or her culture, manages to manifest *Moralisch*. If a given norm passed on by the former makes the latter *impossible*, then the culture itself must be assessed as morally defective; but if it leaves room for the latter, then far from entailing relativism, the possibility of employing a foreign *Sitten* in order to reach genuine moral goodness always remains open.

In the remainder of this article and in Part II (Palmquist 2017), I shall use this framework to conduct a three-stage analysis of Kant's alleged sexism. After a brief account of Kant's views on sex and marriage, §3 examines how Kant would assess the apparent sexism of a person living in culture-p. This will illustrate the importance of avoiding an appeal to foreign cultures (including one's own) when assessing the nature or extent of another person's alleged sexism. I shall then consider in §4 the central question of how we ought to assess *Kant's* alleged sexism. Again, Kant's writings undoubtedly do exhibit *some* form of sexism, for he clearly and repeatedly distinguishes between the nature of men and women in ways that go beyond merely biological differences. The main issue will be whether he was guilty of promoting a domineering form of sexism, or whether his sexism was the ethically admissible, egalitarian form. Finally, Part II (Palmquist 2017) will continue this enquiry by focusing on assessing the type of culture assumed by most readers of this study – i.e., culture-m – by projecting how a presumed culture-f might evolve in its conception of nature and sexism. In Part II each stage of the argument will take marriage as the test case for examining how sexism manifests itself not only in Kant's writings but also more generally in humanity's cultural evolution.

How should we assess Kant's sexism?

Kant undoubtedly was a sexist in the limited sense that he believed men and women are distinguished by natural differences, differences he thought *must* be taken into consideration when engaging in practical reflection on human nature.¹⁷ In *Anthropology*, for example, he

¹⁷ In *Observations*, Kant says: "For here it is not enough to keep in mind that we are dealing with human beings; we must also remember that they are not all alike" (Kant, 1960, p. 229[77]). If such open confessions of the *need* to acknowledge difference is all what Gangavane has in mind when she concludes "Kant is not free from gender bias" (Gangavane, 2004, p. 374), then her accusation does not amount to charging Kant with domineering sexism.

states two “principles” that determine how “the end of nature” distinguishes women from men: biologically, they carry and give birth to babies; and social-psychologically, they have a moralizing effect on men – and by extension, so also on all human beings, through their more direct role in child-rearing.¹⁸ Similarly, his early *Observations* essay portrays women as the beautiful and “fair sex” and men as the sublime and “noble” sex, with all sorts of implications that may seem silly if not offensive to many readers today. For example, he claims men tend to be more adept at the natural sciences, while women tend to be better in the human sciences, especially the science of manipulating men, inasmuch as women “refine even the masculine sex” (Kant, 1960, p. 229, 78f).¹⁹

While such comments may sound patronizing today, there is no evidence that Kant meant them to be in the least offensive. On the contrary, he repeatedly stresses that the sexes have an *equal* status, philosophically, even though their nature is significantly different. This is why he almost always describes natural differences in terms of an opposition between two positive (or occasionally, two negative) tendencies; he *never* associates men and women with good and evil characteristics, respectively. Many commentators have claimed Kant viewed women as irrational, yet what he actually says is that they have an *equal but different* type of rationality: “The fair sex has just as much understanding as the male, but it is a *beautiful understanding*, whereas ours should be a *deep understanding*, an expression that signifies identity with the sublime” (Kant, 1960, p. 229(78); see also Kant, 1974, p. 303).²⁰

Gangavane acknowledges that Kant would defend himself against the charge of sexism by saying “that by nature men and women are equal, for they excel each other in different domains, and also that as rational beings they have equal moral dignity” (Gangavane, 2004, p. 367); what remains objectionable, she thinks, is his view “that in both domestic life as well as civil life they are subordinate, and should ever be so!” Yet this assumes what is clearly false, that Kant had no conception of the *evolution* of ethical norms relating to marriage and civil life, treating the “nature of people ... generally in an a-historical manner” (Gangavane, 2004, p. 367). She contradicts her own claim on the next page by citing Kant’s example of Canadian women who are the primary decision-makers on matters of public interest. Her most weighty criticism of Kant is that “most of what according to him are feminine virtues actually underlie her dependence on men” (Gangavane, 2004, p. 369).²¹ The concept of marriage as a union of persons under a clear hierarchy of roles, she argues, is what enabled men in culture-k to continue dominating women in both the public and private domains. While this may have been the actual historical situation in Kant’s day, it is neither a necessary outcome of Kant’s position nor (as I will argue more fully in Part II, Palmquist 2017) is it consistent with his own account of the marital union.

One example will suffice to illustrate this point. Kant’s claim that women have a moralizing effect on men clearly indicates that he thinks of women as *dominating men*, not

¹⁸ See *Anthropology* (Kant, 1974, pp. 303–311; quoted words taken from p. 305). I discuss this passage later in this section.

¹⁹ Mosser quotes a passage from the Blomberg Logic lectures where Kant makes a similar distinction between the sexes (Mosser, 1999, p. 324). Whereas many in culture-m find such generalizations offensive, others might take the percentage of male versus female enrolments in relevant university majors as evidence confirming the accuracy of Kant’s empirical observation about educational aptitude, even today. This would assume that enrolment numbers correlate positively with aptitude and are not themselves a result of pre-existing gender bias. Of course, opponents could argue that the larger numbers of males enrolled in science subjects and of females enrolled in arts and humanities subjects is a result of gender bias throughout the educational system, rather than a result of basic differences in natural aptitude.

²⁰ Cash makes the helpful observation that Kant’s reason for thinking females should not be entrusted with completely equal authority, both in public affairs and in the home, is *not* that women have less reason than men; rather, it is that they are more susceptible to the influence of emotion (Cash, 2002, pp. 133–134). Women tend to be “too weak to control their emotions” (Cash, 2002, p. 155), and one who is “subject to emotions and passions” tends to “exclude the sovereignty of reason” (quoting Kant, 1960, p. 251).

²¹ The example comes from Kant, 1960, p. 255(113–114).

only emotionally (manipulating men to be more inclined to obey the moral law), but through “the cultivated propriety that is the preparatory training for morality and its recommendation” (Kant, 1974, p. 306). Ironically, as Kant suggests in the same passage, women on their own have more trouble being moral than do men who are under a woman’s influence. This is a good example of how Kant’s theory of marriage is meant to present a genuinely egalitarian arrangement, wherein each spouse’s natural weakness is balanced by the other spouse’s natural strength. It should go without saying that Kant’s theory is describing *general tendencies*, rules of thumb, rather than absolute necessities. Yet it must be said, because many interpreters fail to read him in this way. For instance, Cash, like Gangavane, thinks Kant gives “a contingent empirical observation about the nature of women – that they appear to be more emotional than men and thus are less capable of acting according to the dictates of their reason – the status of *necessary* fact; one which could not be otherwise” (Cash, 2002, p. 135). Yet this wholly ignores Kant’s emphasis on the *evolution* of cultural values. Cash eventually acknowledges Kant’s reliance on nature (Cash, 2002, p. 141), but claims that Kant appeals to nature only to establish the *absolute necessity* of such arrangements. However, Kant would never appeal to nature in this manner: necessity always has its origin in the *mind*; nature is the source of ever-changing *contingencies*.

That Kant viewed his various generalizations about the sexes as contingent rather than necessary is evidenced by the fact that he has no problem admitting that exceptions are easy to find. In discussing nature’s end in human sexuality, for instance, he intends his comments to be both descriptive of general patterns that the sexes tend to follow and normative, inasmuch as such patterns are deemed to exist for the good of the species. This philosophical agenda, and not any feeling of hatred, fear or disdain for women, is what prompts him occasionally to make jokes about those who choose a path that seems contrary to nature as understood by culture-k.²² Such jokes must have seemed justifiable to Kant, inasmuch as people who struggle against the norm in this way seemed to him to be *doing damage* to human progress in realizing the end of nature for the species. As Deranty puts it, “Kant’s argument is basically that theoretical equality requires factual inequality to remain valid. But it is worthwhile noting that as man’s superiority is only deemed natural or factual, other times and other mores might require new means for the same end” (Deranty, 2000, p. 147).²³ Indeed, Kant himself links the husband’s dominance to an empirical, contingent fact “this dominance is based only on the natural superiority of the husband to the wife in his capacity to promote the common interest of the household, and the right to direct that is based on this can be derived from the very duty of unity and equality with respect to the *end*” (Kant, 1991b, p. 279). If Kant were presented with one of the many marriages where the husband is incompetent with money while the wife is a financial whiz, he would surely have regarded this as an acceptable exception, even within the context of culture-k, to the general rule that the husband should direct the family finances.

The sexual nature of human beings functions as more than just a side-issue in Kant’s philosophy; rather, it serves as the engine for cultural change, as a key aspect of what Kant

²² Perhaps the harshest and most commonly quoted example of such a joke is his claim that a woman who seeks to become a serious scholar in such “male” fields as Greek or mechanics “might as well even have a beard” (Kant, 1960, p. 230[78]). Kant’s point was not that women are *incapable* of challenging men in the areas where men tend to excel; empirical evidence would have refuted that claim even in Kant’s day. His point was rather that women are struggling against their nature, and so also (at least by extension) threatening to disrupt the end of nature (most importantly, the propagation of the species), when they insist on taking up a position that culture-k regards as more suited to the social-psychological nature of males. What makes this a joke, of course (albeit, a distasteful one), is that comparative intellectual ability is a social-psychological issue, whereas the ability to grow a beard is purely biological.

²³ Assessing Kant’s claim that inequality in the domestic and civil domains is needed to balance the natural inequality of the sexes, Laurentiis somewhat cynically (and unfairly) boils Kant’s position down to the maxim: “two wrongs make a right” (Laurentiis, 2000, p. 312).

calls “unsocial sociability” – the tendency of all human beings to desire social interaction and yet to respond to it in unsociable ways, due to the radical evil in human nature (See e.g., Kant, 2009, pp. 93–94).²⁴ Donald Wilson makes a similar point, that our radical evil gives rise to the need for the controlling influence of laws, lest we abuse the freedom we have in relation to our equals. “The purpose of a civil condition is... to constrain our ‘selfish animal propensities’” (Wilson, 2004, pp. 103–104). As we shall see in §4, Kant’s theory of the way males and females ought to relate in marriage illustrates this point: just as laws are needed to constrain selfish behavior in society, marriage requires a hierarchical relation in order to prevent unnecessary strife.

In *The Metaphysics of Morals* Kant points out that “we shall often have to take as our object the particular *nature* of man, which is known only by experience, in order to *show* in it what can be inferred from the universal moral principles” (Kant, 1991b, p. 217). Laurentiis points out that this book “does not concern itself with the evolution of human relations and institutions in history. The justification of (hetero-)sexual relations ‘according to principle’ refers exclusively to marriage in the modern civil society” (Laurentiis, 2000, p. 311n).²⁵ This fact about Kant’s intentions must be understood in order to avoid the false assumption that he intends his conclusions to apply for all people in all times – a position that would utterly contradict the explicitly evolutionary approach that, as we saw above, he takes in *Anthropology*. Cash ignores this point when he says the “accusation *that* Kant elevated particular morals and laws of his society to the status of universally applicable truths” is “by now rather trivial and pedestrian”; he claims to explain “*why* he thought that these judgements [sic] were universally applicable” (Cash, 2002, p. 106). But as the quote at the beginning of this paragraph shows, this is not how Kant understood his project: he was not claiming that his interpretations of his own culture must remain true for all time; rather he was showing how the mores and social norms of his day *can be* justified as philosophically acceptable, by showing how they can be grounded in the categorical imperative. Demonstrating such grounding does not exclude the possibility that *other* norms from other cultures might also be grounded in the same universal law.

What must be kept in mind, therefore, when assessing Kant’s comments about the sexes in *The Metaphysics of Morals* and elsewhere, is that in making such comments he is putting aside the transcendental abstractions of his Critical philosopher’s cloak of necessity and making empirical observations about the way human beings actually are or seem to be, within a specific cultural context. Thus, when Kant says “I hardly believe that the fair sex is capable of principles” (a statement frequently taken out of context by Kant’s detractors), he recognizes that readers *even in culture-k* might construe such a comment as promoting domineering sexism, so he immediately adds: “and I hope by that not to offend, for these [i.e., rational principles] are also *extremely rare* in the male” (Kant, 1960, p. 232[81], emphasis added). That is, while women are *hardly capable* of thinking rationally, men also exhibit this ability *extremely rarely*. Far from reflecting a bias against women, Kant is here acknowledging a problem *all* human beings have, the problem of not being able to fulfill the true potentials of our nature. If he shows any gender bias in this passage, it is against males, not females: that *any* females in culture-k exhibited rationality constituted an achievement; that males tend to be just as irrational despite the privilege culture-k affords them is the greater shortcoming.

A clear understanding of Kant’s purpose in such passages enables us to recognize that

²⁴ Gangavane points out that Kant never explicitly assigns unsocial sociability “any role within the family” (Gangavane, 2004 p. 369). While this is true, such a role is clearly implied, for the section of Kant’s *Anthropology* entitled “On the Character of the Sexes” comes within a broader discussion of the ultimate destiny of the human race. The section argues that nature uses sex to drive cultural evolution. For a discussion of this point, see Wilson, 1998.

²⁵ Laurentiis’ point is accurate, provided we take “modern” as a reference to culture-k, not culture-m.

Gangavane is mistaken to claim Kant treats women “as being physically weaker than, and intellectually inferior to men” (Gangavane, 2004, p. 365). While Kant may indeed affirm the former as a rough generalization – a claim that, however unpopular it may be to say so in some circles, is empirically true *as* a generalization (for indeed, this is the rationale for dividing most sports events into different competitions for men and women) – he never intends to impute intellectual *inferiority* to women, but only intellectual *difference*. And the latter is something many feminists readily affirm as a core thesis. Gangavane’s claim that “it is a plain falsehood that all women by nature have less physical strength and intellect than all men” (Gangavane, 2004, pp. 367–368) reveals a gross misunderstanding of the nature of Kant’s generalizations about nature; for as we have seen, such generalizations cannot be refuted merely by citing individual exceptions. Similar claims that Kant was led astray primarily by his “false assumptions” about the sexes abound in the literature (see e.g., Denis, 2001, p. 23), yet they are almost never accompanied even by an *attempt* to provide any concrete evidence that he was wrong. The statement “*p* is false” in such contexts means little more than the unjustified observation: “To believe *p* is ethically inappropriate for anyone in my culture.”

Kant’s view of marriage as illustrating the egalitarian grounding of his sexism

Having introduced the key issues relating to Kant’s alleged sexism (in §1 and §3), I shall now conclude by employing the framework for cross-cultural comparisons (sketched in §2) to offer two arguments in Kant’s defense: one based on his philosophical system, the other on his personal life. First, when reading passages from Kant’s non-systematic writings (where most of his allegedly sexist comments appear), such as his *Anthropology*, we must keep firmly in mind that in his official moral theory Kant never attempts to defend or legitimate sexism, not even egalitarian sexism. Most significantly, when determining what makes an act morally good or evil, Kant draws no distinction whatsoever between males and females. The categorical imperative applies equally to women and men; for men and women alike, only a “good will” can be regarded as absolutely good (see Kant, 1959, pp. 392–393[9]); both women and men need freedom of choice to have moral responsibility; both sexes are implicated by the self-deception inherent in our radically evil nature; and in the realm of political theory, the rights of both men and women are to be protected by laws that prevent the abuse of one person’s freedom by another.

On precisely this basis arises a key difference between culture-k and culture-p: unlike the typical person living in culture-p, Kant and the culture of his day regarded polygamy as ethically inappropriate. Kant argued against polygamy on the grounds that marriage is an agreement to give the ownership of one’s sexual organs to another person, and that it is impossible for a person to give a second person something that no longer belongs to him (or her) by right (See Kant, 1991b, pp. 277–280, §§24–27 of “The Doctrine of Right”).²⁶ That is, once a man marries a woman, his wife “owns” his sexual organ, so he cannot offer to give ownership of his sexual organ to another woman through a second marriage. Kant is here accepting the very “ownership” view of marriage that is often used by men in culture-p to justify cultural attitudes that we would now regard as an institutionalized form of domineering sexism. Much as members of culture-m may dislike the ownership metaphor, we must recognize that Kant used it to *guarantee* women an equal status in sexual relations with men, to *protect* them against the abusive inequalities of culture-p and the domineering sexism he must have seen as likely to arise from it. The egalitarian grounding of Kant’s sexism therefore suggests that he is unlikely to have held his sexist views in a domineering way.

Although this rationale for rejecting polygamy²⁷ seems inappropriate to those living in

²⁶ Kant’s explanation of why polygamy is wrong on this basis comes in §26 (see also Kant, 1974, p. 304).

²⁷ Kant rejects both polyandry and polygyny, for essentially the same reasons (Kant, 1997, pp. 27, 389, 536, and 641).

culture-m, it at least demonstrates that Kant was concerned about the problem of men tending to treat women unfairly. Most of the passages that are typically cited as indications of Kant's sexism are actually expressions of his desire to show the highest possible respect for women, given the norms of his own culture. Within the context of culture-k, honoring the woman as an object of beauty, whose participation in scholarly discussions need not be taken too seriously, except perhaps as a "check" on the tendencies males might otherwise have to cut each other's throats in the heat of debate, is not an expression of oppressive domination. If anything, we should praise Kant for providing a rationale for *encouraging* women to participate in scholarly discussions, as well as in various aspects of political decision-making, on the grounds that their distinctive nature enables them to contribute something that men on their own are unlikely to contribute.

With the above argument in mind, let us now examine Kant's above-quoted claim in *Anthropology*, that women (like monarchs) are to "reign" in the home, whereas men (like prime ministers) are to "govern" (Kant, 1974, pp. 309–310).²⁸ As much as this might sound like domineering sexism to our modern ear, in Kant's day this was a valiant attempt to provide for *equal but different* roles for men and women living in culture-k; as he says in *The Metaphysics of Morals*, the husband's position of superiority in the family "cannot be regarded as conflicting with the natural equality of a couple" (Kant, 1991b, p. 279). By rooting these roles in the nature of the sexes, Kant guarantees that men *must* respect women (and vice versa), lest they lose access to this (the all-important feminine, *moral*) aspect of their common human nature. His theory of marital roles is therefore an attempt not to promote domineering sexism, but to protect both sexes from anyone who would use the norms of culture-k to abuse or oppress either sex.

Without the benefit of an interpretive framework for cross-cultural comparison, interpreters tend to regard Kant's position here as self-contradictory. Cash, for example, calls Kant's view "indefensible" and shockingly illogical "for someone as unquestionably astute as Kant." He quotes Kant's claims that "innate equality" is a right that "belongs to everyone by nature" and that this protects people "from being bound by others to more than one can in turn bind them" (Cash, 2002, pp. 108f).²⁹ And he admits that Kant applies this explicitly to the marriage relationship by defining it in terms of "*equality* of possession, equality both in their possession of each other as persons ... and also equality in their possession of material goods".³⁰ That Kant even describes this reciprocal possession as "a unity of will", whereby each partner shares any "good or ill, joy or sorrow" that the other experiences, is on Cash's view "quite contrary to his remarks that a harmonious union can only be achieved if one partner is subject to the other" (Cash, 2002, p. 113).³¹ However, this depends on what we think Kant means by "subject"; if it refers to a yin-yang type of relationship – a "weak" and "strong" force whereby each depends entirely for its own nature on the equal and opposite existence of the other – then no *domination* of one partner over the other needs to be read into Kant's position. In any case, Kant bases the husband's position on an *empirical* claim that he believed was *generally* true for married couples in culture-k, namely, "on the natural superiority of the husband to the wife in his capacity to promote the common interests of the household".³² Cash rightly points out that this "empirical claim... is one which contemporary readers would see as mistaken" (Cash, 2002, p. 117). Thus he claims to unveil a "glaring flaw" in Kant's argument, one so obvious that he replies to Kant's claim, that his theory of

²⁸ Kant makes a similar remark about marriage: "the united pair should ... constitute a single moral person, which is animated and governed by the understanding of the man and the taste of the wife" (Kant, 1960, p. 242(95)).

²⁹ It is quoting from Kant, 1991b, p. 237.

³⁰ Cash is here quoting from Kant, 1991b, p. 278.

³¹ It is quoting from Kant, 1960, p. 167.

³² Cash is here quoting from Kant, 1991b, p. 279(98); also quoted above, in §3.

the husband's superiority does not conflict with the duty married couples have to be united in equality, merely by exclaiming: "*of course* it is in conflict!" (Cash, 2002, p. 141). But Cash is able to *see* a glaring conflict where Kant did not see one *only* because in culture-m women have gained a great deal more political power and social recognition than they had in culture-k. That is, Kant's empirical claim is no less accurate than Cash's claim is; the difference is due solely to the fact that western culture has evolved. It is therefore not Kant but Cash who is "mistaken" (Cash, 2002, pp. 119–120), for expecting Kant somehow to have known and applied to his own day cultural norms that only came to be widely accepted roughly two centuries later.

The main reason Cash sees Kant's two claims (that marriage partners are fully equal in their external, public relation to each other, under the law, and that the wife ought to be subordinate to her husband in their private relation, at home) as being "*directly* in conflict" (Cash, 2002, p. 122) is that he completely ignores the fact that Kant grounds the *private* inequality explicitly on the *natural* inequality of the sexes. As a child of culture-m, Cash is unwilling to admit any such natural inequality and expects Kant to follow suit. Thus, while he is right to argue that Kant cannot justify his theory by appealing either "to legal equality or to natural equality", Cash overlooks the fact that Kant's appeal is to the natural *differences* between the sexes, not to their equality as members of the human race. Cash's allegation that "Kant employs a rather insidious piece of logical sleight-of-hand" (Cash, 2002, p. 122) loses its force once we allow Kant to play his ace – i.e., once we grant his claim that men and women are *significantly different by nature*. Kant's conclusion then follows with flawless logic: the only way for a man and woman, if they are different by nature, to enjoy the "natural equality" that marriage is supposed to produce, as a *public* relation under the law, is for their *internal* relationship (i.e., within the family) to compensate for any natural differences they may have through appropriately balanced *private* differences in the roles they play. Contrary to Cash's assumption, Kant's theory of spousal roles in marriage does not require either person to "relinquish their natural equality and make someone else their master." Rather, as I shall argue below, they mutually agree to an equitable situation whereby each is master and servant of the other in complementary balance. Cash thinks "we can conclude in one step" (Cash, 2002, p. 123), from the premises that we have a duty to equality and that no person can cease to be his or her own master, to the conclusion "that neither partner in marriage should, or could, become the master of the other through the consummation of the marriage contract." But again, this is only because he presents an eclipsed version of Kant's theory, neglecting the crucial role of biological nature.

The section of *Anthropology* entitled "On the Character of the Sexes" (Kant, 1974, pp. 303–311) is likewise bound to be misunderstood unless we keep in mind that Kant's goal is not to defend the right of men to *dominate* women, but rather to promote a vision of *harmony* within the home, through a mutual understanding of role differences that members of culture-k assumed were grounded in human nature. Thus, we may not agree with the specifics when Kant asks "Who, then, should have supreme command in the household?" and answers "the woman should *reign* and the man *govern*; for inclination reigns and understanding governs" (Kant, 1974, p. 309).³³ But those who accuse Kant, in appealing to this metaphor, of sanctioning a husband's *dominance* over his wife (see e.g., note 33, above) are failing to take into account the subtle balance, the *harmony of the faculties*, implied by the relation between sensibility (the source of human inclination) and understanding in Kant's philosophical System. For practical reason has *primacy* over theoretical reason, and Kant's whole Critical philosophy is based on the assumption that sensibility naturally tends to dominate the former realm while understanding tends to dominate the latter; indeed, the primary function of

³³ Mendus calls this "identification of woman with inclination and of man with reason" Kant's "final dismissal of woman" (Mendus, 1992, pp. 35–36). But I argue below that Kant intended to emphasize the tendency of *women* to dominate *men*, rather than vice versa.

Critique is to expose the errors that result from a failure to acknowledge these natural tendencies.

Despite acknowledging this Critical backdrop, Sedgwick interprets Kant's metaphor negatively on the grounds that Kant's philosophical hierarchy has "reason very clearly on the top" (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 73). While it is true that Kant thinks reason *ought* to control inclination, he also takes the actual human situation to be that it normally does not. Similarly failing to realize that the principle guiding Kant's metaphor is egalitarian harmony rather than sexist domination, Denis claims Kant's metaphor "denies the wife her equality as a rational being" (Denis, 2001, p. 14). Even where not explicit, she reads sexist themes into Kant's texts, claiming he believes men have "authority" over women "because women are not capable" (Denis, 2001, p. 14), whereas Kant's actual view is that women *tend* to be not *as* capable as men in certain areas, just as *men* tend to be less capable than *women* in other areas, and that a well-functioning household ought to take such strengths and weaknesses into consideration. Denis concludes: "We should omit Kant's presupposition of a ruling and a ruled party from our revised picture of a Kantian marriage" (Denis, 2001, p. 19). This is not only unnecessary but unwise, however, once we interpret the metaphor as Kant portrays it, in terms of freely chosen, mutual (yin-yang style) harmony.

Interpreted in the latter way, we can see that Kant's further explanation of his metaphor does not promote domineering sexism but rather calls for culture-k men to become aware of the power women tend to have over them: "The husband's behavior must show that his wife's welfare is the thing closest to his heart. But since the man must know best how his affairs stand and how far he can go, he will be like a minister to his monarch who thinks only of amusement" (Kant, 1974, p. 310). The monarch, not the minister, is the more powerful figure here: Kant's claim is that in the household, just as in government, the one with a position of greater power and authority has an obligation to defer decisions to the one with a lower position in order to maximize the efficiency of the system. So Kant is arguing for a *harmony* of roles that is consistent with egalitarian sexism, not for oppressive roles that would constitute domineering sexism.

Ignoring the implications of Kant's analogy between proper marital roles and the proper functioning of the faculties of the mind, many interpreters find Kant's position here to be highly offensive. Pateman, for example, regards Kant's extension of this analogy to governmental power-relations as "bitterly ironic, for it was by means of the marriage contract that European women of the eighteenth century were removed from civil life to the domestic sphere, undergoing a diminishment in legal status" (Pateman, 1988, p. 119). Similarly, Benbow offers a skewed interpretation based on the assumption that this analogy is a sexist joke with an *intended* double meaning: she claims Kant compares the wife to a *male* monarch as a way of poking fun at the uselessness of the monarchy while at the same time relegating the wife to the position of a mere figurehead (Benbow, 2006). But a more straightforward reading would be that when Kant writes that the husband will act "like a minister to the order of a monarch who thinks only of his [the monarch's] pleasure" (Kant, 1974, p. 310), he uses the masculine pronoun simply because the Prussian monarch was in fact male. Benbow cites a number of studies that document the decreased rights of women during the Enlightenment, as a backlash against early attempts at female emancipation. This general trend may have contributed to Kant's reluctance to think outside the box on this issue; but this does not make his analogy "disingenuous", as Benbow claims, for the analogy fits very well with Kant's belief that the higher one's political authority or position, the *less* one should utilize one's power in controlling others.

One reason Kant is so often assessed as a domineering sexist may be that he never married. The assumption here would be that Kant regarded himself as "too good" to stoop to the level of uniting his will with that of a "mere woman." But the facts of Kant's life do not justify such an assumption. His biographers report that Kant fell deeply in love at least twice.

On these occasions, he hesitated for so long in making a formal proposal of marriage to his beloved that the woman apparently gave up waiting. What was the reason for his hesitation? It was not, as might be thought, that he was too preoccupied with his philosophizing. Kant wrote all of his main works in his mature years, after the love affairs of his youth and middle age were mere memories. He hesitated because of his great concern that, if he were to marry, he would not be able to provide a good, comfortable life for his wife and family. His notes show that he made numerous calculations based on his then meager income and was simply unable to convince himself that he had the financial means to support a wife. Toward the end of his life, Kant recollected (as quoted in Klinker, 1951, p. 40): “When I could have done with a wife, I wasn’t in a position to support one, and when I was in a position to support one I had no further use for one.” We might speculate that Kant’s relationship with his British friend, Joseph Green, whom he visited every day at 7pm *sharp* in his later years (and whose insistence on punctuality may be the main reason Kant gained the reputation of following such a rigid schedule), served as an effective substitute for the intimacy of a woman’s love.³⁴

Would a domineering sexist be so concerned about his financial standing before offering a proposal of marriage? This seems unlikely. Quite aside from the question of whether Kant’s hesitation was *wise* – it certainly was not romantic! – I believe it illustrates Kant’s character as a man who was always careful to show the greatest respect to women, to do nothing that would curtail their freedom of choice through a domineering relationship. His letters, especially those exchanged with women, bear this out. His correspondence with women, when read in its cultural context, without mistaking his attention to the proper etiquette of the day as the kind of condescending attitude it might imply if penned by someone living in culture-m, reveals a man committed to egalitarian sexism – that is, a man who, though keenly aware that his female correspondents were not men, treated them as equals, refusing to allow natural differences to stain the relationships with any trace of dominance.

Clearly, Kant accepted certain key assumptions of culture-k, including the belief that *nature* justifies men in treating women in a fundamentally different way from the way they treat other men. But this does not make him a *domineering* sexist. For he applied his understanding of these presumably natural differences only in order to encourage what he believed to be the best way to establish *egalitarian* values in culture-k. The allegation that, quite to the contrary, Kant’s sexism is *grounded in* his philosophical system (or vice versa), in such a way that the sexism actually invalidates the entire system,³⁵ can arise only by imposing the standards of culture-m onto Kant, instead of assessing Kant in terms of culture-k. Yet as suggested in §2, cross-cultural assessments are philosophically justifiable only when they take into consideration just such differences in cultural assumptions. Kant did not have the benefit of either having lived through or having been told about Freudian psychology or the sexual revolution of the 1960s, as have those in culture-m who impute domineering sexism to Kant. The proper question should be: Within the context of culture-k, was Kant guilty of *domineering* sexism? An affirmative answer would require the interpreter to demonstrate that Kant viewed women in a way that allowed men to *control* women unfairly, as judged by the standards of culture-k, yet no study of Kant’s alleged sexism has come close to demonstrating this. Rather, they have merely demonstrated that Kant routinely *distinguished* between the natural biological characteristics, psychological tendencies, or proper social roles of women as opposed to men. As I have argued, this bare distinction, on

³⁴ For a good account of this and Kant’s many other friendships, see Kuehn, 2001.

³⁵ In response to the all-too-common claim that Kant’s formalistic emphasis makes his general philosophical approach “masculinist” (see e.g., Mosser, 1999, p. 327), Sedgwick effectively argues that it is not Kant but his interpreters who are responsible for much of the sexism found in his official philosophy: “the proper application of the categorical imperative calls ... for sensitivity on the part of human judgment in deciding precisely what features of an individual case are to figure into our procedure of moral assessment.... [So] there is no reason to conclude that... Kantian moral theory lacks any of the essential ingredients of a morality of care” (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 67).

its own, in no way conflicts with his egalitarian moral theory but instead complements it. Thus, much as we members of culture-m may dislike his claims, Kant's insistence on distinguishing men from women implies only that he chose not to step outside the contingent norms of his own culture when defending the ideal of egalitarian sexism. Moreover, as I will argue in Part II of this series (Palmquist 2017), if we hold our own ethical presuppositions about marriage up to the ideal of egalitarian sexism, we will find signs that, in spite of the lip-service we so often give to equality, culture-m has a hidden tendency to encourage *domineering* sexism.

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G. E. Moore and theory of moral/right action in ethics of social consequences

Vasil Gluchman

Abstract

G. E. Moore's critical analysis of right action in utilitarian ethics and his consequentialist concept of right action is a starting point for a theory of moral/right action in ethics of social consequences. The terms *right* and *wrong* have different meanings in these theories. The author explores different aspects of right and wrong actions in ethics of social consequences and compares them with Moore's ideas. He positively evaluates Moore's contributions to the development his theory of moral/right action.

Keywords: G. E. Moore, right, wrong, ethics of social consequences

Introduction

When formulating the theory of moral/right action in ethics of social consequences,¹ I took inspiration from G. E. Moore's critical analysis of right action in utilitarian ethics and his consequentialist concept of right action (Moore, 2000; 2005), which I adopted as the starting point of my reasoning (Gluchman, 2000, pp. 9–23; 2001, pp. 633–634). I follow the view of action similar to that of Moore, which means he evaluates the actions of a moral agent on the basis of their consequences. However, unlike Moore, I form in ethics of social consequences a broader scope of evaluative judgements,² and what is also broader is the value structure of ethics of social consequences, as among the fundamental values there are humanity, human dignity, the moral right of man to life, its development and cultivation, as well as the values of justice, responsibility, tolerance and obligation (Gluchman, 2003; 2009, pp. 73–86; 2013, pp. 111–130; 2017, pp. 131–144). The aim of the article is analyse Moore's ideas of right and compare them with my theory of moral/right action (in ethics of social consequences).

Two theories of right action

In ethics of social consequences, contrary to Moore, the terms *right* and *wrong* have different meanings. While in Moore, right and wrong are priority evaluative judgements, in ethics of social consequences, they are only of secondary importance, as the main evaluative

¹ In the context of the concepts of Philip Pettit, Amartya Sen, Michael Slot and Frank Jackson, ethics of social consequences started to form in the mid 1990s as a version of non-utilitarian consequentialism. The formulation of the theory of moral/right action and the concept of individual, or collective, moral agent by means of his/her intellectual and cognitive abilities, such as reasoning, decision making, behaving, acting and evaluating could be considered the most significant contribution to contemporary ethics of social consequences (Dubiel-Zielińska 2013; 2015; 2016; Domagała 2015; Gluchman 2007; 2012; 2016; Gluchmanová 2013; Kalajtzidis 2013; Misseri 2014; Sachdev 2015; Simut 2011, p. 104; 2016; Švaňa 2015; 2016). Among the most significant contributions to the critical reflection on the above concept are Münz's analysis of ethics of social consequences as well as his problematising of the notion 'social' mainly within human society and avoiding the stimuli of natural science for the elaboration of ethics and morality (Münz 2002, pp. 279–283). Petr Jemelka and Katarína Komenská expressed similar ideas, emphasising the need to consider the findings of natural sciences, especially ecology (Jemelka 2017; Komenská 2016). Moreover, Kišš's objection could also be mentioned to excessive attention paid to metaethical issues while partially overlooking applied ethics (Kišš 2011, p. 21); as well as Josef Kuře's idea characterising this concept as an example of moderate ethical realism which suggests paying more attention to the acting agent. Daniela Navrátilová also points to the need of complex perception of actions and the moral agent with regard to his characteristic features (Kuře 2011, p. 34; Navrátilová 2011, pp. 43–44).

² The original concept of the theory of moral/right action has been further developed especially by Ján Kalajtzidis and completed by an analysis of just action, which is not, however, within the scope of this paper, as it falls beyond a comparison with Moore's concept of right action (Kalajtzidis 2012, pp. 160–189).

judgements are *moral* and *immoral* behaviour, and action is evaluated as *right* or *wrong* on a lower level (Gluchman, 2001, pp. 633–634).

According to Moore, the main criterion of right action is consequences resulting from the action itself. He refuses a restricted approach to the perception of correctness as a criterion and emphasises the importance of only considering correct such action which brings about the best possible consequences (Moore, 2005, p. 70). At the theoretical level at least, such a state of affairs is possible where more than one action is equally right. Then, any of these alternatives could be considered equally right. Unlike Moore's concept, I formulated theory of moral/right action depending on the amount of positive and negative consequences, or a prevalence of the former over the latter or vice versa. The evaluation scale of judgements takes the form of evaluating action as moral (if there is a maximum or greatly significant prevalence of positive over negative consequences) or right (if the prevalence of positive over negative consequences is less significant). Conversely, action is considered immoral (if there is a maximum or greatly significant prevalence of positive over negative consequences) or wrong (if there is a more minor prevalence of negative over positive consequences) (Gluchman, 2001, pp. 633–634). Daniela Navrátilová, not quite fairly, criticises ethics of social consequences claiming that, in spite of its dismissive view of the utilitarian criterion of right action in the form of maximisation, it actually latently accepts this criterion by using it to assess moral action (Navrátilová, 2011, p. 40). She, however, ignores the fact that a maximum prevalence of positive over negative social consequences is not unconditional in evaluating the rightness of action, but rather crediting such an alternative which might or might not be achieved for the action of a moral agent to be considered acceptable by a moral community, or from the viewpoint of ethics of social consequences.

Moore in his theory of right action also paid attention to the study of the extent to which intentions can play a role as a criterion of right action. He claimed that a general opinion could be accepted according to which good intentions tend to give rise to right action while bad intentions lead to wrong action. The role of intentions can, therefore, be accepted in such moral judgments. He, however, pointed out that this tendency is not absolute (Moore, 2005, pp. 94–95). In Moore's view, there is a kind of moral judgment in which it is possible to take intentions of action into consideration, and these are judgments of such action which could be praised and such that should be condemned. At first sight it could seem that right action is praised while wrong action is condemned. Moore, however, proves that there is no direct relationship between these two (Moore, 2005, pp. 97–98), as not all that is right deserves to be praised and, on the other hand, not all that is wrong must be necessarily condemned.³

Similarly to Moore, bearing in mind the intentions of an acting moral agent, I also consider such action immoral which directly, based on bad intentions on the part of the moral agent, caused moral harm. I, however, unlike Moore, think of such action as wrong, which, in spite of the good intentions of a moral agent, caused a prevalence of negative over positive consequences as a result of unforeseen circumstances. In my view, based on the above, such a situation is possible when the action did not bring about any, or hardly any, positive but merely negative consequences; however, if the intention(s) was (were) good, such action can be assessed not as immoral but rather wrong. Conversely, a situation can arise when the prevalence of negative over positive consequences is less significant, but the action is assessed as immoral. Such an assessment is given by the fact that, as a result of external circumstances, the worst alternative, originally set in the intentions of the agent's action, which would merely bring about negative and no, or hardly any, positive consequences, was not realised. The criterion to differentiate between these two kinds of action as wrong and immoral is the presence of an bad intention rather than the amount of negative consequences

³ In this context, Michael J. Zimmerman claims that, although according to Moore it is wrong for Jill to give drugs to John, it does not mean such action should be considered blameworthy (Zimmerman 2006, p. 338).

caused. The consequences, or, more specifically, the prevalence of negative over positive consequences, are the primary criterion according to which these kinds of actions can be determined. From this, an application of a finer criterion follows, according to which intentions for the action of a moral agent are considered (Gluchman, 2001, p. 634).

In my view, more complex situations can be solved by expressing two evaluative judgements. In right action based on wrong intentions it could be stated that such action is, from the consequentialist viewpoint, right; however, from the intention-related viewpoint, it is not praiseworthy; which, however, does not mean it is blameworthy. At first sight, this is a rather complicated assessment which could be shortened into stating that such action is right but not praiseworthy. On the other hand, wrong action based on good intentions could, from the consequentialist viewpoint, be considered wrong; however, from the intention-related viewpoint, it is not blameworthy; which, however, still does not mean it is praiseworthy. Briefly expressed, such action is wrong but not blameworthy. The situation is less complex in the case of other kinds of action, as moral or right action with good intentions which brings about a prevalence of positive over negative consequences can be clearly considered moral, or right, which is, at the same time, praiseworthy. On the other hand, immoral, or wrong, action based on bad intentions can be considered immoral, or wrong, and, at the same time, blameworthy (Gluchman, 2001, p. 640).

Daniela Navrátilová praises the application of intentions as a criterion of assessing action in ethics of social consequences, as it, in her view, aids in specifying the evaluative judgements regarding the action of a moral agent. Should the intentions of action not be regarded, then, in her view, the same assessments of action based on good or bad intentions, merely considering the consequences of such action, which might also be influenced by external factors, would sound absurd (Navrátilová, 2011, p. 40). Similarly, Ján Kalajtšidis positively assesses the fact that the acceptance of intentions plays a role “[...] when determining the extent of punishment or reward in the context of responsibility” (Kalajtšidis, 2011, p. 107).

Unlike my opinion, Moore could see a possible solution to the problem in this objection by getting over “[...] by reference to the distinction between what is right or wrong, on the one hand, and what is morally praiseworthy or blameworthy on the other. What we should naturally say of a man whose action turns out badly owing to some unforeseen accident when he had every reason to expect that it would turn out well, is not that his action was right, but rather that *he is not to blame*. And it may be fully admitted that in such a case he really *ought* not to be blamed; since blame cannot possibly serve any good purpose, and would be likely to do harm. But, even if we admit that he was not to blame, is that any reason for asserting also that he acted rightly? I cannot see that it is; and therefore I am inclined to think that in all such cases the man really did act *wrongly*, although he is not to blame, and although, perhaps, he even deserves praise for acting as he did” (Moore, 2005, p. 100). Ingmar Persson adds that, according to Moore, the effort to maximise actual consequences does not mean praise for the acting moral agent, just as the opposite approach does not mean condemnation of an individual for his action (Persson, 2008, p. 351).

Another part of the theory of moral/right action in ethics of social consequences is obligatory action where likely consequences, which might cause a (maximum to minimum) prevalence of positive over negative consequences, are the criteria. I claim that probable positive consequences are closely connected to good intentions the aim of which is to achieve a prevalence of positive over negative consequences. What, however, plays an important role is the agent’s moral cognition, reasoning and decision making in the process of recognising probable consequences, their analysis and deciding to pursue such action which is likely to bring about a prevalence of positive over negative consequences (Gluchman, 2001, p. 642).

Achieving the best possible results is not a criterion of an obligatory action, but rather achieving any prevalence of probable positive over negative consequences.

In the context of obligatory actions, I do not consider necessary to state that its criterion is probable positive consequences based on good intentions; it suffices to state that the criterion of an obligatory action is probable positive consequences. It is obvious that bad intentions are aimed at achieving negative rather than positive probable consequences. In the same way, in my view, probable positive consequences are those that are likely to cause a (maximum to minimum) prevalence of positive over negative consequences and probable negative consequences are those that are probably to cause a (maximum to minimum) prevalence of negative over positive consequences (Gluchman, 2001, p. 642).

Similarly to obligatory action, I also defined the criterion for such action that should be avoided. These are actions based on bad intentions with the aim of causing a prevalence of negative over positive probable consequences. In the context of assessing action as immoral and wrong, I believe it is obvious that such action that should be avoided is an immoral action, i.e. action based on bad intentions which causes a maximum or greatly significant prevalence of negative over positive (actual or probable) consequences. I further claim that in relation to wrong action, one has to be more careful, as, while in the case of immoral action, it is clear this includes actions based on bad intentions causing a maximum or a highly significant prevalence of negative over positive consequences, wrong action refers to such actions which cause a (maximum to minimum) prevalence of negative over positive consequences and might be either based on ill or even good intentions. In the case of bad intentions that have lead to an actual action which caused some (not maximum) prevalence of negative over positive (actual or probable) consequences, it is clear that such wrong action should be avoided. It is not, however, quite clear in the case of action based on good intentions.

Much like Moore, ethics of social consequences deals with the issue of action assessment based on consequences. However, the question is what consequences should be taken into consideration when reaching an evaluative judgement; probable or actual? I claim that, based on probable consequences, it is almost identical with assessment based on intentions, which, however, does not treat the merits of the case, as it is obvious that probable positive consequences are based on good intentions while probable negative consequences are based on bad intentions. In probable consequences, even when considering external circumstances and influences, one expects them to work in a particular (positive or negative) way, which is also considered in one's reasoning and decision making. It can, therefore, be claimed that, to a certain extent, there is a direct proportional relationship between good intentions and probable positive consequences on the one hand, and bad intentions and probable negative consequences on the other. It is difficult to imagine such a situation when someone, based on good intentions, wished to directly cause a prevalence of negative over positive consequences and, contrariwise, based on bad intentions wished to achieve a prevalence of positive over negative consequences. Assessment based on probable consequences is only justified as informative or preliminary in a particular phase, most often before it has started. Later, when it has started, the degree of its justification gradually falls and when finished, assessment based on probable consequences loses any justness, as it might be rather inaccurate, misinterpretive, or even misleading compared to reality.

Moore came to the same conclusion earlier when he pointed out that actual consequences might not correspond with the agent's intentions and reasoning, as even with the best effort, any unforeseeable event can change them considerably. On the other hand, should one follow Moore and accept probable consequences as a criterion, only that would be assessed which the agent is able to pursue in the moment of decision making. What he considers difficult is that probable consequences are based on a belief which might not, in the end, prove to be true

(Moore, 2005, p. 99). He, nevertheless, claims that a moral agent should opt for such action he believes to be the best possible. However, “[...] the question whether an action is right or wrong *always* depends on its *actual* consequences. There seems no sufficient reason for holding either that it depends on the intrinsic nature of the action, or that it depends upon the intention, or even that it depends on the *probable* consequences” (Moore, 2005, p. 101).

In theory of moral/right action, I approach reasoning over the importance and role of probable consequences in a broader context. Basing the assessment of action on probable consequences is quite closely connected with the assessment of intentions; in the context of assessing actions as praiseworthy or blameworthy, the role of probable consequences is substantially different from that in assessing action as moral/right or immoral/wrong. When assessing action as praiseworthy or blameworthy, one also considers intentions, i.e. probable consequences which could be brought about onto the moral agent in the process of moral cognition, reasoning and making decisions about particular action. I believe that in this kind of assessment, moral and right action based on intentions, which is also praiseworthy, is different from right action which lacks a good intention and is neither praiseworthy nor blameworthy. On the other hand, if one claimed that immoral and wrong action based on a bad intention is blameworthy, wrong action based on right intentions is thought to be neither blameworthy nor praiseworthy. In this approach, assessments based on actual and probable consequences overlap.

I further claim that where actual and probable consequences are in agreement, one can talk of praiseworthy or blameworthy action, depending on the kind of agreement. Action accompanied by a congruence of good intentions, probable and actual positive consequences, is considered praiseworthy. However, if a congruence of bad intentions, probable and actual negative consequences is concerned, such action is considered blameworthy. If there is no congruence between probable and actual consequences, i.e. where actual consequences are in (maximum to minimum) conflict with probable consequences, such action is assessed as neither praiseworthy nor blameworthy. In the case of such a conflict, the action can either be right or wrong, while, in the former case, the outcome of bad intentions and probable negative consequences is actual positive consequences. In the latter case, the outcome of good intentions and probable positive consequences is actual negative consequences. Actual consequences play a decisive role in the assessment of action as moral or immoral, right or wrong; while when assessing action as praiseworthy or blameworthy, the decision depends on the degree to which actual and probable consequences are in agreement. What is decisive in defining obligatory actions are probable consequences, as obligatory actions are typical of not knowing what the actual consequences will be (Gluchman, 2001, p. 647).

Josef Kuře, however, points out that it could be problematic (not only in ethics of social consequences but in consequentialist ethical concepts in general) to assess all consequences, especially in such decisions and actions which concern large social groups, nations or countries. In his view, in the above cases it might be difficult to differentiate between positive and negative consequences, especially if the decisions and actions in question concern several social groups, nations, countries or cultures (Kuře, 2011, pp. 30–31). In the context of theory of moral/right action, Grzegorz Grzybek also poses the question how to predict the quality of one’s action with regard to future consequences. He agrees, to an extent, with me that this primarily depends on the intellectual and cognitive abilities of a moral agent to, in terms of his own capacity and ability, predict probable consequences of his actions (Grzybek, 2011, p. 188).

Moore, in his theory of right action, dealt with the study of the relationship between the obligation to pursue certain action and its usefulness resulting from producing the best possible consequences. In his opinion, it is often claimed that “[...] whatever is expedient is always also a duty, and that whatever is a duty is always also expedient. That is to say, it does

maintain that duty and expediency coincide; but it does not maintain that the meaning of the two words is the same” (Moore, 2005, p. 89). Moore counters objections which the claim that what is useful might not always be obligatory by pointing out that this is valid providing each and every best possible consequence is taken into consideration. Based on this he then presumes it is hard to imagine that to perform an obligation could be, in this sense, useless or that useful action could even be considered wrong.

Following Moore’s concept, I also explore what the criterion is of assessing usefulness or uselessness (or, possible, harmfulness) of action. In my opinion, the overall amount of positive or negative consequences does not refer to the actual degree of usefulness or uselessness of action. It might be a certain attribute or an auxiliary criterion when considering the degree of usefulness of the given action; however, the actual level to express the degree of an action’s usefulness is a prevalence of positive over negative consequences and the degree of uselessness of action is a prevalence of negative over positive consequences. One also has to consider the presence of the other consequences in action (besides those that prevail), in which case, according to him, it could be claimed that the extent to which positive consequences prevail over negative ones determines the level of usefulness of right action. Analogously, this also applies with regard to wrong action, i.e. the extent of prevalence of negative over positive consequences determines the level of uselessness of the action. The lesser the extent of positive consequences, the greater the need to point out that, in such action, its usefulness prevails over its uselessness (or harmfulness). Similarly, in wrong action, the lesser the extent of negative over positive consequences, the greater the need to point out that the level of harmfulness (or uselessness) of such action is not great. If a great prevalence is present, it suffices to assess such action as highly useful, or highly harmful (Gluchman, 2001, p. 653).

Conclusion

Moore considered determining the criterion for right and wrong action an essential aspect of ethics. In this context, he claimed that “almost everybody is agreed that certain kinds of actions ought, as a general rule, to be avoided; and that under certain circumstances, which constantly recur, it is, as a general rule, better to act in certain specified ways rather than in others. There is, moreover, a pretty general agreement, with regard to certain things which happen in the world, that it would be better if they never happened, or, at least, did not happen so often as they do: and with regard to others, that it would be better if they happened more often than they do” (Moore, 2005, p. 1).

I think that above mentioned Moore’s quotation is a very good contribution to using his theory of right action like challenge for its application in analysing the ethical problems. We also see that Moore’s theory has been very useful and productive starting point for establishing theory of moral/right action in ethics of social consequences. Due to his contribution it was possible to develop theory of moral/right action and use it more appropriate for analyses and evaluation of difficult ethical and moral issues in the contemporary humans’ individual and social lives. It is due to a fact that theory of moral/right action is focused on real moral problems of contemporary people. Ability of ethics of social consequences to analyse and respond to current ethical and moral challenges is also result of Moore’s contributions to its development. Really, I fully agree with Moore’s idea that in human history there were (and are) many tragic events and it could be much better if they never happened. I think that it is one of Moore’s greatest messages to humankind and it is necessary to keep it in mind.

Acknowledgement

This paper is a part of the research project – VEGA 1/0629/15 *Ethics of social consequences in context of contemporary ethical theories*.

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Moral and aesthetic considerations of humanity according to the Polish philosopher Mieczysław Wallis

Joanna Zegzula-Nowak

Abstract

In this article, the author presents an overview of the 20th century Polish humanist Mieczysław Wallis who searches for answers to the question of the essence of humanity. The philosopher saw it in human axiological activities building a world of specifically human creations thus giving Man a meaningful existence. An axiological perspective of human subjectivity – the search for the purpose and meaning of human existence in the implementation of aesthetical and ethical values can be seen as a methodological proposal worthy of deeper consideration which could facilitate solving modern ethical and bio-ethical problems.

Keywords: Mieczysław Wallis, Polish axiology in the 20th century; aesthetic and moral considerations of humanity, values

Introduction

Philosophers, scientists, and artists have, for centuries, been searching for answers relating to the essence of humanity which contributes to the greatness and exceptionality of the human being in the world around him. Each effort seemed partial and thus cannot be considered as final. In science, particularly anthropology, features related exclusively to humans were related to activities like laughing and crying, the ability to perceive oneself from the outside (awareness of one's mirror reflection), skills to use tools, abstract thinking, auto-reflection, or the creation of culture, art and science.

In philosophy, this problem is presented in an even more complex way, with a wide range of approaches and perspectives based on ontology and epistemology. When dealing with human attributes, various classifications were evoked: feelings and senses (Sophism), the mind (Socrates, Kant), the soul (Plato), self-awareness (Locke, H. Plessner), personal dignity (Mounier, personalism), freedom (Sartre, existentialism), respecting values (moral and aesthetic) or morality in general.

Mieczysław Wallis (1895–1975), a 20th century Polish humanist made an interesting, thought-provoking attempt at defining the essence of humanity. His concept founded several decades ago can be a guide for a modern person entangled in inter-personal relations and the axiological dilemmas related to them.

This thinker is a representative of the second generation of philosophers of the Lviv-Warsaw school, closely co-operating with and befriending many outstanding representatives of Polish science including Jan Łukasiewicz, Tadeusz Kotarbiński, Tadeusz Czeżowski, Maria and Stanisław Ossowski or Henryk Elzenberg. As an author, Wallis is mainly known for his studies in literature, aesthetics as well as art theory and its history. In my opinion, though, it is a too narrow and simplified image of his interests and scientific accomplishments. His numerous archived writings, unpublished so far, include notes, memories and letters indicate that his work was complex and rich. Among these items, a typescript entitled “Shortcuts” is worth particular attention as it contains Wallis' thoughts on philosophical anthropology, axiology and aesthetics. A picture of modern man is presented,

searching for answers to and remedies for eternal human dilemmas, pains and inner desires.¹ Wallis wrote about his inner intellectual desire to define reality as the complete embracement of reality, where a unique and complex world of human activities, aspirations and creations would play an important part. He described this in the following way: “For many years I have dreamt about building a great philosophical system. I have tried to define reality as the whole in which the human world constitutes a part. Reality being a number of layers where one follows out of the other” (Wallis, 1942–1944, p. 6). Mieczysław Wallis’ considerations are worthy of attention as they encourage reflexion if and by how much a man should transform and adjust reality around him for his own needs in agreement with his nature. Thus the most important and yet unresolved problem arises – what is the essence of human nature; can it be specified adequately and finally. Does it determine the relationship between man and world and if so, in what way? Nowadays these issues are still important, especially with the fast development of science and on-going bioethical disputes and in ethics itself. Maybe Wallis’ concept could be an effective trigger to work out axiological standards to solve them.

Overcoming human subjectivity based on nature versus a sense of life’s fragility and transience

In his notes, Wallis puts human beings at the centre of his considerations, striving to define human characteristics and the significance of human activity in the world. He described humans as complex beings emerging from nature but also transcending it by stopping their inborn instincts and thus, according to Wallis, initiating development of human self-awareness, self-knowledge, including an awareness of the irreversibility of death. He wrote: “Man separated himself from nature and lost his instinctive self-confidence characteristic of animals. Man is unhappier than the animal because he knows he will die. In spite of this no one wishes to be an animal. Knowledge is more important for us than happiness” (Wallis, 1942–1944, p. 161).

From Wallis’ notes it is clear that the issue of death accompanying humanity all the time and being a source of people’s everlasting fear unsettled him from his early childhood. He encountered death in his immediate environment and described it in the following way: “One day when I was little, I learnt that a child I knew had died. This information made a huge impression on me. Till then I thought that only old people die. I was far from old and I thought I would have an infinitely long life ahead of me. Now it turned out that not everybody lives until old age and one can die even as a child. Having realised this, I was devastated” (Wallis, 1942–1944, p. 27). Taking into account the importance of human self-awareness related to one’s finitude, as well as human irrational fear of an unavoidable death, Wallis formed his own concept of an attitude towards death which was worth adopting. The concept may be somewhat comforting to every person considering existential reflection related to the meaning and finitude of one’s existence. Undoubtedly, being aware of one’s finitude is a significant distinguishing factor of Man in the world. Each person has a time in their life when they realise with horror their transience and are faced with an absolute and irrevocable fact which end of life is and they feel afraid and frustrated. Wallis’ recommendation is that instead of worrying about an unavoidable fate it is better to concentrate on what fate brings us and live life to the full. Perhaps human transience is a kind of price for the opportunity of a ‘cognisant life’ and of learning about its riches as opposed to a long-term naked existence. Wallis teaches his contemporaries that life is not about living for ever but about “experiencing

¹ Archived material belonging to M Wallis (mostly handwritten) are currently in the combined libraries in the Department of Philosophy and Sociology at Warsaw University, the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Science Academy (PAN) and the Polish Philosophical Society in Warsaw (catalogue entry PTF 04-38) where they were deposited by his daughter-in-law Elżbieta Grabska-Wallis.

something special – life with all its various opportunities” (Wallis, 1942–1944, p. 55). Studies in thanatology which accompany analyses of the global human situation were present in Polish philosophy in the 20th century, namely in the works of many outstanding humanists, including Henryk Elzenberg, Wallis’ friend. Elzenberg emphasised the common belief that after death a person stops experiencing and receiving sensual impulses seems to be nonsensical rather than frightening. Such a post-death image, i.e. constant pressure of nothingness on human consciousness, is not only difficult to understand or imagine but also forms the basis of many aporias of epistemological and ontological nature. According to Elzenberg, death is complete loss of personality and consciousness, even of one’s own existence, a transition from being to nothingness, a sort of non-existence. Moreover, by proclaiming the undoubted primacy of life over death, Elzenberg emphasised at the same time that life must have a certain quality and value. Therefore, he argued that: *Blind attachment to life is a manifestation of misery* (Elzenberg, 2002, p. 49.)

Such an image of death may also be inspiring in relation to settling modern arguments in applied ethics and bioethics. It can be treated as a proposal of a specified methodological perspective which allows specific moral dilemmas to be settled such as in social life and public life. These include medical staff activities such as allocation of funds and medical services, post-operative care, the importance of alleviating pain, the issue of medical futility or palliative care in the light of quality and comfort of human life and society’s attitude to problems relating to quality of life with regards to prolonging and or shortening life – issues of euthanasia and abortion.

The world of creations which are specifically human: aesthetic and moral conditioning of humanity

Analysing the world of human creations, Wallis pointed out that even exclusively biological activities may gain a new context and meaning and assume sophisticated forms. For example, he wrote: “Man is the only being which invented making love without multiplying and multiplying without making love” (Wallis, 1942–1944, p. 161).

His further philosophical investigations led him to the conclusion that what distinguishes Man in the world is that Man is able to adopt a creative and interpretive approach towards his environment in which the key to finding its beauty and value lies in the surrounding world. Only Man can be sensitive to the aesthetic values of His surroundings. At this point it is worth mentioning that Wallis’ axiology represents a psychological version of relationism (Rosner, 1975, pp. 160–161; Skoczyński & Woleński, 2010, p. 440). He considered an aesthetic value to be the property of objects and does not exist independently of aesthetic objects but, as he stressed, is related to the subject’s specific emotions evoked by the object. According to him the determined value is a special relation between the subject and the object and at the same time is related to evoking in the recipient psychological responses (positive aesthetic emotions). This relation only occurs in the human world thus the value’s presence depends on human activity. The philosopher rejected objective and absolute axiological concepts stating that “the value is not [...] an independent being – real, ideal, intentional, nor something which exists in an everyday sense. It is valid and pertinent but it’s only the ability of certain objects to evoke in perceivers intrinsic emotions which we call ‘aesthetic experiences’. It is a property of these objects and does not exist outside them” (Wallis, 1968, p. 9).

In the light of his manuscripts, Wallis seems to be convinced that a person discovers his authenticity, accomplishment, inner rightness and integrity through an activity characteristic of humans. This includes openness to richness, the “colourfulness” of the world and intellectual – artistic and philosophical – creativity. This conviction is illustrated by one of Wallis’ memories: “I knew a painter who left a girl he had seduced, but was unable to paint

one brushstroke to please the public. I knew a historian who committed financial fraud, but was unable to change, to his advantage, a single comma in the text he quoted” (Wallis, 1942–1944, p. 166).

In his approach towards life the philosopher himself was extremely sensitive to all kinds of beauty and excellence in the worlds of human and natural creations. He could appreciate the visual similarities between art created by humans and nature. This approach is described in a piece entitled “The world’s splendour” in which he wrote: “Carrot leaves are like the intricate paper cut-outs of the Kurpie region. Wine moustaches – rococo decorative style. Fragrant pea flowers – delicate watercolours. Poppy plants – vases from the Sung dynasty[...] How can one not be overjoyed at the sight of such magnificence! However, most people pass this glamor [sic] without noticing it. What a rich variety of colours our forest mushrooms have: boleti, buttermilks, alders, chanterelles! The colours range from pearl, grey, burdock, through lemon to red-brown, russet, chocolate, and chestnut. What lovely warm, bright and golden tones our common onion has. A common wall of red and brown bricks, interwoven with grey grout, shines in the sun like a wonderful Persian carpet. The world plays with thousands of colours” (Wallis, 1942–1944, p. 174). He also noticed similarities between moral and aesthetic beauty. He searched for beauty in people and their characters. Towards others he presented values such as respect, kindness, modesty and charity. As his student, Wanda Nowakowska remembers: “Professor Mieczysław Wallis was extremely modest, well-mannered, full of calm, quiet, deeply reconciled and focused on important issues. He radiated these characteristics thus not only shaping the behaviour of his students but also creating a special atmosphere in the whole department. [...] At the same time he was also extremely kind, always ready to give advice and support” (Nowakowska, 2001, p. 16).

Wallis’ deliberations relating to human existence are undoubtedly related to the views of his contemporary Roman Ingarden. Ingarden was convinced that human beings excel when they go beyond the innate and are able to create their own axiological space. He wrote “Man transcends nature [...] and »with the power of his being« »creates the world which, although generally unchanged, takes on countless new historical faces«. [...] He then starts living beyond his strength and innate nature and creates for himself a new world, a new reality around himself and also inside himself. He creates a world of culture and nominates himself a humanity factor [...] He creates masterpieces which differ completely in essence from what can be found in the world as creations of Nature. The masterpieces are adjusted to the human spirit and represent his fulfilment” (Ingarden, 1987, pp. 13, 15). Moreover, Ingarden was convinced that axiological activity – a burden of overcoming his own biological being as a source of finding the meaning of his fate constitutes human greatness and thus becomes his life’s obligation. His conclusion was as follows: “Human nature is about the constant effort to exceed the limits of animalism which exists in humans with humanity rising above it and man’s role as the creator of values. Without this mission and effort to outgrow himself man sinks helplessly into pure animalism which is his death” (Wallis, 1942–1944, p. 161).

Thus Ingarden stressed, even more than Wallis, that axiological activity both specifically human and free from any biological pressure is an imperative for human action which makes existence worthwhile and meaningful. Similarly, Elzenberg concluded that culture is “a process of transforming man, and consequently his world, towards bigger values” (Elzenberg 2002, p. 245). Thus it is “the warrant, the imperative, the purpose and the calling of man, the dome beyond whose pillars we should see ourselves and others, our lives and our actions” (Elzenberg, 1966b, p. 152).

Likewise, Wallis thought that activities exceeding the biological nature and routine of everyday life, requiring artistic effort to be an obligation of each man. He was convinced that these specific signs of human activity which are often specified as purely conventional, being

strongly in contradiction to human biological conditioning constitute in fact the greatness of existence and human accomplishment in the world. He perversely concluded for example: "Religious or moral prohibitions resulting in suppression and sublimation, which »denigrate« man, were often an incentive in the rising of great cultures" (Wallis, 1942–1944, p. 161). Thus, every activity, primarily axiological, against one controlled instinctively, allows man to transcend his biological, prosaic being. In this light, he wrote, for example, of human experience in the field of art: "Any profound aesthetic experience is a marvel, stepping out of oneself, an »ecstasy«" (Wallis, 1942–1944, p. 174).

Wallis was upset that many people deprive themselves of these kinds of feelings, do not appreciate the singularity of their own being and do not implement it, living for the moment without inner aspirations, and abandon metaphysical concerns which are important for humanity. He wrote: "Man as an *animal methaphysicum*? The majority of people live from day by day, absorbed with making a living, void of any metaphysical concerns" (Wallis, 1942–1944, p. 161). This pessimistic diagnosis was supplemented with the comments of his contemporaries. He wrote: "Most people seem more attractive from a distance. When I was young, I thought that people and institutions are like Renaissance palaces, whose magnificent facades are the promises of equally wonderful interiors. Later, I found out that most of them are rather like those baroque churches, where beyond the impressive façade there is a meager interior. For many people, the circle of interests coincides with the circle of their interests" (Wallis, 1942–1944, p. 161). He, maybe, could see the reasons for such a situation not only in the insufficiencies of human nature and insensitivity to values, but also in the very world of axiological activities and creations. He realised that each human activity which is not determined by his own nature but aimed at "valuing" his world and inner being requires effort, hardship, and work and at times the results may be unsatisfactory, insufficient or even futile. He was convinced that perfectionist aspirations (a willingness to follow a chosen moral ideal) are unique in nature and extremely valuable for the person who has such goals, which often tends to be unattainable and a source of a lack of fulfilment and internal insufficiency. Wallis argued as follows: "The higher the standard a person sets himself, the more painful the feeling of discrepancy between an ideal and achievement. A person of strong moral character constantly feels how imperfect he is, a saint – his sinfulness" (Wallis, 1942–1944, p. 163). It appears that the philosopher did not seem to share the common held view among ethical representatives associated with perfectionism that an aspiration to perfection itself may be a sufficient target and an essence of moral activities, developing and enriching the inner person. In his opinion, human nature simply rebels against a vision of unattainable aim. Therefore, he thought that each scientist who is, with his work, on intimate terms with axiological issues should have an obligation or even a mission to draw other people's attention to the values and beauty of the world. Discovering these may not be natural for some people. However, he believed that each person should have an opportunity to be intimate with the world of axiological creations as they are not exclusively for the chosen ones i.e. experts and art connoisseurs or morality theoreticians. As one of his students, Jan Białostocki wrote: "Wallis was convinced that the values he so admired can and should be available to everyone" (Białostocki, 1983, p. 336). Realising that people can be indifferent to the values of the world, Wallis thought that they should be taught about beauty and the good which the world offers them such as they can perceive and appreciate it. He argued as follows: "Let us endeavour for as many people as possible to notice beauty, character or expression both in art masterpieces which are available to them and also in the most common things in their environment" (Wallis, 1968, p. 25).

Conclusion

In his search for human specifics, Wallis depicted people in unusually many perspectives – as a being which auto-creates itself and searches (and perhaps even finds) its fullness in areas like art, aesthetics, philosophy and morality. Throughout his life he showed the importance and relevance of his own convictions. He set an example with his life as a person who deeply appreciated inner qualities and manifestations of human activities in aesthetics, art and ethics. Thus, remembering him after his death, Białostocki describes him as a “person [...] of exceptional kindness, honourable, extremely honest, [...] deeply and totally devoted to the values he believed in” (Białostocki, 1983, p. 339).

From a research perspective presented by a philosopher from Lodz in Poland, the problem of specifying the peculiarity of humanity and displaying fully the greatness of human beings is based on the acknowledgement of humans as beings with an open, creative and auto-creative attitude towards themselves and their surrounding world.

The presented perspective view of human existence is so much more important and attractive since it indicates to modern man that his creative attitude may be interpreted not only as a mere expression of human creativity, imagination and mastery, but also as an expression of his moral inclination and ability to interpret the surrounding world. It may constitute the most important attribute of human existence, indicating the deepest inner human need to be rooted and to function in a world he co-creates putting it in a normative and axiological perspective, while and at the same time being fully responsible for it.

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Philosophy as the Wisdom of Love

Predrag Cicovacki

Abstract

The author argues that love should play a central role in philosophy (and ethics). In the past, philosophical practice has been too narrowly defined by theory and explanation. Although unquestionably important, they do not belong to the very core of our philosophizing. Philosophy is primarily a way of life, centered on the soul and the development of our humanity – in its most diverse aspects and to its utmost potential. For such a life to be possible, love must play a central role in philosophy and philosophy should be understood not in the traditional sense as “the love of wisdom,” but in a new way – as the wisdom of love.

Keywords: ethics of aspiration, biophilia, ethics, soul, Kant, love, wisdom

I

Why does love play such a peripheral, virtually irrelevant, role in philosophy? Is it because of the way we practice philosophy? Or because of how we understand love?

The original meaning of the word philosophy is “love of wisdom.” The way philosophy has been practiced for centuries hardly leaves any room for wisdom. And if philosophy is not about wisdom, love seems to have no role to play in it either.

Wisdom is concerned with a general understanding of what it means to be a human being and live like a human being. Against Aristotle’s overly intellectualistic interpretation of wisdom, which distances it from the world of lived experience, I interpret wisdom as having to do with our fundamental moral commitment. As I have argued elsewhere, “wisdom is a primal moral disposition, a commitment of a person to the richness of life in general, including his [or her] life and the lives of others” (Cicovacki, 2014, p. 141). If wisdom were of crucial importance, then philosophical anthropology would have been the central philosophical discipline. Yet a proper philosophical anthropology, that is, philosophical anthropology as a normative discipline, has not yet been developed (Cicovacki, 1997). Instead, men are studied as if they were animals.

While there were many philosophers who have contributed some insights toward the establishment of philosophical anthropology as a philosophical discipline, the most significant contribution has arguably been made by Immanuel Kant. Like no other philosopher, he insists that the question: ‘What is man?’ is the ultimate question of philosophy. He furthermore states that the other three central philosophical questions: ‘What can I know?’ ‘What ought I to do?’ and ‘What may I hope?’ all reduce to the question: What is man? This question is ultimate not because it should lead us to some definitive theoretical insight, but because it has to make us realize whom we are and open our vision for what we could, and perhaps should, become. Kant thus implies that philosophy has to involve thought and theory, but that it should not be limited to them. Philosophy must include an active attempt to realize the envisioned ideals of humanity; it must integrate values, thoughts, and action. As Kant puts it, a genuine philosopher is “the teacher of wisdom through doctrine *and* example” (Kant, 1992, p. 537).

It is significant to notice, however, that this “ultimate” question is raised by Kant only in his lectures on logic and never in any of his three *Critiques*. It is also important to recall that, despite being a prolific writer, nowhere does Kant offer his answer to what he pronounces to be the

ultimate question of philosophy. Most important of all, like all modern and post-modern philosophy, Kant's philosophy hardly provides any sufficient ground for a comprehensive understanding of the nature of humanity; neither does he explain how wisdom should order a human life. The reason why this is the case is indicative of the peripheral role of love in philosophy.

Kant asks: What is man? Posing the question in this way reveals a few important points. In Kant's opus, and in Western philosophy in general, the question of man is raised within the framework of a body-soul dualism. For Kant, this is not just a narrow question of the relationship of an individual body to an individual soul. When considered at the most general level, the world has been divided into the world's body and the world's soul. The world's body is the visible and tangible stuff "out there", Descartes' "*res extensa*" (=extended thing). The world's soul is composed of all these immaterial forces and divine energies that move invisibly, "in the wind" as it were. The words for wind, soul, and breath co-mingle in virtually every Indo-European language, which perhaps only adds to our confusion as to what that world's soul really is. Is the soul a thing? Since we think in terms of nouns, we tend to conceive of it as a thing. Yet it is more like a non thing. Instead of treating it like Locke's "*tabula rasa*" (=blank slate), we can rather designate the mystery of the invisible soul-force by the Greek word for wind and breath: "*pneuma*"; even though it is also a noun, *pneuma* suggests a movement and a verb, rather than something static and unchanging, which we usually associate with nouns and things (Young, 1992).

For the last four centuries, we have followed the lead of science in trying to understand the world (another noun word) and the things of which it is composed. In the words of the poet William Blake, our entire culture has fallen into "a single vision and Newton's sleep". Science works because the things we dissect are visibly "out there", to confirm or falsify our thoughts about them. Science also works because it is based on thoughts and hard evidence, rather than on emotions, intuitions, or insights. It works because it can approach things from the outside and penetrate into their internal structure.

By its very nature, the soul poses a different problem. It seems hard or impossible to penetrate it from the outside, at least insofar as we want to rely on a science-like approach. Both rational thoughts and scientific experiments seem to bounce off the soul, without grasping what it is. Yet the internal feelings, intuitions, or insights on which we depend for an inside-out realization seem unreliable when brought before the bar of science. We are thus left without knowledge of the soul, at least not in the same way that we can have knowledge of the body.

There seem to be only two ways of solving this impasse. We can either deny the existence of the soul altogether, or we can turn it into a thing, and, with renewed vigor, approach it the same way we analyze other things belonging to the world's body. The first tactic does not work, because despite all efforts to get rid of the soul, it resurfaces again not only in religion but also in arts and individual experiences. The second approach has become dominant in modern philosophy. The father of modern philosophy, Descartes, did not say: "I have a soul, therefore I am," nor "I care for my soul, therefore I am", but "I think, therefore I am" and what I think about and what I am is a "*res cogitans*" (=a thinking thing), the thing we now call the mind. The thing called the mind can be analyzed (almost, not entirely) in the way in which material things "out there" can be dissected: from outside-in, without emotions, in terms of quantifiable and objectively observable properties (of the brain). The world's soul thereby becomes a part of the world's body, just as an individual soul can be regarded as a part of an individual body. Bodies have no need for wisdom; they need to be pushed around, manipulated, and controlled. Their

relationship is causal and mechanical, not teleological and intentional. Since love does not lead to control and domination, and since it is not an instrument of knowledge – it even appears to stand in the way of objective knowledge – love disappears from modern philosophy. It simply has no role to play in our attempts to understand the world's body as a whole, nor does it seem to be able to contribute anything to our philosophical attempts to answer the question: What is man?

II

There is still a window of opportunity open, and this is why we must look to ethics. As a philosophical discipline, ethics deals with the behavior and attitudes of human beings toward themselves, and toward each other. Unquestionably, love is important in understanding how we relate to ourselves and to each other. Should not, then, love play a prominent role in ethics?

The answer is: even if it should, it does not. Modern ethics is a morality of conduct. Its two most popular representatives, utilitarianism and consequentialism, do not exclude love from their considerations, but love plays no significant role in them. These two (closely related, although not identical) theoretical approaches to ethics emphasize usefulness and consequences. Insofar as love can be useful, or lead to beneficial results, it can contribute to the realization of something good. But this contribution is accidental. Love can just as well lead toward harmful relationships, or result in suffering, jealousy, and other undesirable outcomes.

Kant attempts to build up an ethical theory on benevolent intentions and moral grounds alone (Kant, 1993). Yet insofar as his ethical system is developed as a deontological ethics and focuses on duties, obligations, the moral law and the categorical imperative, it precludes any significant role of love. Love can never be a duty, nor can it be commanded. Insofar as love is understood as an emotion, it is one of the inclinations Kant wants to exclude from his ethics. He wants ethics to be rationally founded and resemble mathematics as much as possible (Kant, 2002).

Despite such tendencies that preclude the role of love, Kant begins his ethical theory with the claim that good will is the only unconditionally good thing in the world (Kant, 1993). Good will is understood in terms of good intentions, and is akin to love, broadly understood. Thus the door for the role of love is not entirely closed. The language of good will is the language of benevolence, of care for our own affairs and the affairs of others. Will – and good will even more so than will in general – directs us toward what we earlier called the world's soul, and the soul is essentially dealing with movement, with desire, with intention. Yet Kant does not want it that way. He ties the will to reason – to practical reason – and makes it something akin to the intelligence used in our dealings with the world's body (Kant, 1993; 2002). Although Kant claims the supremacy of practical over theoretical reason, his ethics strays too far from the loving care and concerns of one human being for another (Cicovacki, 1997).

Kant is so much under the influence of Newton's establishment of the laws of nature that he tries, analogously, to establish laws of morality. Even when parallelism is not understood in such unadulterated terms, the modern ethics of conduct is conceived of in terms of fundamental principles and rules. Kantian ethics is further understood in terms of the gap between "is" and "ought", and in terms of actions that can be determined as right or wrong.

Hannah Arendt contributes significantly to our realization that this ethical orientation is misguided. As a response to the trial of Adolf Eichmann with regard to his role in the Holocaust, Arendt coined the phrase: "banality of evil" (Arendt, 2006). It was not the case that Eichmann did not understand the ethical rules and principles (including Kant's categorical imperative) nor, more importantly, that he acted from malevolence (the ill will). It is rather that Eichmann was a

thoughtless bureaucrat, someone who functioned as a cog in a powerful machine and simply followed orders from anyone above him in the hierarchy.

Arendt's account of evil, and its implication for a proper grasp of love, is supplemented by Tzvetan Todorov and Erich Fromm (Todorov, 1996; Fromm, 1992). By analyzing moral life in the German WWII concentration camps, Todorov first comes to the conclusion that the Holocaust itself was a manifestation of two serious problems of the contemporary world: depersonalization and fragmentation. By focusing almost exclusively on the world's body, we turn the whole world into something soul-less, valueless, and meaningless. The next step, which Todorov believes occurred in the twentieth century, is the transformation of that soul-less, valueless, and meaningless creature into an internally divided being. Just as there is a split between the body and the soul, we also notice a further fragmentation of human mental capacities. One and the same person can be indifferent to the murder of the thousands of innocent inmates and yet be touched to tears by a piece of music, or a beautiful landscape. In such fragmented personalities, genocide is made bearable because victims are not thought of as human beings but as things. They are depersonalized and treated as statistical units and numbers, bodies and things. When this is the case, what matters is whether the quota of these "things" sent daily into gas chambers satisfies the orders given by superiors, and neither the experiences of these people in the chambers nor the reasons why are they sent there in the first place.

In opposition to the ("masculine and rational") ethics of the principles, followed by the organizers, administrators, and guards of the concentrations camps, Todorov recognizes a different ("feminine and sentimental") kind of ethics among the inmates, the ethics of "sympathy". This ethical attitude focuses on care and sensitivity, which leads us back not only to Kant's good will, but also to love in a broad sense.

In an attempt to understand how the Holocaust was possible, Fromm coined a distinction between "*necrophilia*" and "*biophilia*". The depersonalization that Todorov observed in the concentration camp has become a prevailing fact of life in our civilization, although in less drastic and sometimes less obvious forms. Life is always dynamic, like the "windy soul of the world"; it always brings changes and transformations. Dead things are static, unemotional, and indifferent. We turn living beings into dead things, or treat them as such, because they are then easier to manipulate and control.

Fromm dissociates biophilia from the controlling and hoarding tendencies of modern man and our obsession with the sacredness of material goods. He relates biophilia to a productive orientation of character. This creative orientation does not manifest itself in the fabrication of new things but in loving interaction with others, with a sense of brotherhood with everything alive. For Fromm, love of life is the foundation of all positive values. The person who loves life is attracted by the process of growth in all spheres of life. Such a person prefers to construct rather than retain. A biophile wants to mold and influence by love, reason, and personal example; s/he will not act not by force, neither by mutilating bodies and poisoning souls, nor by the bureaucratic manner of administering people as if they are things.

Although Fromm does not say so the banality of evil that Arendt talks about is the banality not only of thoughtlessness, but of indifference. Put differently, just as the opposite of goodness need not be malevolence, the opposite of love need not be hatred. Indifference can be far more deadly for love than hatred – a lack of concern and interest, insensibility and apathy. It is possible for people not to violate any moral law, it is possible for them not to entertain any malevolent intention, but yet be evil, just as they may be spiritually dead. This is why the dominant ethics of principles needs to be redirected, and in this lies a possibility of opening the

door for love to play a significant role in ethics and in our understanding of what it means to live like a dignified human being. But in which direction should we, then, turn our philosophical ethics?

I believe that the past holds the key for an understanding of who we are: of what our nature is and how we should live and when we look at the past, we always return to the two sources that shape us culturally: Christianity and Ancient Greece. In the Christian tradition we find compassion for the suffering of our neighbors as the foundation of our ethical behavior. Compassion by itself is not sufficient to cover the whole range of ethical behavior. But in this tradition we also find the love of God, insofar as God is understood as the highest value and outside of the purely human framework, which thereby gives us a measuring stick for who we are – a point of reference and a sense of identity.

In the Greek tradition the emphasis was on *eros*, the predecessor of what we now oversimplify and understand in terms of romantic love. We also recognize there the focus on virtue and on becoming as virtuous as one can be – as excellent as we can be as human beings. Alasdair MacIntyre revives our interest in this tradition by calling it the “ethics of virtue” (MacIntyre, 1984). Unfortunately, his focus on virtue unnecessarily narrows that which the Greek tradition was about. I find more congenial an interpretation of this tradition in terms of what Richard Taylor calls the “ethics of aspiration” (which also squares well with Fromm’s *biophilia*). This ethics of aspiration can serve as our umbrella concept for understanding not only of how love can play a role in philosophy, but – more importantly – how it can lead us to a fuller understanding of how to live as human beings (Taylor, 1970).

III

Love is an enormously complex phenomenon. The ancient Greek tradition distinguishes between *eros*, *storge* (familial-type love), *xenia* (stranger love), *philia* (communal and friendship based love), and *agape* (self-sacrificial and even unconditional love). The Christian tradition emphasizes love of one’s neighbor (merciful love), but does not neglect the love of oneself (“Love thy neighbor as you love thyself!”) and the love of God. More modern authors speak about romantic love, love between parent and child, brotherly love, erotic love, self-love, love of God, and love of the world. What could these various manifestations of love have in common?

We can come closer to answering this question if we first remove some of the typical misunderstandings with regard to love. Perhaps the most damaging of them is that love is an irrational, irresistible passion; we neither cannot control whether or not we feel it, nor say how long and with what intensity it may last. Especially in its erotic-romantic versions, this irrational passion has also been tied to finding the right object of love and falling in love. Freud goes even further, by trying to “naturalize” love and reduce it to sexual instinct and desire for sexual satisfaction. He contrasts love as a biological-instinctual drive with the civilizational drive that wants to control, repress, and sublimate this libidinal energy for the sake of social order and stability.

Although Freud is wrong in taking libidinal energy as the main motivator behind all we do, he is right to point out that love is not a thing. We use a noun to talk about it, but there is nothing static and thing-like about love; love is not a piece of the furniture of the world’s body. Due to its energy-like and drive-like quality, many who criticize Freud talk about love in terms of action; hence they speak about benevolent action, or, more generally, use a verb to express the presence of love (e.g., I love you). This approach to love is still misleading. Love is not an action of any specific, or even a specifiable kind. Running is an action and it is clear what it involves. Helping

others, say by bringing them food or medication, is also an action, but it can be done without love.

What we have not sufficiently understood so far is that love concerns far less the “who” and the “what” than the “how”. Put differently, love is better captured as an adverb than as a noun or a verb. We can come far closer to the essence of love when we emphasize not a particular person and a particular action, but a way of acting: whatever we do, we can do lovingly. Love essentially deals with how we relate; to ourselves, other people, and the world as a whole.

The second important point is that love need not be irrational at all. Insofar as it deals with the “how”, love is an attitude and an aspiration, which we can consciously and systematically develop and practice. Fromm certainly makes a good point when he speaks about “the art of loving”, and then claims that such an art relies on care, responsibility, respect, and knowledge. He furthermore correctly emphasizes that the mastery of this (and any other) art requires discipline, concentration, patience, and making the mastery of this art our supreme concern. There is no direct way of learning the art of loving, just as there is no direct way of becoming happy; it is something that can be mastered and practiced indirectly. We become the practitioners and masters of this art by developing a loving personality and building a productive and creative character (Fromm, 1956).

We can now reaffirm that love has far more to do with the soul than with the body. Since we do not know how to deal with the ambiguities of the soul – that of the world as well as our own – it is not unexpected that we have been so confused about the nature of love, nor is it surprising that love has played such a negligible role in modern and post-modern philosophy. Even if we keep deceiving ourselves that we can reduce the mind’s thinking to the world’s body, it is more difficult to sustain a similar illusion with regard to love. However popular and widely admired, Freud’s attempt to reduce love to sex is a clear failure. Despite Freud, there is so little of love that reduces to sex, just as there is so much about love that has nothing whatsoever to do with sex.

IV

If love is a matter of the soul and if loving is an art that has to be mastered and practiced, what is the relevance of love for ethics?

If love is a matter of the soul, it has to deal with the movement which we call will, or desire, or intention. As such, love must be relevant for any ethical theory that recognizes the core of ethical values in the will, motivation, or intention. This, of course, would eliminate all versions of utilitarianism and consequentialism, but this result need not worry us too much. Nicolai Hartmann argues that, strictly speaking, utilitarianism and consequentialism are not ethical theories. More precisely, if an ethical theory is possibly only under the condition that there is an absolute or intrinsic good, then utilitarianism and consequentialism are not ethical theories because they deny the existence of such a good. Utility and good consequences inevitably deal with relative good. What is useful is useful for one purpose but not for another. Good consequences are good with regard to one expected outcome but not for another (Hartmann, 2002).

The main reason for the wide acceptance of utilitarianism and consequentialism is not in their inherent ethical merits. It is rather in their capturing what Max Weber so masterfully exposed in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*: the Calvinist view that redirects Christians from piety and compassion toward hard work and service that lead to tangible outcomes (Weber, 2010). Modern Western civilization is underwritten by the belief that a lifetime of labor and

service is proof of an individual's goodness and worth and, vice versa, all tendencies toward inaction, daydreaming, or sentimental attachments are seized upon as outward signs of some inner moral flaw. Utilitarianism and consequentialism are not ethical theories but objective standards for practicality and efficiency.

Love does not have much to do with measured practicality and efficiency; considered in those terms, love is a useless value. Yet, as Hartmann points out, it may be that precisely these useless values, and not practicality and efficiency that confer meaning to our lives (Hartmann, 2003). He furthermore insists that the central value of love inheres in its disposition, in its intention. By its nature, love is affirmation, good will, devotion, and constructive tendency, just as hatred is denial, overthrow, and annihilation. Love involves kindness and devotion, placed in the service of what we love. Understood in this way, love's ethical relevance becomes more apparent. Firstly, by loving something we display its value; what we love we value in a sense of treating it as something special, and in extreme cases as something sacred. Secondly, if loving itself is a genuine good, then its value is not instrumental and relative. The loving attitude is an unconditional and absolute good. An ethical theory that is based on motivations and intentions should place love at its very core. The reason why this does not happen in Kantianism is because it shifts from good will to duties, from benevolence to justice. (Although it would be ideal to bring them together, justice need not be loving and nor must love be just). Once developed, an ethics of aspiration will have love as its central and highest good.

Let us try to be more precise. Following Dietrich von Hilderbrand, we can divide various human motivations into *intentio benevolentiae* and *intentio unionis*: benevolent intentions and intentions striving toward unity (von Hilderbrand, 2009). These two kinds of intentions do not exclude each other, but they are separable. In some forms of love: self-love, brotherly love, love among friends, love of strangers, and love between parent and child, we can see that *intentio benevolentiae* is clearly of central significance. (Such benevolence may be directed toward the self-perfecting, or toward the service of others, but, although moving in opposite directions, these two can be complementary.) Of further importance is the realization that there are also forms of love – personal love, love of the world, and love of God – where *intentio unionis* is of more direct importance.

Are only forms of love based on benevolent intentions relevant for ethics, or could forms of love based on the intention of striving toward unity be of significance as well? That depends on our moral categories. Clearly, the indispensable moral concepts are those of good and evil but are they the only relevant ones?

In analogy with Kant's treatment of aesthetic phenomena, where he distinguishes between aesthetically beautiful and aesthetically sublime, we can introduce a distinction between what is morally good and what is morally sublime. In that case, the forms of love dealing with *intentio benevolentiae* would fall into the category of the morally good, while forms of love based on *intentio unionis* would belong to the category of the morally sublime. To see whether this suggestion is of any value, we should first clarify the category of the sublime.

"Sublime" refers to something great or superior. In such types of experience we feel overwhelmed by the greatness or superiority of what we observe. The purest forms of sublime can be recognized in the realms of religion and myth, but also in the realms of nature and art. We do not have a specific physical sense of the manifestations of the sublime. Rather, the sublime is something grasped by the soul. We even need to establish a certain distance from the sensually given to experience something as sublime. Moreover, we need a distance from our ego: the less this type of experience is about myself, the more easily I can experience the sublime (Hartmann,

2014).

Traditionally speaking, the concept of moral superiority is invoked in the contexts of extraordinary heroism (as presented in heroic epics), or of enormous suffering (as presented in great tragedies). We are more interested here in the possibility of some manifestations of love falling into the category of the morally sublime. I will leave it for another occasion to discuss the love of God, which shifts toward the religious realm, and will instead consider the cases of personal love and love of the world.

By personal love I mean an intense, prolonged, and unlimited love of one person for the unique personality of another. Unlike justice, which connects the surface aspect of one personality to the surface of another, and unlike brotherly love, which connects one's general humanity to the humanity of others, personal love unites the innermost depth of one human being with the innermost depth of another. Personal love is a complete giving of oneself to a relationship with another person: one soul surrenders to another and unites with it. Personal love is an uncalculated giving of oneself without yet losing oneself in this relationship. Hartmann believes that personal love is the greatest moral value and the ultimate source of life's meaning. In his words: personal love "gives an ultimate meaning to life; it is already fulfillment in germ, an uttermost value of selfhood, a bestowal of import upon human existence – useless, like every genuine self-subsistent value, but a splendor shed upon our path" (Hartmann, 2003, p. 381).

Another dimension of love of superior moral value – even more neglected by philosophers and Western civilization as a whole – is love of the world. For centuries we have been treating the world with neglect, even contempt. We behave as if the world exists to serve our purpose, as if it can only have an instrumental value. Love of the world implies a radically different attitude. As Albert Schweitzer argues, love should be understood and displayed as reverence for life – for all living beings, including animals and plants. Ethics would then consist in the affirmation of all life and our devotion to it. More precisely, ethics would consist in my experiencing "the compulsion to show to all will to live the same reverence as I do to my own. There we have given us that basic principle of the moral, which is a necessity of thought. It is good to maintain and encourage life; it is bad to destroy life or to obstruct it" (Schweitzer, 1987, pp. 137–138).

As Schweitzer shows, love in general means a refusal to control, manipulate, or exploit. However, love of the world means the acceptance and the affirmation of *all* reality, not just of all living beings; it means surrender that leads to a sense of unity with the world as a whole, to peace of mind and serenity. The greatest champion of the acceptance of the world and serenity is Lao-tse, who insists that the invisible flow of energy ("*tao*") is the root that gives birth to both the visible and the invisible aspects of the world, to the profane and the sacred. According to this Chinese sage, our task is to learn not to block that flow of energy but to put ourselves in harmony with it, to accept the world and to love it for what it is. Serenity within and peace with the rest of the world is the ultimate form of love and the final wisdom of life. They may be the highest accomplishments of which human beings are capable.

V

By its nature, love is never a mere sentimental kindness; nor is it about what is right and what is wrong. Understood in terms of moral sublimity, love takes us even further outside the usual ethical categories. Love is a metaphysical and religious force that leads us toward philosophical anthropology and comprehensive metaphysics and philosophy of religion. Better yet, if we want to avoid these abstract phrases, we can say that love understood in this way leads us toward a philosophy of humanity, a philosophy of what it means to be a human being, to live like a human

being, and affirm our human place and role in the world as a whole. Love is so crucial because it leads us back to recognize the cultivation of the soul as the centerpiece of our humanity. Love helps us recover what is best in us, the center of our humanity, and it then stimulates us to act from this very center. This acting is not labor, nor is it valuable because it leads to useful results and beneficial consequences. Love is a useless value that bestows meaning on life: the more capable we are of loving and surrendering ourselves, the more meaningful our lives becomes. This is why we should not say: “I think, therefore I am”, but: “I love, therefore I am”. And what I am as a loving being is a developed and mature human being, in the fullest sense of that phrase.

If these reflections are accurate, they suggest a different conception of philosophy as well. In the past, we have been too narrowly focused on theory and explanation as defining our philosophical practice. Although they are unquestionably important, they belong neither to the very core of our philosophizing, nor to the very core of our humanity, which Socrates so aptly captured in the words: “Care for your soul!”

The previous reflections indicate the primacy of the practical over the theoretical; not of practical reason over theoretical reason, as Kant would have it, but of the practical realm, in general, over the theoretical realm. Primarily, philosophy is a way of life. It is a way of life centered on the soul, around caring for the soul and developing our humanity – in its most diverse aspects and to its utmost potential. For the sake of our preservation and, even more, for the sake of our sanity, we need to find a way to overcome the modern fragmentation of personality and the depersonalization of the world. The body and the soul must reunite, and our attitude toward other human beings and the world as a whole must be opposite from our customary indifference. We have to learn how to love and how to make the pursuit of the art of loving the sovereign concern of our lives. This is not a moral law nor a categorical imperative, but an aspiration to the realization of which we should dedicate ourselves.

Accordingly, philosophy has to be practiced from inside-out, rather than from some imaginary value-neutral and cognitively detached point of view, that should then miraculously lead to our proper understanding of our place and role in reality. Philosophy should start with what is the most intimate to us, with good will. It should be built on what makes us alive, on what makes us *most* alive and *most* human, and that is love. In pursuit of love, in pursuit of benevolence and unity, we display our humanity and develop it toward the realization of our highest potential.

Philosophy began as a love of wisdom. In the course of its development, it has lost track of both love and wisdom. The time has come to understand philosophy in a new way – as the wisdom of love. The best wisdom we have been able to achieve so far is the understanding that love makes us as humane as we can be. Our ultimate aspiration in life must be to become not only thoughtful but also loving human beings.

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On the value of human life

Emil Višňovský

Abstract

The author reflects on the issue of the value of human life in the contexts of current “posthuman” era. There is a host of evidence that the value of human for human beings themselves has been radically reduced or ignored, or replaced by other non-human values, and even neglected. The axiological crisis of humanity, as envisioned by Nietzsche, has become the existential and moral crisis of humanity today. No matter how contemporary technological culture challenges the traditional values, the ancient questions of “how to live?”, “what makes us happy?”, and “what makes life significant?” are still here with us and provide even greater challenges to every individual. The author points to pluralist ways of how to deal with these questions including the “stoic pragmatism” among them.

Keywords: human life, value, Konrad Liessmann, Bernard Stiegler, learning to live, stoic pragmatism

1

Let me begin trivially: “The most valuable thing we have is our life”. Though it is vulnerable and fragile, unique and limited by its possibilities; nonetheless, it is the only one and ultimate. One does not have to be a philosopher to know that. And in case one is not a philosopher, one does not care about one's life, or the lives of others, “theoretically” because one just wants to live and “enjoy” one's life as fully as possible. One knows, or at least feels, that one has a natural “will to live” in the sense of Schopenhauer or Nietzsche, or Bergson's metaphysical *élan vital* or Teilhard's cosmic “will to live” for that matter; the power which is not only analogous to animal instincts of self-preservation, but which even transcends it considerably. And if one is lucky enough to succeed, the questions such as “How to live?” and “How ought one live?” may be put aside. Generally, one lives the way one is used to living and has learned to live when brought up within the family or by our surrounding environment (schooling included).

In spite of this, interest in the lives of others, often even strangers is what every art is based on and what “feeds” almost all media programmes: “celebrity” rumors; news of all kinds of human tragedies; the intense following of the fates of soap opera stars – these all attract us irresistibly and can “prove” that Alexander Pope was right as he wrote that “The proper study of mankind is man” (Pope, 2006, p. 281). Thus, interest in how people live – again, mostly the lives of others, how they thrive (or not), belongs to our spontaneity either because we want to learn from the lives of others, or we want to “judge” them, or we care about them because of them or because of ourselves. However, many times it is because we try to cover the escape from our own life via our interest – or even “worry” – in the lives of others...

By any means, life is not only the most valuable thing we have, but the most interesting, attractive, exciting thing no matter if in the form of comedy, or tragedy. Understanding and presentation of human fortunes and their troubles is an inherent substance of all areas of humanities, which nowadays suffer unprecedented traumas. “Depletion of the sense” that philosophers wrote about in the last century is a poor expression. Contemporary humans have begun a journey towards “post-humanism”, eventually “trans-humanism”, which considers technology as a determining tool for solving all problems of (human) life. The question what life means for a human (and what it means to be a human – moreover an “alive human”), is almost

uninteresting because, due to biotechnologies, we are able to master and transfer the phenomena of life itself in a way that we seem to be soon capable of deciding about its quality, length, form and character. Life as a phenomenon, including human life, is not the most valuable thing anymore, because it is becoming the subject of almost ordinary manipulation within the visions of trans-humanists insomuch that our common sense, enhanced by traditional and modern forms of humanism, loses its capacity to absorb that at all.

Thus the question of the value of human life invokes serious concerns today. Our ability to manipulate the structure of living material at nano-level does not necessarily show that we are aware of this value. In fact, the contrary seems to be the case. We are faced with the question what a living human means to another living human on an everyday basis not just because of mass communication technologies due to which we recede from other living humans with whom we sit in the same room (or even share the same bed with), whereas, on the other hand, we get closer to other living humans on the other side of the world via our “online” connections. The same question occurs again more radically when we face the news of terrorist attacks. What is the concept of human life for a terrorist who blows himself up with the primary intention of killing? What is the concept of human life for a thug who, in cold blood, lets himself be recorded while cutting the throat of someone else? Or of the person who deliberately planned yesterday and rashly performed his “race to death” into a crowd today? We can paraphrase Bruno Latour along with Rosi Braidotti: “we have never been humane” at least not as far as the Western world is concerned. Humanism in terms of “universal humanness” was once our ideal, but has never been accomplished; on the contrary, crimes “against humanity” have been committed in the name of it as well as still are being committed on in the name of explicitly anti-humane doctrines. Human history so far has been enacted in a way that certain groups of people have lived at the expense of other groups (and what has mattered from the point of view of an individual has solely been his/her group membership). There has been no “universally unified humanity” and neither, it seems, is there any historical path leading to it. The line between the humane and the anti-humane has never been clear enough, and has become even vaguer in our time, along with other frontiers. This “posthuman situation” of contemporary humanity poses the question: what have we made of ourselves and what are we still able to make?

2

The Austrian philosopher Konrad Paul Liessmann poses similar, equally urgent, questions, but, at the same time with a dignified levity. His Nietzschean views oppose every herd behavior of the time, whether talking about the field of education where the economic doctrine of “knowledge society” turns into “the theory and practice of miseducation” (Liessmann, 2006); or the field of politics where “the awareness of boundaries and differences” is losing itself, because “the spirit of the time” directs one to remove or cross borders (Liessmann, 2012); and finally even the field of daily life, which without critical philosophical reflection declines to the level of “the most deadly drug in the world” – fake, if not worse (Liessmann, 2010b). What about the value of a human? Primarily reduced to “human capital” as a main source of economic development, instrumentally measured and financially calculated together with other goods on the market regardless of what it should really consist and what can hardly be financially expressed – in human dignity (Liessmann, 2010a). It is crucial what position philosophy should hold towards the contemporary “post-human” world: should it assent to it, or be radical in terms of discovering the “roots” of it? What should contemporary philosophy be like in order to speak to modern humans and help them solve the question of “how ought we live?” (and, thus, in a way fulfill its ancient mission)?

According to Liessmann (2000), it could be Nietzsche's philosophy as "a mirror of culture", revealing that behind the noble (ancient and even enlightened, Platonic or even Kantian) ideals of truth, beauty and goodness, their anti-poles, lies, ugliness and evil, remain hidden; forbidden and forbidding, suppressed and suppressing –. Science, art and morality as our most significant cultural constructions built just on one pole, on "a pure truth, beauty and goodness", are simply illusions which need to be exposed as their own anti-poles: truth as a type of error; beauty as our creation and goodness as a tool of the will to power, and altogether as expressions of the will to life (Nietzsche, 1968). Nietzsche's "philosophy of the will" moved primarily within the triangle between the will to life, will to knowledge and will to power. The will to life is the goal, however its effective tool is not the will to knowledge, but the will to power; the latter makes a decision whether and how to use or not to use the former within the interest of life itself. If knowledge is supported by power, it can serve life; if not, it's just an empty word, *flatus vocis*. To build life just on knowledge itself, without any power, is an illusion, because the key knowledge we need for life is knowledge of the relationship of life and power. Nietzsche went on by saying (1968, pp. 266–267): "Knowledge works as a tool of power. Hence it is clear that it increases with every increase of power... In other words: the measure of the desire for knowledge depends upon the measure to which the will to power grows in a species: a species grasps a certain amount of reality in order to become master of it, in order to press it into service". There are plenty of other opinions of this key triad – life, knowledge and power – and Nietzsche's "philosophy by hammer" would be best replaced by "philosophy by heart". However, the times when we were delighted by the illusion of our own "pure humanity" are gone. Hence we need, according to Liessmann (2000), even "the theory of untruth", "the aesthetics of ugliness" and "the ethics of evil" for contemporary philosophy. How can we gain our own value in our own eyes if we don't look at the dark side of our human face?

3

To look at ourselves in different ways is possible and probably even necessary. One such philosophical way is presented by the French philosopher Bernard Stiegler (2013) in his book *What Makes a Life worthy* subtitled "On Pharmacology". The term *pharmakon* is taken from Derrida's reading of Plato's *Phaedrus* (Derrida, 1981, pp. 63–171). Plato (1997, 230d-e) writes about "a tool" with dazing effects which may be used sometimes as a medicine, sometimes as poison. For Stiegler, it means that a *pharmakon* is everything that is "good and evil at the same time" (Stiegler, 2013, p. 10) and has positive as well as negative effects. In other words, the source of our greatest happiness is also, potentially, the source of our greatest unhappiness (and apparently it also holds *vice versa*).

Stiegler, in the introduction to his book, gives us (referring to Donald Winnicott) the example of a mother's care of her child as an example of what she teaches her child regarding the value of life to be lived. Thanks to this care, the child "feels the life", feels the contact with the mother and as much as it feels it, it grows up with the feeling of the value of life. And on the contrary (Winnicott also presents in it his works), the loss of "the feeling of life" and contact with mother as a consequence of relaxation or even loss of care, can become the beginning of a destructive process in which the awareness of the value of life (our own and others) is disrupted. The child is not capable of taking care of itself, therefore only the care of the mother (or her substitution in case of adoption) or of other closely related persons, gives it the feeling of the value of life. Stiegler goes on to generalize: the care, which as an ontological entity, does not exist but is made as a relationship between entities, is a *pharmakon* because its presence, or absence, even its form and quality, has, all in all, positive as well as negative effects. If, for instance, the care is a

condition for human beings to “not to behave as non-human beings”, the focus on the *pharmakon* is the key for the value of our life (Stiegler, 2013, pp. 4–5). It is the same in the case of other key factors of our life: thinking, creativity, economics, capital, work, media and mostly technology, because in the current global situation of humanity we can observe a tendency towards the dominance of the destructive sides of these *pharmakons* in the form of intellectual and economic crises, political and marketing manipulation, consumerism, stupidity and proletarianisation of spirit, social pathology, etc. A destructive side of contemporary anthropogenesis as techno-genesis of humanity consists of the destruction of human desires which lose their contact with acknowledgement of the value of life. Therapy, according to Stiegler (2013), is “the invention of a new way of life” based on a “new way of caring about the world” which consists even in the value change of economics in terms of the original meaning as “a care” (*oikos-nomos* – the rules of the care of household). Techniques and technology as *pharmakons* can potentially improve, not only devastate life, however, these also require a value change. Stiegler summarizes his analysis with a call for “new criticism of life” and referring to Nietzsche’s *Will to Power* in which Nietzsche requests a “new definition of the term ‘life’ as a will to power” (Nietzsche, 1968, p. 331). According to Stiegler, “stupidity is what opens the inhuman-being that [*étrinhumain*] we are”. Therefore, “the only thing that, in its basest form, is worth being lived – in this life that must constantly be critiqued in order for it to be, in fact, worth living – is the struggle against stupidity” (Stiegler, 2013, p. 132).

4

Criticism can be a tool for life changes, but our will to life, our possibilities to live are always framed by culture. We can find “life patterns” in culture which exceed our individual being and effort. We all move within these patterns and adapt to them differently; we learn them consciously, but also take them over unconsciously; and everybody applies them according to their possibilities and capabilities, but just a few can exceed or change them. They are transpersonal, trans-individual patterns, which work in the long term and create something like “the character of human life”. This shows that “this is the way we live here”, “this is the way we have lived here for ages” and “this is the way everybody lives”. It means that everyday ways of thinking, acting and behaving are reproduced in order to “live at all” and thus to keep the continuity of life which was “weaved” for years, decades, centuries. We can see a warranty in this continuity that life will go on further and will stay stable. In spite of all idiosyncrasies and individual creativity when self-creating our lives, the matter of how we live and why we live this way is not only a matter of our will or self-creation, because we take patterns, models or frames for our life from the culture of our community and our era. No matter how creative an individual is, s/he always “weaves” his/her way of life only from the material which an available culture offers, although, based on this, it may go different ways. However, the will to diversify from cultural patterns means to go “upstream”; to encounter misunderstandings; to face criticism from the conservative side; to risk isolation or emigration (inner or outer).

The character of current life – how people generally live – is described by intellectuals, artists, humanists and social scientists in different ways. They strive to catch the cultural frames or relevant features of the time, which enable us to understand how people live and why in this way and not the other; thus they indirectly show what ought to be changed, if people would like to live another way. An individual can – actually has to – manage his/her life in the best possible way; however it’s obvious that “system parameters” are set for them by culture or social order. In this sense, a change in the way of human life is a system change, referring to the whole historical era or socio-cultural paradigm.

From the point of view of contemporary man, we can still talk about modernity – about the paradigm of modern life whose key characteristics have been identified by diagnosticians and critics of modern culture such as Marx and Nietzsche, Dewey and Weber, Simmel and Freud, Marcuse and Fromm, Foucault and Deleuze and many others. Alienation, value crisis, the issue of the public, regimentation of life through rationalized orders, conformism, aggression, narcissism, discipline and control through norms, etc. – these all are just few of the signs determining the life of contemporary humans (in the West); these all are here to stay regardless the phase, no matter so called “post-modernity” or “late modernity”. This late phase even emphasized some of these signs of modern life and added some more in the context of new events such as globalization or technologization of culture at the same time. *Summa summarum*: if anybody uncritically has thought that modern life with its conveniences creates a socio-cultural frame for human happiness automatically, generally still considered as the apex or the sense of life even in this form, they could easily go wrong (Bauman, 2008). It is not just about suicides, which were described by Masaryk and Durkheim in the 19th century; about social or military conflicts and their consequences in the 20th century, which influenced Adorno and Horkheimer; neither only about the forms of social pathologies in the form of social non-recognition, which have recently been analyzed by Honneth and Fraser, nor about much worse forms of social destructions such as corruption or terrorism. Cultural differences of capitalism, psychological consequences of the consumer “society of prosperity” or moral consequences of “the achieving society” have their implications for the life of modern man.

The complexity of the life situation of modern humans is characterized mainly by what Bauman calls “liquidity”, i.e. plurality, openness, uncertainty, loss of reliability and blurring of all life patterns available before to modern living. Such living is “liquid”, unstable, and one can, even has to, change one's life positions and styles according to situations which are changing in an unusually dynamic way. This kind of life is apparently brighter and more interesting, but also more demanding at the same time, and the question is whether and which “school” can teach us to live it. Bauman (2005) points to the fact that the “liquid life” is primarily characterized not only by its fast pace and the race for opportunities, but also by great worries arising from delays, depression arising from loss and the trauma of wasted investments. The art of living such a life is to learn to handle such losses as soon as possible, not to grieve over them so much, because every end means a new beginning, and every beginning will one day become an end. Therefore every loss can be a new gain, not just the other way round. Let's call it “flexibility” as one of the important competences which we need for such “a liquid life”. It is the competence to forget, relieve, reset and supply everything greater than human living within a liquid modernity, but brought up in the “old school” way, could imagine. What was useful for life back then is seriously doubted today even disabled. Referring to the experience and extrapolation from the past to the future is too risky and misleading (Bauman, 2005, p. 1).

Individualization belongs to modern life; it includes responsibility for one's own life and its forms. It obviously holds true for modern human more than for every pre- or non-modern human. To become “the master of one's own life” and “to hold one's life in one's own hands” is one of the most significant aspects of the modern “turn to the subject”, as Charles Taylor (1989) put it. Hence, the role of forming a deliberate attitude to life – in particular to one's own life – and to answer the question of “what to do with it?” is a practical life task of the modern subject. Life patterns work even here. In accordance with them, the approach of a modern human to life may be characterized at least by a well-known old term: instrumentalism. It means instrumentalization even in the understanding of life. Modern humans do not want just to live and spend their lives – they want to benefit from it, achieve and create something; best of all to create something

significant, if not directly a work of art. Simply, it's not enough for modern humans just to live their lives, but they need to make, shape and transform them actively. Our own life is becoming the object of our effort to give it value. To enjoy life is not enough, we need to make it fruitful; it should bring us the joy of the fruits it gives. This means that we do not treat our life as "a gift", but as a role or a problem; thus, through our life, we want to become someone. Our life is not an end for us, but a means; we cannot live it just for the sake of itself, but just for the sake of something else. We do not think of life itself, but of other things. We do not care about life in the same way as we care about anything else. We do not want to waste our life; hence, we work hard (or just speculate). We are ready to "give up our life" for something to give it value.

5

Thus, how ought we live? How to spend our life in order not to feel vanity or sorrow over what have we done? How to spend it meaningfully and worthily – and even non-instrumentally? How to fill the content and time of our life to be satisfied with that which "we have lived well"? What gives life worth? Why is a human life worthy? And what (or which) life is not worth living?

There are as many lives as there are values, which fill in these lives, and there are as many values which these lives possess. We need to admit that different things make the lives of different people worthwhile, even though not all of them equally to everybody. Furthermore, we need to realize that there is no absolute consensus, neither of authority within the question of values nor of evaluation; therefore, we need to respect the answers to these questions as subjective, or inter-subjective. Of course, cultural patterns and norms are present here, working as a social authority towards which all values and evaluations in particular contexts are specified; for instance, one of the best-known answers to the question, "what kind of life is not worth living?" Let us call it the enlightened answer; it had already been given by Socrates: life with no knowledge or understanding is not worth living, "for the unexamined life is not worth living for men" (Plato 1997, 38a). Socrates apparently over-reacted, as Robert Nozick (1989, p. 15) reproached him, because we cannot generalize it as a norm; it can hold true, at most, for scholars and philosophers, but in spite of this, such an "intellectual" norm, although not universal, has worked and is still working. However, we can also mention other aspects – ethical or political – according to which not all human lives are equally worthy, which is getting closer to the function of social authority. Only a few would agree with the statement, that "for instance, Lenin, Hitler or Stalin or Mao Zedong and Pol Pot deserve the same respect as each of the tens of thousands of their victims in accordance with "the principle of the same value", that "every human being and every human life ideally ought to be equally valued", only "because it is about human beings as human beings" (Flew, 1990). Thus, there is a difference between human beings as well as between human lives. Some of them can be examples of spoiled or miserable lives, others of the best and most valuable lives which a human is capable of (There are a lot of "bright" examples of it within history beginning with Socrates through Jesus Christ or Albert Einstein up to Mother Theresa, if we can mention only a few of those generally accepted.)

However, philosophers, also ask the question of the value of life in itself when they put the question of whether "it is worth living?" It is a different question to this one: "what makes life worthy?" The first one reflects existential situations where somebody can make a decision between voluntarily death and continuation of life in an unbearable condition, and ask: "is it worth living in this way at all?" The second one reflects all other situations when the question of the value of life itself is not asked, or is definitely answered in a positive way.

Leaving theological conceptions aside, according to which the whole life – already at its beginning – is sacred, and thus a human is not allowed to take it away, therefore neither to ask

questions about its “worth”. Let us look at the philosophical conception asking it. It was William James (1896) who pointed out that the reasons for optimism in, and joy of, life exist, but as well as reasons for pessimism and sorrow in life, as it is “normal” that none of them last forever, but all are changing as the moods of a human are changing during a life, except for what we know today as a “bipolar mental disorder”. James speaks here more as psychologist and a physician than a philosopher when he talks about mental health and intellectual integrity as conditions prohibiting the asking of this question. Contrary evidence for him is, however, suicide, which is sourced in an intellectual pessimism of “miserable images of life” as the consequence of worldview problems and “abstruse thinking”, unable to achieve peace and balance of mind. Such problems are, for instance, conflicts between nature and spirit or the existence of evil. Inability to confront them intellectually leads to “philosophical melancholy”, which can quite “rationally” come to the idea of suicide as a resignation from them. Philosophical minds are loaded with melancholy, depression, desperation, vanity, severe moods since they need to bear their intellectual burden, which can be their reason for pessimism. However, James shows that there is no fatality in this, because such problems can, on the contrary, stimulate us to an active search, which is a position supporting life. Along with Stiegler, we can say that philosophy (and theology as well) is a *pharmakon*, which potentially is a medicine and a poison at the same time. What will come out as dominant is up to us; we make that decision ourselves, even according to W. James. However, we need the courage to perform it and the faith to prove that life is worth that. Our faith does not guarantee anything to us, it just gives us the chance to “say yes to life” (James, 1896, pp. 60–63). Faith in life is an intellectual power, which makes life worthy, helps to create it actively and to challenge absurdity, negativity and pessimism.

If we cannot be blamed for our life (our birth to life) as individuals, what else ought we do than live? What other better possibilities, alternatives do we have? If somebody reaches the stage that it is a better alternative for him/her “not to live” and to end his/her life, it is a hard decision, but it is a part of his/her life. Because, as Epicurus said, as long as we exist, death is not here, and when it does come, we no longer exist. There is no better alternative for the French philosopher André Comte-Sponville, as he writes about the “will to live” (in other, personal, non-metaphysical and non-theological dimensions than Teilhard de Chardin discussed). He writes: “Life is good in spite of everything; it’s good because of itself; why speculate about it... To exist is good, there is nothing better than that; because to exist is everything and not to exist is nothing... We are not sentenced to life at all; we live lustfully. To live means the will to live. Every single life is an enjoyable song” (Comte-Sponville, 1999, pp. 49–50). There is no cheap optimism inside of it. The philosopher is aware of the seriousness of suicide and the situations which lead towards it; it’s rather “the escape from unhappiness”, than “refusing life” (Comte-Sponville, 1999, p. 51). He does not refuse Sisyphean absurdities, neither the tragedy of life nor does he let himself become fascinated by delights. Life needs “to be accepted and loved” as it is, with all its *pros* and *cons*, because the one who “loves just happiness, does not love life, and suppresses himself from being happy...” (Comte-Sponville, 1999, p. 62).

6

What *does* make us happy? What do we need to enjoy life? Clearly, a lot of particular beings, things, events, and processes. W. James thought about it in his article “What makes a life significant”. He assumes that the significance of life is personal for everyone and if a human cannot see it, it does not mean it does not exist for others. But we should strive to overcome our

“blindness” towards others, learn to respect and tolerate their various ways of life. James overcomes well-known philosophical intellectualism, according to which it is really hard to accept the value and significance of other life activity than philosophy itself (notably in the sense of Plato and Aristotle, who considered a “contemplative” way of life as the best one). Humans can find their happiness and its meaning even in regular everyday activities, in manual and physical activities and their lives do not stop being worth living. We need other virtues important for our worthy life such as courage, patience and kindness, moral ideals helping us to overcome difficult life conditions. The rate of happiness is the rate of balance between everything that humans need for their lives and what is available to them.

The contemporary American philosopher Owen Flanagan joins both questions into one: “Is life worth living and if yes, what makes it so?”, even though he accepts that life can be worth living also for those who cannot say why; or for somebody there are worthy things in life, but they just lose their will to live. A more fundamental question is “What does it mean to live at all?” which is not sufficient to answer just by saying “not to be dead”; but at least we need “to control our life”, make decisions regarding it. What makes life worthy, cannot come only from the fact of “being alive” and reduced to this simple answer. Neither is happiness a factor, which is worthy of life, because somebody can find happiness even in unworthy things (Flanagan, 1996, p. 4). A necessary, although not sufficient, condition of worthy life is, according to Flanagan, “self-realization”, i.e. realization of one's self (Flanagan, 1996, p. 5), which is anything else than “life by myself” in accordance with myself meaning “to live my own life”, as Steve Jobs said during his promotional lecture at Stanford University on July 12th 2005: “Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma — which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary” (Jobs, 2005). To live one's life according to one's will does not mean to live it just for oneself and against others. It means to transcend one's own ‘I’ into the world and lives of others (Flanagan, 1996, p. 10).

According to M. Csikszentmihalyi, we are programmed in a way so that others would be the most important thing in the world for us, and therefore our happiness is largely dependent on how we handle our relationships with them. For the whole life, we look for the one or the ones with whom we feel good, although we don't need to know what it means to feel the goodness of co-being with them. If the source of our greatest happiness is (potentially) the source of our greatest unhappiness, afterwards, living together with somebody else is one of the summits of happiness, as long as a phobia of being refused by somebody else, not being understood by them or being left on our own is one of the greatest unhappinesses. “People are the most flexible, the most changeable aspect of the environment we have to deal with” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 166). On the other hand, we care who we are – if we have to be with somebody, who is not convenient for us, we opt for an escape, for some sort of seclusion. This can be worthy as well. “Yet *how* one copes with solitude makes all the difference. If being alone is seen as a chance to accomplish goals that cannot be reached in the company of others, then instead of feeling lonely, a person will enjoy solitude and might be able to learn new skills in the process. On the other hand, if solitude is seen as a condition to be avoided at all costs instead of as a challenge, the person will panic and resort to distractions that cannot lead to higher levels of complexity” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 175).

Let me conclude in the same vein as I began: “Everybody is the creator of his/her own happiness.” But how is it possible when we do not live our lives in a vacuum, but in particular conditions, which transcend us and which we have not created, but rather just inherited? Here, our desires are met with our possibilities; our aims with the aims of others; our will to live with others’ will to live. *Hic Rhodus, hic satla!* Right here, *hic*, we have to prove what powers we have and what we don’t have under control, as Epictetus recommended – if we want to master the art of a good life. Considering the situation, conditions, circumstances and mainly other humans with their own ideas of life, this does not mean to give up on our own life “according to oneself”. It does not mean to choose between “either me or you”, nor “either everything or nothing”. It rather means to challenge the route of creatively and patiently searching for the understanding of life and others regarding the achievement of some balance – if not harmony – between what we want and what others want. To prefer ones at the expense of others means a conflict, and since the handling of conflicts is a part of the art of life, the most optimal solution seems the “win/win” strategy for both (or all) sides. Thus, according to the life credo: “Live and Let Live!”

And what about philosophy? Does it “finally teach us how to live”, as none other than Jacques Derrida (2005) had grieved for? We do not just live our life, but even think of it, and there is also a very close relationship between how we live and how we think of life: “Philosophy becomes marginalized only when it distances itself from the problems of life... There is no greater social need than guidance in the affairs of life... Since philosophers have abandoned their responsibility in this sphere, the public has abandoned philosophers... But philosophy for its own sake is, in the end, of value only because it makes philosophy for life possible” (Lachs, 2003, pp. 11, 14).

The same philosopher came up with the conception of the creative connection of stoicism and pragmatism, thus “stoic pragmatism” (Lachs, 2012), which can be considered as a prominent example of the ethical conception of the pragmatist art of living. Stoic pragmatists “are committed to making life better until their powers are overwhelmed. When circumstances render aggressive affirmation no longer possible, however, they surrender to the inevitable gracefully and without complaint. As pragmatists, they insist on the centrality of intelligence in the conduct of life, but they extend the reach of good sense to the acknowledgement of failure or futility” (Lachs, 2012, p. 1).

Stoic pragmatism shows how stoicism and pragmatism can mutually benefit and complete each other by balancing their opinions on a conflict and the humbleness, power and definitiveness of human life; thus to both poles of life, which present pleasure *versus* sorrow; joy *versus* suffering; enthusiasm *versus* disappointment; beauty of life *versus* its absurdity, etc. A real life most often balances between both of these poles – between a life of happiness and of unhappiness. The pragmatist art of living tends to both of these tendencies as well: to the fulfillment of the human’s lot by luck and to the wisdom of how to bear real unhappiness in a dignified way.

What could this mean “to know” regarding the issues of life? Who of us can say that they “know how to live”, if none other than Derrida admitted at the very end of his life journey precisely this: “I never *learned-to-live*. In fact not at all! ...” (Derrida, 2007, p. 24)? Does it mean to know what to do with our life, what to dedicate it to? Does it mean, in spite of everything, to know how to face the challenges, not only negative, but even positive ones, in order not to lose the will to live? Not to be disgusted? Not to lose all love for life? Keep the will to live, desire to live, reason to live and hope to live by all means? Be enlightened every single day...

Everybody has their own light, somebody else is the light in himself/herself; it is very inspiring when at least two people can find the understanding in what this light brings them – if

they are a light for each other. And it does not stand just for love; every mutual respect, empathy, intellectual understanding, friendship means that light – in a word, every way of appreciation of the value of a living human by and for another living human.

To know how to live means to know how to combine the will to live with the respect for it. This is the right opposite to what is happening in the human world at present: the will to live (our own life) without any respect for (the) life (of others). This is the world we have been creating for as long as we can remember. In what name do we create it? In the name of life? What kind of life and who is it for?

Acknowledgement

This publication is the result of the project implementation: Comenius University Science Park – 2nd phase supported by the Research & Innovation Operational Programme funded by the European Regional Development Fund.

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Against charity: Some preliminary considerations

Bob Brecher

Abstract

Charity is often viewed as a paradigm of morality. I suggest, however, that charitable action is morally problematic – even morally wrong. Following a brief characterisation of charity, it will be suggested that it wrongly puts recipients in a position of dependency and dispensers in a self-congratulatory position of political quietism.

Keywords: charity, dependency, gifts, needs

Introduction

In this brief, programmatic article I want to propose something that will probably appear counter-intuitive, to say the least. The suggestion I want to make is that charity, far from being a good thing, is wrong; that charity is in fact immoral. This may of course be thought a wild, and wildly implausible, claim. After all, charity is among the cardinal virtues; and charitable work is widely regarded as paradigmatic of morally laudable action. In brief, charity is generally regarded as just *obviously* a good thing but that charity is so regarded does not mean that that is what it is. While this is not the sort of extended and thorough treatment necessary to make the case that I think is there to be made, my hope is that it may act as a sufficient provocation, to be countered, explored in more detail or of course both.

So let me start by offering just one example by way of illustrating what I have in mind when I suggest that charity is immoral. It was recently reported in the UK that “Leading homelessness charities whose remit is to protect vulnerable rough sleepers have been passing information about some of them to the Home Office, leading to their removal from the UK” (Taylor, 2017). My contention is that the moral deformation this represents is not so much an aberration as something that arises from the function and form of contemporary charity. Recipients of charity are precisely on that account not fully people; they are less than the rest of us, and in particular less than those who offer them charity. The following quotations from the article speak for themselves:

Howard Sinclair, chief executive of St Mungo’s [one of the charities involved], said: “The reality is that under current UK legislation, there are vulnerable people that are not eligible for support or housing and as a result are left destitute on the streets. When returning home is the only option for a vulnerable individual sleeping rough, we have to ask ourselves what would happen if we didn’t get involved. The stark reality is that without any intervention people would simply deteriorate on our streets” (Taylor, 2017).

A spokesman for homelessness charity Change, grow, live (CGL) said: “Change, grow, live (CGL) do all we can to help rough sleepers to get help, regardless of their background or nationality. We work with a number of local authorities and statutory agencies around the country to reduce the risks faced by rough sleepers and find solutions to their sometimes complex needs. If employment or housing cannot be found for an EU national, we will offer supported reconnection to that home country or somewhere they have relatives, and liaise with services there to ensure they have a place to go. When there is no other option and the person has refused reconnection, they are unable to work and cannot be housed, there is little alternative to them going back to their home country” (Taylor, 2017).

Insofar as the slightly better off refugees or asylum seekers who are not sleeping rough and who do not need to submit to St Mungo’s or the CGL’s complicity with inhuman UK

government demands, they are more of a person than those who are on the streets. Moreover, the people in that position may be sacrificed in the name of charity; they may be sacrificed to allow St Mungo's and the CGL to offer charity to the 'natives'.

None of that, of course, is to say that everyone engaged in charitable work is thereby necessarily acting immorally. My target is structure, not individual intention. Nonetheless, if I am right that charity is morally problematic, then questions about complicity have to be asked about our engagement in it, in exactly the same way that questions about complicity have to be asked about our engagement in universities, school boards of governors, private health provision or indeed a whole host of public – and perhaps private – activities. For even if not all complicity is avoidable, it does not follow that such complicity is not morally wrong.¹

Charity

Let me begin, then, by outlining what I take charity to be. Not that this is a matter of definition: as I have argued in another context (Brecher 2007, pp. 3–6), real things (objects, phenomena, movements, institutions) cannot be defined, but only described. That is why arguments about right and wrong, about what we should or should not do, cannot be settled by appealing to definition. If you think that that is a peculiar claim to make, consider a chair; and now try to define it. Can you do so? All that can be done is to try to offer as inclusive a description as possible. For the real world can always disrupt our descriptions: someone may invent a chair no one has yet thought of; new techniques of torture may be invented that evade capture under a previous characterization of the practice. In the same way, it is of course possible that in some world utterly different from our own, charity might not be what it is now. But that is another matter. What I am concerned with is charity as it is here, today, in our world.

Any description of charity must start with the recognition that voluntariness is central to it, both individually and structurally: unlike paying taxes, one is not compelled to donate to charities or to work for them; and unlike schools, the police or the armed forces, charities are voluntary associations in the 'civil society' sector. Another way of putting the point is that charity is supposed to be supererogatory; while it is not a moral obligation, it is nonetheless morally laudable. Compare diving into a rough sea to save the child apparently drowning in it: you don't have to try to rescue the child, but it is reckoned a good thing if you do.

Hence charity, for all that its roots lie in ancient traditions, is in its contemporary form a creature of the modern world, where individual and collective are carefully delineated. We are sufficiently autonomous individuals not to have to do what it is nonetheless good to do; and while collective obligations – often legally enforceable obligations – have their place, so does the supererogation that marks us out as individuals. That is why, for instance, the medieval institution of tithes occupied a space somewhere between charity and taxation (National Archives, no date). In many ways, the Christian Churches' system of tithes was very much like a tax, since (a) the Church was very often the local political master and (b) membership of the Church, like citizenship of a state today, was very much not a matter of choice. In other ways, however, the demand for tithes appealed (rightly or wrongly; realistically or otherwise; cynically or sincerely) to an understanding of the system of tithes as voluntary, as something freely chosen as part and parcel of one's membership of the Church. To that extent, such giving was regarded as both religiously and morally good. Why this comparison matters is that it illustrates that what it is for an action to be voluntary, or freely chosen, is not a straightforward given. It is something that requires to be understood somewhat differently in different social and political contexts and under different social and political structures. What is clear, however, is that it is only with the emergence of the view that 'individual' and 'social'

¹ For recent interdisciplinary discussion of the complex ramifications of complicity, see Afxentiou, A., Dunford, R. & Neu, M. (2017).

are *fundamentally* distinct that voluntariness can be understood in the way it is today, here in Europe; and that it can come to take on the importance that is accorded it.² J. S. Mill's famous claim would have been unintelligible in, say, 13th century Europe: The human faculties of perception, judgment, discriminative feeling, mental activity, and even moral preference, are exercised only in making a choice (Mill, 1989, p. 59). Of course, it is charity's voluntariness that makes it attractive: you are not compelled to give to charity; and charities, unlike state institutions, do not have to exist. Charity is supererogatory: it is at once more than you have to do and more than there has to be. Charity is not in any way obligatory; it is neither legally nor morally required. That is its point. While it may be morally admirable, it is not morally obligatory. You have to refrain from committing murder; but you do not have to give to charity. Killing someone for fun is clearly wrong; not giving to charity is not (obviously) morally impermissible.

All this gives rise to some interesting issues of detail. Consider, famously, Peter Singer. He thinks that everyone should give 10% of their income to charity; but even he does not think that this should be compulsory, rather than a matter of donation (though, in his case, that caveat may be a utilitarian one to do with consequential side effects rather than one concerning the logic of charity).³ For if charitable giving were morally mandatory, then of course, it would no longer be a charitable act, just because it would no longer be voluntary. Moral obligations, on the other hand, are not obligations that are simply voluntarily accepted; rather, they are required obligations – and according to some, rationally required. This raises of course a particularly controversial issue about the 'voluntariness' of morally mandated actions. As Kant famously insists, we should not be coerced by other people; but nonetheless, freedom consists in following the moral, that is to say the rational, law. But however one might wish to unpack the set of issues this raises, the central point remains and remains whether or not one sides with Kant about the nature of moral action that while charity is voluntary, saving a child apparently drowning in a shallow stream (at little or no cost to oneself, and other things being equal) is not. In short: if legally required, then charitable donation is a tax; if morally required, then charitable donation is not supererogatory. Again: compare a brave and morally admirable act, such as going into the proverbial burning house to rescue someone. If you do not rush into the house, that does not make you a moral pariah. Rescuing someone in those circumstances is supererogatory and that is what both giving to charity and working for charity are like. Neither resemble the sort of classic "child drowning in a shallow stream" case mentioned earlier: if you are walking beside a shallow stream and see a toddler in difficulty, you have to do something about it; simply to walk on would indeed make you a moral pariah, even if you were phobic about streams and could do no more than call for help.

It is this sort of case that raises the issue of borderlines. For example, is giving money to a famine relief organisation, or giving something warm to a homeless person on the street in the middle of a cold and wet winter, an act of charity? The obvious answer is that of course it is; that these are in fact paradigmatic instances of charity. But suppose that you are the only person around who can easily afford to give money, or the only person around who has spare warm clothes. And suppose that the needs in question are urgent. Then you might suppose that it is morally obligatory to give money or donate warm clothes.

It seems to me that the more morally required one takes such an act to be, the less it is to be understood as a charitable act. Compare again giving money to a beggar on the street. As I have suggested, one might entirely reasonably suppose that this is not something one is morally obliged to do, however admirable – possibly morally admirable – it might be to do so. But one might *not* think that: one might instead suppose that there is a moral obligation to

² Tithes may of course function rather differently in other religious traditions and histories.

³ He sets out his position in Singer (2009).

give every beggar some money to the point where one cannot afford to do so. In that case – which is basically Singer’s position – then it seems to me that one does not actually regard giving the beggar money as an act of charity at all, but rather that one supposes it to be a matter of moral obligation. Charity, that is to say, borders on being a moral *demand* without finally becoming such.

Charity and dependency

What I have just outlined is the source of what I take to be the moral problem about charity. Because charity is not morally *required*, it cannot avoid being a problem *for the recipient* of charity. Why? Because people receiving charity are thereby put into a position of dependency. They do not receive what they get as an entitlement. Note here that the phrases, ‘receiving’ charity, ‘claiming’ charity, or even ‘getting’ charity do not seem quite right. This should not be surprising. After all, charity – unlike welfare – is something people are supposed to be grateful for. Now, gratitude is of course fine – in its place. A friend sends me a book as a present: I am grateful. There is nothing mysterious here. Gratitude is an entirely appropriate response to a gift. But as a response to charitable provision?

Certainly it is the case that charitable giving is often understood as a sort of gift-giving. And this *seems* right: you give money or time to people who need it. But although this seems right, it is not. While charity might look like a gift, it is in fact something quite different. There are two respects in which this is so, and they are closely related. Both centre on people’s needs. The first, and I think fundamental, point is that responding to a person’s need differs from giving them a present; the second, which derives from the former, considers how responding to a person’s need – since needs are necessities, and thus in a sense objective in a way that desires are not – morphs on that account into responding to a real need one supposes the recipient to have, as contrasted with what they themselves take their need to consist of. I shall come to this issue, that of paternalism, presently.

First, though, let us consider how giving someone something they need is different from giving them a present. The more that something is really needed by another person, the less someone’s giving it to them can count as a gift. It is precisely because I did not need that book that it could be (and was) given to me as a gift. But charitable giving is not like that. Suppose I were starving and without the means to get hold of any food; and then suppose that someone gave me something to eat. Would that food be a gift, a present? It seems to me that it would not, just because it was something I really needed. Gifts, or presents, are not things I really need; in one sense, I do not need them at all, and being given something I do not need is a constitutive part of the pleasure of being given the book. On the other hand, however, if I am starving and need food, then that food is not a gift. Gifts are things that could be substituted by other presents; a bottle of wine could have taken the place of the book without any loss of its being a gift. Being given food, however, when starving is not like that; here, *only* food will do which is another way of drawing attention to its necessity, which is exactly what a genuine gift is not. Of course, the starving recipient of food might well *feel* grateful for it. But that is not the point. Rather, there is something wrong with their having been made to feel grateful for getting something they need; and that is one way of drawing attention to what is problematic about charity.

People do, however, tend nonetheless to think of charity in terms of gift-giving. If someone receives a ‘charitable gift’ then, surely, they ought to be grateful, just as though they should be grateful for a birthday present. No wonder the neo-liberal state couches its propaganda in precisely these terms: in the words of Her [UK] Majesty’s Revenue and Customs, “If your donations are under the Gift Aid scheme, your chosen charity can also claim tax back (known as tax relief) from the government” (HMRC). The very idea of ‘Gift Aid’ depends on conflating charity with gift-giving and so the UK tax authority’s statement exactly mirrors

government – and not just government – thinking. People in need should be grateful for what they are given. But charities deal with needs, and acts of charity address needs. So gratitude on the part of the recipients of charity is quite inappropriate, as many people who work for charities and/or who take part in charitable activities such as half-marathons in aid of such-and-such doubtless agree. But then they should have second thoughts about charity. The upshot of all this is that either charity supplies needs, in which case gratitude is not appropriate; or gratitude is appropriate, and perhaps appropriately felt, in which case what is at issue is not charity, but a gift.

So let me focus in light of that on the issue of people's needs being met through charity. The fundamental question is this: should needs be met by charity? I shall approach the question from two rather different angles, although angles which are in the real world very closely connected: what is charity like for its recipients; and what is charity like for its distributors?

Recipients of charity

This brings us to the second issue mentioned a few paragraphs ago. It may perhaps be brought out by considering institutional charity: the nineteenth century British workhouse, for example, or today's "overseas aid". The logic governing the workhouse was this: people who are starving on account of being too poor to buy food are poor on account of their being feckless; on account of their not being sufficiently responsible to meet their own needs. Simply to give them food would not change that state of affairs; indeed, it would exacerbate the problem. For that problem arises out of what their fundamental need is rather than the superficial one of hunger: and that fundamental need is to become a responsible person. Furthermore, it is by submitting to the discipline of work that one becomes a responsible, or real, person. The logic of "overseas aid", tied as it so often is to economic restructuring demands through the IMF or the World Bank, is exactly like this. Poor people's fundamental need is to learn to be responsible and efficient neoliberal economic actors – anything else is only a temporary sticking plaster and in fact inhibits just those changes that are required because it addresses only the symptoms of poverty, not its causes. That is why "restructuring" the economy – that is to say, imposing neoliberal discipline and values across the society concerned – is required.

Both examples have parallels with giving a young child pocket money but carefully circumscribing what they spend it on until they are sufficiently mature not to make feckless spending decisions and that is the model on which many of us come increasingly to respond to beggars on the street: here's some money, buy yourself something to eat – but don't spend it on alcohol. We might donate some tinned food to a food bank but can you imagine an alcohol or a tobacco bank? The point is that it is the donor who is the ultimate arbiter of another person's real needs and while that is entirely reasonable in the case of a young child, it is to treat adult recipients of charity as if they were young children and not the equals of "donors" as adults.

But even where that is not the case, where those who dispense charity do not take it upon themselves to make decisions concerning real needs on behalf of its recipients – and thus where the issue of unjustified paternalism does not arise – charity is nevertheless bad for its recipients. Let me indicate why. First, to have to rely on charity for one's basic needs – or perhaps even one's not so basic needs – to be met puts one in a position of dependency on the benevolence of others. And that at once reflects and creates a situation of radical inequality but it is precisely that inequality which is the root cause of the problem (assuming, of course, that the world's resources are as a matter of fact sufficient to meet everyone's needs, an

assumption that I will not defend here but that I believe is an entirely reasonable one).⁴ It helps entrench apology, shame and dependency in terms of recognition as a person. Moreover, to go back to some of the earlier discussion, dependents have to show gratitude, however illogically. They have to perform their lives, not to live them. That is why you cannot give a present to a person who is dependent on charity – they are not properly a person. In short, recipients of charity, even of unconditional charity, cannot be the equals of donors, just because they are dependent on the latter. This is not an argument against our being dependent on one another – we are⁵ – but an argument against anyone being fundamentally dependent on others’ *benevolence*, that is to say on the contingent convictions, preferences or whims of others (however sincere). It is why Kant insisted that an action performed out of benevolence could not be a moral action at all. And he was right.

Dispensers of charity

I shall end by gesturing in the direction of arguments about how engaging in charity might adversely affect those doing so, namely the dispensers of charity; that is to say, how it may adversely affect us. As in many other cases, the effects of actions on the actors concerned are all too often overlooked: compare for instance, capital punishment, imprisonment or interrogational torture (Brecher, 2007, pp. 68–72). Four issues, again inter-related, come immediately to mind; doubtless there are others. First, there is the issue of the extent to which being in a position to dispense charity (and ‘dispense’ is deliberately a loaded term here) may all too readily feed our egoism. In making us feel we are doing something good, it makes us feel virtuous; we are better people than those who do not give to charity. Second, it may too easily serve to salve our consciences by encouraging us to think we are doing all that can be done to make the world a better place – when that is not the case. Perhaps we should be doing something harder and something, moreover, that is much less clearly virtuous, namely fomenting political change. Of course, these two things need not be inimical: we could do both, and many do.⁶ But my worry remains the weight of charitable activity as compared to political activity; and particularly in structural terms. It is not so much individual psychology that is the problem, as the sheer political weight of charity, both individual and institutional. Finally, that weight itself tends, I think, to foster both a naïve optimism about the sort of place the world is and, closely associated with that, the self-delusion – both individual and social – that is necessary to maintain such optimism. Think, for example, about the SOAS (University of London) report of 2014 on Fair Trade which showed how “wages on officially certified markets are below what is paid by comparable employers” (Vidal & Provost, 2014). Yet “Fair Trade” continues to be celebrated as a progressive cause, naïve and self-delusory as that is.

A provisional conclusion

Some or all of these moral failings might well be forgivable – unavoidable, even. Certainly they characterize a good many features of our society other than charity. But that does not exonerate us. We are complicit in something that is wrong. It may be less seriously and/or obviously wrong than many other things but it is also more dangerous than many other things, just because it *appears* not to be wrong at all. In the end, the greater the moral demands a society makes of its individual members, the more problematic it is likely to be; to be a society in which individuals’ moral sense has to make good the wider deficiencies of that society and such a moral sense is increasingly likely to require a degree of moral heroism. The obvious example is that of people under occupation. Today’s neoliberal society, one that

⁴ See for example Mohammad Habibur Rahman (2016).

⁵ See Alasdair MacIntyre (2013) for a marvellous analysis of our dependencies.

⁶ In the UK, War on Want is an unusual charity in being politically engaged and active, and in understanding the necessity of that to achieve its long-term goal of ending *both* poverty and unequal dependency together.

outsources its political obligations to its members and/or to others, and is thus reliant on their moral convictions and willingness to act on them, is on the way to becoming such a polity. Think of how we treat refugees in today's Europe.⁷

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⁷ For one recent example of moral bravery in this context see the *Guardian* video, The valley rebels (2017).

Is it ‘more normal’ to enhance than to restore our nature?

Martin Hähnel

Abstract

In this paper I give a short overview about the general implications of issues of human nature within the field of human enhancement. The first section of my contribution deals with a certain intertwining of human enhancement and the intrinsic claims of human nature, showing that a non-statistical concept of human nature can play a crucial role in the debate on human enhancement. After that, my aim is to validate that particular enhancements (e.g. neuro-enhancement) fall under the same normative criteria as “normal enhancement”, only requiring a special contextual awareness to co-exist with it ethically. Methodically, my intention is to draw on quasi-naturalist approaches, which argue that our nature as humans is not a “mixed bag”, but seems to be wholly constituted by its species-related characteristics. As a result, we can state that our evaluations of living beings or life forms, which are also evaluations of our methods of medical treatments and of our ethical attitudes, depend on our picture of human nature.

Keywords: enhancement, human nature, life form, Neo-Aristotelianism, function, natural goodness

Introduction

Before starting my short investigations, I would like to clarify that nowadays every explicit appeal to human nature is under suspicion. For that reason, a serious explanation of human nature can only be motivated or performed by a robust concept of species membership, potentiality, and naturalness while directly avoiding essentialist allusions. Of course, I am well aware of the fact that making any scientific reference to human nature with the help of these categories is still problematic in our time. Above all, when considering the special issue of human enhancement we find a large number of objections, which very often lead to the point that human nature has to be understood as a mere *flatus vocis*.¹ That means that improving human nature is comparable with improving unicorns: Or to put it less metaphorically, we want to improve something that does not exist (cf. Lewens, 2015, p. 39).

Defining human nature by its role in human enhancement

Contrary to these introductory remarks (and for good reason), I am convinced that human nature still remains a substantial ethical concept that does not allow the problem of its justification to be shifted to the concerns of an unsound and self-sufficient theory of the good.² But before we are able to clarify the role of human nature for enhancement, we have to give rise to the question what the ethical status of human nature generally could be. Obviously, this status cannot be deduced merely from essentialist deliberations referring to a certain biological substrate that remains identical to itself throughout natural processes. But it also cannot be deduced from reflections assuming that all of the history of man is meant to comprise the endless, uninterrupted transformation of human nature.

¹ Most of the philosophizing biologists share this view: “What does evolution teach us about human nature? It teaches us that human nature is a superstition” (Ghiselin, 1997, p. 1). From this perspective, human nature is nothing but a placeholder-concept that only offers “plenty of room for improvement” (Buchanan, 2011, p. 26ff.)

² Francis Kamm seems to prefer such an account which argues that “the human and the good are distinct conceptual categories” (Kamm, 2009, p. 103). Admittedly, goodness in this sense is exclusively understandable in terms of a “technical goodness” (Georg Henrik von Wright). According to this view, *X is as good as an S*, not *is X good as an S*. The latter expression rather refers to something that we can call “natural goodness” bringing the human and the good together again.

In recent literature, we can find some pertinent determinations of what human nature has to be like.³ First, there is the nomological or statistical notion of human nature. According to this account, “human nature is a set of properties that humans tend to possess as a result of the evolution of their species” (Machery, 2008, p. 323).⁴ Behind every nomological classification of this kind, we can simply recognize the observation that something is part of human nature only when it is shared by most humans. This “inert” view of human nature can be explained as follows: imagine that you are throwing a yellow ball into a large bowl with lots of yellow, red and blue balls. After that, you grab a single yellow ball by taking it out of the bowl. What happened to the composition of the bowl’s content? Nothing, because grabbing and taking out the ball did not change the fact that there are yellow, red and blue balls still in the bowl.

The “inert” or “mixed bag” approach generally denies the “natural priority of the natural over the artificial” (Harris, 2009, p. 133), because it is assumed that the original state of nature is mainly determined by the “poor”, “brutish”, “nasty”, etc. Following this Hobbesian picture of nature, there is no predominant quality of nature constituting positive norms for human life. From that it follows that nothing normatively relevant can be deduced from a fragmentary concept of nature; we can only rely on statistical results about human nature.

The general tendency to take care of the shared properties of a given species often results from the fact that biologists are convinced that no biological species has a proper nature because they identify the fact of having a certain nature with the fact of having a queer essence called “nature”.⁵ Probably this could be still valid for the case of Michael Sandel who speaks freely about his “given world” argument, although he always argues that we should not think of life as being a gift from God. Indeed, there is in some sense a natural tendency towards respecting the “given” or the “giftedness” of life (cf. Sandel, 2009), but nature itself is not only meant to be something that is given in an essentialist way. In this paper, I want to present a second elaborated model of human nature that combines the idea of individual traits with the intrinsic normativity of species membership. However, I do not agree with thinkers like Devitt who argue that the species themselves have intrinsic essences (Devitt, 2008). My view of species membership, rather, examines substantial concepts of natural kinship, combining a Neo-Aristotelian life-form approach with Kripke’s idea according to which species designates *a posteriori* truths and therefore seem to exist necessarily. In my view, it is too easy to think that we only have to build up clusters where genetic and epigenetic factors are put together. We should, to a greater degree, evaluate the specific role human nature could play in the context of enhancement (that is what I call “the human form objection”). There is, of course, no independent concept called “human nature” applicable to every case of enhancement. Because of that, we are better off approaching things the other way round: There are several concepts of enhancement allowing one to reveal what human nature should be.

The statistical notion of human nature and the human form objection

By referring to the already introduced cluster model or trait-view we can see that a statistical notion of human nature pretends to show that human beings evolve normally if they share the

³ Following Daniels (2009), human nature, in general, must be a dispositional, selective population concept without being able to specify how to become effective in some way.

⁴ There is, indeed, no room for the idea of natural defects, because there is nothing normally wrong in failing to have characteristic properties.

⁵ But we can find a good possibility to rewrite such an essence in terms of references remaining the same across worlds in which the relevant natural facts do not differ: cf. Freiman (2014). With the help of this account it is no longer necessary to assume a queer entity that is bearing something unchangeable like the “factor X” of Fukuyama or the idea that nature has to be understood as a static collection of organisms that can be ‘preserved’ like a can of fruit (cf. Juengst, 2015).

same properties. But what about those specimens who are cultivating their traits but cannot share them with the majority?

At this point, we should try to offer an account of human nature that will run independently of any statistical assumption. There is only one possibility to speak about human nature in a rational manner, if we can substitute the trait-view with a holistic but flexible conception of human nature: “The only biologically respectable notion of human nature that remains is an extremely permissive one that names the reliable dispositions of the human species as a whole” (Lewens, 2015, p. 40).⁶ Unlike Lewens this ‘human species as a whole’ can only be exemplified in terms of the life form, i.e. the reliable or normal form of human nature.⁷

But what is the difference here? The nomological or statistical notion of human nature only refers to certain traits of the species *homo sapiens sapiens* but not to the human life form itself. Hence, Groll and Lott argue that the “human form is a distinct and legitimate sense of human nature” (Groll & Lott, 2015, p. 625). According to Michael Thompson, it belongs to such a form S “to be/do/have F” (Thompson, 2004, p. 49). From that perspective, an S is “defective/sound in a certain respect if it is/has/does F” (Thompson, 2004, p. 55). As a consequence, human nature is, according to the cluster model or trait-view, no longer qualifiable as the aggregate of accidentally arranged properties. It is rather *the underlying logical concept that allows the evaluation of those traits apparently recognized as being incompatible or insufficient*. This is why the “concept of human form is conceptually prior to the statistical conception of human nature” (Groll & Lott, 2015, p. 630).⁸ Human nature expressed in terms of so-called “Aristotelian categoricals” is not meant to describe statistical generalities; it rather “gives the ‘how’, of what happens in the life-cycle of the species” (Foot, 2001, p. 32). Under these premises, human nature is no longer understandable as a “mixed bag” (Groll & Lott, 2015, p. 624), because from this reduced perspective or “inert view”, it is impossible to say that some parts of our nature are good (for us) and other parts are bad (for us).

If we now accept the view of life form instead of promoting the “inert view”, we are no longer forced to endorse the division of an originally homogeneous concept of human nature into its heterogeneous capacities.⁹ From that it follows, if I intend to manipulate a missing or impaired capacity, for example, one’s capacity to hear, it has, at first glance, no influence on human nature as such, but case-by-case it has an influence on the capacity that is immutably attributed to our nature: It is, for instance, against our nature to permit the ‘normalization’ of a particular defect.¹⁰

Against this background, the fact that only some of our human traits are formed to be a part of our nature cannot lead to a normative standpoint. Following on from this, we would be

⁶ Although Lewens is right in claiming that it is necessary to name all the reliable dispositions of a species, he neglects the relevance of the existence of those “unreliable” natural defects forming an objective account of human nature.

⁷ While stage-theory of human nature remains descriptive, our life-form concept becomes genuinely normative in descriptive terms.

⁸ This view is not consistent with the view of Buchanan who states that “altering or destroying human nature need not result in the loss of our ability to make judgments about the good, because we possess a conception of the good by which we can and do evaluate human nature” (Buchanan, 2009, p. 141). To make judgments about our nature is not independent of our nature; it is itself a part of our nature. Foot (2001) has shown that humans, animals and plants are subjects of the same logical and evaluative structure.

⁹ Of course, we have to differentiate dispositions from capacities. According to our human form approach, capacities are direct derivations of dispositions, but they need to be activated like virtues.

¹⁰ If deaf parents insist on the artificially induced trans-generational passing on (e.g., via IVF) of “their” missing capacities to their own children that would be against our nature. With regard to the “inert” -view of human nature, we are only able to evaluate the trait of hearing separate from other traits. For that reason, it would be, compared to the life form-approach, impossible for us to understand why the transfer of defects is morally wrong.

incapable of evaluating whether medical intervention is prohibited or not. But with regard to the concept of life-form or human form presented by Philippa Foot and Michael Thompson, it can be shown that their reflections on the form of human life are contributing to a better understanding of what is good and what is bad for us as human beings. From that point, my aim is to show that human nature obviously has a certain role to play in debates about enhancement. Under these revised epistemological circumstances, human beings that are part of the same human form of life are commonly embedded in the same normative horizon. In this context, ethical assessment of a human being is no longer based on the isolated ability to develop his or her personal autonomy or to ensure his or her cognitive functions; rather, it is necessary to practise and realize the natural dispositions that must be present in order to match the species-typical criteria given by the human form itself.¹¹ In order to realize this ambitious programme, we only have to put the whole focus on the Neo-Aristotelian idea of well-being. Well-being, in this sense, neither means that there are certain needs an individual has to satisfy for the moment, nor that there are unchangeable dispositions that an individual is forced to realize for the maintenance of its species. Well-being cannot therefore be understood as a proper function (“good for”)¹² or as an element of a (retrograde) causal history. It is, in fact, fully comprehensible as an ahistorical or neutral function of the species itself (“genuine good”). Such an ahistorical welfare-based account, provided by Philippa Foot and Michael Thompson,¹³ finally aims at demonstrating that *all* traits of a species serve the purpose of fulfilling its own genuine form. In this respect, defects are considered to be something ‘natural’, because they shed light on the objective form that has to be fulfilled. For this reason, we have to accept the defect as such, which means that we are not compelled to promote a particular enhancement.

The emerging case of particular enhancements

Before we take a look at particular enhancements we should try to give a general account of the phenomenon of enhancement. As Thomas Douglas argues “enhancements are typically understood to be interventions that (a) aim at (succeed in) augmenting human capacities or traits, either by amplifying existing capacities/traits, or by adding new ones; and, (b) are not, or not merely, therapeutic.” However, if we consider particular clinical or research contexts “enhancements meet the further criterion that they (c) centrally involve the use of biomedical technologies, such as pharmaceuticals or surgical techniques” (Douglas, 2013).

According to this helpful distinction, let me clarify my concerns a little: The concept of human form is not against medical interventions at all, but this fact does not dispense us from giving an appropriate account whether particular enhancements are required or not. The concept of human form can help us to elucidate the general aim of a re-therapeutization of enhancement issues.¹⁴ Several proponents of enhancement techniques, such as John Harris, notoriously claim that it is not preferable to compensate for special defects if there is the chance to enhance human functions leading to full compensation or overcompensation for these deficits. However, Harris and his colleagues always forget that there are some

¹¹ It is very important to know what an “Aristotelian necessity” is. Such a special necessity gives us the overriding criteria to know the basic needs of an organism in order to flourish. Nevertheless, these “Aristotelian Necessities” can hardly explain which actions are normatively relevant or not. From that reason, Anscombe (1981) has developed the theory of *stopping modals* helping to learn normative concepts in practical settings.

¹² The following expression by John Harris perfectly fits an instrumental or technical account of goodness: “If it wasn't good for you, it wouldn't be enhancement” (Harris, 2007, p. 9).

¹³ This account is critically examined by Fitzpatrick (2000).

¹⁴ Until now, many authors have drawn a thick line between therapy and enhancement. But that does not imply a general rejection of enhancement. In this paper, I only want to support a ‘normalized’ account of enhancement: “normal enhancement”, in this respect, is nothing more than the idea of lending nature a helping hand or of making small steps forward instead of heating a universal moral progress.

enhancements that are *not necessary* (in a deontic and non-metaphysical sense) at all, because they do not belong to the human form itself. According to Thomas Aquinas, it is always better or good for a blind horse to go slowly. With regard to this trivial example, no one thinks here of enhancement first; however, we should, at least, pay attention to some possible ways for practical accommodation. The word “better” is mostly relative to the subject a proposition is referring to; otherwise it must refer to certain states of affair being independent of any subject that could be described by the expression “better”. Hence, if we try to replace the substantive, to which an evaluative predicate is attributed to, by a certain state of affairs (e.g. an emotion or pro-attitude) we undermine a strong notion of “goodness”. If we agree with Harris and his weak notion of “goodness” being displaced by a strong concept of “better”, we could simply focus on the *state* of the actual blindness of the horse, not on the general aims and needs of a practical life-form called “horse”. Following this occurrent-state view, we were forced to bring the fact of curing a dysfunction to the same level as the fact of enhancing a function; but this is – first and foremost in a practical sense – not conducive. According to an ordinary or naturally strong understanding of “goodness”, the expression “something is better or something gets better” can only indicate that something is attaining the goal of being good relative to the life form this exemplar is representing. With the help of this explanation we are able to uphold the old therapy/enhancement-distinction and it finally becomes easy to prevent ‘a degeneration of the best’ (following the old adage *corruptio optimi pessima*).

But another point is also worth mentioning: In order to realize these requirements we have to introduce a normative notion of ‘normality’ as a new standard that cannot be rejected with the help of our subjective evaluations.¹⁵ So far, “normal” is not an evaluative term but the basis for our evaluations (cf. Fricke, 2015). For this reason, “normal functioning”¹⁶ tends to be a *contradictio in adiecto*, because “to function” signifies nothing more than “to go on in a normal way”.¹⁷ Contrary to this, Schwartz (2005) holds that there could be some dysfunctions that are normal. This is obviously not true, because the correct formulation should be that dysfunctions *are not normal, but could be natural*. If we accept the views of Schwartz, Daniels and others we would reduce the occurrence of natural dysfunctions to a matter of our subjective evaluations. However, such natural dysfunctions are not normal. It is, for instance, not appropriate to relativize the normative implications of normality, because without a non-statistical concept of normality we cannot state that one’s life is good with disabilities or tends to be bad if we accept the trans-generational passing on of defects (cf. footnote 10).

Incidentally, this is supposed to be no objection to the everyday practices playing a crucial role in medical reality. The surgeon is, of course, keen to restore the normal functioning of his patient’s knee. However, he is only justified in making this assertion because he knows what it means to have an artificial knee joint and to be okay with a healthy knee. Thanks to his ability to discriminate he will, like no other, understand that running faster with the help of an artificial knee joint is often to the disadvantage of other capacities that are not enhanced or dis-enhanced.

As we have already seen, the notion of human nature, as well as a normative concept of normality, can be no product of statistical calculations. Besides, Foot’s and Thompson’s allusions, from a common sense perspective, do not advocate a certain “folk biology”.

¹⁵ The idea that ‘the normal’ could be abnormal (for us) is quite sophistic; the idea itself is part of the process of a gradual derealisation of normality, especially of its normativity.

¹⁶ The elaborated “normal functioning”-concept of Norman Daniels cannot give us a theoretical account of the design of a species. Daniels’ interpretation is only interested in the requirements needed for a fair distribution of opportunities; equally, he lacks a robust notion of normality, because it is not clear what is meant by being normal with regard to social embeddedness and moral sensitivity. From that it follows that diseases have nothing else but biological causes.

¹⁷ This is comparable to the following case: We do not need “health” for making it an explicit goal in our life, because we should be happy for the moment not being forced to set up this demand when we are healthy.

Philosophers like Dieter Birnbacher always reject this perspective, because the “natural bonus” induced by our original intuitions must be verified by scientific investigations.¹⁸ However, that is not the crucial point Neo-Aristotelian thinkers aim to show. What they want to show is that an organism is/has/does F as part of its life cycle. With regard to this understanding, human nature is not the direct opposite concept to certain logics of domination (cf. Albers, 2014, p. 248) resulting from a Hobbesian or Rousseauian view of nature. Neo-Aristotelians like Foot, Thompson and Hursthouse rather build on the biological necessities of living beings without reducing their self-formation to the genetic input: “Being a member of a given species is a matter of having the right genetic constitution” (Lewens, 2015, p. 41). This view that is obviously reduced to the right genetic constitution¹⁹ does not comprise the idea of an “Aristotelian necessity”²⁰, because a necessity, in our understanding, is not only a biological, function-based concept; it is distinctively a matter of practical concerns.²¹ Generally that means that we can alter human beings, but not their life form including typical species-related practices. In the case of life forms, we are not adopting the essentialist idea of real-existing natural kinds. We only take note of the basic needs an organism has to fulfil as its intrinsic aims. From that it follows, that the talk of enhancement always corresponds to something *beyond the necessary* whereas life form-conceptions are able to limit themselves to *what is necessary for* an organism to flourish as this organism. For the case of particular enhancements, that would normatively imply: “So, to claim that a particular enhancement would eliminate or drastically alter some aspect of human form gives us *pro tanto* reason not to make the change. Likewise, to claim that a particular enhancement would contribute to or genuinely enhance some aspect of human form gives us *pro tanto* reason to make the change” (Groll & Lott, 2015, p. 625).

Conclusion: Application of Results and General Outlook

To shortly summarize, please see the following matrix, which indicates the different modes of enhancement in the light of the classical enhancement/therapy-distinction:

	Neo-Aristotelian Concept of Human Nature/ Life form	The “mixed bag” view of Human Nature
<i>alteration as enhancement</i>	over-restoration as manipulation (“defeating the purpose”)	improvement (overloading the purpose)
<i>alteration as therapy</i>	restoration (fitting the purpose)	omission (not exhausting the purpose)
<i>ethical operator</i>	“good as”	“good for”/“better for”
<i>normative evaluation in general and with regard to particular enhancements</i>	moral obligation not to enhance but to give therapy; particular enhancements are restricted to the needs of the	moral obligation to enhance and to upgrade therapy as a mode of enhancement; there are no life-form dependent enhancements,

¹⁸ Most of the sceptics of the intrinsic value of human nature presuppose that things are more or less natural (Birnbacher, 2006, p. 4ff.; Roughley, 2011, p. 23), but this is not true. We cannot decide which part of the given is natural and which part is artificial. This would reduce our results to mere findings of an unfounded *natura naturata*-perspective.

¹⁹ Apparently, Lewens ignores the important achievements of epigenetic research. Other authors like Okasha (2002) and Ereshefsky (2008) try to bypass these scientific findings by defining species membership in terms of the existence of internal relations between individuals.

²⁰ We are able to integrate epigenetic as well as genetic factors into our clasping life form-approach.

²¹ Cf. footnote no. 11.

	life form	because there is only a universal duty to enhance
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As we can see here any normative evaluation rests on the ethical operator we intend to choose. Moreover, whether a given intervention counts as enhancement or not always depends on how it is applied. “How” simply means: to whom and in which amount. Therefore, ‘treatment’ or ‘therapy’ is normally *within* the scope of the life a species prescribes to. Otherwise, we are dealing with particular enhancements that do not fit the normal needs of an organism. Hence, our ethical concerns must be *beyond* the scope of life and its normal requirements.

Of course, we can always deflate a strong notion of enhancement insofar as we tend to speak about enhancement as something ‘normal’. But ‘normal enhancement’ is only a non-informative pleonasm that can simply be substituted by notions of ‘treatment’ or ‘therapy’. And if one does not accept this deflationary life form-dependent account of “enhancement” he or she is forced to explain by which means we are able to justify the prioritization of a therapeutic sanction towards a particular enhancement practice. Although Ramsey (2012) rightly believes that human nature can inform us regarding issues of enhancement his account must fail, because he is still committed to the refuted “mixed bag”-view of human nature. His life-history trait cluster model rather wants to avoid essentialism instead of finding a common evaluation pattern as is provided by the Neo-aristotelian life form-approach. As Michael Thompson has shown, every cluster model is combinatory vague and thus remains normatively inert if we do not link our evaluations to the life form we belong to and we are describing – this extends to others as non-humans, not only for us as humans.

Finally, it is very easy to see that my thoughts seem to be in some way anti-meliorist. In my opinion, introducing therapy as the most appropriate mode to modify capabilities and to legitimize these modifications is the only way to answer the claim of Philippa Foot to *leave things as they are*.²² That does not imply the promotion of omissions to act, because “to leave things as they are” also means to correct the deficiencies that can prevent us from leaving things as they are. Besides, every claim arising from the natural necessity to correct life-form dependent defects is not at risk of being transformed into the universalizable moral obligation to enhance (Harris, 2009). That is why it is obviously ‘more normal’ to restore than to enhance our nature.

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²² This moral demand is not only restricted to Western philosophy. Ryuichi Ida, bioethicist from Japan, claims that concerning issues of enhancement we are called upon to respect “the view of ‘As it stands’” (quoted from: Savulescu & Bostrom, 2009, p. 5). This view is opening up an important intercultural perspective covering the idea of Wittgenstein shared by most of the Neo-Aristotelians: “I have been asked the very pertinent question as to where all this leaves disputes about substantial moral questions. Do I really believe that I have described a method for settling them all? The proper reply is that in a way nothing is settled, but everything is left as it was” (Foot, 2001, p. 116).

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